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Landscaping the 'Femme-Jardin' in Depestre's Erotic Trilogy

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Haiti, located on the western third of the island of Hispaniola, was colonized by the French in 1697. Slaves were imported from Africa to work the cane fields and the forestry industry, and the country became one of the richest in the Caribbean. In the late 18th century the slaves revolted and, under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture, Haiti became the first black empire to declare its independence in 1804. Since then, Haiti has witnessed almost complete deforestation, has undergone major political strife, and has become the poorest country in the western hemisphere. Despite a troubled past, and the ongoing state of poverty and political violence, Haitian people continue to celebrate life.

The city of Jacmel is home to Haiti's second largest annual carnival. It is also the birthplace of the Haitian poet, novelist, and political activist, René Depestre. Born in 1926, Depestre spent only twenty years in Haiti before he was exiled for his participation in the student revolution which aimed to oust President Elie Lescot. Life in exile, however, did not prevent Depestre from being a revolutionary thinker, nor did it impede his creativity. In fact, since his exile in 1946, Depestre has produced an abundance of literature, poetry, and essays that reflect his revolutionary and subversive thinking, his nomadic lifestyle, and his dueling perceptions of the world. It is, in part, due to these perceptions—inspired from a Haitian past and the confrontation of the 'other' world—that Depestre’s literature takes on the aspect of the carnivalesque, as a continual transgression of order and a bacchanal festival. Three of his works in particular, Alléluia pour une femme-jardin (1981), Hadriana dans tous mes rêves (1988), and Eros dans un train chinois (1990) form a carnival-inspired trilogy that presents life as a magical voyage filled with opposing images of life and death, Christianity and voodoo, order and disorder, celebration and misfortune, beauty, constant renewal, and, most notably, highly...
sexualized women. The trilogy also establishes geography as a nexus wherein landscape, woman, exile, and language converge and produce a new and legitimate reality. This paper will explore the manner in which topography, woman as geographical landscape, exile, and language create a carnivalesque reality in Depestre's trilogy.

The celebration of carnival, or originally *la fête des fous*, was established as a means by which the human group could set aside the established regulations of daily life in order to be rejuvenated. The festival was seen as a temporary and necessary rupture, "une rupture sans laquelle la vie serait insupportable" (*La fête des fous* 37), after which a renewed order could be established. This notion of upheaval, or rupture of the established order, crosses easily into the realm of literature. The literary carnivalesque, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, is also a transgression or inversion of natural societal order. This is achieved on the fictional level, in part, by placing seemingly contradictory ideas—such as life and death, public and private, male and female, or the spiritual and material—in direct juxtaposition to one another, thereby rupturing established notions of congruity.

Carnivalesque literature also privileges laughter, celebration, orality and, most importantly, the exaggeration of the non-repressed human body. Bakhtin emphasizes the importance of the body in the carnivalesque: "This exaggeration has a positive, assertive character. The leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance" (*Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World* 19). This carnivalesque exaggeration of the body—especially the female body—is highly privileged in the works of Depestre.

The bountiful emergence of the 'femme-jardin', the earthly embodiment of female sexuality, in Depestre's trilogy calls attention to her significance. Woman is the

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prized focal point in this trilogy and her presence allows for the transgression and inversion of established order. The ‘femme-jardin’ asserts several different functions within Depestre’s trilogy. First, woman serves as a legitimate vehicle for transgressing sexual taboos, which in turn, leads to the questioning and overturning of other collective taboos. Next, the female figure occupies a space in the oneiric realm of the unconscious wherein fantasy is permissible and expected. Here, in the imaginary, one finds an amalgamation of the impression of reality with the reality of one’s desire. Finally, woman serves as the vehicle by which repression—often political—is transgressed and liberty is achieved. That Depestre allocates such significant power to the ‘femme-jardin’, reveals why he began his trilogy with Alléluia pour une femme-jardin.

**Alléluia pour une femme-jardin** is a novel composed of ten short stories, the first of which shares the title of the novel. It is this novel where the image of the ‘femme-jardin’, or the garden-woman, is first put forth as an earthly representation of the garden of paradise. Woman, for Depestre, exudes vital life rhythm, inspires beauty, incarnates nature, and is worthy of homage. In his eulogy of women, Depestre transcends the physical components and boundaries associated with the human body. This carnivalesque notion, which challenges the physical role of the body, permits him to cross into a supernatural realm where woman transmits the natural rhythms of the universe. “J’étais né pour le rythme vital de la femme qui fuyait devant moi. Ses courbes se déliaient dans une harmonie incandescente de glandes, de fibres, de tissus, de nerfs, de muscles, de chair aux rondeurs implacablement lyriques” *(Alleluia)*. Here, in the first short story, Olivier speaks about his aunt, with whom he consentingly has an affair. This statement however, could be applied to all women, for Depestre finds the erotic life force within
them all. In fact, Depestre is unabashed in his sexual descriptions of women. His sumptuous language embraces and devours the female body in what can be seen as almost a religious experience. From the body of woman, the universe is revealed to man. “...chacun de ses seins se révéla à mon toucher un monde en abrégé qui reflétait le fabuleux univers...” (Alleluia 28).

The concept of the ‘femme-jardin’ as an expression of the universe is encapsulated within Depestre’s vision of ‘l’érotisme solaire’. This notion of eroticism is driven by the exotic and erotic representation of nature within woman. The ‘femme-jardin’ is often associated with tropical and fertile land and the edible or potable provisions found thereupon. She is portrayed as ripe for harvesting at any given moment, and is willing to share her bounty: « ...elles voyaient, à la fin du coït, leur sexe disposé avec grâce sur une table d’apparat au milieu d’autres plats aussi somptueusement garnis. Elles entendaient leur propre voix crier. ‘Monsieur, à table ! C’est servi chaud’ » (Hadriana 28). Elena Pessini further describes the role of ‘l’érotisme solaire’ in Depestre’s works:

Dans Alléluia pour une femme-jardin, les Rosena, Mariana, Zaza creusent le portrait d’un être solaire dont les descriptions puisent dans le lexique de la nature tropicale, érotique et érotisée. Faite, forgée des mêmes éléments que l’univers, la femme-jardin est aussi disponible que sont les richesses de la nature, femme à manger, femme à boire, à posséder, offrande pour un banquet préparé, semble-t-il, pour des réjouissances toutes masculines, elle désaltère, ressource, alimente, enflamme. Toutes les métaphores employées pour la décrivent renvoient à sa rondeur, à sa sensualité, à son énergie (Pessini, 104).

Depestre’s erotic depiction of the female body, his depiction of woman as an earthly paradise, and his veneration of the fruits she has to offer is, in part, an attempt to dismiss negative images of the female body. He clearly intends to invert the myth of
woman as the perpetrator of the ‘original sin’. The religiously proclaimed wrongdoing of
the ‘first woman’ is transgressed by Depestre’s highly sexualized and extremely
sanctified representation of woman. He sees the female body, not as an obstacle to virtue,
but rather as a celebratory key to the universe. Depestre sees the divine in women,
especially in their genitalia,—which he discusses in great detail—and finds any hatred of
the female sex atrocious: « ...j’étais saisi d’une rage homicide envers tous ceux qui ont
discrédité la chair de la femme... je chassai de ma vie... les mythes funèbres et répugnants
qui ont enténébré et humilié la femme en présentant son sexe comme l’extrême cap
avilissant des relations humaines! » (Alléluia 30). Here, Depestre forcibly inverts any
pre-established taboos associated with the female sex. He takes the forbidden body of
woman, honors it, praises it, and finds within it a force stronger than himself. In allowing
the ‘incest taboo’ to be violated between Olivier and his aunt Zaza, for example, Depestre
demonstrates further inversion of sexualized taboos. He permits the rupture of the incest
taboo simply because the desire is reciprocal, the woman is beautiful, and she is able to
initiate the boy into the universe of erotic desire. For Depestre, there seems to be no
reason to limit the dominion of sexuality. In fact, in a carnivalesque upheaval of the
notion of consciousness, he creates environments that are seemingly contrary to natural
order and that allow for unlimited fulfillment of erotic desire. One such creation is the
dream, or the development of literary onirism. Here, Depestre merges conscious and
unconscious realities, sexuality, and desire by providing literary ‘hallucinations’ which
would typically be found in dreams.

The dream-like reality of Depestre’s works is made possible by his use of the ‘réel
merveilleux’ which he loosely defines as « la négation poétique et romanesque des
circumstances historiques de la conquête coloniale» (Le métier à métisser 112). Depestre claims to find a utopian freedom within his ‘réel merveilleux’. This freedom permits him to explore the effects of colonization upon the colonized, yet in a manner which seems to celebrate their inner transformation and progression into the modern world, rather than dwelling upon their misery. He sees the present-day reality of the colonized as the result of many influences—historical, social, fantastical, erotic, mythical, and mystical—and attempts to portray the culmination of these forces. Depestre’s ‘réel merveilleux’ permits him to « articule, métisse, créolise...le merveilleux, le surréalisme, l’haitianité, la négritude, la francophonie, l’érótisme solaire, et d’autres valeurs de la modernité qui m’empêchent de désespérer du cœur humain» (Le métier à métisser 113-14).

Within his concept of the ‘réel merveilleux’, Depestre recognizes, embraces, and proposes a Haitian perspective to political movements which made waves in the literary world of French colonization. In their Eloge de la créolité, Antillean writers Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant give a broad overview of the literary trends that developed as a result of French colonization. First, they discuss the notion of ‘mimetic expression’ wherein the colonized would write using the French literature as their model, “We had our fabulists, our romantics, our Parnassians, our neo Parnassians, not to mention the symbolists” (Eloge 77). Next, they discuss the discontentedness found with this movement and describe the ‘negritude movement’—a black pride movement founded, in part, by Aimé Césaire—that “...gave Creole society its African dimension, and put an end to the amputation which generated some of the superficiality of the so called doudouist writing”, or inauthentic writing that appeals to the taste for the ‘exotic’ (Eloge 79). Furthermore, finding dissatisfaction with the fact that “…Negritude replaced the
illusion of Europe by an African illusion” (Eloge 82) without furthering the notion of creoleness, they are inspired by the ‘Caribbeanness’ of Edouard Glissant, a Martiniquan writer who created the concept of ‘Antillanité’. Here, they find a notion which they are mostly satisfied, for in his ‘Caribbeanness’ they find a literary fashion of thinking which makes it possible to “achieve the passage from the common lived experiences to the expressed consciousness” (Glissant, qtd in Eloge 121). Finally, they suggest that ‘creolized’ literature—a carnivalesque subversion of the literature of the French ‘center’ into Francophone literature— must be expressed by an ‘interior vision’ that creates an “annihilation of false universality, of monolinguism, and of purity” (Eloge 90).

Literature of the hexagon is a result of a hegemony wherein France acts as a centripetal force, pulling in all the minor voices that gravitate around it into a homogenous whole. Creolized literature, however, is the result of an opposing force, a centrifugal force, which disperses the notion of France or French as the center, and creates a heterogeneous genre of literature that reflects the hybridization of cultures represented, in part, by the French language.

The idea of a ‘creolized’ literature is quite similar to Bakhtin’s notion of ‘dialogism’ which he defines, in part, by the account of multiple voices within literature. He claims that “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices...” (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 6) permits the true expression of human consciousness, and allows for the creation of multiple histories. He praises the ability of the author,—Dostoevsky in this case-- to rid himself of the heavily influential European ‘monolinguism,’ and to express a new reality. “What is important for us here is the striving of... artistic energies and the new form of
his artistic visualization of the inner man" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 62).

Central to Bakhtin's notion of dialogism is also the role of authorship. He claims that the multiple consciousnesses appear as a result of an authorship that gives full autonomy to its characters. The characters are not string puppets operated by a puppeteer (the author), but rather act and interact independently of the author. Bakhtin describes the role of authorship in creating a dialogic position between the author and his characters: “…the author’s discourse about a character is organized as discourse about someone actually present, someone who hears him (the author) and is capable of answering him” (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 63).

While Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism emphasizes the value of polyphony in establishing multiple consciousnesses, creolized literature establishes a cultural vision of heterogeneity made possible by multiple representations of culture. The cultural diversity expressed in ‘creolized’ literature portrays the author’s vision of himself as the result of simultaneous, yet independent, cultural convergences.

René Depestre’s literature incorporates the notion of ‘creoleness’ as formulated by the interior vision of a Caribbean people, but he also finds that a more complete vision is required to portray the truth of human existence. “La notion d’être humain dit mille fois plus que les notions obsolète de race, nationalité, frontière, blanc, étranger, noir, métis, et autres mythes qui ont appauvri et déshonoré le prodigieux registre vital de la planète» (Le métier à métisser 112). For Depestre, creolization is the result of the totality of one’s life experiences, and these experiences are not accumulated only in the physical realm. Man, for Depestre, is ‘né coiffé’, or born with the ability to experience the
supernatural realm. He takes this idea to an extreme, leaving aside the ‘rationally’
constructed notions of creoleness and creates a reality, his ‘réel merveilleux’, where man
is fully human and able to participate in the united realms of reality, fantasy, dream, and
spirituality.

The ‘réel merveilleux’, especially in combination with the aforementioned
‘érotisme solaire,’ permits Depestre to transcend the corporal realities of both the French
colonization of Haiti and his exile from Haiti. By privileging the carnivalesque excess of
human sexuality—especially the female body-- while merging fact with fantasy, Haiti
with France, black with white, Christianity with voodoo, death with life, and misery with
celebration, he carnivalizes and creolizes his interior vision of Haiti.

The carnivalesque juxtapositions and imaginary realities found in Depestre’s
works force his reader to relinquish any pre-established notions of rationality. He
intentionally portrays a reality in which Cartesian rationality is inapplicable and, if
anything, hinders his expression of ‘creoleness’. In one critique of Hadriana dans tous
mes rêves, the second novel in the trilogy, Joan Dayan forewarns the reader of Depestre’s
unique style of writing: “Abandon to the magic of ‘wild’, ‘rhythmic’, and poetic writing
is the key to reading Hadriana. Critics warn that Europeans ‘must let themselves go,’
forget Descartes, and read themselves into the magic…” (Dayan 164).

Hadriana begins with the unbridled erotic desire of a phallic butterfly that enters
the bedrooms of sleeping virgins and penetrates their dreams as he deflowers them. The
butterfly, once a man by the name of Balthazar Granchiré, wrongly seduced a sorcerer’s
femme-jardin. As a punishment, he was transformed into a lascivious butterfly, who is

1 “Naître coiffé, c’est posséder illico un don surnaturel. C’est ouvrir la porte aux esprits qui rôdent au
bordage de la terre. C’est commercer avec les défunt s, écouter les paroles venues de l’autre monde, et voir
au-delà du visible (Gisèle Pineau, La grande drive des Esprits, 11).
condemned to ‘waste his sperm in the chase of females’, forever seeking dreaming virgins and eternal orgasms. «Les orgasmes les plus ensorcelants ouvriront des débâcles dans les belles vies que ton satan de phallus aura réduites à sa merci» (Hadriana 26).

The dream-like reality, in which the formidable butterfly transforms the lives of these women, sets the stage for a magical and carnivalesque reality in Hadriana. Through the sexual escapades of the mythical phallus, Depestre permits both pleasure and pain to be obtained through dreams and fantasy. At the same time, Depestre establishes a role for woman wherein she becomes the sexualized geographic ‘landing strip’ or ‘womanscape’ for the male phallus.

Une fois sa proie endormie, il imprégnait l’atmosphère d’effluves aphrodisiaques. Quelque minutes après, les siens faisaient sauter les boutons des chemises de nuit, les fesses rompaient l’élastique des culottes, les cuisses en flammes s’écartaient à souhait…Balthazar n’avait plus qu’à entrer en compagne. De superbes adolescentes, couchées vierges…se réveillaient dans l’effroi, avec du sang partout, sauvagement dépucelées (Hadriana 27).

The image of the virgin in Hadriana lends itself well to the notion of womanscape, or the desire of man superimposed on the female body. First, her untainted body gives the sense of a new and uncharted landscape to be explored by Depestre, both within the realm of the female body and, as an analogy, within the geographical landscape of Haiti. Through the body of woman, he is able to express his pristine and uncontaminated ‘réel merveilleux’, or fully ‘creolized’ vision of Haiti. Next, the virginal blood of these women represents the sacrificial role Depestre assigns to his ‘femme-jardin’ of transgression. Not only is the female body a womanscape by which Depestre explores new landscapes, but she seems to exist as a sacrificial rite of passage into the ‘réel merveilleux’.

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The notion that a virgin can be transformed into a ‘femme-jardin’--a highly sexualized being-- and is sacrificed in the achievement of male fantasy implies, to a certain degree, that she does not exist in her own right, but rather as a vision of man. The ‘femme-jardin’ is the male projection of femininity and serves to fulfill and mirror his fantasy. This concept of femininity is abundantly present in Depestre’s works, especially in his short stories. Each story presents a woman who is ‘discovered’ by a Haitian man and who, upon their sexual union, assumes the perfunctory role of ‘femme-jardin’. Depestre exploits femininity in the sense that he gives the female character no identity of her own. Woman, for Depestre, is a “somptueux bloc de vie” (Eros 59) who incarnates male desire.

A similar approach to the manipulation of femininity is found in Jean Baudrillard’s *De la séduction*. Here, he offers an explanation for the abundant simulation of femininity within society. He, like Depestre, depicts women as a projection of man’s fantasy:

…cette parodie du féminin n’est pas aussi féroce qu’on le pense, puisqu’elle est la parodie de la féminité telle que les hommes l’imaginent et la mettent en scène, dans leur phantasmes aussi, Féminité outrepassée, dégradée, parodique…elle énonce que dans cette société la féminité n’est rien que les signes que les hommes l’affublent. Sursimuler la féminité, c’est dire que la femme n’est qu’un modèle de simulation masculin…il est dit que la femme n’est rien, et que c’est là sa puissance (*De la séduction* 28).

This notion implies that woman exists only as an interior vision of man. She is a projection of his inner reality and serves as the vehicle by which he is able to achieve his fantasy. Hadriana Siloé fulfills this function particularly well in *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves*, for Hadriana, the central character and ‘l’idéal de la femme-jardin,’ is Depestre’s
dazzling amalgamation of the womanscape which serves as a portal to his carnivalesque creoleness and his ‘réel-merveilleux’.

The story of Hadriana Siloé, is perhaps one of Depestre’s best expressions of ‘creoleness’ expressed through womanscape. In fact, Hadriana’s ‘creoleness’ is emphasized to such extremes that she becomes a literary repository wherein the carnivalesque juxtapositions of opposing ideologies and realities coexist. While Hadriana is French and Catholic, she was raised in Haiti and has been surrounded by voodoo.

"Malgré leurs fortes attaches catholiques... l’enfance d’Hadriana fut illuminée par les contes époustouflants que les servantes noires lui murmuraient... » (Hadriana 51). Hadriana lives in a zone between two worlds, yet she serves as the vehicle by which they are united.

The occasion that serves to initiate the unity of these seemingly opposing realities is the marriage of the French, Hadriana Siloé to the Haitian, Hector Danoz. The announcement of their marriage, in itself, sets the stage for an extraordinary event:

...ces noces mixtes viennent opportunément donner à Jacmel l’occasion de rythmer de nouveau sa vie dans la danse et la fantaisie. « La cérémonie religieuse à l’église...sera suivie d’une réception au manoir des Siloé. Dans la soirée, les jeunes mariés ...et leurs invités rejoindront la population sur la place d’Armes pour participer à un carnaval sans précédent (Hadriana 38).

The entire city of Jacmel arranges “le carnaval du siècle, un hymne inégalable à la beauté de la vie et à la liberté de l’amour” (Hadriana 41) for the wedding. This wedding represents a perfect ‘métissage’ of the French, Christian, and Caucasian culture with the Haitian, Voudou and black culture. It is seen, by all, to be the event which will transgress the difficulties with which Haiti has been plagued, namely colonization, natural disasters, local politics, and the troublesome antics of the phallic butterfly. « ...après la malédiction
des derniers mois, le mariage de ces deux êtres d’exception est comme un pacte que Jacmel va signer avec l’espérance et la beauté » (Hadriana 38). The Jacmelians, in the hope that this union will, indeed, alleviate their trouble, prepare for a pagan ritual of sacrifice in which “on calcula de sacrifier vingt-huit bœufs, seize chèvres, trente-trois porcs, un nombre indéterminé de volailles...” They do not anticipate that the sacrificial offering will be Hadriana herself.

Hadriana, at the moment she accepts Hector as her husband, with a “oui hallucinant de détresse” (Hadriana 46), ‘dies’ at the altar. While her parents quickly whisk her home to be laid out in the traditionally somber Christian ritual of death, the entire city of Jacmel, unaware of this fact, is standing by to celebrate her marriage. Once they learn of Hadriana’s sacrifice at the altar, however, the city proceeds to celebrate her death with the same carnival intended for her marriage. As a result of Hadriana’s death, pagan celebration and Christian ritual meet, once again, in carnivalesque juxtaposition: «Dès lors une lutte sans merci s’amorça entre les deux systèmes de croyances qui se disputent depuis toujours l’imaginaire des Haïtiens: la foi chrétienne et la foi vaudou » (Hadriana, 48). The wedding celebration is replaced by a bacchanalian celebration of Hadriana’s death.

As the factual carnival proceeds, so does the literary carnivalesque, with multiple narrations of the events surrounding Hadriana’s death providing for detailed, yet fragmented, examinations of the circumstances. The multiple narrations that recount Hadriana’s death recall the theory of ‘detour’ of Edouard Glissant which stresses a unique narrative style of creolized literature. He maintains that creoleness is not often narrated in a teleological manner. That is, it does not begin at one point and go forward,
in a direct line toward a particular end. Creolized literature, instead, offers a circular
narration, one that progresses in a spiraling manner as it is slightly distorted by the act of
repetition. Glissant discusses the repetitive, or oral traits of creolized literature: « Il y a un
art de la répétition qui est propre au texte oral...Un tel discours gagne donc à être répété à
loisir, tout comme le conte est déclaré soir après soir...Le discours se reproduit de lui-
même mais sa banalisation...ne discrimine pas des toiles “valables” d’un ensemble
indifférencié... » (Discours Antillais 464). Glissant demonstrates that multiple narrations
are not only essential to the orality of creolized literature, but also that they do not
diminish the value of the subject of narration.

One narration of the events surrounding Hadriana’s death, by a mambo priestess, is
that Hadriana, like another Jacmelian ‘femme-jardin’, has been “envaginé à mort” by
the phallic butterfly. While this supposition easily supports her hallucinatory utterance at
the altar, Hadriana’s questionable state of virginity raises humorously juxtaposing views
between Christianity and Voudou. The priestess believes that Hadriana must be properly
deflowered—even in death—to avoid any future encounters with the virgin-seeking
butterfly. Hadriana’s mother, however, claims that her virginity belonged to Hector, with
whom it is now too late to share. “Après tout...la besogne sacrée appartenait à Hector
Danoze, l’époux légitime” (Hadriana 53). This narration, and many others riddled with
juxtaposing ideas and a carnivalesque celebration of Hadriana’s death, raises pertinent
questions of the role of femininity, creoleness, exile, religion, the private versus the
public sphere, colonization, and interracial marriage.

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2 A mambo priestess is a woman who occupies a form of clergy in the Voudou religion. Her responsibilities,
in part, are to maintain the relationship between the community and the spirits.
In order to examine the psychological and racial dimensions proposed by the interracial marriage between Hadrianna and Hector, it is first important to consider the observations of the Martinique-born doctor, author and essayist, Frantz Fanon. One of the most renowned theorists of the twentieth century on the issue of decolonization and the psychopathology, or mental and behavioral disorders, associated with colonization, Fanon discusses the psychological dimensions of interracial relationships in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon has, very literally, a black and white vision of men, women, and relationships. He maintains that the history of colonization—of black people by white people—has created a complicated psychological construct in which both black and white people are trapped: “There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect...For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 10).

It is precisely because of this psychological construct that Fanon feels that there is an inherent inequity between interracial couples. In chapter two of *Black Skin, White Masks*, or “Woman of Color and the White Man”, Fanon observes that a fellow Martinican’s proclamation of love for a white man expresses this inequality:

Mayotte (Capécia) loves a white man to whom she submits in everything. He is her lord. She asks nothing, demands nothing, except a bit of whiteness in her life...she writes, ‘All I know is that he had blue eyes, blond hair, and a light skin, and that I loved him.’ It is not difficult to see that a rearrangement of these elements in their proper hierarchy would produce something of this order: ‘I loved him because he had blue eyes, blond hair, and a light skin.’ We who come from the Antilles know only one thing too well: Blue eyes, the people say, frighten the Negro (*Black Skin, White Masks* 43-3).

Here, Fanon inverts the words of Mayotte Capécia to demonstrate how the psychological inferiority black people can be distorted into a desire to be white. Fanon stresses the fact
that Capécia loves the man simply because he is white, and that his whiteness, although intimidating, serves a means by which to restructure, and strengthen, her own inferiority.

Fanon’s depiction of the relationship between “The Man of Color and the White Woman” is similar to that of his portrayal of Capécia’s relationship with a white man. Fanon claims that black men, with their intense desire to be equally as powerful as the white man, can find dignity and worth in the arms of a white woman:

I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white...who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man...I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine (Black Skin, White Masks 63).

This depiction portrays a black man’s psychological inadequacy in regards to a white woman. Here, Fanon shows how a white man can seemingly overcome a history of colonization and inferiority by embracing that to which he was subjected. While Fanon would likely apply this psychological profile to the relationship between the Haitian Hector and the French Hadriana in Hadriana dans tous mes rêves, Depestre seems to portray this interracial marriage in a very different way.

First, although Hadriana is French, she has been raised in Haiti and has, therefore, attained a degree of creoleness. She is not seen as a ‘blanc’, but is rather revered by her fellow Jacmélians as a local legend: « A sa mort, les Jacméliens, qui l’aimaient et l’admirèrent comme une fée, l’intégrèrent, le soir même, au répertoire des fables du pays, dans une fantastique histoire... » (Hadriana 51). Hadriana is portrayed as a woman who has voluntarily assumed a creolized existence, and who, because of her creoleness, has been accepted by the public as a benevolent and valued addition to the community.
Next, Hector is portrayed as an astounding citizen of Jacmel, who is in no uncertain terms inferior to Hadriana. Hector, in fact, is praised by his godfather for being equally as passionate about his country and fellow Haitians as he is about Hadriana:

Pour mon filleul, en effet, ses bien-aimés en ce monde, ce ne sont pas seulement les siens, sa fiancée, ses amis d’enfance. Il aime avec une force égale sa terre de Jacmel si souvent passée par les armes du destin : cyclones, incendies, dieux vlanbindingues, sans parler des fléaux d’État qui s’en prennent à la liberté des chrétiens-vivants. Enraciné dans la passion d’une femme, Hector Danoze l’est également dans sa tendresse envers le sort de ses concitadins (Hadriana 38).

Depestre clearly intends for there to be no inequality between Hadrianna and Hector. In fact, he seems to unite them in order to express his creolized vision of Haiti, which is readily apparent in the events surrounding Hadriana’s death.

As mentioned before, there are many narrations recounting the possible reasons for Hadriana’s death. Hadriana’s own account of her death, however, reveals that she has actually been ‘zombified’, and taken prisoner by Voudou sorcerers who want to turn her into a black ‘femme-jardin’: « …tout ce qui est à l’endroit dans ta vie de femelle blanche sera mis à l’envers nègre, à commencer par ton nom de famille: Hadriana Siloé, ça ne va pas à un zombie, il y a trop de sel blanc dans ce nom. Je te baptise à mon tour: Eolis Anahir-dah ! Voici ton nom de négresse-femme-jardin à papa Rosanfer » (Hadriana 180).

Hadrianna struggles with her captors, but is finally able to free herself and escapes to Jamaica. Here she finds her childhood sweetheart, a Haitian man by the name of Patrick, with whom she spends the rest of her days.

That Depestre sacrifices his ‘ideel femme-jardin’ on the day of her wedding, and allows her to be ‘zombified’—a process typically reserved for true Haitians—shows that she is integrated into the Haitian culture and belief system. Furthermore, that Hadrianna remains white, yet enters into another interracial relationship proves that the ‘femme-
‘femme-jardin’ is a means by which problems of color or race can be transgressed. Elena Pessini comments on Hadriana’s creoleness as a transgression of racism:

Hadriana est blanche parce qu’Haïti ne se conjugue pas seulement en noir, le personnage est créole, au sens de provenant des îles, originaires des îles, représentant Haïti et lui appartenant. La femme-jardin blanche célèbre un érotisme féminin qui veut se débarrasser de la notion de race et comprendre en soi toutes les composantes du monde antillais (Pessini, « Hadriana dans tous mes rêves de René Depestre ou comment on guérit un zombi » 106).

Depestre, in effect, uses Hadriana’s sacrifice at the wedding alter to demonstrate the power of the femme-jardin to transcend notions of racism, and to confirm the possibility of a ‘métissage’, or combining, of cultures.

Women, in Eros dans un train chinois, take on a rather sacrificial role wherein they must pay a price for man’s liberation. This novel, the third of the trilogy, is composed of ten short stories—complete with a ‘glossaire érotique’—and recounts an assortment of sexual escapades experienced by ‘nomadic’ men, all of whom happen to be Haitian. Several stories take place in communist countries set in, or around, the late 1950’s—namely, China, Yugoslavia, and Cuba—where the political repression is insupportable and where an eventual, almost predictable, cross-cultural coupling serves as the ultimate transgression, or release.

The sacrifice of the ‘femme-jardin’, which triggered the bacchanal celebration in Hadrianna, is abundant in Eros dans un train chinois. Several of the cross-cultural trysts end badly for the ‘femme-jardin’. One of the unfortunates, a young virgin, works as a nurse in a Peking hospital. She meets the Haitian on one of her nightly rounds and is not shocked by his suggestion that they take off their clothes and ‘fait le grand soleil’, but she warns of the stringent social rules of the communist regime which forbid this liberty: “C’est interdit par la révolution...On s’exposerait à des peines très lourdes.” (Eros 38)
The Haitian slyly convinces her that it is a scandal to be a virgin at her age, “Vierge à vingt-deux ans... c’est un scandale!” (Eros 38), and that they override this ‘prohibition obscene’. Once their tryst is discovered, however, the ‘femme jardín’ takes full responsibility for the “complot criminel contre l’Etat et la révolution” and is sentenced to work in a leper colony for the next nine years. The revolutionary ‘jouissance’ of the Haitian is made possible by the sacrifice—of virginity, and of well-being—of the ‘femme-jardin’.

Another nubile femme-jardin, “Le réel merveilleux féminin en chair et en os” (Eros 54), assumes the role of sacrificial object in “La jupe.” Kostadinka meets the young Haitian in a chance encounter and, after a night during which she is prepared “trois heures durant à la pénétration première” (Eros 59), she returns to her barracks, having soiled her white skirt with her virginal blood. The following day, she is arrested by the Yugoslavian police who punish her infamy by shaving her head in public. Here again, the ‘femme-jardin’ is ‘sacrificed’, in order for the Haitian to accomplish his ultimate act of insurgence. She is the means by which man escapes oppression and celebrates freedom, but at the same time, she is often portrayed as a sacrificial object who pays for man’s liberation. The ‘femme-jardin’, and the sexual release she provides, becomes, in effect the vehicle by which Depestre’s men transcend their earthly repression.

That Depestre uses the female body, or womanscape, as a means by which men transgress oppression may seem, to some feminist critics, as a sacrilege to the female body. It cannot be denied that men have, historically and presently, taken advantage of the female body as a means of personal pleasure or political control. Lisabeth Paravisini-
Gebert discusses this phenomenon and the importance of attributing cultural significance to the symbolic construct of the female body within literature:

The experience of many Caribbean women, historical experience as well as experience translated into literary texts, denies the body’s existence as mere symbolic construct. During the media buildup leading to the most recent U.S. intervention in Haiti, U.S. audiences heard the majority for the first time, of the systematic use of rape by military forces as a means of political control. Haitian readers...would reject feminist theorizing on the body’s symbolism as superfluous, given the immediacy of the connection between women’s rape and both historical and day-to-day reality in their country” (Daughters of Caliban 7).

While Depestre’s men in Eros dans un train chinois use the female body as a form of personal pleasure and a means by which to transgress political repression, it is clear that the interaction between men and women is not rape; it is a consensual union. It is also apparent that men are not always the instigators of the sexual interactions. Furthermore, Depestre seems to avoid perpetuating the threat of black sexuality on the white woman, as his Haitian men couple with women of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Finally, because of the cultural diversity of the ‘femme-jardin’ Depestre succeeds in allocating cultural significance to his women. As he celebrates the sexual union between man and woman, he also celebrates his notion of a creolized humanity made possible, in part, by the interaction with culturally diverse women.

Eros dans un train chinois embodies Depestre’s notion of ‘géolibertinage’, or a cross-cultural celebration of sexuality, for the novel is geographically wide-ranging, and all women, regardless of nationality, color, or race, are celebrated and become a ‘femme-jardin’. Depestre defines his notion of géolibertinage in “Mémoires du Géolibertinage”:

Tout l’insolite de la femme ...tenait à merveille dans ces syllabes plénières: GÉOLIBERTINAGE...A leur lumière, je découvris...des femmes de tous les pays, et beaucoup d’entre elles somptueusement douées pour les services dionysiaques de la vie. Elles devinrent mes hémisphères Nord et Sud...Le bien, le juste, l’idéal, le vrai, le beau et le bon, le merveilleux, le singulier et
l'universel...une fois mis dans la position horizontale devenaient concrets comme un sein, une bouche, un ventre, ou un grand cri glorieux de jeune femme qui jouit (Alléluia 113).

The aspect of celebration—especially of the female body and sexuality--is vital to Depestre’s ‘géolibertinage’ which differs greatly from the renowned libertinage of Sade. Depestre pays homage to this traditional notion of libertinage—free sexual license which transgresses societal taboos--however he finds that it lacks the truly liberating qualities he sees in sex. Depestre discusses the shortcomings of Sade’s libertinage:

« J’avoue...éprouver une sorte de gêne angoissante à la lecture d'étincelants libertins comme...Choderlos de Laclos, Sade...Leurs œuvres, qui ont incontestablement contribué au progrès des Lumières et de la démocratie, en laïcisant le droit au plaisir, gardent un arrière-goût de culpabilité » (Métier à métisser 126). While Sade’s taboo-breaking sexual escapades are typically achieved behind closed doors, which, for Depestre, implies a notion of guilt, Depestre’s are an open celebration of erotica. His ‘géolibertinage’ is a very public expression which celebrates sexuality as a natural aspect of life and emphasizes the beautiful and liberating components of sex. Depestre shuns any shame attributed to sexuality and, instead celebrates the joyful union of woman and man. Depestre illustrates his liberating notion of ‘géolibertinage’ as it ties in to his understanding of the ‘réel merveilleux’ and also to his ‘érotisme solaire’:

Dès mon premier coït, j’ai senti que l’acte d’amour, consommé dans la joie, sans esprit de culpabilité, fait partie du réel merveilleux, si cette notion a un sens au regard de toute forme de célébration de la vie. Il existe bel et bien un réel merveilleux féminin qui, à mes yeux, est capable de protéger l’amour du libre service sexuel et des notions de péché qui déshonorent souvent les relations qui se nouent entre homme et femme. Dans mon livre Eros dans un train chinois, je me suis fait de nouveau, à perte de vie, cartographe des horizons solaires de la femme (Le métier à métisser 119).
In *Eros dans un train chinois*, woman—the 'creolized' woman of many different backgrounds—is represented by beauty, strength, and sexuality. Depestre’s concept of 'géolibertinage' opens the doors of the world to the Depestre’s nomadic Haitian. Women become the vehicle by which he explores the world, becomes rooted to his physical surroundings, and finds liberation in exile. At the same time, the nomadic relationships permit him to raise questions of interracial relationships, politics, and personal freedom. Through the liberating act of sex, a physical 'métissage' of cultures, Depestre finds freedom and establishes a new identity for himself in exile. Women, in effect become Depestre’s geographical map of identity and masculine fantasy.

What is most significant about Depestre’s use of landscape is that it encompasses more than the purely physical and geographical notion of landscape. Depestre’s conception of landscape is comprised not only of geographic or temporal certainties, but also of the human body, sexuality, exile, and language. His understanding of landscape comprises the expression of the human body, its sexuality, its spirituality, its truth, its memory, its potential, and its future. Homi Bhaba, in “Dissemination”, discusses a similar concept of visual realities which are narratively linked to human identity, “The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes...the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression” (*Nation and Narration* 295). Bhaba’s notion of ‘inscape’ is that which is most significant in regards to Depestre’s works. Depestre, through a wide-ranging application of landscape, manages to transcend traditional notions of national identity. As a Haitian subjected to the ramifications of French colonization and sentenced to live in exile, Depestre seeks to create, within his
surroundings, the means by which to establish and express the complex truth, but also the joyous transgression of his existence. Therefore, any topography becomes a metaphor for the human condition, and that condition is, for Depestre, the union of the body with its surroundings.

Depestre's poetics often address the landscape characteristic of the Caribbean such as volcanoes, sugar cane fields, mountains, rivers, and the ocean. He also takes the weather and other natural elements affecting the landscape into consideration. Thus fire, hurricanes, rain, and sun as well as animal life figure prominently in his works. Depestre finds interconnected links of human beings to the landscape that surrounds them: "...il y a un cordon de solidarité qui lie, de manière indestructible, les pierres, les arbres, les poissons et les êtres humains..." (Alleluia 25). This interconnectedness provides for a symbiotic relationship of representation and signification, between human beings. While human beings occupy the landscape that surrounds them, the landscape is inscribed in the human and serves as one defining feature of the human 'inscape'.

The image of the volcano is particularly strong as representative of the colonized Caribbean in the works of one of Depestre's contemporaries, Aimé Césaire. Born in Martinique in 1913, Césaire observed the aftermath of one of the largest volcanic eruptions ever recorded. Mount Pelé, which erupted in 1902, completely devastated the village of Saint-Pierre, Martinique, killed nearly 30,000 people and bared the ground of vegetation with its huge lava flows. The image of the volcano is thus one of power, one of repressed energy, and one capable of striking with force. The powerful memory of the volcano, and the landscape which was affected by its force, is thus manifested as representative of the human 'inscape' of the Caribbean.
Césaire harnessed the image of volcanic power to represent those repressed by colonization and those who must, inevitably, release pent-up energy and cry out against repression. In his celebrated poetic text, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, Césaire pays homage to Toussaint Louverture, the African slave who led the first successful slave rebellion in Haiti. It is Toussaint Louverture’s original cry—in 1789—against slavery and colonization which allows for the ‘Césarian cry’ against black oppression. This is largely due to the fact that it was in « Haïti, où la négritude se mit debout pour la première fois et dit qu’elle croyait à son humanité… » (*Cahier* 24). This cry of black pride is perceived as the true voice of those who have also cried out in fear and misery. The Césarian cry is, for the colonized masses, the cry of truth:

«...dans cette ville inerte, cette foule criarde si étonnamment passée à côté de son cri comme cette ville à côté de son mouvement, de son sens, sans inquiétude, à côté de son vrai cri, le seul qu’on eût voulu l’entendre crier; parce qu’on le sent sien lui seul ; parce qu’on le sent habiter en elle dans quelque refuge profond d’ombre et d’orgueil, dans cette ville inerte, cette foule à côté de son cri de fain, de misère, de révolte, de haine, cette foule si étrangement bavarde et muette.....”

(*Cahier* 9).

The Césarian cry and volcanic imagery is also represented within the works of René Depestre. He, like Césaire, draws upon the physical characteristics of the volcano to represent turbulence and explosiveness in real life. The bitter racial contestation brought about by post war sentiments in the streets of ‘Une ambulance pour Nashville’, for example, is likened to volcanic activity wherein « la foule s’épaississait, s’encollerait, et écumaient » and the two black people involved must be helped by the police « à se dégager du volcan » (*Alléluia* 105).

While Depestre draws upon the turbulence and disruption of the volcano inherent to Césaire’s volcanic trope, he also transforms the notion of volcanic imagery to
assimilate sexuality. Volcanic rumblings become a metaphor for human sexuality: « A travers la soie du vêtement sa femelle-de-bien, en vibration avec ma veine première, passait en moi comme une transfusion de brûlants globules rouges » (Eros 150).

Depestre’s volcanic activity results in explosive orgasm which, for Depestre, is the ultimate release of repression. Accompanying this release is the cry of orgasm which Depestre likens to the Césairian cry of revolution. For Depestre, sexual energy is the true force of human nature, and the release of this energy is the ultimate revolutionary action.

The sentiments of one nomadic Haitian, in the short story “Baozhu”, reflect his sense of pride in his virility and the force he finds therein: « Loin de rougir de ma bande de jeune homme en parfaite santé physique et spirituelle je devais plutôt être fier d’un sang mâle si allègrement prêt à faire et l’amour et la révolution » (Eros 35).

Within the volcano trope, Depestre also finds the force with which to awaken humanity to its true self. In his semi-autobiographical, “Mémoires du géolibertinage,” Depestre travels the world in exile from Haiti, looking to find « une humanité réelle », but encountering only a « civilisation...(qui) maintenait les yeux fermés sur les problèmes essentiels de l’homme » (Alléluia 109). The jaded and discontented traveler feels as if the entire universe is incapable of resolving its devastating history. Lost within himself, and within the world, his inner frenzy seeks liberation and relief: “Où trouver la négation radicale, volcanique de cette zombification profonde de mon être? Où était pour moi une nouvelle géographie? Où était pour moi un nouveau nombril, une nouvelle humanité?” (Alléluia 111).

Here, Depestre reveals the umbilical cord as a link to humanity, but also as a link to geographical landscape. This notion of geographic ‘rootedness’ is significant for
Depestre, for, having lived most of his life in exile, he has no specific geographical roots to speak of. He, therefore, must find another way in which to forge a connection between his history, his exile, and his surroundings. To do so, Depestre subverts the hegemonic view of national identity or "rootedness" as characterized by a sedentary and unique adherence to one nation. He opposes this occidental vision of identity with a creolized identity, formed by a nomadic exploration of the world, which permits the forging of identity by means of multiple and heterogeneous roots. This concept is borrowed, in part, from the notion of the rhizome in *One Thousand Plateaus* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, which they describe as:

...an acentered, non hierarchical, non signifying system without a General and without an organising memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states... Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and the bi-univocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes a metamorphosis, changes in nature (*One Thousand Plateaus* 21).

While the notion of Deleuze and Guattari applies mainly to mental processes, Depestre adopts this idea of the rhizome, which allows for multiple identities, as a means by which to forge his own cultural identity in a life of exile. His application of the rhizome theory is similar to that of Edouard Glissant, who believes that « le rhizome n’est pas nomade, il s’enracine, même dans l’air… » (*Discours Antillais* 340). Depestre applies this explanation of the rhizome to his own concept of heterogeneous identity, which he defines as the ‘identité banian’:

"J’ai le sentiment d’avoir acquis, du fait d’un *exil* qui a duré toute la vie, ce que j’appelle une *identité banian* (du nom d’un arbre de l’Asie aux racines multiples qui ont l’originalité, après leur monté à la lumière, de redescendre dans la terre pour de successives remontées). Mon identité multiple se nourrit à la fois du *chez-*

26
It is, in part, due to the possibility of multi-rootedness that Depestre claims to have lived a happy exile. He believes that life in exile is an adventure which has allowed him to intermittently assume different nationalities depending upon his host country, while still maintaining his Haitian identity. This approach to identity destroys the logic of homogenous 'rootedness' and allows for a creolization of humankind. It is the nomadic human experience as a whole—not limited to national identity—that Depestre considers vitally important to his notion of identity. He finds that the interaction of the individual with the landscape—especially human landscape—is of great significance. As the role of woman is highly emphasized in Depestre’s trilogy, the notion of womanscape seems to function as a geographic map to identity. In “Mémoires du géolibertinage,” a young nomadic Haitian discusses his newfound connection to the earth: woman.

« ...je découvris qu’il y avait à la cité universitaire, à Paris, des femmes de tous les pays...somptueusement douées pour les services dionysiaques de la vie. Elles devinrent mes hémisphères Nord et Sud... Elles étaient le nombril électrique de la terre, le grand influx nerveux qui protège le soleil, la lune, les saisons et les récoltes » (Alléluia 113).

Depestre finds that he is able to feel even the pulsations of the earth through the female body.

The notion of womanscape serving as a means by which to convey identity can also be found in the works of Léopold Senghor. As one of the founders of the négritude movement, Léopold Senghor associates his black pride with the black African woman. According to Florence Stratton, “The poetry...pays tribute to her body which is
frequently associated with the African landscape that is his to explore and discover. As embodying mother she gives the trope a name; the Mother Africa trope” (Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender 41). Senghor’s idealized woman represents negritude in its entirety, for her blackness is beauty and life, her caresses are reminiscent of the soft beating of the tam-tams in his native Africa, and her reproductive power insures the regeneration of his roots. Thus, woman becomes the everlasting landscape of negritude. In his poem, “Femme noire” Senghor pays tribute to his native Africa, as he eulogizes the black African woman:

Femme nue, femme noire
Vêtue de ta couleur qui est la vie, de la forme qui est beauté!
...je te découvre,
Terre promise...et ta beauté foudroie en plein cœur...
Je chante ta beauté qui passe, forme que je fixe dans l’Eternel
Avant que le Destin jaloux ne te réduise en cendres pour
Nourrir les racines de la vie.
(Léopold Senghor, “Femme Noire”)

While the notion of ‘womanscape’ here clearly praises woman’s capacity to portray the beauty in human identity, Senghor speaks only of black identity and the black African woman. Depestre, on the other hand, goes beyond this image of woman and transforms his women into a geographical map of creoleness. His concept of ‘womanscape’ is not limited to the Mother Africa trope, but rather embraces women of all colors, races, and nationalities. The united woman of Africa becomes a heterogeneous woman. His ‘womanscape’ places the entire universe within the body of a ‘creolized’ woman, or the ‘femme-jardin’ who comprises his experiences of the world.

The ‘creolized woman’ for Depestre, whose exile from Haiti led him on a nomadic exploration of the world, allows for the ‘overcoming’ of real or imaginary
borders of politics, languages, religion, and culture. Through sexual union with the
‘femme-jardin’, and the emphatic description of her ‘creoleness’—“peau noir, jaune,
griffe, grimelle, mulâtre, sacatra, marabou3” (Alléluia 115), Depestre is able to ‘inhabit’
multiple places, cultures, and religions. He finds that this ‘universal’ contact, or the
intercourse of culture through the body at the international level, permits him to rise
above the isolating dynamics of the modern world, his exile included:

Aux côtés de mes femmes, aux confins rayonnants de leurs orgasmes, je fus tour à
tour Out-Napishtim et Atibon Legba, le Christ et le houngan haïtien Antoine
Langommiers, Bouddha et Ougou Badagris4…je fus en même temps Dessalines et
Baudelaire, Béhanzin et Léon Tolstoï, Ali-Houssain-ben-Ali-be-Sina et
Shango…Je fis un monde horizontal où il n’était jamais question de guerre froide,
ni de rideau de fer, ni d’impérialisme…” (Alléluia 116-17).

Here, we see that the ‘creolized’ woman permits Depestre to create multiple identities for
himself. He is able to remain Haitian, while at the same time being ‘transported’ in time
and place by the womanscape of the ‘femme-jardin’.

Since womanscape is, in part, the means by which Depestre communicates his
identity and his experience of the world, the female body can also be understood as a
corporal expression of language. This use of the body, as a substitution for language, is a
prominent theme in Bakhtin’s study of Rabelais’ carnivalesque masterpiece, Gargantua
and Pantagruel. Bakhtin focuses most specifically on the ‘grotesque body’ and ‘grotesque
bodily processes’ such as “copulation, pregnancy, birth, eating, drinking, and death”
(Rabelais and His World 355). He lauds the use of the corporal body as an instrument of
textual expression and shows that the body is a useful tool in communicating abstract
feelings and thoughts: “…all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the

3 “Termes issus de l’époque coloniale désignant les mulâtres et correspondant à différents degrés de
métissage” (footnote in Alléluia 115).
4 These gods, or demi-gods from various cultures are placed in juxtaposition to Haitian Voudou gods, loas
(spirits), or priests.
material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed with its images” (Rabelais and His World 355). An example of this rethinking, or of communicating a sacred notion with the human body, is found in the following passage of Gargantua and Pantagruel. Here, Rabelais communicates the sanctified notion of birth through a colorful illustration of the female body:

...a little while after she began to groan, lament, and cry, then suddenly came the midwives from all quarters, who groping her below found some peloderies...it was her fundament, that was slipped out with the mollification of her straight intrall...the coteyledons of her matrix were presently loosed, through which the child sprang up and leapt, and so entering into the hollow veine, did climb by the diaphragm even above her shoulder, where that veine divides itself in two... (Gargantua and Pantagruel, translated by Urquhart 40).

This extract, which penetrates the obscure notion of birth, is incredibly rich in corporal and oral language. Here, Rabelais embraces the natural aspect of the birthing process. He inserts the ‘grotesque’ features of birth into the text, while also describing the arduous evacuation of the child from its mother's body.

Depestre, with his generous application of the female body, succeeds in establishing a relationship between language and the body. This relationship can best be described in terms of what Julia Kristeva refers to as the ‘génotexte’, or “signifying productivity” of a text. The ‘génotexte’ is a ‘generative process’ which allows for the occurrence of multiple signifiers. Kristeva discusses the unlimited possibilities within the ‘génotexte’: “le génotexte n’est pas une structure, il représente l’infini signifiant. Le génotexte ne présente pas une signification, il présente toutes les significances possibles” (Prud’homme et Légaré 2). Depestre, who inscribes the female body into his texts, creates a génotexte which signifies, on the level of the masculine drive, male desire. He gives the female body several voices of his desire such as creoleness, liberation, and
sexual fulfillment. As his génotexte works in conjunction with his phénomènale, the structure or story of the text, Depestre performs what can be seen as a “géoliberinage” of language. His male characters, through the act of sexual ‘possession’, consume the corporal orality of the ‘femme-jardin’ and create a ‘doubling effect’, or the interaction between the génotexte and phénomènale, permitting for a “a process (which) moves through zones that have relative and transitory borders and constitute a path that is not limited to the two poles of univocal information between two full-fledged subjects” (Norton Anthology 2177).

It is the female body, or womanscape, that permits Depestre to move effortlessly between cultures, and to transcend any notion of restrictive boundaries. With a génotexte substantiated by the sexual exploration of the female body, Depestre creates a liaison between language and the body which transgresses the typical notion of “language” as either written or spoken. He inscribes his language onto the body of woman and, in taking her body through the act of sexual intercourse, he reclaims one of the most salient features of ‘creolized’ literature, which is orality.

According to the aforementioned supporters of ‘creolized literature’ (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant), the concept of orality is fundamental to the notion of ‘creoleness’. This deep-seated notion of orality originated in the plantation system and is traceable to the verbal interaction between masters and slaves, or their “dynamics made of acceptances and denials, resignations and assertions (Eloge 95) The representation of the plantation system is common in Depestre’s works. It appears, for example, in “De l’eau Fraîche pour Georgina”, where Depestre describes a ‘femme-jardin’: “…leur belle voisine est un champ de canne à sucre qui n’a pas été arrosé dans les derniers temps et
qui hurlait à la bénédiction de l’eau fraîche et mâle!” (Alléluia 82). Here, Depestre evokes the plantation origins of ‘creole’ orality, which he inscribes on his womanscape.

Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant claim that orality became useless to the colonized man once the plantation system was destroyed. They maintain that colonization, and the imposition of a French system of values and language, estranged man from his natural ‘inscape’ to the point where ‘Frenchness’, or the French language, became a means by which to express the colonized man’s alienation within society (Eloge 95). However, they later allow for the once present orality to be somewhere “buried in (a) collective consciousness’ (Eloge 95) and recognize that ‘creoleness’, or orality, may be created through efforts of the writer to ‘inseminate Creole in the new writing” (Eloge 97).

Depestre inseminates his texts, both literally and figuratively by means of the ‘femme jardin’. The ‘femme-jardin’ expressed as the embodiment of creoleness, is “inseminated” with the ‘creoleness’ of the Haitian man. Womanscape is, at once, the literal repository of ‘creole’ orality (or corporality). It is precisely because Depestre is so aware of his own ‘creoleness’, as well as his ability to express it in literature, that he justifies his use of French rather than his native Haitian Creole:

Pour se donner un langage à eux, les Haïtiens se firent voleurs de feu: ils prirent de force à la France le temps et la flamme de son système de signes. Cette opération...permet à l’imaginaire haïtien d’exprimer sa singularité tout en succombant aux charmes du français (...) j’honore le français autant qu’il m’honore quand je parviens à faire un usage maternel de sa richesse d’expression (...J’écris pour la fonction-langage commune à toutes les humanités) (Le métier à métisser 116-17).

Depestre’s ‘métissage’ of language is only one of the ways in which he expresses his ‘creoleness,’ for he believes that human identity cannot be limited to imposed notions of language, race, culture, religion or other imaginary boundaries. He, therefore, chooses to
juxtapose these ideas, to rupture any pre-established definitions of identity, and to create
a carnivalesque inversion of established order wherein he fashions a ‘creolized’ union of
humankind. This union, a sexual celebration of ‘creoleness,’ is made possible largely
through Depestre’s application of the ‘femme-jardin’ as a womanscape. By privileging
the body of woman, Depestre portrays the liberating and revolutionary aspects of
eroticism and Haitian ‘creoleness.’” It is because of his revolutionary approach to
geographic freedom and his use of womanscape that Depestre maintains a “joyous idea of
exile” (Dayan, “France Reads Haiti” 156). This understanding of the world allows him to
be anywhere in the world, but, at the same time, to write, metaphorically, from the same
small wooden desk he left in his Jacmelian bungalow.
Works cited


