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From Choc En Retour To Nomadisme En Fleche

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FROM CHOC EN RETOUR TO NOMADISME EN FLECHE

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Pennsylvania State University, 2013

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DEDICATION

To my parents: Colleen and Tim.

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I would like to give a special thanks to Dr. Jeanne Garane, whose superior knowledge of French post-colonial literature helped guide me through this process; Dr. Eli Jelly-Schapiro, whose grasp of post-colonial theory aided me in thinking about Edouard Glissant and Aimé Césaire's historical theories in new ways; David Beek, a fellow graduate student in Comparative Literature, who first introduced me to Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*; and my parents, Colleen Glennon and Tim McElhinny, for all their love and support.

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to analyze and expound upon Aimé Césaire's theory of history, *choc en retour* from *Discours sur le colonialisme* and situate William Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!* and André Schwarz-Bart's *La Mulâtresse Solitude* (and to a lesser extent *Le Dernier des Justes* and *Go Down, Moses*) within this theoretical framework; which presents the Holocaust as the culmination ("retrun shock") of four centuries of colonial violence – from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries – perpetrated by Western powers such as France and the United States. While Césaire's application to Schwarz-Bart's texts is more standard – with his two novels explicitly linking Antillean slavery to the Holocaust – the connections between American antebellum slavery, the Civil War and consequent decades of racially motivated discrimination and terror in the United States – as presented by Faulkner – have rarely been viewed through *choc en retour*. This stems from a dearth of research seeking to build upon Aimé Césaire's historical connections, and link concentric histories of violence and exploitation to one another. Thus, this thesis takes a genealogical approach, which also employs Glissant's theorization of *nomadisme en flèche*. This notion casts imperialism as a perpetually wanton extraction of goods and resources, in which bourgeois states constantly seek out new markets and labor pools in service of metropolitan prosperity; as they engage in increasingly amoral practices (i.e. slavery). Understanding *choc en retour* in tandem with *nomadisme en flèche* allows for linkages between seemingly divergent timelines. As a result, this thesis argues that Faulkner and Schwarz-Bart use their novels to show how

both France and the United States' domination of various peoples cast as "the Other" and perpetuation of violent exploitative processes through *nomadisme en flèche* carries the constant threat of "un véritable choc en retour" – leading to Antillean slave rebellions, the Civil, the Holocaust and today's perpetually violent neoliberal world.

PREFACE

“There must be some way out of here,” said the joker to the thief

“There’s too much confusion, I can’t get no relief

Businessmen, they drink my wine, plowmen dig my earth

None of them along the line know what any of it is worth”

“No reason to get excited,” the thief, he kindly spoke

“There are many here among us who feel that life is but a joke

But you and I, we’ve been through that, and this is not our fate

So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late”

All along the watchtower, princes kept the view

While all the women came and went, barefoot servants, too

Outside in the distance a wildcat did growl

Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl

Bob Dylan, “All Along the Watchtower” (Dwarf Music 1968)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT	v
PREFACE	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAME.....	1
1.1 CHOC EN RETOUR	8
1.2 GLISSANT, CÉSAIRE, SCHWARZ-BART AND FAULKNER.....	16
CHAPTER 2: FROM EMPIRE TO RUIN: THE WORKS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AND ANDRE SCHWARZ-BART	28
2.1 COMPELLED TO EMPIRE: <i>LA MULATRESSE SOLITUDE</i> AND <i>ABSALOM, ABSALOM!</i>	29
2.2 EMPIRE’S COLLAPSE FROM WITHIN	42
2.3 EMPIRE FROM POINTS OF RUIN: <i>GO DOWN, MOSES</i> AND <i>LE DERNIER DES JUSTES</i>	59
CONCLUSION: THE MODERN TRAVELER, REPARATION THROUGH RELATION.....	77
REFERENCES	85

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAME

The cargo ship and the freight train—two technological marvels that bookend a period of global domination by Western Europe and the United States beginning with the sixteenth century Age of Exploration and ending in two ruinous World Wars in 1945—represented the highest levels of contemporary engineering. Each spoke to the human capacity for wonder like never before: new worlds to be discovered, peoples to contact, lands to settle, fruits, plants and animals to farm – all accompanied by vast networks of travel and trade. As a result, even today, they still factor into the Western imagination as symbols of the pioneering spirit that brought Spain and Portugal, Britain and France, and finally the United States to prominence. However, for the many¹ casualties of this “progress,” these technologies figure quite differently. Slave traders routinely forced up to six-hundred persons into cramped, wooden hulls before embarking upon the middle-passage. Similarly, SS personnel shut five thousand Jews into fifty box cars with each shipment to Auschwitz, Treblinka and Sobibór. The formerly enslaved, Olaudah Equiano, referred to his 1753 experience aboard a slave ship as “absolutely pestilential” (Equiano 60), while Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi likened the train to an “ambulatory vehicle of death” in speaking of his 1944 deportation to Auschwitz (Levi 108). In both tragedies, Nazis and slave traders alike transformed commercial vessels into instruments of terror

¹ This thesis will primarily interrogate this idea through the transatlantic trade, chattel slavery in the U.S. and the Caribbean, the Holocaust, and the Second World War. While all these tragedies entailed death on a massive scale, they destroyed an even greater number of lives through displacement, oppression, forced labor, and unending terror as well.

that facilitated two of history's greatest crimes. And, to the Jews and Black Africans who survived, the impression left by those engines of captivity and deportation could never be forgotten. For the rest of their lives, it would seem as if another galleon or locomotive lay just around the corner, waiting to take them back into the abyss.

The racism and violence accompanying these redeployed technologies came to define the transatlantic slave trade and Hitler's final solution in similar ways. However, literary texts seeking to synthesize the Holocaust and slavery are few and far between. Two notable exceptions include André Schwarz-Bart's 1959 *Le dernier des Justes* and his 1972 *La mulâtresse Solitude*. As a French Jew of Polish origin, the author tragically lost most of his family in the Holocaust, only narrowly escaping a similar fate by hiding (Scharfman 211). After the war, while studying at the Sorbonne, Schwarz-Bart set his sights on creative fiction as way to pay homage to and refigure the memory of his lost brethren (Scharfman 210-211). Nevertheless, he was opposed to retreating inside himself in this endeavor, and chose instead to reach out to other contemporary Parisian Diasporas. Schwarz-Bart befriended many French Antilleans stating, "ce qui me portait vers eux... [n'était qu'une] froide solidarité pour nos « frères de couleur, » [mais aussi]... leurs façons d'être... leur sagesse... leur art de vivre" ["what drew me to them was not only a superficial solidarity with our 'brothers of color,' but their attitude, their wisdom and their way of being"] ("Pourquoi j'ai écrit *La mulâtresse Solitude*" 7).² Thus, Schwarz-Bart acknowledges his otherness to this minority, and engages in a relational exchange, growing his geographical-historical scope in the process.

² Translations of "Pourquoi j'ai écrit *La mulâtresse Solitude*" from the 26 January 1967 of *Figaro littéraire* are my own.

In doing so, he eventually met Martinican poet, playwright, theorist and politician Aimé Césaire while visiting Martinique (“Pourquoi j’ai écrit *La mulâtresse Solitude*” 8). From Césaire he learned “[d’imaginer] une mode de narration plus « moderne », où le passé et le présent, l’Amérique et l’Europe, se mêlait en un lacs inextricable” [“to imagine a more modern form of narration, where the past and present, Europe and the Americas found themselves woven together in a vast, inextricable network”] (8). Thus, he took direct inspiration from Aimé Césaire’s 1950 *Discours sur le colonialisme*, in which the Martinican theorist argued that Europe’s drive to colonize Africa and enslave its people in the New World set processes in motion that eventually begat the Holocaust. He calls this “un choc en retour,”³ which saw colonial-style violence unleashed onto the metropole during the Second World War. In light of this, Schwarz-Bart’s work sought to highlight numerous contact points between the persecution of Jews and slavery in the Caribbean through vivid characters and imagery, which breathe life into Césaire’s theory. Echoing Levi and Equiano’s descriptions, the author places these histories side-by-side, and demonstrates how each operated on a shared logic of ethnocentrism, persecution, internment and terror.

Michael Rothberg’s 2009 *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* – the first academic book linking Holocaust and postcolonial studies – makes interdisciplinary inquiries to blur the color lines and group identities that have worked to create a model of “competitive memory” (Rothberg 1). Within this framework, assertions of commonality between seemingly divergent atrocities attract immediate criticism for delegitimizing one while legitimizing the other.

³ While this literally means “return shock” there is no good English translation of his term, “choc en retour” that captures its full meaning. Thus, I will mainly use the untranslated French when referring to this concept.

Nevertheless, according to Rothberg, the compartmentalization of memory has led to exactly what it disparages: a Holocaust Museum on the Washington Mall without equivalent memorialization of American slavery,⁴ or monuments all over Paris to the two World Wars with only sparse references to France's colonial past. For this reason, he argues for a system of "multidirectional memory," in which social actors bring commemorations of separate crimes against humanity together in the public sphere (3-4). The scholar supports his claims with Césairien and Arendtian theory, and applies them to literary, journalistic and biographical works linking slave narratives and Holocaust memoirs. In fact, he dedicates half the book's fifth chapter, "Anachronistic Aesthetics," to Schwarz-Bart recognizing the importance of the author's juxtaposition of French plantations and Nazi ghettos (135). Therefore, Rothberg integrates two extremes of Western history identifying Schwarz-Bart as an advocate against their perpetual isolation.

Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* serves as the foundation for a field of research that invites new questions to scholars of Schwarz-Bart and Césaire. Even though he labels them as conduits through which a model of multidirectional memory could emerge, he leaves their respective views of history open to further research. Implicit in each author's oeuvre is not solely the similarities between slavery and the Holocaust, but also a pervasive world view shared by Western Europe and America, based on the marginalization, oppression and exploitation of supposed others – present from the mid sixteenth century Age of Exploration through the end of World War Two – that produced both the slave plantation and the concentration camp. As a result, Schwarz-Bart writes at the end of *La mulâtresse Solitude*, "ce livre est le premier d'un cycle qui se déroule de

⁴ As of 2016, there is now an African American History museum on the Mall; however, only a part is dedicated to American Slavery. Thus, it is not an explicit memorialization. It would be as if the Holocaust were commemorated in an exhibit on American Jews.

1763 à 1953” [“this book is the first of cycle, which unfolds from 1763 to 1953”].⁵ The overlap between the novel’s concluding synthesis of Guadeloupe’s 1802 slave rebellion and the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, along with *Le dernier des Justes*’ final homage to the scattered ashes of those perishing at Auschwitz speaks clearly to his stated goal. Nevertheless, only publishing three works in his lifetime, many critics focus on how he falls short of definitively posing a genealogy of events connecting slave raids in Casamance to *rafles* in Paris.⁶ Thus, despite preceding Édouard Glissant’s turn to relationality and Patrick Chamoiseau’s créolité movement, his work often figures as a mere curiosity, left out of Caribbean canon.⁷ This stems from the misconception that Schwarz-Bart’s project was overly ambitious in scope, and misguided in its attempts to blend highly particular histories and cultural traditions (Rothberg 138-139). While Rothberg rebuts this critique for not taking Schwarz-Bart’s contribution to relational thought into account, this can be taken a step further. In connecting the Holocaust and slavery, Césaire’s *choc en retour* directly informs Schwarz-Bart’s works. The theorist’s essay did not elaborate a linear progression from colonialism to National Socialism, but a conceptual one. This is to say that the brand of capitalism imposed by Great Britain, France and the United States upon the rest of the world compelled them to empire, and necessitated the exploitation and suppression of perceived others; while the metropole prospered – thriving off the riches gained from workers exploited – but constantly teetering on the edge of ruin.⁸ As a result, Schwarz-Bart’s greatest strengths are seen in

⁵ Translation is my own.

⁶ See Ronnie Scharfman’s “Significantly Other,” Rothberg’s chapter “Anachronistic Aesthetics: André Schwarz-Bart and Caryl Phillips on the Ruins of Memory” in *Multidirectional Memory*, and Isabell Tarica’s “Jewish Mysticism and the Ethics of Decolonization in André Schwarz-Bart.”

⁷ Schwarz-Bart is not mentioned in either Chamoiseau’s wide-ranging treatise on Caribbean literature, *Ecrire en pays dominé*, or Glissant’s four part *Discours antillais*.

⁸ See the conclusion to Franz Fanon’s *Les Damnés de la Terre*, 239.

his vivid portrayal of French slavers, soldiers, policemen and guards driven to savagery during periods of colonization and societal collapse.⁹

While Schwarz-Bart's texts should serve as an illustration of Césaire's theory put into literary practice, other authors also hold relevance. For example, William Faulkner draws strong connections between American antebellum slavery, the Civil War and subsequent decades of racially motivated discrimination and terror in the United States. In thinking of the American South as part of the Caribbean tradition, both Chamoiseau and Glissant have recognized the importance of Faulkner's body of work for Antillean writers; and yet, he is rarely paired with Césaire due to a dearth of research seeking to build upon the theorist's connections.¹⁰ However, to realize a model of multidirectional memory scholars must take generative approaches in analyzing slavery and the Holocaust. If achieved, this will foster a more unified understanding of the causes of slavery and the Holocaust as a perpetuation of violent acts throughout the world. Faulkner's novel *Absalom! Absalom!* serves this purpose well, as it displays Césaire's cycle playing out in a highly focused manner between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. Read in tandem with Schwarz-Bart, the two authors give personalized depictions of history, which encompass both the broadly defined process – moving from colonial domination to the World Wars – and greater historical specificity – America's consent to continue black slavery leading to the Civil War. And yet, reparative readings also emerge, which center on Glissant's avocation for “une poétique de la relation, selon laquelle toute identité s'étend dans un rapport à l'Autre” (*Poétique de la Relation* 23) [“a Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship

⁹ During the Wars of the French Revolution and the Second World War.

¹⁰ As outlined by Michael Rothberg's conception of “competitive memory.”

with the Other”] (Wing 11). For this reason, authors such as Faulkner, written on extensively by Glissant, and Schwarz-Bart, whose work almost anticipates the Martinican theorist’s, are indispensable in diagnosing these problems. For, in the interrogation of Western violence and the tragedies of colonialism, they engage in “la pensée de l’errance;” thus venturing outside their own set of experiences to form new cross-cultural bonds in a process that possesses the capacity to lift humanity out of its collective historical malaise.

Hence, this thesis will view Césaire’s theory of *choc en retour* as a theory of history that can also be applied to literary works that depict consequential moments when Western powers descended into chaos after sustained periods of imperial profit-seeking, defined by pervasive violence and racism. This thesis will establish the ways in which colonization, slavery and the Holocaust form segments of a larger narrative – as written by Schwarz-Bart, Faulkner, Césaire and Glissant – in which capitalism drove France and the United States from empire to ruin, culminating in the Civil War, Jim Crow and the Hitlerian years. This introductory chapter, which forms the historical-theoretical backbone of this thesis, presents an extended reading of *Discours sur le colonialisme* and *Poétique de la Relation* to explore and synthesize Glissant and Césaire’s historical outlook, and explain its relation to Faulkner and Schwarz-Bart’s larger bodies of work; Chapter Two, “From Empire to Ruin” focuses on André Schwarz-Bart’s *La mulâtresse Solitude* and William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* to examine the French and American beginnings of empire and the formation of a slave economy to expand them, and how Schwarz-Bart and Faulkner – in *La mulâtresse Solitude*, *Le dernier des Justes*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* – depict the collapse of Western imperial

institutions as a direct result of sustained adherence to violent and amoral practices. Finally, the conclusion, “The Modern Traveler, Reparation Through Relation,” applies Glissantian ideas of errantry and relationality – from *Poétique de la Relation* and *Faulkner, Mississippi* – to Schwarz-Bart’s and Faulkner’s texts to show how these legacies of violence have shaped French and American culture, and the continued relevance that these authors hold for today’s audiences.

1.1 CHOC EN RETOUR

In the end they were lucky, that was all. Aside from a few disjointed mutterings about Atlantis or some other terrestrial paradise, they had no idea if anything was even there. The Earth might still have been flat for all they knew, and initial explorations hoped to find nothing more than a simple, economical passage to India. And yet, European musings about a kingdom beneath the sea proved all too real, giving credence to their wildest dreams; a literal *ailleurs* where – un beholden to Europe’s rigid, feudal social structure – *tout était possible*. But what Thomas Moore thought would be a potential Utopia quickly devolved into a horror story that would serve as the setting for indigenous exterminations, imperial domination, and a dangerously profitable slave economy spun out of control for centuries to come. Indeed, these lands lay on a firm collision course with History, where in which they were to be the object of a profound, sick, madness impelling Western colonizers. Ripped from the hands of the Arawak, Susquehannock, Aztec and Inca alike, they took on new appellations – La Nueva España, la Nouvelle France, British North America, the West Indies – as the Union Jack, la Fleur-de-lys, le Tricolore, and eventually the Star Spangled Banner flew overhead. And at the center of it all were a spattering of nearly seven thousand islands, greater and lesser,

throughout the Caribbean Sea; the crossroads at which this *Novus ordo seclorum* came together, inviting new and terrifying possibilities for every party involved.

Hispaniola, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Grenada, Barbados, St. Martin, Jamaica... all were swallowed up by the tide of commodities and consenting technologies,¹¹ bringing their beneficiaries immeasurable wealth. The colonizers shipped cash crops – sugar, tobacco, cotton and coffee – back home to satisfy a nascent, but ever growing, consumerism. In the process, bourgeois gentilhommes came into violent contact with the isles' native inhabitants and, when they were eliminated, they brought enslaved Africans to their shores. They were unwilling participants in the colonial experience to begin with, and their arrival necessitated the formation of new unequal relationships, in which they would be used as pawns in the accumulation of copious amounts of capital; but their toil provided no personal gain.

Yet, these ventures were by nature unsustainable from the outset. Colonizing forces and slaveholders must have known this. However, theirs was a nomadic way of life as Édouard Glissant defines it in his famed *Poétique de la Relation*. Not the *nomadisme circulaire* of the Berber or Native American peoples, in which, as Glissant explains, they invariably came back to the same spot after its resources had had ample time to replenish, but a *nomadisme en flèche*¹² (*Poétique de la Relation* 24). In doing so, the Martinican theorist outlines a process where, from the conquistadors to la Grande Armée, Western influence continually emanates outward – extracting the resources (human, natural or otherwise) it needs from a particular area, laying down roots, only to set sail for another location amid waning profitability (24). By necessity, bourgeois actors

¹¹ This term comes from Betsy Wing's translation of Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, page 9.

¹² Betsy Wing translates this into English as "arrow nomadism." This thesis will primarily use its French appellation, 9.

seek to justify themselves through renderings of *civilisation* which, “[aide] peu à peu à maintenir ensemble [des] contraires, qui ne s’identifient d’abord que par l’opposition à l’Autre” (26) [“bit by bit helps hold together opposites, whose only former identity existed in their opposition to the Other”] (Wing 14). Therefore, as capitalism’s proliferation invariably marginalizes various groups – bringing about massive labor movements, racial discrimination, revolution, war, strife and poverty – the occident attempts to hold it all together through “puissance” [“power”] and “pulsion totalitaire de la racine unique... opposant le citoyen au barbare” (27) [“bit by bit helps hold together opposites, whose only former identity existed in their opposition to the Other”] (14). As a result, “les nations occidentales se sont constituées, puis ont répercuté sur le monde” (27) [Western nations established themselves, and then they had repercussions on the rest of the world]¹³ with their power and influence soaring to new heights, but giving rise to a “second fall” culminating in one of history’s greatest crimes – a trans-Atlantic empire born out of the original sin of a capitalist accumulation of goods.

Early in the nineteenth century’s second half, Karl Marx recognized that the Western hegemons – possessing a limited amount of resources and laborers to produce goods – found themselves in constant pursuit of new markets as they were progressively expanding to undertake more global exploits. Naturally, consumption – increasing exponentially after the seventeenth century – exacerbated this process, as it brought about an inflated demand for fresh products that Europe lacked the capacity to produce: tobacco, cotton, coffee and sugar. For Marx this entails “an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production, but its point of departure... [and plays] the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology” (Marx 873). Thus, the

¹³ Translation is my own.

worldwide scramble for power and monetary gain grew from an ever-increasing material need. However, this presented important structural problems, the solutions for which changed the global framework in ways theretofore unseen as Marx states: “From this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority [in which] conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short force, play the greatest part” (Marx 874). Referring to this phenomenon as “Primitive Accumulation” Marx, like Glissant, seeks to work against notions that errant capitalism represents the most advanced state of human civilization.¹⁴ Thus, in this tradition, theorists view capitalism as a system, which speaks to man’s most base desires and brings out his greatest evils through service of its perpetuation. Therefore, ultimately capitalism is something to be surmounted, not embraced; for – in light of the violence imposed on those marginalized – it constantly invites a consequent decline, collapse and backlash.

The intellectual giant of the Négritude movement, Aimé Césaire, wrote his famous *Discours sur le Colonialisme* to identify the nature and causes of this backlash. First and foremost a poet, Césaire’s turn to historical-theoretical discourse merged with his trademark poetic style anticipates fellow Martinican, Glissant’s call to “stay with” and “crions le cri de poésie” (*Poétique de la Relation* 21) [“cry our cry of poetry”] (Wing 9). Thus, Césaire uses this medium to provide damning vignettes of centuries of European crimes in Africa and the Americas with its three opening lines:

Une civilisation qui s'avère incapable de résoudre les problèmes que suscite son fonctionnement est une civilisation décadente.
Une civilisation qui choisit de fermer les yeux à ses problèmes les plus cruciaux est une civilisation atteinte.
Une civilisation qui ruse avec ses principes est une civilisation moribonde. (7)

¹⁴ See Chapter 26 of Karl Marx’s *Capital: Volume I*.

[A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization.

A civilization that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilization.

A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization.] (Pinkham 1)

Ironically presenting “civilisation” as a western misnomer riddled with contradictions, he argues that the very process of colonization works to “déciviliser le colonisateur... à le dégrader, à le réveiller aux instincts enfouis, à la convoitise, à la violence, à la haine raciale, au relativisme moral” (11) [“to *decivilize* the colonizer... to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism”] (2). This culminates in his assertion – setting the stage for Glissant’s rendering of imperialism speaking to humanity’s most self-indulgent, primal impulses – that colonization is “[la] tête de pont dans une civilisation de la barbarie d’où, à n’importe quel moment, peut déboucher la négation pure et simple de la civilisation” (17) [“[the] bridgehead in a campaign to civilize barbarism, from which there may emerge at any moment the negation of civilization, pure and simple”] (5). Thus, he gives a view of Europeans as a people driven towards savagery through crimes committed against, “les Indiens, les Juanes, les Negres” (10) [“the Indians, the yellow peoples, and the Negroes”] (2).

While he announces clearly and resolutely that “*l’Europe est indéfendable*” (8) [“*Europe is indefensible*”], he takes these assertions far beyond simple damnation. Employing searing imagery, Césaire puts forth a theory of history entitled *choc en retour*; charging that the horrific events surrounding the Second World War, constituted a “boomerang shock,” which brought the racism, violence, and genocidal implications of European imperialism to its own front door.

Et alors un beau jour, la bourgeoisie est réveillée par un formidable choc en retour: les gestapos s'affairent, les prisons s'emplissent, les tortionnaires inventent, raffinent, discutent autour des chevalets.

On s'étonne, on s'indigne. On dit : 'Comme c'est curieux ! Mais, Bah ! C'est le nazisme, ça passera !' Et on attend, et on espère ; et on se tait à soi-même la vérité, que c'est une barbarie, mais la barbarie suprême, celle qui couronne, celle qui résume la quotidienneté des barbaries ; que c'est du nazisme, oui, mais qu'avant d'en être la victime, on en a été le complice ; que ce nazisme-là, on l'a supporté avant de le subir, on l'a absous, on a fermé l'œil là-dessus, on l'a légitimé, parce que, jusque-là, il ne s'était appliqué qu'à des peuples non européens. (11-12)

[And then one fine day the bourgeoisie is awakened by a terrific reverse shock: the gestapos are busy, the prisons fill up, the torturers around the racks invent, refine, discuss.

People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: "How strange! But never mind-it's Nazism, it will pass!" And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, but the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples.] (3)

Thus, Césaire deconstructs a cycle of Western violence – centering on its destabilizing effects for colonized peoples, and likening “colonisation” to “chosification,”¹⁵ where the colonizer dominates, enslaves, objectifies and reduces them to “instruments de production” [instruments of production] – and casts the Third Reich as a direct result of colonial atrocities (10). Thus, he laments the countless “societies drained of their essence,” all in the name of what Derek Walcott¹⁶ deems to be history’s dirty joke—progress. However, balking at the statistical defenses levied by Western apologists citing roads, bridges, factories and other ostensible developments, Césaire counters with “[les] milliers d'hommes sacrifiés au Congo-Océan... des millions d'hommes arrachés à leurs dieux, à leur terre, à leurs habitudes, à leur vie, à la vie, à la danse, à la sagesse” (22)

¹⁵ There is no good translation for this word in English. The closest would be “thing-ification.”

¹⁶ See Walcott’s poem “The Schooner Flight.”

[“the thousands of men sacrificed to the Congo-Ocean... millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life-from life, from the dance, from wisdom”] (6). As a result, Césaire squarely condemns the continent “tombée entre les mains des financiers et des capitaines d'industrie” (22) [“fallen into the hands of the most unscrupulous financiers and captains of industry”] (7) spurring the tragedy of enlightenment colonialism and the barbary of the Second World War.

Understanding this conjecture of the Western civilizing project as one of violent, rooted, nomadic expansion (according to Glissant) – taking one from the farthest reaches of the European continent to the shores of Africa, Asia and the New World alike and culminating in the Holocaust on the European continent (according to Césaire) – and its gap-ridden record, requires an examination of these historical events through creative fiction. Oftentimes, through works of fiction, an author can do more to humanize and contextualize a situation than even the most adept historical and political discourses. In his chilling introduction to *Poétique de la Relation*, "la Barque Ouverte," Glissant asserts that the enslaved African's supreme debasement came in “le ventre de cette barque” (17-18) [“the belly of this boat”] (Wing 6) as they were carted off from their African homelands *vers le gouffre, vers l'inconnu*. Using the image of “une moule... enceinte d'autant de morts que de vivants en sursis” (17) [“a [matrix]... pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death”] (6) he gives a damning retelling of the conditions onboard:

Supposez deux cent personnes entassées dans un espace qui à peine en eût pu contenir le tiers. Supposez le vomi, les chairs à vif, les poux en sarabande, les morts affalés, les agonisants croupis. Supposez, si vous le pouvez, l'ivresse rouge des montées sur le pont, la rampe à gravir, le soleil noir sur l'horizon, le vertige, cet éblouissement du ciel plaqué sur les vagues. Vingt, trente millions, déportés pendant deux siècles et plus. L'usure, plus sempiternelle qu'une apocalypse. (17)

[Imagine two hundred human beings crammed into a space barely capable of containing a third of them. Imagine vomit, naked flesh, swarming lice, the dead slumped, the dying crouched. [Imagine] over the course of more than two centuries twenty, thirty million deported... [worn] down in a debasement more eternal than the apocalypse.] (Wing 5-6)

Due to this great crime – from Réunion to Louisiana, Martinique and Guadeloupe – a common thread emerged, defining the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a three hundred year period of colonial domination under slave labor economies (Régent 9). Through this process, West Africa became increasingly depopulated; with thirteen million persons taken from their homes spurring innumerable sufferings – families torn apart, lovers left unwed, farewells unsaid – the details of which modern audiences can only imagine. The numbers reveal that an average slave ship from Africa took almost a month to reach the Antilles, transported hundreds of enslaved persons in deplorable conditions – with an ensuing mortality rate of twenty percent (Régent 9-10). However, while these figures paint the scale to which this atrocity took place, they do not always provide the best angle from which to access slavery’s history. A freed slave, Ottobah Cugoano¹⁷, echoes this in his 1787 auto-biography, *Thoughts and Sentiments*,¹⁸ describing “the horrible scenes... and the base treatment... in this dreadful captive situation,” but also lamenting that “thousands more suffered [a] similar and greater distress,” without being afforded the chance to tell their story (Cugoano 11).

The contemporary reader can only imagine such bleak scenarios, with the accompanying physical and mental anguish imposed upon these individuals lost to

¹⁷ Cugoano was brought to England by his master and later freed as a result of the favorable 1772 Somerset ruling abolishing slavery in the British Isles. This decision also affected the famed Olaudah Equiano.

¹⁸ His memoir’s full title is title is: *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*.

History's abyss. For this reason, predictably, many efforts to downplay and placate the evils of slavery, and their pertinence to modern audiences have arisen. In doing so, apologists valorize kind masters, and domestic slaves, often spared from bondage's most barbarous aspects. This phenomenon stems from a selective reading of history, in which veritable slave narratives, such as Olaudah Equiano and Cugoano's, find themselves buried under the weight of more abundant sources from plantation owners and overseers, missionary accounts and *récits de voyage* explaining slavery away as little more than a "curious institution" (René 14). Thus, Glissant advocates for poetics as a form of resisting this ignorance "des tortures et des massacres" (21) to make connections between tragedies cast – often due to profound gaps in established national narratives – into *l'abîme*.

1.2 GLISSANT, CESAIRE, SCHWARZ-BART AND FAULKNER

Adelaide, Auror, Duc du Maine, La Concord, Desire – benign names of ships used to deport up to thirty million persons from their homelands – inspire the "Rose-Marie" found in Glissant's 1964 novel, *Le Quatrième siècle*. The ship figures prominently at the novel's beginning when two twentieth-century descendants of African slaves discuss their ancestors' passage to the Caribbean. The hundreds of boats "de l'arrivage... passer dans les brumes de leur souvenir" (20) ["that brought them over... slip into the fog of their memory"] (Wing 12) while the modern tankers coming and going from the harbor nearby continually taunt the young Mathieu and his elder, Papa Longoué. The vessels' presence forces each to reflect upon "[le] bois noirci, [gonflé] par l'eau" ["the blackened wood swollen by water"], "les traces épaisses de sang" ["the thick remains of blood"], "la potence aux pendus" ["the gallows"], "le bâton crochu qu'on

enfonçait dans la gorge de ceux qui tentait d’avalier leur langue” [“the hooked stick they used to thrust into the throat of anybody who tried to swallow his or her tongue”], “le fer à rougir” [“the branding iron”], “[la] forchette implacable pour ceux qui refusaient le pain moisi” (20-21) [“the ruthless fork for anyone who refused to eat moldy bread,” and finally [“the slave count”] (13-14). The captain and crew celebrate a job well done, “[en frottant] le corps [de l’esclave] au moyen d’un balai à long manche, reqlant plaies, arrachant des lambeaux de ce qui n’était déjà que bribes de toiles souillées” (22) [“scrubbing the slaves’] bodies with a long-handled broom, scraping wounds and ripping shreds from filthy, already tattered fabric”] (14) to find that a whole two-thirds made it alive. Over a hundred and fifty years later, Papa Longoué can still smell the “fadeur de mort” [“stench of death”] plaguing the harbor “depuis longtemps” (23) [“just the same”] (16). Well-versed in oral history, the old man gives a precise, yet nonlinear recollection of the hardships experienced by his ancestors as his protégé listens on (Miller 345). Foreshadowing the author’s equally graphic 1991 “La Barque Ouverte,” Glissant conveys the lingering trauma lasting generations beyond initial enslavement.

Christopher Miller claims in *The French Atlantic Triangle* that together these passages give the finest renderings of the middle-passage in French (345). Glissant successfully resituates the transatlantic trade as a transformative process, which thrust the enslaved into an “ocean of trade” where they were reconstituted as commodities (345). Thus, the scholar notes that, however sparse its treatment, Glissant casts the ship as an ever-present point of reference in Antillean literature (345). In light of Glissant’s footnote on the first page of “La Barque Ouverte,” the theorist views it as the mechanism, which deterritorialized African societies, robbed them of their oral traditions, yet facilitated

“créolisation” in the New World (17). Nevertheless, Glissant charges that “dans l’espace du bateau, le cri des déportés est étouffé, comme il sera dans l’univers des Plantations,” [“within the ship's space the cry of those deported was stifled, as it would be in the realm of the Plantation”] a silencing that has continued “jusqu’à nous” (17) [“to this day”] (5). Therefore, a driving force behind Glissant’s work entails reasserting creole history through the written word.

Unlike Aimé Césaire’s 1939 *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, neither *Le Quatrième siècle* nor “La Barque Ouverte” seeks to revisit créolité’s African past (Miller 349). For Glissant, his ancestors’ homeland remains unknowable, obscured by the opaqueness of the ocean path and wooden hull, which brought them.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Césaire takes a different stance, as his afro-Caribbean narrator returns to the Antilles from Europe and looks back to Africa, as a starting point for unified anti-colonial struggle: “à force de penser au Congo/je suis devenu un Congo bruissant de/forêts et de fleuves/ou la fouette claque comme un grand étendard/l’étendard du prophète” (50) [from brooding too long on the Congo/I have become a Congo resounding with/forests and rivers/where the whip cracks like a great banner/the banner of a prophet] (Eshleman, Smith 51). However, qualifying his infatuation with the homeland and support for Negritude he states:

Je refuse de mes boursoufflures comme d’authentiques gloires... Non nous n’avons jamais été Amazones du roi du Dahomey, ni princes du Ghana... ni docteurs à Tombouctou... ni architectes de Djénné, ni Madhis, ni guerriers... ma négritude n’est pas une pierre... ni une tour ni une cathédrale... elle plonge dans la chair rouge du sol... la chair ardente du ciel.²⁰

¹⁹ Miller does note the late career—1999—novel of Glissant’s called *Sartorius*. Envisioning a nondescript tribe in heart of West Africa and their struggle in the face of seventeenth century beginnings of colonization and the slave trade, Miller argues that this novel’s geographic focus allows Glissant to realize a genuine relational connection between Africa and the Caribbean, that previously eluded him.

²⁰ A combination of quotes on pages 60 and 66.

[I refuse to pass off my puffiness for authentic glory... No, we've never been Amazons of the king of Dahomey, nor princes of Ghana... nor wise men in Timbuktu... nor the architects of Djenne, nor Madhis, nor warriors... My negritude is not a stone... neither tower nor cathedral... it takes root in the red flesh of the soil... takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky.]²¹

This speaks to Césaire's desire to foster an international proletariat of colonized peoples, bound together by shared legacies of oppression and poverty, opposed to bourgeois nationalism. Thus, despite the wide overlap between Glissant and Césaire, critics have set up a binary between the two, citing their disagreement on Africa's place in Caribbean identity.

But anti-colonial politics aside, both similarly diagnose the history and economics of slavery. When Césaire evokes the slave ship in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* he discusses the slave trade as a whole, and frames it as an atrocity in service of economic gain: “nous sommes un fumier ambulante hideusement promoteur de cannes tendres et de coton soyeux... et l'on nous vendait sur les places... nous vomissure de négrier” (60) [“that we are walking compost hideously promising tender cane and silky cotton... and they would sell us on the town square... We the vomit of slave ships”] (Eshleman, Smith 61). In light of this, *Le Quatrième siècle* aligns with Césaire's poem as Papa Longoué comments on the expansion of slavery: “Depuis le premier bateau, quand ce commerce n'était qu'une aventure dont nul ne savait si les profits seraient convenables, jusqu'à la *Rose Marie*, à l'époque où c'était devenu une affaire fructueuse” (23) [“From the very first boat—when this commerce was still no more than an adventure and no one knew if it would make a decent profit—right up to when the *Rose Marie* came, and by then it had become a successful venture”] (Wing 16). To build upon this, Glissant also portrays

²¹ A combination of quotes on pages 61 and 67.

modern ships that – despite no longer bringing slaves – still carry “cargaison croupie” (20) [“foul cargo”] (12) in the service of capital’s proliferation. In a read through of his *nomadisme en flèche* the author shows a capitalist world in constant motion as it redeploys technologies in search of new resources and labor pools to exploit and harness. Thus, in the wake of chattel slavery, Mathieu and Papa Longoué find themselves on a worn down island outpost woven into a larger global network. Césaire expresses the same rebuke of modernity in *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* presenting the financial and maritime epicenters of “Bordeaux et Nantes et Liverpool et New-York et San-Francisco” as being plagued by “le dos de gratte-ciel” [“the spines of skyscrapers”] and driven to madness by “le scintillement des gemmes” (46) [“the glitter of gems”] (Eshleman, Smith 47). Thus, the similarities in Glissant and Césaire’s understanding of capitalism’s consequences outweigh their spatial-temporal dualism; by identifying Europe’s drive to colonize as a direct result of capitalist expansion and pairing it with vivid representations of human suffering, they do much to fill the void left by the scarcity of primary slave narratives written in French.²²

Christopher Miller echoes this point in *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* as he researches different forms of memory engaging with slavery in the francophone tradition. Therefore, from denouncing the inadequacies of Jean Baptiste Du Tertre and Labat’s first-hand accounts to pointing out the hypocrisy of Rousseau and Voltaire, and engaging with more sympathetic eighteenth and nineteenth century writers such as Claire de Duras and Eugène Sue, Miller places special focus on Caribbean twentieth century fiction (xii). Much of the book concerns itself with problematizing a lack of veritable source material from which to study French slavery.

²² See Miller’s *The French Atlantic Triangle*

He identifies the absence of a “French Equiano,” relative silence on the part of African authors, and France’s total unwillingness to engage with its colonial past (xi). To combat this, the scholar advocates for reading Glissant and Césaire’s oeuvres as primary texts, which bridge gaps in knowledge and understanding of the middle passage and plantation life (345). Nevertheless, Miller remains preoccupied by Césaire’s original representation of an Atlantic triangle in *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, and how a shared discourse between the three corners of the French Atlantic triangle – France, the Antilles and West Africa – has yet to emerge (4). As a remedy, the scholar proposes paired readings of Glissant and Césaire (344-345).²³

From analyzing *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, *Le Quatrième siècle*, *Discours sur le colonialisme* and *Poétique de la Relation* in conjunction with one another, scholars can indeed realize a clear picture of slavery and its aftershocks. When applying Césaire’s theory of *choc en retour* to these fictional works, both authors present slavery as producing an increasingly globalized, yet unequal world. However, written at opposite ends of the Second World War, they exhibit differing visions of what a neo-liberal future might have in store. Even at its darkest moments, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* remains hopeful for radical change. Césaire presents the slave ship not solely as an instrument of terror, but also one that brought about revolution: “le négrier craque de toute part... son ventre se convulse et résonne... L’affreux ténia de sa cargaison ronge les boyaux fétides de l’étrange nourrisson des mers” (78) [“The ghastly tapeworm of its cargo gnaws the fetid guts of the strange suckling of the sea”] (Eshleman, Smith 79). Giving the image of the slaves onboard as a “tapeworm” that would “gnaw” at and

²³ Miller also places heavy emphasis on Maryse Condé. Her novel, *Moi Tituba, Socière* holds much relevance to this thesis as it too explores the relation between Jewish and African Diasporas in the amorous relationship with a Jewish man and an enslaved black woman.

destroy Western powers from the inside harkens back to the poem's early reference to "un homme seul que défie les cris/blancs de la mort blanche/TOUSSAINT, TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE" (46) ["a lone man defying the white screams of white death/TOUSSAINT, TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE] (47).²⁴ In doing so, Césaire suggests the Haitian Revolution as a type of *choc en retour* against the French colonizers that could serve as inspiration for future anti-colonial struggle (as does C.L.R James in his 1938 *The Black Jacobins*). Of course, this would be complicated once the horrors of the Holocaust came to light, prompting his later *Discours sur le colonialisme* in which Nazism is presented as the supreme and "veritable choc en retour" begotten by imperialism. As outlined in the previous chapter, to recover from World War Two Césaire sees France and Great Britain taking one of two paths: either "l'initiative d'une politique nouvelle fondée sur le respect des peuples et des cultures" (71-72) ["a policy of nationalities, a new policy founded on respect for peoples and cultures"] (Pinkham 23), or succumb to "L'heure américaine" ["The American hour"] with all the ensuing "Violence, démesure, gaspillage, mercantilisme, bluff, grégarisme, la bêtise, la vulgarité, le désordre" (69) ["Violence, excess, waste, mercantilism, bluff, gregariousness, stupidity, vulgarity, disorder"] (23). Written fifteen years later, Glissant's commercial tankers in *Le Quatrième siècle* speak to a global financial system coalescing around the latter outcome, with "relation" – opposed to proletarian revolt – being the principle means of resistance. Thus, if placed side-by-side the Martinicans' respective works paint a persuasive portrait of Western powers compelled to Empire and driven to ruin only to

²⁴ For an extended discussion and comparison with C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins* see Chapter Two, sections one and two, of this thesis.

exchange imperialism for globalization and neoliberalism; with their own particular revolutionary and relational solutions.

Nevertheless, Miller, Chamoiseau, and the vast body of Caribbean literary scholars overlook an important student of Césaire and pioneer of the créolité movement, André Schwarz-Bart. His novel *La mulâtresse Solitude*, which takes the reader from Africa to the Caribbean at the behest of French slavers, successfully integrates all three poles of the transatlantic trade and gives a stunning reading of colonial history, which brings slavery, the Holocaust and the rising tide of neoliberalism into conversation with one another. Because of his unique personal journey Schwarz-Bart found himself more apt than many of his contemporaries to make this connection. As a French Jew who lived through the Nazi occupation, most of his relatives died in the Holocaust (Rothberg 142). Furthermore, as the husband of a Guadeloupien woman – Simone Schwarz-Bart, an accomplished writer in her own right – he garnered an atypical consciousness of French slavery’s legacy in the Caribbean (137). Thus, he observed a sameness in the histories of enslaved Africans and persecuted Jews, which played out in a cycle (150). Holding *Discours sur le colonialisme* in high esteem, Schwarz-Bart predicated his project on synthesizing Jewish and African histories of subjugation through his novels (135). Committed to creative fiction, the author arguably worked within the medium best suited for presenting Césaire’s and Glissant’s ideas.

Schwarz-Bart’s novels themselves delve into very distinct historical periods, while managing to cast them in similar lights. In *La mulâtresse Solitude*, he traces the lives of two characters: an African mother captured by French slavers, taken to the island of Guadeloupe, and her daughter, the famed Mulâtresse Solitude, who joined the maroons

after the French Revolution and resisted France's attempts to reinstate slavery under Napoleon. In *Le dernier des Justes*, Schwarz-Bart tells the story of a Jewish family from the Middle Ages through the Second World War – most prominently focusing on the character Ernie Levy and his experiences as a Jew in France amid widespread collaboration between French and German authorities to advance Hitler's Final Solution. Not only do these novels serve as jarring personal narratives, they also succeed as examples of informed historical commentary with prominent areas of intertextual overlap. As a result, Schwarz-Bart manages to integrate seemingly divergent histories in two poignant works of fiction – accomplishing a distinct blend of history, fiction and biography – providing an accurate and measured retelling of French history and breathing new life into the many ideas surrounding Césaire's term, *choc en retour*. And yet, in spite of this, his work has been relegated to the realm of curiosity. This can be most readily attributed to what Michael Rothberg describes as a “model of competitive memory” in which scholars do not think of separate atrocities – such as slavery and the Holocaust as interrogated by Schwarz-Bart – in conjunction with one another, but analyzed in their respective vacuums (1).

In contrast, Miller, Chamoiseau and Glissant all recognize the American author, William Faulkner, for his significance in thinking of the Caribbean and the American South together, in light of their shared history of enslavement and imperial expanse. In Glissant's *Faulkner, Mississippi*, he notes that despite coming from the plantation class “ruinée par la guerre de Sécession” (50) [“ruined by the Secessionary War”] (Lewis, Spear 32), and living in the South – with all its “préjugés,” “limites,” and “non-dits,” (31) [“its prejudices, it limits, and its unreachable silences”] (17) – he questions his ancestors

slaveholding past and their tenuous fight for independence during the Civil War. Thus, instead of taking on the selective memory of his countrymen – to portray enslavement as “une période de bonheur et de plaisir partagés entre maîtres et esclaves” (24) [“truly an age of happiness and pleasure, shared between master and slave”] (12) – Faulkner presents the Civil War as a direct consequence of the South’s “backward thinking,” which led to the collapse of antebellum society (39). His 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!* is a masterful rendering of this deterioration as the United States was driven from empire to ruin by its use of slave labor. Through the life of the novel’s main antagonist, Thomas Sutpen, Faulkner shows the persistent *nomadisme en flèche* of the United States in the technologies, violence and dehumanizing practices used to grow its subcontinental slave empire deeper into the American frontier. The ambitious Sutpen sets his sights on becoming a member of the plantation class after growing up in poverty. Tenacious to a fault, he follows a dark path taking him from West Virginia to Louisiana, Haiti and Faulkner’s famed Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi; which, according to Glissant, “se présente comme un résumé-monde... le compté à l’écart du monde, pour signifier le monde entier” (76-77) [“presented as a world in microcosm”] (53). Thus, Faulkner thrusts all of Western ugliness onto this outlier of America’s imperial expanse – creating a sort of “tourbillon” [whirlwind] bringing about “les bois ravagés” [“ravaged woods”], “les champs désolés de coton” [“barren cotton fields”], “la guerre Civile” [“the Civil War”], and “d’autant de misérables existences” (39) [“miserable, and small-minded lives”] (23). In this sense, Glissant argues that *Absalom, Absalom!* figures as an allegory, which shows “le processus sans cesse avorté de la « fondation, » de l’établissement de la terre nouvelle” (63) [the endless and aborted progress towards the “foundation,” or

settling [of the New World]”] (42). For this reason, Sutpen’s rise and fall should be viewed as forming a part of Glissant’s larger narrative of *nomadisme en flèche* that beckoned a series of Césaire’s “return shocks” – from the Haitian Revolution to the Civil War and the Second World War – which culminate in Schwarz-Bart’s conflation of slavery and the Holocaust.

Interestingly, Glissant praises Faulkner for his courage in bringing difficult histories of enslavement, succession, and renewed post-war racial prejudices into conversation (24). Subsequently the theorist compares Southern apologism to a pervasive form of Holocaust denial, and then underscores the need to “rapprocher ces deux exterminations, ces deux horreurs nées de la bête humaine” (24) [“compare these two exterminations, these two horrors born of the human beast”] (12). Nevertheless, his admiration for those who strive to mix these “tourchons et serviettes” (24) [“apples and oranges”] (12) of history mostly amounts to an unrealized ideal. While Glissant would see Faulkner’s work on serving a new model of “multidirectional memory,” he does not develop the potential linkages between Holocaust and post-colonial studies. Similarly, in *Écrire en pays dominé* Chamoiseau casts the transatlantic trade as “l’holocaust des holocausts” [“the holocaust of all holocausts”]²⁵ without expounding upon the idea (122). Although both highly regard Faulkner for his treatment of the slave question in America and the Caribbean and the Civil War, neither mentions André Schwarz-Bart (with only a passing reference to his more widely regarded wife, Simone²⁶) who highlights the broader implications of these transhistorical connections. Curiously, Schwarz-Bart

²⁵ Translation is my own

²⁶ In *Écrire en pays dominé* Chamoiseau quotes Simone Schwarz-Bart in one of his *sentimenthèques*: « contre la néantisation, aller au fils des vies qu’on s’embarque au rêve, sans militantisme autre que l’attitude vraie, la langue juste forgées de deux langues nouées, le vrai, le vrai même s’il semble s’éloigner de ton rôle. »

remains overlooked despite engaging in the same intellectual rigor for which Faulkner has become renowned.

As a result, a reading of Schwarz-Bart's two principle novels – *La mulâtresse Solitude* and *Le dernier des Justes* – alongside Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* is necessary to understand the points at which Caribbean slavery, American slavery, the Civil War, World War Two and the Holocaust intersect, and their place in a larger historical genealogy. Implicit within each author's project is the belief that Western imperialism – specifically American and French, with relevant applications to Great Britain – continually invited backlash – such as slave rebellions in Martinique, Guadeloupe and the successful Haitian Revolution – and (albeit temporary) collapse. With each text exhibiting Césaire and Glissant's *choc en retour* and *nomadisme en fleche*, a comparison of Faulkner and Schwarz-Bart's views of history read through of the Martinicans' theorizations of capitalist expanse and its consequences, remains vital.

CHAPTER 2

FROM EMPIRE TO RUIN: THE WORKS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AND ANDRÉ SCHWARZ-BART

From initial capture to the middle passage, eventual auction and the inevitabilities of plantation life, quantifying the horrors of the African slave trade is two-fold. While first-hand accounts, ship ledgers and plantation records give historians a window into its different aspects, and statistics from which to estimate the numbers of those enslaved, the sheer scope of cultural loss and human trauma will never be fully known. Regarding such a transnational, multi-faceted and indeterminate period in world history, any attempt at rationalizing it through one, or even several, essential historical narratives seems insufficient; for beyond history's reach lie a million individual sufferings – crying out, lost between temporalities, left to the imagination – whose bearers remain nameless, forever. For this reason, historical analyses of slavery's practices and institutions throughout Africa and the New World provide an indispensable, but ultimately incomplete record, necessitating an examination of more hybrid forms of memory to give greater rootedness to that which seems illusory. Indeed, the specters of those captured, drowned, chained, beaten and forced to toil without reprieve give the works of André Schwarz-Bart, Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant and William Faulkner a haunting precision absent from purely historical analyses;²⁷ thus, necessitating a turn to the literary

²⁷ See the introduction to Christopher Miller's *The French Atlantic Triangle*.

realm, which responds to Glissant's call to "tenir en poésie" (*Poétique de la Relation* 21) ["stay with poetry"] (Wing 9).

In support of this notion, scholars such as Michel-Rolph Trouillot, David Scott, Michael Rothberg and Christopher Miller have worked to diagnose gaps and omissions within history and argued that the fictional narrative plays an important role in the production of collective memory as well. For Trouillot, this bears striking implications in two divergent fashions: while fiction possesses the capacity to negatively influence history's construction, causing it to conform to prefabricated ideals held by a particular society, literature oftentimes works counter to this (*Silencing the Past* 25). Through alternative narrativizations of the past within the public sphere, authors, poets, journalists and academics alike gain the opportunity to shed light on that which tends to be overlooked (25). According to Rothberg, this type of discourse, which exists between fact and fiction, seeks to "people" history in such a way that invites the possibility of reclaiming stories of those persecuted from history's abyss (*Multidirectional Memory* 153). In this spirit, Schwarz-Bart, Faulkner, Glissant and Césaire take up literature as a means of conjuring, humanizing and ultimately linking eras ostensibly unrelated to one another. Their works of creative fiction comment on and re-imagine histories of enslavement, genocide, revolution and war, and elicit passages conveying their effects on a personal level. Thus, reading these authors' novels, poems and essays together – thinking of them as primary texts – holds the potential to uncover a conceptual series of events which compelled Western powers to empire, and pushed them to the brink of ruin.

2.1 COMPELLED TO EMPIRE: *LA MULATRESSE SOLITUDE* AND *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

Schwarz-Bart opens *La mulâtresse Solitude* like a fairytale, “Il était une fois sur une planète étrange, une petite négresse nommée Bayangumay” (11) [“Once upon a time, on a strange planet there was a little black girl by the name of Bayangumay”] (Manheim 3), around 1750 in Casamance, today part of Senegal. Initially, her life is peaceful as she grows up happily and experiences the many joys of youth. Nevertheless, the author quickly moves away from the idyllic tone, to situate Bayangumay’s story within the history of slavery. By now, British and French slavers had cast a wide net over the West African coast to serve lucrative colonies from Jamaica to Sainte-Domingue. Aware of the slavers, referred to as “les marchands des hommes” [“sellers of men”] the girl’s tribe moves further from the Casamance riverbanks – where slave raids were common – to encircle themselves within “marais peu accessibles” (31) [“marshes that could be reached only with difficulty”] (32). He further conveys Western Europe’s tightening grip on Africa, likening the continent to “un poulpe nouée sur la greve, qui perde goutte à goutte de sa substance” (31) [“an impaled octopus losing its substance drop by drop”] (32). Thus, Bayangumay’s village is that of an enclave, just outside the trade’s reach. And yet, with some Africans aiding the colonizers in enslaving their brethren, and the increasing demand for laborers half a world away, fear and “méfiance” [“distrust”] descend upon the villagers as they say: “Autrefois nous ne craignons que nos ennemis, aujourd’hui nous avons peur des amis” (31-32) [“In the past we feared only our enemies; today we fear our friends”] (32). While evoking African collaboration, Schwarz-Bart asserts that before the slave trade came to Casamance it was a place of “luxe” and “tranquillité.” Now called Sigi-Thyor, meaning “sit-down and cry,” the French slavers’ lust for human capital has thrust evil upon the basin, and compelled locals, fearing bondage themselves, to become

“chasseurs” [hunters] (31). Thus, Schwarz-Bart sees colonizing ventures as the principle cause of Africa’s destabilization.

As C.L.R. James writes in his landmark work of narrative history, *The Black Jacobins*, with the expansion of the colonial empire, coupled with increased demand in the metropole, the French needed labor; “so the slavers brought more and more [Africans], in numbers that leapt by thousands every year, until the drain from Africa ran into the millions” (5). Like James, Schwarz-Bart attempts to bring a narrative element to this horrid tale – arguably relying more heavily on narrative than his counterpart – with his novel, *La mulâtresse Solitude*, opening in 1755 on the West African coast, and closing in 1802 on the island of Guadeloupe. Nevertheless, a thorough bibliography at the end of its French edition outlines the list of contemporary sources Schwarz-Bart used to research French slavery (141). As a result, the novel should be viewed as a work of historical discourse, told through the medium of fiction. While story bound in nature, it successfully parallels verified historical events and the experiences of those subjected to the institution’s hardships.

The ways in which both James and Schwarz-Bart meld historical discourse, biography and historical fiction to conjure up repressed memories of the transatlantic trade, enslavement and subsequent revolutions speaks to narrative’s ability to form powerful counter discourses. Prominent post-colonial critic David Scott, reinforces this idea in discussing *The Black Jacobins*: “certain... formal features of a historical narrative – plot for instance – contain within them determinate story potentials... [which] help to give the history, irrespective of its semantic or thematic content the recognizable shape of a story of one kind... rather than another” (*Conscripts of Modernity* 32). Thus, James

reification of the Haitian Revolution is significant because it traces a line through history – from initial capture to the middle passage, enslavement and rebellion – and relates it to his own contemporary struggle against British colonization in Trinidad and Tobago. Schwarz-Bart accomplishes this *mélange* as well, with *La mulâtresse Solitude* discussing slavery (and slave resistance) as a total experience, lasting generations beyond abolition. This leads to the novel’s stunning ending that juxtaposes the failed Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and Solitude’s 1802 slave revolt in Guadeloupe. Nevertheless, while James largely frames his narrative as one of romance²⁸ to arouse support for anti-colonial struggle, Schwarz-Bart’s figures as one of tragedy. Thus, while James’ brutal summary of slavery in his book’s first chapter, “The Property,” serves as a shocking prologue that contextualizes the coming revolution, the actual story does not begin until he evokes Toussaint L’Ouverture; whose atypical upbringing allowed him to rise to the highest status that a slave could in plantation society, before upending it (19-20). In contrast, Schwarz-Bart relates the personal stories of Bayangumay, and her daughter Solitude, to show the agony caused by enslavement, and its reverberations throughout history.

Thus, Schwarz-Bart does not simply enter a discussion of captivity and enslavement, but shows its debilitating effects as a “lived experience” (Lindsay, Sweet 1). His marked use of genre hybridity – particularly biography and historical fiction – in *La mulâtresse Solitude* allows him to examine the day-to-day lives of those rounded up and enslaved in Senegal and the French Antilles; all while interrogating the broad

²⁸ In the 1962 Vintage-Random House reissue of *The Black Jacobins*, James walks back his romanticization of the Haitian Revolution in a new preface and appendix, titled “From Toussaint L’Ouverture to Fidel Castro.” In this he qualifies his past hopes for the success of anti-colonial struggle with its failures in the nascent post-colonial era. This is reflected in the original preface, which reads: “This book is the history of a revolution and written under different circumstances it would have been a different but not necessarily better book.” In doing so, James casts the book as a product of its time. For a book-length study of this phenomenon see David Scott’s *Conscripts of Modernity: the Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*.

processes at work. This exemplifies, renowned anthropologist and physician, Paul Farmer's argument from his 1996 "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View From Below" in which he writes, "the experience of suffering, it is often noted, is not effectively conveyed by statistics or graphs. The 'texture' of dire affliction is perhaps best felt in the gritty details of biography... in order to see how various large-scale social forces come to be translated into personal distress and disease" (261-263). For this reason, Schwarz-Bart's portrayal of the veritable life story of the famed Guadeloupean revolutionary, la Mulâtresse Solitude – and imagining that of her mother – gives him the ability to access this history with great detail and resonance.

The author successfully presents a West African coast where – by the eighteenth century's second half – the political, economic and social strains of the trade have pushed Bayangumay's tribe to the brink. In the days leading up to her capture she has several nightmares in which the slavers descend upon her village. As the fear becomes a fact of life, Schwarz-Bart shows its impact on the villagers' psyche writing, "La destination finale des captifs était inconnue : le peuple disait que les Blancs se repaissent de viande humaine, les sages estimaient qu'ils en font hommage à leurs dieux et ceux qui sentaient leur esprit chanceler – ceux-là contemplaient l'immensité du ciel et se taisaient" (*La mulâtresse Solitude* 32) ["the ultimate destination of the captives was unknown: The common people said the whites fed on human flesh; the sages believed they offered it up to the gods; those who felt their minds were cracking contemplated the immensity of the sky and said nothing"] (Manheim 32). Despite the tribe's efforts to protect themselves, Bayangumay finally awakes one night to hear women screaming, "protégez-nous des marchands des hommes!" ["protect us from the sellers of men!"] while flurries of arrows

rain all over and she thinks of her “cauchemar” [nightmare], which “brouillait et prenait appearance du réel” (34) [“was growing confused and taking on an appearance of reality”] (36). The author ends the scene with the girl’s sobs, only to flash to the next day when “La mort faucha largement sur la place du village” [“death mowed the village square”] and all survivors finding themselves “en une sorte de longue corde à nœuds” [“attached to a long knotted rope”] as they are guided “au long des sentiers de servitude” (34-35) [“over the paths of servitude”] (37). Finally, after several agonizing weeks of uncertainty and forced travel, Bayangumay begins to learn that the slavers do not intend to keep her in Africa. Upon arrival at Cap-Vert, Schwarz-Bart notes how “traînant leurs chaînes” [“fitted with chains”] the captives are forced onto a slave ship by overseers who “dressaient des lames et des batons métalliques sur tout le monde” (38) [“raised blades, and iron clubs, and rifle butts over everyone”].²⁹ In doing so, Schwarz-Bart uses terrifying imagery to convey the crippling pain, terror and anxiety experienced by the Africans in the dark, constricting space of the ship. The author stays with Bayangumay’s every thought, as terror sets in and she sees the small pitch-black hole framing the ship’s cargo hold. Even as the girl experiences one final “seconde infiniment douce” (38) [“infinitely sweet moment”] (41) in which she looks at the sky for the last time and smiles, her situation steadily worsens. With everyone extending their arms and using them like “des antennes” [“feelers”] of blinded ants, Schwarz-Bart’s description of space sharply contracts. Now, with all light suspended – thrust into “l’ombre” [“darkness”] and “l’inconnu” [“the unknown”] – Bayangumay lies down as best she can.

Trapped within an agonizing and perpetual night, the girl sees herself as part of “une infinité de petits poissons” (38) [“thousands of little fish”] swirling around inside the

²⁹ Translation is my own.

beastly vessel's giant stomach. Through this symbolic imagery, Schwarz-Bart finds himself squarely between Glissant and Césaire – echoing the description of slaves onboard as tapeworms in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, and anticipating Glissant's reading of the ship as a womb in "La Barque Ouverte." While Césaire's conjecture cites the ship's revolutionary potentialities, and Glissant casts it as the mechanism through which a new creole identity would surface, Schwarz-Bart mostly focuses on the space's violent attributes. This builds upon the horrors briefly evoked by James and Césaire, along with Glissant's severe, yet disjointed treatment of the middle-passage in *Le Quatrième siècle*. Thus, Schwarz-Bart's rendering of the slaves as a school of fish, desperately trying to find escape only to be beaten back at every bout speaks to their ensuing powerlessness. Furthermore, his portrayal unfolds in real-time with pulsating realism to depict the brutality used to degrade, dehumanize and strip enslaved Africans of all freedoms once possessed. In doing so, he shows – with astonishing clarity – how French slave traders utilized the most modern technologies of their time to terrorize an entire continent – deporting and enslaving millions of its inhabitants.

And yet, in a final gesture, Schwarz-Bart writes, "et puis tout redevint ordinaire" ["and then everything became ordinary again"]³⁰ after the crew seals off the hull and sets sail for Guadeloupe. This speaks to slavery's violent self-normalization, in which Bayangumay feels forced to accept her fate if she hopes to survive. However, lying supine, she "tremblait et ressentait toutes douleurs, la faim, la soif, la vermine, le manque d'air, l'odeur d'autrui et celle de ses propres ordures répandues" (41) ["trembled as though with fever, and felt each of her miseries—hunger, thirst, vermin, the lack of air,

³⁰ Translation is my own.

the smell of others and the smell of herself”].³¹ Amid unsuccessful attempts to “avalier sa langue” [swallow her tongue] the girl decides to fasten “une parole poétique dans sa tête” [“a poem in her head”] (46), repeating it over and over as the boats sails off: “*Ô donnez-moi un message à porter aux ancêtres/Car mon nom est Bayangumay/Et je sortirai demain/Oui demain je sortirai du rang des bêtes*” (42) [Oh, give me a message to take to the ancestors/For my name is Bayangumay/And tomorrow I will [leave this place]/Yes tomorrow I will cease to be an animal] (46). Writing the novel in collaboration with his wife, Simone, while living in post-independence Dakar, Senegal (Scharfman 211), the couple found themselves working on the *La mulâtresse Solitude* at a profoundly different moment from the inter-war period experienced by anti-colonial theorists like Césaire and James. Thus, notions of revolt and creole identity are not as present in Schwarz-Bart’s rendering of the middle passage. Bayangumay’s gesture speaks to a far more understated form of resistance. She caustically recognizes her total animalization onboard, but holds onto the possibility to overcome. In doing so, she maintains a sense of defiance that will, if nothing else, allow her to “endure.” But Bayangumay does not only endure as she comes to raise a daughter who will take up arms and resist enslavement years later.

In contrast to *La mulâtresse Solitude*, *Absalom, Absalom!* avoids exploring the consciousness of enslaved characters to the same extent. This reticence provokes one of Glissant’s few criticisms of Faulkner’s work.³² Nevertheless, in the chapter “En noir-et-blanc” of *Faulkner, Mississippi* Glissant asserts that the author mitigates this by presenting Black slaves as “témoins vivants, et non responsables, de cette damnation

³¹ Translation is my own.

³² An exception to this is Sam Feathers, a half Native American, half African American character in *Go Down, Moses*. Glissant explores this critique throughout the chapter “En noir-et-blanc” in *Faulkner, Mississippi*.

originelle” (84) [“living witnesses, not [the] responsible [parties], to the original sin of the South”] (Lewis, Spear 58). They are witnesses to the brutality of “l’esclavage” and “la Guerre Civile” but “ils ne [le] porteront pas avec eux au long de l’Histoire. Ils ne font pas l’Histoire” (84) [“This 'situation' will not accompany them throughout History, for they do not make History”] (58). Instead, Glissant writes “« They endured. » Ils enduraient. Ils endurèrent” (81). Thus, Faulkner interrogates America’s violent expanse through white characters because “la responsabilité originelle” [the original sin] rests with them (Glissant 84). Furthermore, Glissant charges that Faulkner understood “qu’il comprendra jamais ni les Noirs ni les Indiens, et qu’il serait odieux (et, à ses yeux ridicule) de poser au narrateur tout-puissant et d’essayer de pénétrer ces consciences pour lui impénétrables” (97) [“that he [would] never understand Blacks or Indians and that it would be hateful (and in his view ridiculous) to pose as an omniscient narrator or to try to penetrate these minds unknowable to him] (68). Ultimately, it was more useful for Faulkner – lacking the cross-cultural experience of Schwarz-Bart – to critique Southern history from his own vantage point rather than attempting to appropriate the voice of *l’Autre*.

Writing in 1936, the author nevertheless finds a way to set up a relational dialogue between “les Noirs et les Blancs” [“Blacks and Whites”] when “separate but equal” reigned supreme (Faulkner, Mississippi 99). For example, towards the end of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the novel’s narrator, Quentin Compson, recounts the story of his grandfather’s friend, Thomas Sutpen, to his Harvard roommate, Shreve, in 1909. Through Sutpen’s rise and fall, Shreve, a Northerner, interacts with the South’s troubled history for the first time and wonders how Quinten bears it all.

[It's] something my people haven't got... We don't live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?) and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. What is it? Something you live and breathe like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago? a kind of entailed birthright of father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman... a long line of colonels killed in Pickett's charge at Manassas? (361)

Glissant echoes this when he states, “[Pour Faulker] la tare de l’esclave était... la souffrance physique de l’oppression et de la misère. Mais aussi pour l’esclavagiste, une manque irremediable... une souffrance morale” (99) [“the flaw of slavery was, for the slave, the oppression and misery brought on by the physical suffering. But also for the slaveholder, it entailed an irreversible moral suffering”].³³ Therefore, Faulkner presents the antebellum South as a colonized space – with Reconstruction and the Jim Crow South rendered as a post-colonial space – in which the colonizer, white slaveholders, and the colonized, black slaves (and Native Americans)³⁴ and their descendants, were – and continue to be – forced to occupy the same space. For this reason, both groups carry this malevolent history with them: African Americans continue to deal with the lingering trauma and economic reverberations of chattel slavery and segregation, while whites find themselves – and the wealthy, industrialized nation they enjoy – marred by their ancestor’s original sin. Implicit within Faulknerian discourse is a belief that Southern whites must recognize these facts of history; that the socio-economic system to which they consent and benefit from finds its root in a profound evil, which has led to sustained political, social and economic discrimination of black and native Americans. Therefore, Faulkner seeks to deconstruct the old, mythic South, and unmask the ugliness of the

³³ Translation is my own.

³⁴ The narrative of genocide of Native Americans also forms a part of this story. Unfortunately, it remains largely unexplored by the literary and theoretical works in question.

“new” South, which rose from its ashes. This amounts to certain aftershocks of American slavery – from the Civil to Radical Reconstruction and Jim Crow – which fascinate Faulkner and relate well to those articulated by Schwarz-Bart and Césaire.

Consequently, Faulkner frames *Absalom, Absalom* around Sutpen’s quest to find fortune as a member of the plantation aristocracy. Thus, Quentin takes a keen interest in the circumstances that led to the man’s rise to prowess. In chapter seven, he relays his grandfather’s, General Compson, retelling of it to Shreve, beginning with a ten-year-old Sutpen who had never questioned his family’s poverty – feeling that there were simply “some spawned rich” and “some not” (222). Notably, Faulkner presents the boy’s Appalachian farming community as an egalitarian space where “the land belonged to everybody and anybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say ‘This is mine’ was crazy” (221). The West Virginia enclave seemingly exists outside of history with the idea of a land “all divided, fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own, and where a certain few men... had the power of life and death and barter and sale over other” completely outside his realm of understanding (221). This portrayal lines up with Bayangumay’s serene “planète étrange” [strange planet] soon to be overrun by, but still existing outside the reach of “les marchands des hommes” [the sellers of men] in *La mulâtresse Solitude*; as well as the sylvan maroon communities that Schwarz-Bart features towards its conclusion. However, through French and American assent to processes of *nomadisme en flèche*, and capitalist expanse, no acreage or individual could escape its – dually beneficial and ruinous – effects. In light of this, the prospect of leaving their small farm for work on a plantation in Tidewater, Virginia tantalizes Sutpen’s father

as the family packs up and heads east. Exposed to these riches for the first time, the boy develops a fascination with their splendor.

[He] had never heard of, never imagined, a place, divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing but ride over it on fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the galleries of big houses while other people worked for them; he did not even imagine then that there was such way to live or to want to live, or that there existed all the objects to be wanted which there were. (221)

And yet, the boy initially maintains a degree of innocence and believes the mansion's occupants to be his equals, irrespective of their social standing. It is only when a house slave rebukes Sutpen for attempting to enter the estate through the front door, and the ensuing humiliation, that makes him acutely aware of "the difference not only between white men and black ones, but... a difference between white men and white men" (226). From this point on, he comes to resent and envy the plantation aristocracy, aspiring to join its ranks so that he would never again be made to feel subordinate.

Faulkner structures what follows with Sutpen's blunt declaration, "So I went to the West Indies."³⁵ The house slave's reproach stays with him into adolescence, eventually causing an internal explosion that shatters his innocent disposition. The anxiety pushes him to an extreme state of mind in which he feels a psychological need to attain their same status. At first, Sutpen thinks of this within the context of violence: "If you were going to combat them that had the fine rifles, the first thing you would do would be to get yourself the nearest thing to a fine rifle" (238). However, he quickly realizes that weaponry forms but a part of this struggle and that "You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with" (238). Thus, *Absalom, Absalom!* arrives at its greatest contribution: the fusion of Caribbean history with that of the

³⁵ Sutpen utters this several times throughout the chapter during his retelling of his voyage to General Compson. See pages: 227-257.

American South (*Faulkner, Mississippi* 17). This prominently surfaces once the fourteen-year-old Sutpen learns of “a place called the West Indies to which poor men went in ships and became rich,” and ventures to Haiti (227). There he believes he will acquire the necessary fortune “so long as that [he] was clever and courageous” (227). Continuing with his succinct statement, “So I went to the West Indies,” he recounts his thought process before departing: “when the time came I realized that to accomplish my ‘design’ I should need first of all and above all things money in considerable quantities” (243). Sutpen’s captivation with “the West Indies” works to both frame its position within the American imagination as a site of boundless opportunity and wealth, and underscore the monetary power relations between the fledgling empire and its soon-to-be Caribbean sphere of influence. While the author muddles Haiti’s history considerably, its representation is by no means insignificant. As Faulkner expert Jeff Karem points out, Sutpen’s 1820 rise to become an accomplished plantation overseer – gaining slaves and a fortune of his own in the process – fifteen years after the Haitian Revolution and the resulting massacre of the French, is a virtual impossibility (163). As a result, Faulkner culls his representation of Haiti through a deliberately ahistorical lens (163).³⁶ Thus, even as the author gives Haiti a clear presence in Sutpen’s ascent, its spatial-temporal state remains elusive. Nevertheless, the author’s refrain from confining Haiti to its history renders it emblematic of the Caribbean as a whole, and presents it as a starting point for the wealth and exploitative processes that would eventually beget the American empire. Thus, as *La mûlatresse Solitude* explicitly ties French slavery to its beginnings in Africa,

³⁶ In “Fear of a Black Atlantic? African Passages in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Last Slaver*,” Jeff Karem discusses at length how initial manuscripts of the novel Faulkner described Haiti with greater fluidity and grounded the slave revolt in which Sutpen fights as part of a larger political insurrection on the island. However, he would strip much of this from its final version (162-165).

Sutpen's journey frames the American institution as one, which emanated from the neighboring islands.

Overall, 864,000 black Africans would be brought to Haiti, 291,000 to Guadeloupe and almost twenty million to the Caribbean in total (Régent 51). And yet, an inherent violence in the technologies and brutalities of chattel slavery existed that even these figures – while unconscionable – cannot convey. Eighteenth century freedmen, Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano, found themselves continually plagued by this as well – that “thousands more suffered [a]similar and greater distress,” without being afforded another chance at freedom (Cugoano 11). Nevertheless, the degree to which their personal narratives depict the horrors of the middle passage and plantation life do much to reinforce the humanity of those enslaved. Schwarz-Bart's recreation of their scenarios in *La mulâtresse Solitude* – along with Faulkner's attempt to “relate” to them in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* – follows in their footsteps by giving contemporary readers a place to empathize with black Africans' loss of freedom and entrapment on Caribbean and Southern plantations.

2.2 EMPIRE'S COLLAPSE FROM WITHIN

Schwarz-Bart divides *La mulâtresse Solitude* into two parts: the first, “Bayangumay” conveys initial capture in West Africa, while the second, “Solitude,” portrays the ugliness of day-to-day plantation life and the attempts to resist it. In Bayangumay and Solitude's narratives Schwarz-Bart does much to individualize the travails of those enslaved. In particular, through Bayangumay's journey – in which she finds herself taken captive, shipped to the Americas, and raped – the slave experience is

portrayed as one of extreme dehumanization. Schwarz-Bart emphasizes this upon describing her state after spending a few years on a Guadeloupien plantation.

[Elle] était indubitablement vieille, telle une vieille case branlante, avec sa peau fripée et ses plaques de moisissure grise au visage, ces touffes d'herbe rose sur le corps, un peu partout, comme à toutes celles qui n'ont pas su passer au travers du fouet. Il y avait aussi cette oreille manquante, qui l'obligeait à parler de biais, sa main en cornet, comme les vieilles d'entre vieilles ; et le boitillement qui lui venait du tibia mal remis, dont une pointe perçait, encore, donnant à Man Bobette une démarche d'insecte abimé, de mouche à laquelle on a enlevé une aile. (49)

[She was undoubtedly old like a ramshackle old hut, with her ravaged skin and those splotches of grey mold on her face, and on her body those tufts of pink grass where the whips had fallen. Besides one of her ears was missing, which made her talk on a slant... And then there was the slight limp caused by her broken shinbone, which had set and still protruded in one place, so that she walked like a mutilated insect, a fly with one wing plucked off]. (55)

Virtually indistinguishable from older women on the plantation, her health appears to be in a terrible state. Now known as Man Bobette, she works as a field hand, and has given birth to a mulatto daughter, Solitude, after being raped by a white slave trader. Being no more than thirty years of age, her tormentors have stripped Bayangumay of everything that once constituted her identity. Indeed, with this passage Schwarz-Bart reminds his reader of the animalization thrust upon slaves, who were treated no better than livestock by their oppressors – possessing little agency.

In the face of masters' unchecked domination of slaves, various levels of the American government, the Bourbon court, and the French Republic all attempted to implement certain "slave codes" in hopes of regulating their most heinous transgressions. Of course, these statutes held but a weak *de jure* status as C.L.R. states that "for the least fault, the slaves received the harshest punishment" to emphasize their *de facto* reality (James 12). Thus, local magistrates acted as mere figureheads who possessed little capacity – or will – to actually enforce these laws (12). One finds a particularly ironic

example of this in *métissage* – or the Southern term, miscegenation – in which plantation personnel would impregnate enslaved women through rape or *concubinage* and father mixed race children.³⁷ In spite of its widespread practice, the very idea of racial “mixing” remained a great social, political and religious anxiety surrounding plantation society, with various laws being passed to stymie its continuation (Gautier 154). One finds this in Article IX of *Le Code noir*, which placed harsh penalties on masters and overseers who kept black concubines.

Les hommes libres qui auront eu un ou plusieurs enfants de leur concubinage avec des esclaves, ensemble les maîtres qui les auront soufferts, seront chacun condamnés en une amende de 2000 livres de sucre, et, s'ils sont les maîtres de l'esclave de laquelle ils auront eu lesdits enfants, voulons, outre l'amende, qu'ils soient privés de l'esclave et des enfants et qu'elle et eux soient adjugés à l'hôpital. (85)

[Free men who shall have one or more children during concubinage with their slaves, together with their masters who accepted it, shall each be fined two thousand pounds of sugar. If they are the masters of the slave who produced said children, we desire, in addition to the fine, that the slave and the children be removed and that she and they be sent to work at the hospital].³⁸

In addition to this, anti-miscegenation laws were also enacted by a host of American states.³⁹ Nevertheless, these reforms were rarely enforced in the Antebellum South; with Arlette Gautier identifying a similar situation in the French Antilles stating, “ces lois repressives sont suivies de peu d’effets” [“these repressive laws were followed to little effect”] (156).⁴⁰ Schwarz-Bart and Faulkner both go to great lengths in their works to

³⁷ Arlette Gautier also discusses sexual relations between white women and black slaves in chapter six of *Les Soeurs de Solitude*. She states that while these types of relationships did occur, they were extremely rare and led to disgrace and social estrangement for “les blanches” involved (151-154).

³⁸ Translation provided by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/335/>

³⁹ See *The Encyclopedia of African American History*, page 230, for a discussion of the complexities and variety of anti-miscegenation laws in the Antebellum South. It is also noted that after Reconstruction these laws became a way to enforce Jim Crow segregation. All would be repealed after the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court.

⁴⁰ Translations of Arlette Gautier’s work are my own.

show métissage and miscegenation's realities on American and French plantations. For example, in the event of Bayangumay's resulting pregnancy and subsequent birth of Solitude, authorities take no action to identify her rapist or remove her child from bondage as mandated by "Article IX." This leads to what Gautier refers to as an "ombre du blanc" ["white shadow"] resting over the mixed-race children of the enslaved, which comes to define the "[violence] contre le sexe des femmes... dévoilée par la brutalité esclavagiste" ["the violence against women... unveiled by slavery's brutality"]; however, "Solitude, née de cette violence avec un œil vert et un œil noir... [prendrait] un jour les armes" ["Solitude, born from this violence with one green eye and one black eye... would, one day, take up arms"] to fight back against those very same oppressors (Gautier 8).⁴¹

In the interim, Solitude's status as "une mûlatresse" affords her certain advantages. When she comes of age, the master moves her to "la grande maison" where she acts as his daughter's – Xavière, whom she must call "maîtresse" – playmate (64-65). Schwarz-Bart notes that métisse slaves were coveted by masters as they "servaient d'intermédiaires entre les Noirs et les Blancs" (46) ["served as intermediaries between the blacks and the whites"] (Manheim 52). While living in the mansion, Solitude enjoys her status, seeing that "les tâches étaient dérisoires, et d'une facilité enfantine au regard des champs" (67) ["her duties were nothing compared to work in the fields"] (78) being well fed, clothed and sheltered. Nevertheless, the slave condition stays with the girl as she must still live in fear of Xavière's "mignon fouet à manche d'os" (65) ["little bone handled whip"] (75) that, when wielded, would give her the grimace of an overseer.

⁴¹ To make this point Arlette Gautier uses Schwarz-Bart's *La mûlatresse Solitude* as a reference. This strengthens arguments that this text should be read as historical discourse as well as creative fiction.

Indeed, many oppressive institutions invariably use privileged members of a dominated community (garnering better treatment, but remaining dominated all the same) to control the larger population, with the use of mixed race house slaves to facilitate relations between white masters and black field hands forming a part of this larger tradition.

Though he is not a mulatto, Toussaint L'Ouverture is portrayed in a similar light in *The Black Jacobins*. The author describes "a small privileged caste... butlers, maids, nurses, female companions, and other house servants," who enjoyed "kind treatment and comparatively easy life" (James 19). James' discussion of these slaves remains fairly negative stating, "Permeated with the vices of their masters and mistresses, these upper servants gave themselves airs and despised slaves in the fields" (19). However, despite sharing this background, "a few of these used their position to cultivate themselves, to gain a little education, to learn all they could," like Toussaint (19). Thus, Toussaint rose to a status usually reserved for the white, petite bourgeoisie – becoming a coachman in charge of livestock and garnering his own parcel of land to develop. Yet, when armed struggle descended upon Saint-Domingue in 1791, the man used his intellect and position to cleverly exploit divisions between the mulattos and white colonists vying for independence (99). In doing so, he came to lead the army of black rebels that ultimately brought down the entire colonial regime (99, 116-117). Thus, James observes that "the leaders of a revolution are usually those who have been able to profit by the cultural advantages of the system they are attacking" with the Haitian Revolution being no exception (19). This relates to Césaire's casting of slaves in cargo hulls as tape worms – slowly eating away as the colonizers from within. Since, Toussaint would eventually descend from those onboard and sound the call for rebellion – employing the colonizers'

own tactics against them – he embodies the theorist’s conception of “un veritable choc en retour.”

Faulkner also explores these same themes through a discussion of miscegenation, and the questions of privilege, legacy and heritage surrounding the practice. For example, during his time in Haiti, Sutpen gains fortune by marrying Eulalia Bon, the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner, and fathers a son, Charles. Despite the woman’s dark complexion, the man initially believes her to be part Spanish; however, upon realizing that black blood ran through her veins,⁴² Sutpen repudiates his marriage and child because “they would not be adjunctive to the forwarding of his design” (*Absalom, Absalom!* 262). Even though Eulalia and Charles’ blackness was so subtle “he could have closed his eyes and... fooled the rest of the world as they had fooled him,” his “conscience” would not allow the child “to bear his name” (266). Sutpen’s “design” remained so particular that the upstart planter refused to entertain the thought that his hereditary line might be corrupted by “negro blood” (263-264). And yet his tightly held, if not warped, moral convictions do not allow Sutpen to leave the mother and child derelict. Instead, he grants his fortune and plantation to them, takes just twenty slaves with him, and sails away for Jefferson, Mississippi. At the novel’s beginning, Faulkner shrouds Sutpen’s arrival in mystery stating: “it was only by sheer geographical hap that Sutpen passed through [Jefferson] at all, pausing only long enough for someone... to look beneath the wagon hood and into a black tunnel filled with still eyeballs and smelling like a wolfdan” (26-27). After purchasing a vast acreage from Native Americans, which he would call “Sutpen’s Hundred,” he immediately begins to implement his grand “design”

⁴² Faulkner never fully explains how Sutpen discovers this, but her blackness forms such a consequential cornerstone of the plot that the reader is never led to question it.

that – in addition to the money, slaves and land he had already attained – would require the formal trimmings of a true Southern plantation: a legitimate home and family. In doing so, Sutpen seemingly brings the Caribbean to Jefferson for a time, speaking to the “wild” slaves in a creole French so strange that “another Frenchman could not have understood all of it” and enlisting the help of an architect from Martinique to direct construction of his mansion (257). With every step, the man takes a decidedly schematic approach to create an immense plantation conforming to his delusions of grandeur. Nevertheless, he remains determined to overcome his mishap on Haiti. Thus, he marries a second wife, Ellen, who delivers two “pure” children, Henry and Judith, for him – ostensibly stabilizing his situation and fashioning an enduring legacy in the process.

Amazingly, the circumstances of his original sin in the West Indies fail to weigh heavily on Sutpen’s conscience; by leaving the mother and child with land and money of their own, he feels absolved from any wrong doing. Years later, echoing his grandfather, Quentin would explain Sutpen’s callous departure stating, “[he believed] the ingredients of morality were like a pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but a pie or cake could come out” (263). And yet, Sutpen would never free himself from the specters of his past, with Charles Bon eventually tracking him down, bringing ruin to his birth father’s grandiose “design.” Counter to the man’s belief that he could placate his first wife and son, Eulalia and Charles relocate to New Orleans and she raises the boy – “plotting and planning” all the while – to exact her revenge. This culminates in Eulalia strategically enrolling her son at the University of Mississippi concurrent with Henry Sutpen. While there, Charles befriends Henry who, in turn, invites him to spend the class

break at Sutpen's Hundred. Accepting the offer, Bon comes face-to-face with his father for the first time in years with Sutpen unable to believe it. While neither acknowledges their blood ties, both are well-aware of the stakes at hand, and the encounter throws Sutpen into a panic. Even though he had "imagined, planned, designed" his way out of poverty and became one of the plantation elite, he "felt and heard the design—house, position, posterity and all—come down like it had been built out of smoke" upon seeing Bon (267). Faulkner compounds Sutpen's stress when Bon sets his sites on his half-sister, Judith. Realizing "that Judith was in love with Bon" as "the nigger groom that fetched the mail back and forth between Oxford and Sutpen's Hundred each week brought letters to Judith that were not in Henry's hand [but Bon's]" he decides to take action (268-269). As a result, Sutpen corners Henry, tells him of his "minor tactical mistake" in the Caribbean, and asks that he remedy it by murdering Bon (269).

Faulkner pairs the symbolic *choc en retour* of Bon's return – which threatens to destabilize all of Sutpen's achievement – with America's literal *choc en retour*, the Civil War. Accordingly, he asks Henry to kill Bon in 1861, when the half-brothers join the university company, and Henry merely hopes that "that the War would settle the matter, leave free one of the two irreconcilables" (95). This gives him four long years to "wrestle" with what he "has" to do (268-269); recalling conversations with his father and confronting Bon on the matter over and over again. Observing the violence of the war first-hand, Henry initially hopes that, in its wake, "there wouldn't be anything left that mattered, worth getting that heated over, worth protesting against or suffering for or dying for." And yet his father's statement (as matter of fact as "So I went to the West Indies"), "he cannot marry her, Henry," continues to fester. Thus, he arrives at the

conclusion that he must kill Bon, because, in the war's waning days, with Sherman's scorched earth march and Grant's Richmond siege making its result a virtual *fait accompli*, Henry convinces himself that, despite the South's imminent capitulation he can still preserve his family's "honor and pride" (354). But even at the last minute, Henry looks for an alternate solution imploring Bon to reconsider his intention to marry Judith stating, "You are my brother... think of her [Judith]" to which Bon retorts, "it's the miscegenation, not the incest you cannot bear... I have [thought of you and of her]. For four years. Now I am thinking of myself... I'm the nigger who's going to sleep with your sister" (357-358).⁴³ And yet, Henry balks at the deed throughout the war's duration, until after their surrender and subsequent return to Sutpen's Hundred – when he must finally confront the reality of Judith and Bon's marriage – he takes out a pistol, and shoots Bon at the plantation's gate (358).

The shot rings and reverberates throughout Sutpen's Hundred, whose shocks complement its – and the South's – swift decline. With this act of violence, Faulkner muddles the idea of the Civil War as a potential historical end point, after which the fractured *de jure* union might enjoy a peaceful and fraternal *rapprochement*. Implicit in Henry's hope that the conflict would solve the "Bon problem" is the larger ideal that war can lead to the realization of progress, allowing for those involved to come together and start anew. However, in reality, the Southern surrender – while definitively ending American slavery – fails to realize a true *farewell to arms* and forge a lasting peace. Instead, Henry's feelings of defeat lead to profound emasculation, "the ultimate degradation to which war brings the spirit, the soul," which he attempts to remedy by

⁴³ Bon states that he would have abandoned his intention to marry Judith had Sutpen, his father, confronted him directly. Nevertheless, since he sought to indirectly dissuade him through Henry, Bon refuses to change course.

clinging to constructions of familial honor, and shooting his “negro” half-brother (157). And yet, still feeling conflicted about his actions, Henry flees from the plantation vanishing for years to come.⁴⁴ In the aftermath of his son’s crime, Sutpen returns to the plantation, now “a ruined land” (157), speaking to the post war situation as a whole, “encompassing each ruined field and fallen fence and crumbling wall of cabin or cotton house or crib” (160). Despite the collapse of Sutpen’s Hundred – its fields overgrown and slaves gone – the once mighty planter sets out to rebuild and restore its former glory. Nevertheless, the subsequent terror and tensions of the Reconstruction era, with “carpet baggers,” “locked doors,” “tales of negro uprisings,” and “the ruined, the four years fallow and neglected land... [as] men with pistols in their pockets gathered at secret meeting places in the town,” makes his aim a virtual impossibility (161). This forces Sutpen to take up progressively more desperate steps to reinstate his dynasty crushed by the war’s end, Bon’s murder, and Henry’s disappearance. As a result, he “seduces” his longtime overseer’s (Wash Jones) fifteen-year-old granddaughter, Milly, aiming to produce a new male heir; however, after she gives birth to (much to Sutpen’s chagrin) a girl, her enraged grandfather kills Sutpen in 1869 – “quiet and bloody,” with “his teeth still showing,” and “his hair almost white” (185). In the planter’s spectacular downfall, Faulkner anticipates Césaire’s work where he asserts that “la colonisation travaille à *déciviliser* le colonisateur... à le dégrader, à le réveiller aux instincts enfouis, à la convoitise, à la haine... [à] *l’ensauvagement*” (*Discours sur le colonialisme* 11). This also falls in line with Glissant’s recognition of Faulkner’s overarching critique of the United States’ colonial-enlightenment project; which thrust the colonizer (the plantation

⁴⁴ At the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* It is revealed the Henry returned to Sutpen’s Hundred at the end of his life to die. This results in him and his lover, Clytie, setting the entire plantation on fire.

aristocrat) and the colonized (the black slave) into the same space – begetting only violence and domination in service of economic gain.

Schwarz-Bart also uses his craft to show how a fundamental moral bankruptcy permeated every single aspect of this terror-inducing system of economic dehumanization. However, in making his subjects the enslaved themselves he achieves a more personalized realization – from initial captivity to the slave ships, the plantation fields, mansions and beyond – of their struggle. Making an effort to give a complete view of French slavery, the second part, entitled “Solitude,” of *La mulâtresse Solitude* portrays the horrors of plantation life. As Solitude ages, she begins to understand the true nature of her situation upon witnessing the execution of an enslaved woman who killed her newborn baby. Much to the chagrin of plantation owners, this was a relatively common practice amongst enslaved women who saw killing their newborn children as a means freeing them from the harsh realities of slave life, and return their child’s spirit to their African homeland (Régent 156). As a result, the overseers set up brutal executions as punishment for this practice: “les yeux flambants comme des torches, elle avait insulté les maîtres pendant des heures, accrochée au poteau d’entrée de la rue cases-negres, avant que les fourmis manioc n’en finissent avec son corps enduit de mélasse” (52) [“They had tied her to the doorpost of one of the huts and coated her naked body with molasses. It took the manioc ants several hours to finish her off, and all that time, her eyes blazing like torches, she screamed insults at the masters”] (59). Struck by the punishment’s depraved nature, the girl also focuses on the reactions of those around her. One man, whose leg was cut off after an attempted escape, simply repeats, “les Maîtres sont bons, le Maîtres sont justes” (52) [“the masters are good, the masters are just”] (59) over and

over again in a trancelike state. Even her mother remains extremely subdued in the face of this atrocity, as Solitude observed that they both “regardaient la scène avec les mêmes yeux” (52) [“[observed] the scene with the same eyes”] (59), which simply looked on in horror. This passage paints an accurate picture of slaves’ hopelessness in the face of a master’s virtually unchecked authority over them.

This act of barbarism foreshadows the novel’s violent conclusion after the temporary abolition of slavery by the French revolutionary committee,⁴⁵ the emergence of its titular character as the famed Mulâtresse Solitude, and her resistance to Napoleon’s reinstatement of slavery throughout France’s colonial empire. The French citizenry’s disposal of the Bourbon monarchy, resulting in a groundswell of enlightenment fervor in the early years of the revolution, presented severe ideological and structural problems for the continuation of slavery (Jennings vii). Coupled with the de facto success of the revolution in Saint-Domingue, the newly empowered National Assembly outlawed slavery throughout the French colonies in 1794 (Jennings vii). Schwarz-Bart portrays this with the arrival of republican troops in May of 1795, who formally enforce abolition. After a brief armed struggle with plantation owners and royalists, the slaves are freed and begin to receive compensation for their work, with any punishments doled out strictly regulated by regiments of republican soldiers. At first Solitude takes comfort in this new lifestyle; yet she eventually comes to see it as nothing more than a reformed continuation of the old slave economy, and decides to go to the mountains and join the maroons.

In maroon communities former slaves could attempt to reclaim the freedoms they had lost when taken from Africa or born into slavery. Here they could make decisions about their own lives, travel freely, work at a leisurely pace and love whomever they

⁴⁵ *La Comité de salut public* headed by Maximilien Robespierre from 1793-1794.

wished (Gautier 227). *La mulâtresse Solitude* deals extensively with maroon society in Guadeloupe's dense central forest, which maintained a strong presence into the nineteenth century, and was likened to a small, yet self-sustaining republic by colonial officials (Régent 165-166). While the maroons of Saint-Domingue never returned to their shackles, going on to successfully win full independence and set up a republic of their own, those of Guadeloupe and France's other Antillean colonies would not be so fortunate. Nonetheless, this forms one of the novel's happiest segments as Solitude finds the ability to settle down, fall in love, and prepare to start a family; however back in the metropole, instability ran amuck – threatening Solitude's newfound way of life.

What began as a popular left-wing movement, devolved into terror, mass executions, and eventually resulted in the rise of a right-wing dictatorship under the control of Napoleon Bonaparte. As a result of the revolution, the French quickly lost their grip on the Antilles. Abolition was seen by many as little more than a ploy to discourage further revolts, and rally the African populations to fight for the French against the British and Spanish, during the Wars of the French Revolution (Régent 233). Suffering from political, economic and military destabilization, France could barely govern itself, let alone its colonies. Compounded by centuries of severe mistreatment and the spread of republican ideas to the plantations, maroon communities grew and moved ever closer to formal independence (Régent 261). Nonetheless, the fact remained that France still depended on goods from its colonies, which necessitated a large, economical labor force. Thus, when Napoleon overthrew the republic, he decided to reverse its policy of abolition and reinstate slavery in 1802 (Jennings vii). Naturally, this caused widespread problems for emancipated slaves – particularly in Guadeloupe and Saint-Domingue, where armed

conflict and marooning intensified. To comment on this development, Schwarz-Bart provides an informed, eloquent explanation on the eve of Solitude's rebellion.

Elle avait commencé au-delà des mers, bien des années auparavant... [le] jour de l'Abolition des esclaves dans les colonies françaises. La Convention s'y était résignée dans l'espérance – et le secret dessein, que la nouvelle embraserait toutes les plantations du Royaume-Uni... Huit ans plus tard, le traité de paix avec l'Angleterre ouvrait les océans au sucre, et mettait fin à la liberté toute provisoire du nègre. Au lendemain de sa signature, une flotte importante appareillait du port de Brest... montées de vétérans des [guerres napoléoniennes]. (122-123)

[It had begun beyond the seas many years before... when slavery in the colonies was abolished. The Convention had resigned itself to this measure in the secret hope that news of it would spread to the British West Indies... and provoke a revolution... Seven years later, the peace treaty with England opened the seas to sugar and put an end to the brief freedom of the blacks. The day after it was signed, a large fleet [sailed] out from Brest... carrying veterans of the campaigns of [Napoleon's wars]]. (154-155)

In doing so, the author puts his focus squarely on the violence surrounding slavery's reinstatement, along with the ridiculous and disingenuous chain of events that led to Guadeloupe's unfortunate early eighteenth century state of affairs – eliciting a particular poignancy, in both the accuracy and humanity of its portrayal.

Solitude, destined to be a mother, put her own immediate needs aside to lead their fight against the tyranny of enslavement and participated in many battles against Napoleon's forces.⁴⁶ The most consequential portion of *La mulâtresse Solitude* comes during Solitude's final battle. After successfully repelling the French for some time, reinforcements arrive and push Solitude's militia into the abandoned Danglemont plantation house, where they are destined to make their last stand. Through the window,

⁴⁶ With the maroon communities being rather egalitarian, women and men alike took up arms to combat slavery's restoration, including Solitude (Gautier 221). Schwarz-Bart shows her to be a selfless individual who, despite carrying a child, sides with the revolutionary General Delgrès and leads the maroons to resist enslavement. In this sense, the creole revolutionaries take the enlightenment ideals – 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' and 'vivre libre ou mourir' – more seriously than their metropolitan counterparts. Still, despite the heroism, which their popular rebellion entails, the French army ultimately puts down the resistance (Gautier 251).

Solitude observes “un flot continu de soldats [français], tous hurlant des chansons de France et treuchant de leurs baionettes dans la masse d’hommes et de femmes et d’enfants qui etaient un seul cri : *lan mô, lan mô, lan mô, vive lan mô*” (131) [“an unbroken wave of [French soldiers], all bellowing songs of France and plunging their bayonets into the masses of men, women and children, who all seemed to be shouting in unison ‘*La mort, la mort, vive la Mort*’”]⁴⁷ (166). Depicting the rebels choosing death over a return to their chains is a powerful moment in the novel, which portrays their willingness to give up their lives as a final form of resistance. Nevertheless, Solitude, being gravely injured in the fighting, must succumb to the imperial forces once they finally overtake the mansion. As a pregnant woman she is not executed immediately as most of her compatriots – instead she must wait until the delivery of her child, at which point, on November 29, 1802, the French authorities hang her. Born into slavery as well, Solitude’s child would have to wait until 1848 –France’s definitive abolition of slavery – to experience the freedom her mother and grandmother coveted so dearly. In spite of France’s eventual abolition – coming much later than England’s and other European counterparts – it remains impossible to assuage the debilitating effects for those four million human beings who saw their lives completely stolen from them as a result of this slave economy. Indeed, in depicting these events, Schwarz-Bart presents the tragic nature of slavery and the equally tragic fate of those who resisted it.

However, *La mulâtresse Solitude* does not end upon Solitude’s execution, but with a modern traveler visiting the plantation where the rebels rallied and met their ultimate demise. Now under private ownership, the Danglemont plantation curiously

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Manheim translates the creole “*lan mô*” into French and not English, which would be: “*Death, Death, Death, long live Death.*”

contains a small plaque commemorating Major Delgrès, and the others who fought and died for their freedom. In exploring the now empty space, where overseers no longer have the right to force enslaved persons to toil for hours on end, Schwarz-Bart makes the novel's most consequential connection.

Si l'étranger insiste, on l'autorisera à visiter les restes de l'ancienne Habitation Danglemont. Le gardien fera un geste, et, comme par une magie, surgira de l'ombre un nègre des champs tout dépenaillé, qui ouvrira des grands yeux incertains sur l'amateur de vieilles pierres. Ils s'en iront tous deux, l'homme venu d'ailleurs et celui-ci, ils marcheront longtemps au milieu de courts troncs échevelés, arriveront à un coteau dominant la mer et les îles voisines, Martinique, Désirade, Montserrat, toutes également surmontées d'un volcan. Ils iront et reviendront sur leurs pas, ils iront et soudain ce sera un pan de mur à hauteur de genou, un remblai d'où percent des éclats, des fragments aux arêtes d'os. Une, deux guêpes scintilleront à l'entour, se figeront dans l'air immobile : les oiseaux mouches aiment l'écartement de ce lieu, la senteur des fleurs lourdes et penchées de la banane. Ressentant un léger goût de cendre, l'étranger fera quelques pas au hasard, tracera des cercles de plus en plus grands autour du lieu de l'Habitation. Ça et là, sous de larges feuilles mortes, dorment encore des moellons projetés au loin par l'explosion et déterrés, enterres à nouveau et redéterrés par la houe innocente des cultivateurs : il heurtera l'un d'eux du pied. Alors, s'il tient à saluer une mémoire, il emplira l'espace environnant de son imagination ; et si le sort lui est favorable, toutes sortes de figures humaines se dresseront tout autour de lui, comme le font encore, dit-on, sous les yeux d'autres voyageurs, les fantômes qui errent parmi les ruines humiliées du ghetto de Varsovie. (139-140)

[If the traveler insists, he will be permitted to visit the remains of the old Danglemont plantation. The guard will wave his hand, and as though by magic a tattered black field worker will appear... and they will start off. A long walk among the shaggy trunks of the banana trees will take them to a hillock overlooking the sea and the neighboring islands, Martinique, Désirade, and Montserrat, each of them, like Guadeloupe, surmounted by a volcano. Here they will stroll this way and that and ultimately come to a remnant of a knee-high wall and a mound of earth intermingled with bone splinters... Conscious of a faint taste of ashes the visitor will take a few steps at random, tracing wider and wider circles around the site of the mansion. His foot will collide with one of the building stones, concealed by dead leaves, which were dispersed by the explosion and then over the years buried, dug up, covered over, and dug up again by the innocent hoes of the field workers. If he is in the mood to salute a memory, his imagination will people the environing space, and [all sorts of] human figures will rise up around him, just as the phantoms that wander the humiliated ruins of the Warsaw ghetto are [still] said to rise up before the eyes of other travelers.] (177-179)

In this passage, which serves as the conclusion to *La mulâtresse Solitude*, the author makes a stark connection between the confines of the slave plantation and those of the concentration camps and ghettos of the Second World War. Warranted by several factors – legally codified notions of racism, mass deportations to lands unknown, the systematic dehumanization of individuals deemed as *the other* for economic and political gain, and the massive human rights abuses proliferated through the violence and terror that ensued – Schwarz-Bart aptly identifies the interrelated nature of colonial violence and Nazi terror. In doing so, the author lends new credence to Césaire’s theory of *choc en retour*. Synthesizing Cugoano and Equiano’s personal accounts, and the revisionist discourses of Césaire and Arendt, he achieves a universal work that brings the sufferings of Solitude and her compatriots to the German ghettos and death camps – which exhibits the true evils of colonialism, totalitarianism and their consequent violence, unmitigated by centuries of enlightenment and technological advancements. One can only mourn for those who faced the slave ships, the iron muzzles, the heavy chains, the cat o’ nine tails, and extrajudicial killings – in hopes of conveying their sufferings in new ways, to ever larger and more sympathetic audiences.

In this sense, Schwarz-Bart’s project effectively illustrates the pain of the enslaved as a pain felt around the world, in a variety of spatial-temporal zones, from which it has yet to recover. He achieves this connection through powerful story-telling and marked historical research in *La mulâtresse Solitude* – taking the reader from Senegal to Guadeloupe to Poland – to do his part in furthering scholarly and artistic endeavors seeking to unearth and mitigate the West’s history of violence, all while

shedding light on the particular role of France in it all. His other novel, *Le dernier des Justes*, along with Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* bear similar implications.

2.3 EMPIRE FROM POINTS OF RUIN: *GO DOWN, MOSES* AND *LE DERNIER DES JUSTES*

The most consequential segment of Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, titled "The Bear" explores the implications of a post-colonial South in the aftermath of the Civil War. Centering on the novel's protagonist, Ike McCaslin – who comes from a mighty plantation family that, through share cropping, has preserved much of the antebellum status quo into the late nineteenth century – the author uses his epiphany to highlight the structural problems with the American economy, which the Civil War failed to solve. This comes to a head when McCaslin, as an adolescent, reads through the family's plantation's ledgers. Upon confronting the records upon records of the McCaslins' slave acquisitions – begetting various instances of rape and miscegenation in the process – Ike cannot help but question the corrupted legacy he stands to inherit. First, Ike reflects on the flawed economic outlook his grandfather, Carothers McCaslin, held in setting up the plantation, focusing on "the human beings [his forefathers] held in bondage and in the power of life and death had removed them from [the land] and in their sweat scratched the surface of it to a depth of perhaps fourteen inches to grow something out of it which not been there before and which could be translated back into... a reasonable profit" (*Go Down, Moses* 243-244). This realization by McCaslin, forms part of Faulkner's larger interrogation of capitalist expanse in which bourgeois actors found themselves ever more "décivilisé" [de-civilized] (*Discours sur le colonialisme* 11) by the depraved practices

needed to continually advance their own self-interests, as defined in Glissant's "nomadisme en flèche."

A striking feature of Faulkner's work – shared with Schwarz-Bart – is its intertextuality. Thus, through its interrogation of racial discrimination and economic exploitation, *Go Down Moses* directly evokes "old Thomas Sutpen" as another nomadic agent who engaged in these very same practices to claim his own "fragment of money" (244). Growing into an avid outdoorsman, Ike comes to valorize the American wilderness, and concludes that men like Old Carothers and Sutpen squandered the land through "the sailfuls of the old world's tainted wind" (248). He asserts that ever since the "Fall of Man" in the Garden of Eden, Adam's descendants⁴⁸ spent the coming millennia turning all the known world into "chattel" as "men fought over the fragments of that collapse until at last even the fragments were exhausted and men snarled over the gnawed bones of the old world's worthless evening until an accidental egg discovered them a new hemisphere" (246-247). In Columbus' voyage to the Americas, Faulkner expresses the initial hope that, in this "New World," "man" could realize "a nation... founded in humility and pity and sufferance and pride of one to another" (247); an opportunity "he" would throw away through the virtual extermination of the Native American population and the enslavement of black Africans.

With Sutpen's rise and fall figuring as a prelude to *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner constructs a genealogy of events, which relate the waning French Antillean sugar empire to the South's exploding cotton dynasty; fueling American expanse to the farthest reaches of its frontier. In speaking with his grandson, General Compson relays Sutpen's venture to Haiti with insight similar to that of Ike McCaslin. For Sutpen, "the West Indies"

⁴⁸ See R.W.B Lewis' *The American Adam*.

figured as a “spot of earth... which might have been created and set aside by Heaven itself... as a theater for violence and injustice and bloodshed and the satanic lusts of human greed and cruelty,” where “high morality was consistent with the money,” regardless of how dulled and bloodstained the gold coins’ sheen had become (*Absalom, Absalom!* 250). Addressing Haiti specifically, General Compson states, “[it] was the halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization, halfway between the dark inscrutable continent from which the black blood,” – despite all their “thinking and remembering and hopes and desires” were “ravished by violence” and brought to the “little lost island” – and the “cold known land” by which they were “doomed” (250-251). In this quote, Faulkner suggests the Caribbean as the point on the Atlantic Triangle in between Africa “the jungle” and Western Europe and North America, where this “cold, known” civilization melded “oppression and exploitation” with unrestrained profit-seeking to foster the wealthiest colony in history; whose cane stocks would be valued “pound for pound almost with silver ore;” as if nature held some recompense for “torn limbs and outraged hearts... [and] the blood that had vanished into the earth... even if man did not” (251). Faulkner’s Haiti, raided, set “homeless and desperate on the lonely ocean” (251) is the site of Sutpen’s most consequential plunder – those twenty slaves – whom he would take to Indian lands at the ends of American imperial expanse, and with whom he would raise a plantation of his own. This sets up the Caribbean as a mirror, which reflects the *nomadisme en flèche* and *choc en retour* coming to the United States, as Southern planters would assent to and engage in the same ruinous colonizing ventures.

Decades later, McCaslin learns of his family's own sins. As he pours over the detailed ledgers, he pieces together his grandfather's sexual misdeeds. From this, McCaslin fixates on one entry relating to Eunice, a slave whom Carothers had taken as a concubine: "Aug 13th 1833 Drownd Herself" (*Go Down, Moses* 256). Then he finds the entry about their daughter, Tomey, ending with "*Tomasina... dide in Child bed June 1833 and Burd*" (257). The child left behind, Terrel, lived on the plantation until Ike was ten-years old; therefore, he recalls his fair complexion and McCaslin-like features, deducing that they must have come from Old Carothers himself. Thus, Ike's grandfather was not only Terrel's too, but Terrel's father as well, causing him to shriek, "*His own daughter. His own daughter. No No Not even him*" (259). As a result, Eunice, unable to bear that Carothers had engaged in an incestual relationship with her (their) daughter, Tomey, commits suicide.

Failing to come to terms with his grandfather's violation of Tomey and Eunice, Ike, in conversation with his cousin, declares: "Don't you see? This land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it" (266). Glissant's reading of Yoknapatawpha as a *resumé-monde* at *l'ecart du monde* comes to light in these ledgers, which Faulkner presents as "the chronicle which was a whole land in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire South" (280). Indeed "men armed in sheets and masks" subverted the "proclamation" signed by "the stranger in Washington"⁴⁹ at every turn as "the bodies of white and black both... swung from lonely limbs" (278). As a result, Ike views the new South as a "gutted and empty land" where, in spite of everything, "the white man at the desk [still] added and multiplied and subtracted" (279). Returning to the ledgers, he evokes "new ones... filled rapidly... containing more names

⁴⁹ This references the Emancipation Proclamation and President Abraham Lincoln respectively.

than old Carothers or even his father... had ever dreamed of" (279). As a result, the story, of a racially divided South, "which two-hundred years had not been enough to complete and another hundred would not be enough discharge" continues in this particular archive (280). Along with the perpetuation of the plantation system, under sharecropping, Ike also bears witness to the rising tide of Northern industrialization. This manifests itself in the locomotive, "dragging its length of train behind it so that it resembled a small dingy harmless snake vanishing into weeds" (304). Despite being "harmless once" (304), this is no longer the case by the novel's present moment—1941—as Ike sees the forest's "ultimate doom, watching it retreat year by year before the onslaught of axe and... log-lines and then dynamite and tractor plows" (337). This leaves McCaslin disillusioned in his old age.

Thus, Faulkner takes the reader on a historical journey through Ike as he wrestles, in real-time, with the McCaslin family's moral bankruptcy – emblematic of the South's as a whole – and concludes that he must repudiate his inheritance of the plantation. Ike's effort to step outside of history, shunning his predetermined role as a plantation owner, puts him on a spectrum with Thomas Sutpen. Like McCaslin, he too shirks from the path of least resistance – a quiet life in the Appalachian Mountains – to remove himself from history and reframe his personal narrative in the Caribbean and Mississippi. While Faulkner renders the two men as opposites – with one striving for possession and the other dispossession – he places a link between them in their unwillingness to consent to entrenched societal processes (Sherry 59-60). Nevertheless, in working against their social standings neither succeeds in their stated goal: Sutpen's plantation falls into ruin, as Ike's cousin, Cass Edmonds who gains the land in his stead, institutes share-cropping,

which effectively maintains a South defined by quasi African bondage and ethnocentrism for years to come. According to Charles Sherry, their divergent results stem from their different historical moments: Sutpen's trajectory, tied to that of the plantation aristocracy and the Civil War, ultimately belongs to the "order of history;" while Ike comes from the subsequent postbellum generation lacking "purpose" and "order" (63-64). In doing so, Faulkner casts the Southern tradition as one of tragedy, which subverts noble (Ike) and malevolent (Sutpen) actors indiscriminately – leading to a worn out, maligned piece of Earth maligned by its history.

Similar to Faulknerian intertextuality, André Schwarz-Bart beautifully connects *La mulâtresse Solitude* to his other principle work, *Le dernier des Justes* to present the Holocaust as the ultimate culmination of centuries of *nomadisme en flèche* and the definitive *choc en retour*. While ostensibly a work of fiction, a brief introduction outlines a list of historical sources utilized by the author, also noting that his own personal experiences contributed heavily to its realization. As in his novel of slavery, this text also serves as a narrative history that concerns itself with lapses in French memory. When placed side by side, the two novels speak to each other in profound ways, exhibiting stark areas of overlap, which emphasize these gaps and establish the necessary links to give further credence to a trans-historical approach, which realizes Césaire's theorization of *choc en retour*.

The novel itself centers on the story of one Jewish family from the middle ages to the 1940's. Its most pertinent segment tells the story of Ernie Levy, a Jewish man whose story takes the reader from prewar Germany to War-time France to the Vichy and occupied zones, and finally to the dreaded concentration camps. Encompassing the

novel's final two hundred pages, Ernie's portion begins with him as a teenager in Germany in 1934. Feeling completely mired down by the increasingly harsh climate towards the German-Jewish citizenry, Ernie attempts suicide, which the author notes as being common for Jewish youths during this time. Paralleling his descriptions of enslaved Africans taking their own lives, the author expresses the desperation of Jews in prewar Nazi Germany. Despite this, the Levy family finds fortune when they successfully apply for French visas in 1938. Initially overjoyed at the news, the family would experience a reprieve from persecution for just a few short years – entering a toxic prewar environment,⁵⁰ which quickly devolved once Germany invaded Poland; thus, triggering France and Great Britain to go to war.

Although the Levy family understands that it is “mieux d’être allemandes en France, que juifs en Allemagne” [better to be German in France than Jewish in Germany], they liken it to a choice between “la corde ou la potence” (246) [the frying pan and the fire] (Becker 266). This is to say that that with the onset of war, as the once powerful *Front populaire* fell apart, the situation became increasingly hostile for refugees in France, now seen as potential enemy combatants (Marrus, Paxton 65). To overcome this, Ernie decides to join the French army, making him and his family seem more loyal to the Republic. Nevertheless, he quickly finds poor treatment among its ranks, routinely being sent to the frontlines alongside African regiments from the colonies. Drawing the

⁵⁰ Throughout the thirties anti-parliamentary fascist movements commanded a sizeable amount of seats in the National Assembly with future Vichy leaders such as Xavier Vallat and Pierre Laval at the helm. In spite of Léon Blum's – the first Jewish and the first socialist Prime Minister of the Republic – broad left-wing coalition, famously dubbed the Popular Front, his premiership radicalized the French right as anti-Semitism became a trademark of their opposition to his government. For example, after Blum's victory Vallat infamously stated, “Pour la première fois, ce vieux pays gallo-romain sera gouverné par un juif,” angrily lamenting the election's result (Sherwood, Mandel 184). Similar to the Nazis, the concepts of race and nationality became increasingly important. Thus, someone deemed to be un-French heading the nation's government constituted a wrong of history, which those who came to the forefront of the Vichy regime intended to right with racially charged legislation when they came to power in 1941.

same connection as Arendt, who states, “[those] desperately worried about the future of the French nation turned ‘imperialist’ in the hope that colonial manpower would protect French citizens against aggressors” (*Imperialism* 12-13), it appears that in times of war, France saw the Jewish refugees and colonial subjects as one and the same; disposable in service of *la patrie*. Consequently, these codified notions of racism carried increased weight once Germany decisively won the Battle of France, and set up the French State.

In *Le dernier des Justes*, Ernie Levy’s journey shows the devastating ways in which anti-Semitism began to affect Jews in France. All of his family members find themselves deported to Gurs, an infamous concentration camp south of Toulouse. Quickly, the camps turned into cesspools of disease and starvation. In one account, A. Plédel, a pharmacist visiting Gurs, describes their condition, “The camp! An immense sewer, where twenty thousand persons live pell-mell... I came away sickened and ashamed at the same time” (Marrus, Paxton 165). This has led many scholars to charge that France’s concentration camps – which the French managed independently from 1940 to 1942, and caused thousands of deaths from a lack of food and medicine – shared in horrors similar to those of Germany (Marrus, Paxton 175). After reading a letter from his parents describing their state, Ernie airs his anger, stating that “France le cédait mal aux traditions allemandes” [“France conformed at times the best German tradition”], and causing him to lament, “*Impossible d’être juif*” (258) [“To be a Jew is impossible”] (279). Thus, with his protections as a soldier running thin, and the concentration camps weighing heavily on his mind, Ernie deserts his unit in an attempt to find refuge in the unoccupied zone.

Schwarz-Bart discusses the final portion of the Holocaust in France, when Ernie Levy ends his sojourn in the south, and makes his way to Paris in hopes of finding some of his family before their deportation to the East. He goes to the Marais district, the historically Jewish neighborhood of Paris, where some Jews have managed to avoid internment at Drancy.⁵¹ There he learns of his father's deportation from a group of his friends, sparking a debate amongst them as to the nature of the Final Solution. Ernie states, "Il y a des gens qui ont lu certaines feuilles clandestines, il y a des gens qui ont entendu certaines radios interdites. Mais ce qu'ils chuchotent de bouche à l'oreille n'est pas fait pour l'esprit humain. Ils vous disent : voilà ce qu'il en est de nous ; mais eux-mêmes n'y croient pas... je ne le sais pas [aussi]" (285) [Some of us read clandestine leaflets, some of us heard forbidden broadcasts. But the stories they tell are too much for the human spirit. They tell you this is what's been happening to us, but they don't believe it themselves... I don't know [either]] (309). One of the men responds saying, "C'est très mal ce que vous faites... A Paris, en ce moment, la vie est plus courte qu'une chemise d'un enfant" (285) [What you have done is very bad... In Paris right now life is shorter than a baby's smock] (309). Their exchange showcases similar strategies used by the French slavers, in which the German and French authorities sought to deliberately muddle their plans to stymie Jewish resistance.

Through the course of his time in Paris, Ernie tries to go on with his life, despite constant round ups of Jewish deportees. He succumbs to wearing the star, and undergoes several forms of discrimination from police and regular people on the street or metro. In one particular instance, he notices "une petite demoiselle étoilée [Golda]... prisonnière de

⁵¹ Drancy was Paris' most infamous concentration camp, from which the majority of French Holocaust victims were deported.

deux ‘patriotes’ français qui la caressaient en riant” (290) [a frail bestarred girl, [Golda,] in a doorway fighting desperately with two French ‘patriots’ who were pawing her and laughing] (315). Afterwards Ernie and Golda fall in love, and cling to what they feel are their last days of life before another *rafle* takes them away. In one of the novel’s most touching scenes the two take off their stars, and go on a walk through center-city Paris, eating ice cream, enjoying each other’s company, and viewing the city’s most coveted sites. In the midst of this Golda remarks, “Je me demande... pourquoi ils nous interdisent les squares... dis-moi, pourquoi les chrétiens nous en veulent-ils comme ça ? Ils ont pourtant l’air gentils, quand on les regarde sans étoile” (298) [“I wonder why they forbid us in public squares... tell me why, [Ernie] why do the Christians hate us the way they do? They seem so nice when I can look at them without my star”] (323-324). To this he can only respond solemnly, “C’est très mystérieux” (298) [“It’s very mysterious”] (324). Later that night, feeling increasingly worried about their situation, Ernie and Golda passionately make love one last time during which Ernie murmurs “Demain n’existe pas” (303) [“there is no tomorrow”] (329).

A few days later, upon arriving at Golda’s apartment the concierge notifies him that the police came to take her to Drancy. She expresses regret for what happened, saying that she wanted to warn Golda, but had no choice other than to let the police proceed. Ernie, taken aback by her flippancy, remarks “‘Ne vous inquiétez pas, madame... tous les Juifs reviendront. Tous.’ Puis réprimant un frisson : ‘Et s’ils ne reviennent pas, il vous restera toujours les noirs, ou les Algériens... ou les bossus’” (305) [“Don’t worry about it Madame. All the Jews will be back. All of them.” Then suppressing a shudder, “And if they don’t come back you’ll still have the Negroes, or the

Algerians... or the hunchbacks”] (331-332). Then, desperate to save Golda, Ernie walks up to Drancy’s gate, encountering two French gendarmes, and asks if he can visit her. He observes that they “se considéraient des gardiens seulement du bétail amené par le Gestapo” (307) [saw themselves only as guards over the stock rounded up by the Gestapo] (333), and told him that he could enter but that there was no guarantee that he would ever come out. This parallels the historical narrative, which describes the French as giving extensive police and logistical support to the Nazis in their attempts to exterminate European Jewry (Marrus, Paxton 372). Schwarz-Bart also illustrates how the Frenchman sought to muddle their involvement – despite standing right outside and guarding the camp, the gendarmes affirm that they bear no responsibility for what goes on inside. Likewise, the concierge attests that she did all she could, even though she made little effort to delay or refuse the police taking Golda away – consequently Ernie sees his persecution in the same terms as that of black and maghrebian Africans.

Horrified by the state of the camp, Ernie is immediately seized by gestapo personnel upon entering. They subsequently take him back to their barracks, violently interrogate, strip and beat Ernie before throwing him into the camp’s general population, marked for deportation. Like Bayangumay’s treatment before her relegation to the slave ship, this exemplifies “the widespread useless violence, as an end itself, with the sole purpose of inflicting pain, occasionally having a purpose, yet always redundant,” which characterized the “Hitlerian years” (Levi 105-106). Fortunately, Ernie finds Golda, and stays with her as the French police and Gestapos alike force the couple onto a freight train destined for Auschwitz. The passages describing how the slavers coerced and forced newly enslaved Africans onto the ships bear a haunting resonance with Schwarz-Bart’s

description of the freight trains as he renders Ernie and Golda's departure towards terrors unknown.

Ernie perçut le dernier cercle de [l'enfer]. Et lorsqu'une heure plus tard, en gare de Drancy, les glissières se refermèrent sur la nuit des Juifs entassés dans les wagons à marchandises, Ernie ne put s'empêcher de crier, lui aussi, avec tout le bétail hurlant sa peur en un souffle unique: Au Secours! Au Secours! Au Secours!... comme s'il eût voulu, lui aussi, remuer une dernière fois les espaces où la voix humaine rencontre un écho – si faible soit-il. (332)

[Ernie realized clearly that he was entering the last circle of [hell]. And when, an hour later at the Drancy station, the sliding doors closed over the dark night of the Jews packed into freight cars, Ernie could not help shouting, he too shrieking his terror with the whole flock in a single breath: 'Help! Help! Help!' As if he too wanted, one last time, to stir up a void against which the human voice could echo—however feebly.] (361)

As in the aforementioned case Schwarz-Bart blends his protagonist's experience with the historical record in order to transfer the collective suffering of European Jews onto an individual with whom the reader can empathize. According to Levi, the horrors of "[this] sealed boxcar converted from a commercial vehicle into an ambulatory vehicle of death" left a lasting trauma, which he could never escape – even years later he continued to fear the possibility that another train lurked just around the corner, waiting to carry him off once again (Levi 107-108). Similarly, in his own personal narrative Ottobah Cugoano, a freedman, discusses the lasting impression the transatlantic crossing left upon him: "when we found ourselves at last taken away, death was more preferable than life... it would be needless to give a description of all the horrible scenes which we saw, and the base treatment which we met with in this dreadful captive situation" (10-11). Thus, Schwarz-Bart works to explore these sorts of verified historical accounts in a larger series of novels. When Bayangumay and Ernie's scenes are placed beside one another, it becomes clear that the author wanted to present the middle passage and the infamous deportations

to Auschwitz as related processes. Both instances showcase modernity at its worst as their perpetrators used the most advanced technologies available to seamlessly facilitate extremely heinous, yet calculated crimes on a massive scale.

This leads to what Kathleen Gyssels monikers *le souci Schwarz-Bartien* [“the Schwarz-Bartien conundrum”] in her book, *Filles de Solitude* (Gyssels 165).⁵² Concerning Schwarz-Bart’s work “le drame *wie es eigentlich gewesen*” [“events as they actually happened”] could only take his novels so far (Gyssels 165). Checking the historical record would never reveal to the modern traveler touring Caribbean plantations and Polish ghettos the thoughts and sentiments of the deportees as they entered the gas chambers, or the Africans as they endured the tragedy of the slave raids (Gyssels 167). Therefore Schwarz-Bart was obliged to mix “le réel et le fictif, la légende et l’Histoire,” [“reality, fiction, legend and history”] to create ostensibly ahistorical texts, which characterize France as an enabler of genocides past and present (Gyssels 166-167). As a result, the author relied heavily on fiction as a tool to bring his overarching historical and political arguments to the forefront. This comes to a head at the end of *Le dernier des Justes* as Schwarz-Bart translates the experiences in the rarely explored space of the gas chamber into prose (Rothberg 141).

Quand la nappe de gaz eut tout recouvert, il y eut dans le ciel noir de la chambre de mort un silence d’environ une minute, coupé seulement par les hautes quintes de toux et par les manifestations de ceux qui étaient trop enfoncés dans l’agonie pour faire l’offrande... Les voix mouraient une à une... les enfants expirants plantaient leurs ongles dans les cuisses d’Ernie, en un suprême recours, et déjà l’étreinte de Golda se faisait plus molle, ses baisers s’estompaient, quand s’accrochant farouche au cou de l’aimée elle exhala [un] souffle discordant... Puis il savait qu’il ne pouvait plus rien pour personne au monde... de ses bras moribonds, il étreignit le corps de Golda en un geste déjà inconscient de protection aimante, et c’est dans cette posture que les trouva une demie heure plus

⁵² Translation of Gyssels’ work is my own.

tard l'équipe de Sonderkommando chargée de brûler les Juifs au four crématoire. (344-345)

[When the layers of gas had covered everything there was silence in the dark sky of the room for perhaps a minute, broken by shrill, racking coughs and the gasps of those too far gone in their agonies to offer a devotion... The voices died one by one... the dying children had already dug their nails into Ernie's thighs, and Golda's embrace was already weaker, her kisses were blurred when, clinging fiercely to her beloved's neck, she exhaled a harsh sigh... And then he knew he could do nothing more for anyone in the world... With his dying arms he embraced Golda's body in an already unconscious gesture of loving protection, and they were found that way half an hour later by the team of *Sonderkommando* responsible for burning the Jews in the crematory ovens.] (373-374)

Since no one explicitly knows the personal details of Jewish deaths at Auschwitz, Schwarz-Bart turns to the realm of fiction once again. Working through imagination, he frames the murder of Europe's Jews within the confines of a love story. As a result, the reader ceases to view the Holocaust through the distant terms of a death toll, but instead through the lens of raw human emotion to which one can personally relate. Thus, Schwarz-Bart not only mourns this as a tremendous loss of life, but also as a loss of all the joys which life can bring forth – Ernie and Golda will never get to spend the years together, which they should have been afforded. Nevertheless, within this narrative the author also implants a hopeful message, positing the potential for beauty to endure in the face of atrocity (Tarica 82-83). By affirming their humanity through their amorous relationship, Ernie and Golda form a bond which transcends time and space, existing outside of history (Tarica 82-83).

Thus, Schwarz-Bart works to people these histories with “enigmatic” characters who gesture towards a more “profound reality” underlying the negative one, which they currently inhabit (Tarica 82-83). And yet, in a diversion from fictional narration, he leads

himself into a moment of what could be read as authorial intrusion during the novel's final paragraph:

Parfois, il est vrai, le cœur veut crever de chagrin. Mais souvent aussi, le soir de préférence, je ne puis m'empêcher de penser qu'Ernie Lévy, mort six millions de fois, est encore vivant, quelque part, je ne sais où... Hier, comme je tremblais de désespoir au milieu de la rue, cloué au sol, une goutte de pitié tomba d'en haut sur mon visage ; mais il n'y avait nul souffle dans l'air, aucun nuage dans le ciel... il n'y avait qu'une présence. (346)

[Yes, at times one's heart could break in sorrow. But often too, preferably in the evening, I can't help thinking that Ernie Levy, dead six-million times, is still alive somewhere, I don't know where... Yesterday, as I stood in the street trembling in despair, rooted to the spot, a drop of pity fell from above upon my face. But there was no breeze in the air, no cloud in the sky... There was only a presence.] (374)

Indeed, this plea, in which he implores his readers to sympathize with Ernie Levy's struggle on a personal level, remains consistent with his larger fusion of historical discourse and fiction. By challenging audiences in this way, Schwarz-Bart works to position Ernie Levy as a character who embodies jarring and concrete suffering (Tarica 90). Therefore, as in the case of *Bayangumay* and *Solitude*, he principally asks for sympathy; for the sympathy of an engaged public ultimately has the potential to materially tie these events together and create a unified narrative of colonial and totalitarian violence from which the world can move beyond (Tarica 90).

Like McCaslin and Sutpen, *Solitude* and Ernie's chronicles end in tragedy. Thus, Faulkner and Schwarz-Bart present this narrative feature to frame their bodies of work, and views of history. Each author employs creative fiction to deconstruct the systematic mistreatment of African Slaves and Jews. Carried out through racism, bigotry and the desire for economic gain. In doing so, they demonstrate that the histories of oppressed peoples, while distinctive from one another, contain similar threads. These include racial prejudice and government imposed persecution, eventually giving rise to accepted forms

of state terror and torture, and ultimately resulting in massive human rights abuses and genocide. With culpability being extremely muddled, Schwarz-Bart and Faulkner show that the consequences of French and American imperialism cannot be isolated to any one geography – expanding them to Haiti, Guadeloupe, Casamance, Mississippi, Poland, France, Appalachia, and beyond. Continuing into the current era, The French Republic and the United States, viewed from within as bastions of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” must recognize their complicity as nation states in creating today’s perpetually violent world – marred by terrorism, economic inequality, refugee crises and resurgent right-wing populism – a world far from what it *ought* to be.

Nevertheless, Schwarz-Bart and Faulkner shed light on new pathways through which future generations might mitigate this cycle. Despite their tragic endings, they contain, albeit brief, passages where the characters successfully gesture towards mitigating their societies’ oppressive institutions. From Solitude’s years as a maroon to Ernie and Golda’s stroll through Paris’ *Île de la Cité*, Schwarz-Bart demonstrates the nobility of the oppressed in their quest to triumph over the evils with which they are faced. Although unsuccessful, Solitude’s participation in the rebellion so that her own child would be born free, and Ernie’s willingness to stand by his true love as they are sent to the gas chambers, speak to the humanity of the millions of Africans and Jews subjected to these horrors. Furthermore, Ike McCaslin’s attempts to subvert the plantation hierarchy by renouncing his birth right, turns him in a living example – beckoning other Southerners to do the same. Also, McCaslin, Quentin and Shreve’s engagement in historical inquiry to unearth difficult memories of Sutpen’s rise and fall, and Old

Carother's incestuous relations, speak to an interpersonal engagement with history – necessary to repair the damage left by twenty-five decades of slavery, a bloody Civil War and ongoing violence, discrimination and segregation. Thus, their individual pursuits of justice, in spite of profound obstacles, exemplify the need for different groups to recognize common bonds and relate to one another.

Thus, critics should view Schwarz-Bartien and Faulknarian discourse as an indispensable development, which established a model for interrogating past events through a mixture of biography, fiction and historical discourse. According to Estelle Tarica, in doing so, Schwarz-Bart seemingly “anticipates Glissant” by creating “internally vast” characters who “encompass that history of rupture from some point outside it but within the subject itself” (83). In a similar vein, Valérie Loichot casts Faulkner's “rapport with the Caribbean” as a relational exercise, which both influenced Antillean authors, such as Glissant and Chamoiseau, and manifested the “the West Indies” in the American consciousness as the external geography, which produced the Southern plantation aristocracy (Loichot 47). Thus, both authors anticipate Glissant's arguments for the necessity of diverse peoples to relate to one another through processes of errantry. In his *Poétique de la Relation*: he writes, “La pensée du rhizome serait au principe de ce que j'appelle une poétique de la relation, selon laquelle toute identité s'étend dans un rapport à l'Autre” (23) [Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call a Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other (Poetics of Relation 11)]. This gives their projects greater global relevance. An examination of Glissant's writings, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Go Down, Moses*, *Le dernier des Justes* and *La mulâtresse Solitude* exhibit how these histories are interconnected to and

eventually become indistinguishable from one another. Focusing on the Caribbean – one of the most multi-cultural areas in the world – and writing in a more theoretical manner, Glissant shares the penultimate Schwarz-Bartien and Faulknarian view: that sympathy for and engagement between different groups provide hope for humanity to subvert past hierarchies and instances of *choc en retour* and move to a place of mutual understanding and respect.

In this sense, Faulkner and Schwarz-Bart's novels represent nascent forms of Glissant's conception of errantry. By taking their own personal experiences – Schwarz-Bart, a Holocaust survivor, and Faulkner, an American Southerner whose ancestors owned slaves – and reaching out to Caribbean intellectuals and the descendants of slaves to understand their particular legacies of oppression, poverty and diaspora; Schwarz-Bart and Faulkner invite new paradigm shifts, linking trans-Atlantic histories and creating a new understanding of what it means to be human in the face of so much suffering. For this reason, the relational gestures seen in their oeuvres possess the capacity to influence political, historical, literary and academic thought plus serve as a starting point for a social and economic platform, which holds the potential to lift the world out of its collective malaise.

CONCLUSION

THE MODERN TRAVELER, REPARATION THROUGH RELATION

Despite a well-recognized narrative of political instability derived from Bourbons, Bonapartes, three revolutions, two world wars, a fascist dictatorship, and five separate republics, certain unthinkable events⁵³ continue to plague France's ability to conjure up and bear witness to darker aspects of its history. These manifest themselves in the nation's failure to reckon with its colonial past and its penchant for nationalism. The two most troubling facets of these separate, yet inextricably related, legacies are those of the Vichy Regime, France's slave economy and – in both cases – the massive human-rights violations and genocide that ensued. Despite nominally freeing all the enslaved persons throughout their empire in the 1790's, slavery quietly continued until 1848, leading to the dehumanization and deaths of countless individuals. The tale is similar with respect to the French State, set up in the aftermath of the third republic's capitulation in 1940, which needed little persuasion to actively seek out and aid in collaborative efforts with the Nazis to deport and ultimately murder tens of thousands of Jews from France. In spite of Hannah Arendt's and Aimé Césaire's efforts to connect these events to one another, both lament their constant undermining within popular discourses. In *Part Two of The Origins of Totalitarianism: Imperialism*, Arendt attests that, "Imperialism's political narrowness and shortsightedness ended in the disaster of totalitarianism, whose unprecedented horrors have overshadowed ominous events and the even more ominous mentality of the

⁵³ Michel-Rolph Trouillot's term from *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, page 70.

previous period... Imperialist rule, except for the purpose of name-calling, seems half-forgotten” (xi). Similarly Césaire chides Western inability to bear witness to these facts of history in his *Discours sur le colonialisme*: “On s’étonne, on s’indigne. On dit : ‘Comme c’est curieux ! Mais, Bah ! C’est le nazisme, ça passera !’” (11) [People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: ‘How strange! But never mind-it's Nazism, it will pass!’] (Pinkham 3).

In *Les Guerres de Mémoire*, a preface by Benjamin Stora attempts to explain this phenomenon stating: “Après des périodes de grandes... soulèvements, guerres, évolutions, massacres, génocides... les sociétés accumulent des silences pour faire tous les citoyens poursuivent leur vie ensemble” [“After periods of great... upheaval, war, massacre, genocide... societies take on certain silences... to facilitate its citizenry’s ability to live together peacefully”] (Stora 7).⁵⁴ For this reason, the Triangular Trade, the subsequent centuries of imperial conquest, and the Second World War are often analyzed within a vacuum – contributing to attitudes that their aftershocks bear little connection to one another. Supposed progress such as the abolition of slavery, civil rights legislation and capital’s diffusion down to the socio-economic ladder’s lower rungs, creates a superficial impression that the past is now past.

Of course, this is also the case for the United States with regard to its own slave history. According to Eric Baptist’s recent study, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, social trends perpetuate the belief that “the worst thing about slavery as an experience... was that it denied [enslaved Africans] the liberal rights and liberal subjectivity of modern citizens” (xix). In response, Baptist goes on to outline the problems that this type of public memory poses:

⁵⁴ Translation is my own.

But slavery also killed people, in large numbers. From those who survived, it stole everything. Yet the massive and cruel engineering required to rip a million people from their homes, brutally drive them to new disease-ridden places, and make them live in terror and hunger as they continually built and rebuilt a commodity-generating empire—this vanished in the story... [Now,] textbooks segregate twenty-five decades of enslavement into one chapter, painting a static picture. Millions of people each year visit plantation homes where guides blather on about furniture or silverware. As sites, such homes hide the real purpose of these places, which was to make [African Americans] toil under the hot sun for the profit of the rest of the world. All of this is the symbolic annihilation of enslaved people. (xix)

This shows that slavery is often viewed as an aberration of liberal thought – running counter to Jefferson’s ironic statement, “all men are created equal” – that could be corrected by simply reforming the same legal and economic framework once used to perpetuate it. In doing so, entrenched interests in Western Europe and America, which continue to reap the benefits of capital once gained through slave labor, conveniently make the economics of enslavement seem antithetical to capitalism as a whole. Thus, they render slavery as a moribund, antiquated and static system that was ultimately incompatible with the free-market principles, which made Western Europe the axis of power throughout the imperial age, and intensified American hegemony into the twentieth century. The problem with this train of thought comes when atrocities, such as slavery and the Holocaust, are parsed out from one another and not thought of together, as part of a larger genealogy. Surfacing time and again throughout history, capitalism’s need to seek out new markets – necessitating empire and the exploitation of subaltern populations – has incited (and continues to incite) discord and instability throughout the globe.

To combat this, Edouard Glissant speaks to the notion of *l’errance*, in his celebrated discourse *Poétique de la Relation*, as a mechanism, which invites the possibility that marginalized groups, with seemingly divergent histories, can forge

common bonds with one another. Thus, by engaging in errantry, one finds the occasion to relate the specific set of experiences that constitute his identity to a presumed Other. Through this process the errant broadens his horizons, to acknowledge existing, marked variances among different linguistic and cultural traditions; and yet most of all, he recognizes that the world's greatest beauty resides in this diversity – only being saddened upon the realization that it is unknowable, *en masse*. For Glissant, the daunting challenges posed by this task present the greatest threat to the realization of “une poétique de la Relation” (23). As a result, he writes that, in spite of “toute irrécusable technologie... l'horreur à vaincre des famines et des ignorances, des tortures... il y a en proue, et désormais commune, cette rumeur encore, nuage ou pluie ou fumée tranquille Nous nous connaissons en foule, dans l'inconnu qui ne terrifie pas. Nous crions le cri de poésie” (21) [“all the indisputable technologies... the horror of hunger and ignorance, torture and massacre to be conquered... there is something we now share... We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify. We cry our cry of poetry”] (Wing 9). Thus, the theorist posits the literary realm as the best means to sort out and ultimately subvert established hierarchies of subjugation.

Aside from taking a comparative approach to link the slave trade and the Holocaust, Schwarz-Bart also quarrels with models for remembering and moving beyond this terrible history akin to that of Glissant's “pensée de l'errance.” In the concluding lines of each novel, he presents somewhat differing views on this matter. In the 1959 *Le dernier des Justes*, Schwarz-Bart himself still seemed to be struggling with how best to commemorate this horrendous loss of life. He expresses the sentiment that a memorial

might not be enough, fearing it could essentialize Holocaust victims (Scharfman 104).⁵⁵ Instead, he urges his reader to try and think of the six million murdered as individuals rather than a statistic (Scharfman 96). Through the story of Ernie Levy, Schwarz-Bart moves to emphasize their humanity more than anything else. This invites questions on whether one should strive to remember suffering on an individual or collective level. While the *Le dernier des Justes* seems to be more supportive of the latter, Schwarz-Bart expresses a continuum between the two – that Ernie Levy “mort six millions de fois” [dead six million times]⁵⁶ (346) is representative of the collective as a whole.

Nevertheless, in 1972, by ending with a modern traveler visiting the site of Solitude’s final stand in 1802, the author seems to hold a slightly different view. In this passage, he gestures towards a more collective form of memory by positing a tourist (perhaps even Schwarz-Bart himself) already possessing knowledge of the Warsaw Ghetto memorial before visiting the Guadeloupien plantation. As a result he is able to make a link between Nazi and colonial violence, and perceive a clear progression from one to the other as he is haunted by their respective ghosts (Scharfman 102). Schwarz-Bart’s beautiful articulation of this traveler’s groundswell of emotion is indicative of his personal evolution due to his own journey as an errant, going between Western Europe and the Antilles to bridge gaps in his own conception of history. Thus, he thinks of both the individual, Solitude, and the oppressed masses – not only from slavery, but the Holocaust as well – to evoke a shared experience of suffering.

Still this begs the question: can one who does not possess a unique background, like Schwarz-Bart or Faulkner, achieve this same level of relation on his own accord? I

⁵⁵ Following citations come from Scharfman’s article: “Reciprocal Hauntings: Imagining Slavery and the Shoah in Caryl Phillips and André and Simone Schwarz-Bart.”

⁵⁶ Translation is my own.

think of my own arrival in France, from the United States, to live and work there for the first time. Holding degrees in French and History from a northern state university, I managed to obtain a contract to teach English at a public elementary school in Toulouse, France for a year. Completing an undergraduate thesis on France's complicity in the Holocaust and working for the state welfare department for most of my academic and professional life, I had always attempted to engage with difficult legacies continuing to affect those existing on society's margins. Overall I felt more cognizant of and more empathic toward my nation's slave history, and the general plight of the American poor than most. This had allowed me to excel in this vocation; however, feeling overwhelmed by suburban ennui, frustration with the American way of life, and all that social work exposes one to, I decided to accept the offer from the French Ministry of Education.

During my first weeks in Toulouse, I felt out of place and took many long walks throughout the city in an attempt to become acclimated. On one of these walks, I stumbled upon a small green space on the city's outskirts in which stood a beautiful statue commemorating everyone who saw their lives destroyed by France's participation in the slave trade. It depicted an African woman with a broken chain link adorned with a commemorative plaque. Interestingly, the monument was inaugurated on the anniversary of Aimé Césaire's death; however, the name was meaningless to me; I had yet to read *Discourse sur le colonialisme*. Nonetheless, I stopped to look at the statue with open eyes, and as I reflected upon it, I was incredibly moved by its powerful inscription – how horrible it must have been, I thought to myself.

Moving on from this experience, months went by and I began to feel less like an expatriate and more like an integrated resident of the French Republic, seamlessly able to

participate in all its institutions had to offer. Nevertheless, my penchant for paying homage returned on a trip to Paris. While walking through the Père Lachaise Cemetery, I paused at all the usual spots: the graves of Jim Morrison, Oscar Wilde and Gertrude Stein. And yet what caught my eye the most were a completely unadvertised series of monuments dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust in France. The most striking monument to me was a cast iron sculpture of a skeletal man caught within a bristle of thorns in memoriam of the deportees from Drancy to Auschwitz. It caused me to stop and think for several minutes. Recalling my own research, I felt a profound sadness for the 70,000 Jews from France who perished under the regime of Maréchal Pétain. Again, I considered how horrible it must have been.

In spite of these sentiments my cries reached out in vain, independent of one another. Despite all my education and supposed knowledge, I could not connect the two experiences with the said monuments to one another. Unlike Schwarz-Bart, I could not truly play the role of the errant as I had no direct connection to either atrocity – to me each event was only a learned memory, terrible yes, but a learned memory all the same. In fact, it would not be until I discovered André Schwarz-Bart's *Le mûlatresse Solitude* a year later, while studying French Literature in the Southern United States, and reading the novel's final passage that I would be able to fully understand my ostensibly divergent experiences in Toulouse and Paris.

My own personal experience falls in line with William Faulkner's 1950 speech accepting the Nobel Prize in Literature, which reflects on the poet's role in the facilitation of human understanding. To begin, the author states, "Our tragedy today is a general and

universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it,”⁵⁷ in which humans have consequently “forgotten the problems of the human heart.” Therefore, the author sees the question “When will I be blown up?” overtaking efforts to engage with the “spirit” of and relate to one another. Faulkner laments a world wrought by “victories without hope” and “pity without compassion,” that shirks from the hard work of repairing the cracked “bones” and “the scars” left by history’s travails. Nevertheless, the author leaves his audience with a hopeful message: that the literary can impart concepts and experiences, which might lie outside a particular reader’s realm of understanding, and broaden their horizons to combat this lack of engagement.

I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance... The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice... The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail. (The Nobel Foundation)

In light of this, authors, like Schwarz-Bart and Faulkner, who step outside their own fixed identities (that of a French Jew and White Southern Male) to interact with “the Other” (the descendants of African and Caribbean slaves) perform the role of Glissant’s errant. This exemplifies why a society must “tenir en poésie.” For it provides the likes of Césaire, Glissant, Schwarz-Bart and Faulkner the perfect medium through which to communicate their relations between diverse peoples, spaces and temporalities. By virtue of this cross-cultural, trans-historical exchange the hope of fostering an engaged public able to move beyond these difficult histories—together—continues to endure.

⁵⁷ All quotes from William Faulkner’s banquet speech come from the Nobel Foundation’s website: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1949/faulkner-speech.html

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