

Université de Liège

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COMMENTED TRANSLATION
OF
MICHELLE CLIFF'S
NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN
(PARTIM)

Mémoire présenté par **Amandine Schiffers** en vue de l'obtention du grade de Master en
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TRANSLATION

III

THE
DISSOLUTION
OF MRS. WHITE

I have an assassin for a lover.

—Yoruban hymn to Shàngó

III
LA
DISSOLUTION
DE MME WHITE

J'ai pour amant un assassin.

—Hymne yoruba à Shàngó

Boy drove a truck for a laundry in Brooklyn and Kitty took a job in their office. She did clerical work, of which there was actually little, filing and typing mostly—she was the office girl. Catching water from the tap in the basin in the one washroom to make coffee in a stained percolator for the boss, fetching him doughnuts from the bakery two blocks away, dusting the confectioner's sugar from the desk where it settled like a pale pollen.

Because there was little clerical work, she was also assigned the task of sending out “helpful hints” to the laundry's customers, sticking them into the stiff plackets of the shirtfronts or between the folds of bedsheets in the back room, where the packers—two middle-aged Black women—bundled the cleansed linen for delivery. Kitty sat in the middle of a long aluminum table, between the two women, receiving the as-yet-untied parcels of cloth from one, slipping in her advice, except it wasn't *her* advice, not yet, then passing the parcel to the third woman at the table. All was accomplished in quiet.

[...]

Boy était chauffeur pour une blanchisserie de Brooklyn et Kitty s'y fit engager comme employée de bureau. Elle accomplissait quelques tâches administratives — en fait, il y en avait très peu, du classement et de la dactylographie principalement — elle était la fille de bureau. Elle préparait le café du patron dans un percolateur sale avec de l'eau qu'elle prenait au robinet du lavabo dans l'unique toilette, elle allait lui chercher des doughnuts à la boulangerie deux rues plus loin, elle époussetait le sucre glace du bureau où il se déposait comme des grains de pollen clair.

Comme il y avait peu de travail administratif, on lui avait également confié la tâche d'envoyer des « conseils utiles » aux clients de la blanchisserie, et elle les glissait dans les doubles pattes rigides des plastrons ou entre les plis des draps de lit ; cela se passait dans l'arrière-boutique, où les emballeuses — deux femmes noires d'âge moyen — empaquetaient le linge propre pour la livraison. Kitty s'asseyait au milieu d'une longue table en aluminium, entre les deux femmes, recevant de l'une les paquets de tissu qui n'étaient pas encore ficelés, elle glissait son conseil, sauf que ce n'était pas son conseil *à elle*, pas encore, puis passait le paquet à la troisième. Tout cela était exécuté en silence.

The advice varied only superficially, always concluding with the reminder that customers continue to use the services of White's Sanitary Laundry, est. 1945.

Kitty signed these notes, an authentic touch, in the name of Mrs. White, the imaginary wife of an imaginary man, conceived by Mr. B., the proprietor of the laundry. Mr. B. had Mrs. White's messages printed by his nephew Louie, who operated the printshop a few doors away. "A good boy," Mr. B. called him, even though Louie must have been forty at the very least.

Mrs. White and her philosophy of laundry, and thus her philosophy of wifedom, of which laundry was but one office, was the creation of Mr. B. Describing in his quaint sweet language that it was a wife's duty to make her husband's shirts, their crispness and their stiffness, a matter of her primary concern. That it was part of her mission to assure "sanitary sheets to bless the slumber of your loved ones." That a woman might be held to account if her tablecloth showed tattletale gray.

The word *sanitary* was important, a keystone, to Mr. B., who remembered a not-too-distant time of rooms jammed with darkness, people, and little else. No light once you walked into the hall and shut the street door behind you. Nothing green except the pale cabbage simmering through the rooms. The only water from a rusted tap shared by ten families. Crowded together, whether in tenements, sweatshops, on the docks, or in the streets, where their voices raised to be heard and split the air. He could see the peddler clothed in scales on Friday afternoons, aging merman hawking halibut or cod, as the day wore on his stench stronger, the fish cheaper.

Mr. B.'s concern was White's Sanitary Laundry; across the street was the United Sanitary Meat Market, two blocks away the Excelsior Sanitary Bakery.

To accompany Mrs. White's words, Mr. B. fashioned an image which decorated each page on which her hints and reminders were printed. Such an American image. In carriage. Physiognomy. Presence. Wisdom. Good nature. Part

Le conseil ne variait guère que dans la forme, se concluant toujours en rappelant aux clients de continuer à utiliser les services de la Blanchisserie Hygiénique de White, fondée en 1945. Kitty signait ces billets, une note d'authenticité, au nom de Mme White, l'épouse imaginaire d'un homme imaginaire, conçue par Monsieur B., le propriétaire de la blanchisserie. Monsieur B. faisait imprimer les messages de Mme White par son neveu Louie, qui tenait l'imprimerie quelques portes plus loin. « Un bon garçon, » disait Monsieur B., même si Louie devait avoir une bonne quarantaine d'années.

Mme White et sa philosophie du blanchissage, et donc sa philosophie de la vie de femme mariée, dont le blanchissage n'était qu'un des nombreux devoirs, était la création de Monsieur B. Elle décrivait dans sa langue douce et désuète qu'il était le devoir d'une épouse d'accorder aux chemises de son mari, à leur fraîcheur et leur rigidité, une importance toute particulière. Que c'était une partie de sa mission que de s'assurer que « des draps hygiéniques bénissent le sommeil de ceux qui vous sont chers. » Qu'une femme pourrait être tenue responsable si sa nappe affichait un gris suspect.

Le mot *hygiénique* était important, même essentiel, pour Monsieur B., qui se souvenait d'une époque pas si lointaine de logements remplis d'obscurité, de gens, et de pas grand-chose d'autre. Aucune lumière une fois que vous entriez dans le couloir et que vous fermiez la porte d'entrée derrière vous. Rien de vert à part le chou maladif qui mijotait et imprégnait l'immeuble. La seule eau provenait d'un robinet rouillé partagé par dix familles. Ils étaient entassés les uns sur les autres, que ce soit dans des immeubles, des ateliers de misère, sur les docks, ou dans les rues, où leurs voix s'élevaient pour qu'on les entende et fendaient l'air. Il se souvenait encore du camelot recouvert d'écailles du vendredi après-midi, un triton vieillissant qui criait ses flétans et morues, et comme le jour avançait, sa puanteur devenait plus forte et le poisson devenait moins cher.

L'entreprise de Monsieur B. s'appelait la Blanchisserie Hygiénique de White ; de l'autre côté de la rue, il y avait la Halle aux Viandes Hygiénique Unie, deux rues plus loin, la Boulangerie Hygiénique Excelsior.

Pour accompagner les mots de Mme White, Monsieur B. façonna une image sur laquelle ses conseils et rappels étaient imprimés. Une image tellement américaine. Dans son maintien, sa physionomie, sa présence, sa sagesse, et son sourire bon enfant.

altruism. Part salesmanship. Inspired by Fay Bainter, Selena Royle, Jane Darwell, as Mr. B. sat in the Brooklyn Loews during the Depression, perfecting his English.

An older woman with gentle gray curls, pink skin, two places on either cheek where the pink deepened slightly, soft rounded bosom, small mouth. Her lips indicating a smile that was not so much a reaction to something as a constant in her countenance—reassuring, never mocking or making fun. Her understanding nature accentuated by her tilted chin and clear blue eyes. Slender sculptured nose ending well above her smooth top lip, which had absolutely no hint whatsoever of the dark spiky hair that was common to all the older women in the neighborhood, who, after all, were not Americans and who had nothing in common with this image.

The jobs at the laundry were the jobs available to the Savages. An education in colonial schools, Jesuit or otherwise, did not seem to go very far here. And their previous experience—selling Scotch whisky and registering the names of tourists in a hotel log—seemed out of place.

They were ill-equipped. There was also the problem of their accents. Even if their credentials were of the highest, their skin of the palest, their accents unsettled most employers. Except Mr. B., whose own accent was very much with him. “It is not so much your accent, my dear,” he once told Kitty. “It’s that it is strange . . . I mean in the unfamiliar sense . . . to most Americans.” He paused. “By now people are used to certain sounds . . . it confuses them when there are new ones . . . especially from exotic places . . . you know what I mean. . . .” He let his voice trail, shrugged, and sighed. He was, after all, a realist.

For the moment Boy and Kitty worked quietly, looking to further opportunity. Boy picking up white nylon bags filled with dirty clothes and linen, and delivering the carefully folded and tied parcels of laundry. Kitty using her voice only as Mrs. White, or as the office’s quiet girl. Saving her twang,

Mi-altruisme. Mi-art de la vente. Inspirée par Fay Bainter, Selena Royle, Jane Darwell, les actrices que Monsieur B. avait vues enfant quand, pendant la Grande Dépression, il allait perfectionner son anglais au cinéma Loews de Brooklyn.

Une femme d'âge mûr aux douces boucles grisonnantes, à la peau rose, avec deux zones sur chaque joue où le rose fonçait légèrement, une poitrine ronde, une bouche menue. Ses lèvres dessinant un sourire qui n'était pas tant une réaction à quelque chose qu'une constante dans l'expression de son visage — rassurant, jamais moqueur. Son naturel bienveillant accentué par son menton incliné et ses yeux bleu clair. Le nez fin, sculpté, se terminant bien au-dessus sa lèvre supérieure toute lisse, qui ne portait pas le moindre soupçon du duvet noir et piquant si courant chez toutes les femmes âgées du quartier, qui, après tout, n'étaient pas américaines et n'avaient rien en commun avec cette image.

Les emplois à la blanchisserie étaient ceux auxquels les Savage pouvaient prétendre. Une éducation dans des écoles coloniales, Jésuite ou autre, ne semblait pas mener bien loin ici. Et leur expérience antérieure — vendre du Scotch et inscrire les noms des touristes dans un registre d'hôtel — semblait hors de propos.

Ils n'avaient pas les qualités requises. Leur accent posait également problème. Malgré les meilleures références, les peaux les plus pâles, leur accent perturbait la plupart des employeurs. À l'exception de Monsieur B., dont l'accent était lui-même très prononcé. « Ce n'est pas tant votre accent, ma chère, dit-il un jour à Kitty. C'est que c'est étrange... dans le sens de différent, je veux dire... pour la plupart des Américains. » Il marqua une pause. « Aujourd'hui, les gens sont habitués à certains sons... cela les trouble quand il y en a de nouveaux... surtout quand ils viennent d'endroits exotiques... vous voyez ce que je veux dire... » Il laissa traîner sa voix, haussa les épaules, et soupira. Il était, après tout, un réaliste.

Pour le moment, Boy et Kitty travaillaient tranquillement, tout en cherchant d'autres opportunités. Boy ramassait des sacs de nylon blanc remplis de vêtements et de linge sales, et livrait les paquets de linge soigneusement pliés et attachés. Kitty n'utilisait sa voix que sous l'identité de Mme White, ou de la fille de bureau taiseuse. Elle réservait ses inflexions des îles,

her talk of home, for the shopkeepers of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Until Boy told her it was too dangerous, he felt, for her to travel there alone, or with one of their daughters, and he had no desire to accompany her.

He was making himself at home. Settling in. Branching out. Getting his information at the local bar where he stopped each evening, glancing at the ball games on the television suspended over the dark wood counter, telling his stories to the other workingmen who rested their behinds on patched plastic seats and drank Schaefer on tap. He didn't tell these men about his wife and her visits to Bed-Stuy. He listened as they talked on and on about the residents of the place—their displeasure turning ugly, so ugly that if Boy cared to defend the people his wife felt at home with, he would have been afraid to. He held his tongue, neither agreeing nor objecting. Silent in his mestee/sambo/octoroon/quadroon/creole skin. They naturally took his silence as acquiescence, believing, against their better judgment, that there was the son of a plantation owner in their midst—which is how he introduced himself.

Kitty did not cease her visits to her home away from home, but she limited them and did not talk about them, not telling Boy when she went, not taking the girls along with her, not bringing food from home, home to them.

She lived divided, straining to adjust to this place where she seemed to float, never to light, the shopkeepers of Bed-Stuy her only relief. She questioned why she was so miserable—and immediately responded that her mother was dead. Her mother would not have approved of her—her mother who told her to make the best of it. Whatever *it* might be. You lie wid dog, nuh mus' get up wid flea? Her mother's comment whenever Kitty quarreled with Boy. She smiled at the memory of it. She felt her mother's loss, keen. But there was more to her discontent, that she knew. She was not at home with pretense.

Time went on. After some weeks at the laundry, Boy got himself a position as a television repairman through

de chez elle, pour les commerçants de Bedford-Stuyvesant. Jusqu'à ce que Boy lui dise un jour, qu'à son avis, c'était trop dangereux pour elle d'y aller seule, ou avec une de leurs filles, et qu'il ne souhaitait pas du tout l'accompagner.

Il se mettait à l'aise. S'adaptait. Étendait ses relations. Il se renseignait au bar du quartier où il s'arrêtait chaque soir, en jetant un coup d'œil aux matchs de baseball qui passaient à la télévision suspendue au-dessus du comptoir de bois sombre, racontait ses histoires aux autres travailleurs qui reposaient leurs postérieurs sur des sièges en plastique déchirés et buvaient des Schaefer à la pression. Il ne leur parlait pas de sa femme et de ses visites à Bed-Stuy. Il les écoutait déblatérer sans fin sur les habitants du quartier — leur antipathie se faisant menaçante, si menaçante que, si Boy s'était soucié de défendre les gens avec qui sa femme se sentait à l'aise, il aurait eu peur. Il se taisait, sans acquiescer ni protester. Silencieux dans sa peau métis/sambo/octavonne/ quarteronne/créole. Ils prenaient tout naturellement son silence pour de l'approbation, croyant, contre tout bon sens, que c'était le fils d'un propriétaire de plantation qui se tenait parmi eux — car c'est ainsi qu'il s'était présenté.

Kitty ne cessa pas ses visites à ce second chez elle, mais elle les limitait et n'en parlait pas, ne le disait pas à Boy quand elle y allait, n'emmenait pas les filles, ne ramenait pas chez eux de nourriture de chez eux, de leur maison à eux.

Elle vivait divisée, s'efforçant de s'adapter à cet endroit où elle semblait flotter, sans jamais se poser, avec pour unique soulagement les commerçants de Bed-Stuy. Elle se demandait pourquoi elle était si malheureuse — et y trouvait directement comme réponse que sa mère était morte. Sa mère n'aurait pas approuvé ce qu'elle faisait — sa mère qui lui avait dit de faire son chemin. Quel que soit le *chemin*. À fos fréquenter chyen, ou ka attraper puces, non? C'était le commentaire de sa mère à chaque fois que Kitty se disputait avec Boy. Ce souvenir la fit sourire. Elle ressentait la perte de sa mère, profondément. Mais elle savait qu'il y avait autre chose. Elle n'était pas à l'aise avec les faux-semblants.

Le temps passait. Après quelques semaines à la blanchisserie, Boy se trouva un poste de réparateur de télévision par l'intermédiaire de

someone he met at the bar. It was still laborer's work, but paid a good deal more than driving the laundry truck. His hope grew. Meanwhile, Kitty remained at the laundry, moving between Mr. B.'s office, the bakery, the washroom, the packing room, the want ads, the interviews. Day after day.

Soon it was late summer. One afternoon Kitty took herself to a big bank near Montague Street. It must have been her fiftieth interview, she thought, as she trudged through the hot streets, her cotton dress sticking to the back of her legs. In the bank, she was ushered upstairs to a large white man with a blond balding head, who leaned across his fat cherrywood desk to take her hand. "How do you do, Mrs. Savage."

"How do you do," Kitty responded.

As they spoke—about his name and title, the job of receptionist and how vital it was, the weather, New York in summer, the heaviness of the air and when it might lift—the man eyed her curiously, stressing again the duty of a receptionist to create a positive impression on the public. Then he spoke a direct question at her. "And where does that musical voice come from?"

From one lickle piece of gristle in me t'roat, she thought to answer. Instead, she dropped her voice and responded, "I am a Jamaican."

"I see . . . I see." Silence. Then, "My wife and I have not had the pleasure of visiting your beautiful island, but we have heard all about it from our maid . . . ah, perhaps you know her . . . her name is Winsome."

Of course. Kitty ceased listening to the man, letting his inquiry hang in the air, waiting for a chance to get out. He began speaking again. She was thinking about Winston and Grace. Their jobs. Their advice. Her chance at departure came quickly enough. The man had risen and was obviously indicating a finish to their conversation, only slightly discomfited by the stone-woman across from him.

"But," he spoke in an assuring voice, "there *is* a vacancy in our executive washroom. Perhaps your husband

quelqu'un qu'il avait rencontré au bar. Il s'agissait toujours d'un travail manuel, mais c'était bien mieux payé que de conduire le camion de la blanchisserie. Son espoir grandissait. Pendant ce temps, Kitty restait à la blanchisserie, se déplaçant entre le bureau de Monsieur B., la boulangerie, les toilettes, la salle d'emballage, les petites annonces, les entretiens d'embauche. Jour après jour.

Ce fut bientôt la fin de l'été. Une après-midi, Kitty se rendit dans une grosse banque près de Montague Street. Cela devait bien être son cinquantième entretien, pensa-t-elle, tandis qu'elle se traînait dans les rues chaudes, sa robe de coton collant à l'arrière de ses jambes. Dans la banque, on l'introduisit en haut auprès d'un gros homme blanc au crâne blond et dégarni, qui se pencha sur son énorme bureau en merisier pour prendre sa main. « Enchanté, Mme Savage. »

« Enchantée, » répondit Kitty.

Tandis qu'ils parlaient — du nom et du titre de l'homme chauve, de l'emploi de réceptionniste et de l'importance capitale de ce poste, du temps, de New York en été, de la lourdeur de l'air qui tardait à se lever — l'homme l'observait curieusement, en soulignant à nouveau que la réceptionniste se devait de créer une impression positive sur les clients. Alors, il lui posa une question directe. « Mais d'où vient cette voix musicale ? »

D'un ti morceau de cartilage dans ma gôj, pensa-t-elle répondre. À la place, elle baissa la voix et répondit, « Je suis Jamaïcaine. »

« Je vois... je vois. » Silence. Puis, « Ma femme et moi n'avons pas eu le plaisir de visiter votre magnifique île, mais nous en avons beaucoup entendu parler par notre bonne... ah, peut-être la connaissez vous... elle s'appelle Winsome. »

Évidemment. Kitty cessa d'écouter l'homme, laissant sa question en suspens, attendant une occasion de s'en aller. Il recommença à parler. Elle pensait à Winston et Grace. Leurs emplois. Leurs conseils. L'occasion pour elle de s'en aller arriva assez vite. L'homme s'était levé et indiquait manifestement la fin de leur conversation, légèrement déconcerté par la femme impassible qui se tenait devant lui.

« Mais, dit-il d'une voix convaincante, il y a bien une place disponible aux toilettes de notre direction. Peut-être votre mari

might be interested?" His manner eloquent, his smile gracious. See, we're not so bad after all.

She stood and walked out.

The whole business might have seemed a small thing. Should she have expected better? And she had kept her dignity. It was he whose stupidity was made plain. Then why did she feel in the wrong?

She left the big marble and granite building—hard as dem heart hard, she muttered—and walked over to the old Episcopal cemetery and sat on the grave of Marcus, F A I T H F U L S E R V A N T. She wept. Then caught herself. This t'ing a fact of life. Face it, gal. Your mama counsel you not to venture where you nuh welcome. She took the subway back to the laundry.

Kitty and the women in the packing room—named Georgia and Virginia—spoke only from necessity. But when Kitty was in the outer office, not sitting between them, she could hear them chatting softly, laughing. The word *girl*, affectionate, was repeated often. That afternoon, when she walked into the packing room where the women were sharing a sandwich and fell silent on her entry, Kitty wanted to smash what was between them, the three of them, and shout "Me not dem!", the other them. She wanted to tell the women what had prevailed, who she really was, but she could not and held back, afraid of what they might think of her, knowing their own travels through the city would make her seem only like a cry-cry baby. A house-slave inconvenienced by massa whim, while dem worked the cane.

Unable to speak to them, she took her place between them, her feelings lit by a dim fury, sticking Mrs. White's messages methodically, automatically, almost instinctively by now, into the shirts and between the sheets. Reliving over and over again what had happened at the bank. The cemetery with her touchstone of a grave. Why hadn't she said something to the man?—on the one hand. Why didn't these women speak to her?—on the other.

Why had she maintained silence, calling it dignity,

serait-il intéressé ? » Ses manières étaient éloquentes, son sourire bienveillant. Vous voyez, on n'est pas si méchants que ça après tout.

Elle se leva et sortit.

Toute cette histoire n'avait pas d'importance. Aurait-elle dû s'attendre à mieux ? Mais elle avait gardé sa dignité. C'est lui qui avait étalé sa bêtise. Alors pourquoi se sentait-elle en tort ?

Elle quitta le grand bâtiment de marbre et de granite — aussi rès que leurs cœurs rès, marmonna-t-elle — et elle alla faire un saut dans le vieux cimetière épiscopal, s'assit sur la tombe de Marcus, FAITHFUL SERVANT. Elle pleura. Puis elle se ressaisit. La vi comme ça. Ouvre tes zyé, ma fi. Ta manman t'a déjà dit pas aller où moun pas vouloir de toi. Elle prit le métro pour retourner à la blanchisserie.

Kitty et les femmes de la salle d'emballage — qui se prénommaient Georgia et Virginia — ne se parlaient que lorsque c'était nécessaire. Mais quand Kitty se trouvait dans le bureau extérieur, et non assise entre elles, elle pouvait les entendre bavarder doucement, rire. Les mots *ma fille*, affectueux, étaient souvent répétés. Cet après-midi-là, quand elle entra dans la salle d'emballage où les femmes se partageaient un sandwich et que celles-ci se turent, Kitty eut envie de briser ce qu'il y avait entre elles, entre elles trois, et de leur crier « Mwen pas comme eux ! », les autres eux. Elle eut envie de dire à ces femmes ce qu'elle avait dû subir, qui elle était vraiment, mais elle ne pouvait pas et se retint, de peur de ce qu'elles pourraient penser d'elle, sachant qu'à côté de leurs propres tribulations dans la ville, elle aurait eu l'air d'un bébé cadum. Une esclave domestique incommodée par un caprice du mèt, alors qu'elles, elles travaillaient dans les kann.

Incapable de leur parler, elle prit sa place entre elles, ses sentiments embrasés par une fureur imprécise, fourrant les messages de Mme White méthodiquement, automatiquement, presque instinctivement désormais, dans les chemises et entre les draps. Revivant encore et encore ce qui s'était passé à la banque. Le cimetière avec sa tombe comme pierre de touche. Pourquoi n'avait-elle rien dit à l'homme ? — d'une part. Pourquoi ces femmes ne lui parlaient-elles pas ? — de l'autre.

Pourquoi avait-elle gardé le silence, appelant cela de la dignité,

through all the other interviews in which her musical voice, her golden skin, had become the center of conversation and the reason for refusal? Coward!

Her head began to ache. She took her ballpoint and, hiding the paper with her curved fingers, like a schoolgirl being examined, embellished one of Mrs. White's epistles—one announcing a two-for-one sale, a businessman's special on shirts. She drew a balloon from the upturned mouth of the benign lady and printed within: EVER TRY CLEANSING YOUR MIND OF HATRED? THINK OF IT. When Georgia raised her head to watch Kitty as she wrote, for the pace at the table had slowed, Kitty caught her eyes and said softly that she was repairing a printing error. She quickly stuck the message into the shirt pocket, a blue button-down Arrow, not unlike the one worn by the man who had so distressed her.

Later, on the subway, she thought about what she had done and worried less about the possibility of being found out—a woman creating her own noise was rarely attended—than the fact that she had done such a thing. Was she turning into a crazy woman? Like the one with sores who chanted on the D train? Or one of the women at home who talked to lizards and duppies? Who thought they could slip from their skin at night and follow the Old Hige, their raw flesh aflame?

No. She was not crazy. There would be plenty of time for that. She smiled to herself. No. She was lonely. She was angry. Yes. That was all.

Automatic writing, they called it.

It probably would not happen again.

Settling this in her mind, more or less, she took some pleasure in what she had done. Hoping some businessman would find her message. That she might be a flower on the wall as he was struck by Mrs. White's reprimand. How silly.

Then she smiled at the idea of Boy cleaning a white-man's toilet.

As she shifted in the subway heat, her skirt stuck to

durant tous les autres entretiens au cours desquels sa voix musicale, sa peau dorée, étaient devenues le centre de la conversation et la raison du refus ? Elle n'était qu'une lâche !

Sa tête commençait à lui faire mal. Elle prit son stylo-bille et, cachant le papier dans la courbe de ses doigts, comme une élève à un examen, embellit un des courriers de Mme White — un courrier annonçant une vente deux-pour-le-prix-d'un, une offre exceptionnelle pour homme d'affaires. Elle dessina une bulle qui sortait de la bouche retroussée de la dame bienveillante et écrivit en capitales à l'intérieur : VOUS AVEZ DEJA ESSAYE DE NETTOYER LA HAINE DE VOTRE ESPRIT ? SONGEZ-Y. Quand Georgia leva la tête pour regarder Kitty qui écrivait, parce que le rythme à la table avait ralenti, Kitty croisa son regard et lui dit à voix basse qu'elle corrigeait une erreur d'impression. Elle fourra vite le message dans la poche de la chemise, une chemise Arrow bleue, pas si différente de celle que portait l'homme qui l'avait tellement bouleversée.

Plus tard, dans le métro, elle réfléchit à ce qu'elle avait fait et s'inquiéta moins de la possibilité d'être démasquée — on faisait rarement attention à une femme qui crée ses propres interférences — que du fait qu'elle eût fait une telle chose. Était-elle en train de devenir folle ? Comme la folle avec des plaies qui chantait dans le train D ? Ou l'une des femmes de chez elle qui parlaient aux lézards et aux duppies ? Qui pensaient pouvoir se glisser hors de leur peau la nuit et suivre la Vieille Sorcière, leur chair à vif enflammée ?

Non. Elle n'était pas folle. Elle avait encore tout le temps pour ça. Elle se sourit intérieurement. Non. Elle était seule. Elle était en colère. Oui. C'était tout.

On appelait ça de l'écriture automatique.

Cela ne se reproduirait probablement plus.

Après avoir réglé cette question dans son esprit, plus ou moins, elle prit un peu de plaisir à ce qu'elle avait fait. Espérant qu'un homme d'affaires trouverait son message. Qu'elle puisse être une fleur sur le papier peint au moment où il serait frappé par la réprimande de Mme White. Comme c'était ridicule.

Puis elle sourit à l'idée de Boy nettoyant le w.c. d'un blanc.

Au moment où elle changeait de métro dans la chaleur souterraine, sa jupe la collait,

her, more than perspiration. She rose and glanced behind and saw that the stain had begun. She left at a station two stops before hers and was grateful for the dim light on the platform. At the top of the stairs in the bright late-summer evening was a shop run by a woman from Puerto Rico.

Kitty sought the folded cloth she had been taught to use as a girl. She entered the domain of another island woman. The woman, one thick black-and-white braid wrapped around her head, stood behind the cash register in the front of the shop. Behind her was a shelf of sanitary devices and birth protection. Douches, jellies, pads, plugs, foams. The woman had arranged the whole into a pyramid, above which was a sign: SERVILLETAS, TAMPONES, Y CONTROL DE LA NATALIDAD. In the middle of the pyramid, enveloped by the goods for sale, blessing their offices, was a statue of the Virgin, aureole of gold, robe of gold, face and hands of dark wood. A plaque at her feet identified her as La Morenita, La Virgen de Montserrat. The woman smiled at Kitty as she entered, greeting her with a nod of her head and a phrase in Spanish. Kitty smiled and nodded in turn and indicated with her eyes that she needed something from the pyramid. "I am sorry; I speak very little Spanish."

"It is okay. I live in America long time now. I know English."

"I am newly arrived. I am a Jamaican."

"*De Jamaica?*" The shopkeeper gave the name of the island the Spanish pronunciation.

"*Sí, de Jamaica.*"

"*Bueno.* What can I do for you?"

"I am having my . . . the curse . . . you know what I mean." Kitty's eyes turned down. The woman did not quite get her meaning. The *curse* was foreign to her.

"I bleed . . . *sangre.*" Kitty made herself whisper.

"*Ah, sí.* You need some pads? *Tampones?*" The woman turned to regard La Morenita and her display.

"I was wondering . . . in Jamaica we use cloth. Folded. We wash it each time by hand. Do you have such a thing?"

plus que de la transpiration. Elle se leva, jeta un coup d'œil à son derrière et vit que la tache avait commencé à apparaître. Elle sortit à une station deux arrêts avant le sien et fut heureuse de la faible lumière sur le quai. Au sommet des escaliers, dans le soir éclatant de la fin de l'été, se trouvait un magasin tenu par une Portoricaine.

Kitty cherchait les linges pliés qu'on lui avait appris à utiliser dans son adolescence. Elle pénétrait dans le domaine d'une autre femme des îles. La femme, une épaisse natte noire et blanche enroulée autour de la tête, se tenait derrière la caisse enregistreuse à l'avant du magasin. Derrière elle se trouvait une étagère de produits hygiéniques et de protections contraceptives. Douches vaginales, gelées, serviettes hygiéniques, tampons, mousses. La femme avait arrangé le tout en une pyramide, au-dessus de laquelle il y avait un panneau : SERVILLETAS, TAMPONES Y CONTROL DE LA NATALIDAD. Au milieu de la pyramide, enveloppée par les marchandises, bénissant leurs offices, se trouvait une statue de la Vierge, auréole d'or, robe d'or, visage et mains de bois noir. Une plaque à ses pieds indiquait qu'il s'agissait de La Morenita, La Virgen de Montserrat. La femme sourit à Kitty quand elle entra, la saluant d'un hochement de tête et d'une expression en espagnol. Kitty sourit en hochant la tête à son tour et indiqua du regard qu'elle avait besoin de quelque chose dans la pyramide. « Je suis désolée ; je ne connais que quelques mots d'espagnol. »

« Ça va. Je vis en Amérique longtemps maintenant. Je parle anglais. »

« Je suis arrivée récemment. Je suis jamaïcaine. »

« *De Jamaica ?* » La commerçante donnait au nom de l'île sa prononciation espagnole.

« *Sí, de Jamaica.* »

« *Bueno.* Qu'est-ce que je peux faire pour vous ? »

« J'ai mes... ragnagna...vous voyez ce que je veux dire. » Kitty baissa les yeux. La femme ne comprit pas tout à fait ce qu'elle voulait dire. Les *ragnagna* lui étaient étrangères.

« Je saigne... *sangre.* » chuchota Kitty.

« *Ah, sí.* Vous avez besoin de tampons ? *Tampones ?* » La femme se tourna pour regarder La Morenita et son étalage.

« Je me demandais... en Jamaïque, nous utilisons des linges. Pliés. On les lave à la main à chaque fois. Vous auriez ça ? »

Around the shop were touches of the woman's homeland. Unguents, balms, candles in glass cylinders with saints and virgins fixed to them. Kitty envisioned a drawer with folded cloths.

"No. No such thing. La Morenita and I are in America long time now." The shopkeeper smiled. "These cloths are not convenient in New York. There is not the privacy for women to wash them, and the sun is too weak to bleach them."

"I see." Kitty felt very foolish, like a homesick child. "Well, may I have a box of Kotex, please, *por favor?*"

"*Sí*. Of course." The woman removed a box from the side of the pyramid, then walked to the back of the shop, leaving Kitty at the register and returning a few seconds later with a paper towel wet with water and salt. She murmured *pardon*, and began to carefully stroke the back of Kitty's skirt. Kitty was at first embarrassed, then gave in to the woman's care.

The shopkeeper returned to her place behind the register and, as she rang up the sale, Kitty's eyes glanced over at the darkness of the Virgin. "What means La Morenita?"

"It means the little dark one. They say she was cut from the life. From ebony."

There was absolutely no visible outcome from Kitty's impetuosity. Probably no one paid any mind to Mrs. White. Powerless icon masked as mother. Kitty trudged on.

When it seemed, after similar interviews, similar insults, similar assumptions that because she spoke in accented language she was illiterate—when it seemed, after months in this new country, that she would labor forever as Mrs. White, walking the streets of Brooklyn on her lunch hours, visiting her home away from home in secret, traveling each evening back to the small apartment where she cooked dinner for the girls, waiting for Boy to reappear, now he had traded his paints for the camaraderie he found in the bar. She, watching the infernal television, thinking it

Partout dans le magasin, il y avait des rappels de la patrie de la femme. Onguents, baumes, bougies dans des cylindres de verre sur lesquels étaient accrochés des saints et des vierges. Kitty s'imaginait un tiroir rempli de linges pliés.

« Non. Pas ça. La Morenita et moi, on est en Amérique longtemps maintenant. » La commerçante sourit. « Ces linges ne sont pas pratiques à New York. Les femmes n'ont pas l'intimité qu'il faut pour les laver, et le soleil est trop faible pour les blanchir. »

« Je vois. » Kitty se sentait stupide, comme un enfant qui a le mal du pays. « Bien, puis-je avoir une boîte de Kotex, s'il vous plaît, *por favor* ? »

« *Sí*. Bien sûr. » La femme ôta une boîte du côté de la pyramide, marcha ensuite vers le fond du magasin, laissant Kitty à la caisse et revint quelques secondes plus tard avec une serviette en papier imbibée d'eau et de sel. Elle murmura *pardon*, et se mit à frotter soigneusement l'arrière de la jupe de Kitty. Kitty fut d'abord gênée, puis s'abandonna aux soins de la femme.

La commerçante retourna à sa place derrière la caisse et, tandis qu'elle enregistrait la vente, les yeux de Kitty regardèrent par-dessus la femme la noirceur de la Vierge. « Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire, La Morenita ? »

« Ça veut dire la petite noire. On dit qu'elle a été taillée dans la vie. Dans l'ébène. »

Le geste impulsif de Kitty n'eut absolument aucun résultat visible. Probablement que personne ne prêtait attention à Mme White. Icône impuissante déguisée en mère. Kitty continuait son labeur ingrat.

Quand il lui sembla clair, après des entrevues similaires, des insultes similaires, des suppositions similaires qu'elle était illettrée parce qu'elle parlait avec un accent — quand il lui sembla clair, après des mois passés dans ce nouveau pays, qu'elle travaillerait à jamais sous les traits de Mme White, parcourant les rues de Brooklyn pendant ses heures de déjeuner, rendant visite en secret à son chez elle loin de chez elle, rentrant chaque soir au petit appartement où elle préparait le souper des filles, attendant que Boy réapparaisse, maintenant qu'il avait échangé ses peintures contre la camaraderie qu'il trouvait au bar. Elle, regardant la satanée télévision, en pensant que

would take her mind off her troubles, suffering as she was from a weariness which did not promise to leave her, wishing her life away, as the days got shorter, giving in more and more to Boy's warnings about Bed-Stuy, unable to return with the food she cherished—when all this got to her so she could not bear this place and the prospect of the cold with her thin blood, Kitty amused herself by sending more messages. They could hurt no one. No doubt she had been right and no one attended to Mrs. White or her silly hints—they would all end their journey on a garbage barge.

Her pen traced balloons and filled them in, putting words in Mrs. White's pert mouth.

WE CAN CLEAN YOUR CLOTHES BUT NOT YOUR HEART.
AMERICA IS CRUEL. CONSIDER KINDNESS FOR A
CHANGE.

WHITE PEOPLE CAN BE BLACK-HEARTED.

THE LIFE YOU LIVE WILL BE VISITED ON YOUR
CHILDREN.

MARCUS GARVEY WAS RIGHT.

Things did not really become difficult for Kitty until Boy found a sheaf of these pronouncements in her handbag while rummaging one night for cigarettes, and confronted her with them, waving them in her face.

"Kitty, for God's sake . . . what is this?"

"What you doing in my bag, man?" She was suddenly embarrassed.

"Never mind that. . . . What in hell are these?"

"In hell fe true. None of your business."

"Don't shut up on me, woman. You gone crazy? You want to lose your job?"

"Nuh gwan lose me job, bredda."

"You will if Mr. B. him find these."

"How him gwan find them? Chuh, man, is jus' something I do for entertainment."

Then quiet.

cela détournerait son esprit de ses ennuis, souffrant comme elle le faisait d'une lassitude qui ne promettait pas de la quitter, souhaitant échapper à sa vie, comme les jours raccourcissaient, cédant de plus en plus aux avertissements de Boy à propos de Bed-Stuy, incapable de rentrer avec la nourriture qu'elle chérissait — quand tout ceci lui sembla si clair qu'elle ne put plus supporter ni cet endroit ni la perspective du froid avec son sang fluide, Kitty s'amusa à envoyer d'autres messages. Ils ne pouvaient blesser personne. Il ne faisait aucun doute qu'elle avait eu raison et que personne ne faisait attention à Mme White et ses stupides conseils — ils finiraient tous leur course sur une barge à ordures.

Son stylo dessinait des bulles et les remplissait, mettant des mots dans la bouche mutine de Mme White.

NOUS POUVONS NETTOYER VOS VETEMENTS MAIS PAS VOTRE CŒUR.

L'AMERIQUE EST CRUELLE. ESSAYEZ LA GENTILLESSE POUR CHANGER.

LES BLANCS PEUVENT AVOIR LE CŒUR NOIR.

VOS ENFANTS SERONT PUNIS POUR LA VIE QUE VOUS MENEZ.

MARCUS GARVEY AVAIT RAISON.

La situation ne se compliqua qu'au soir où Boy trouva une liasse de ces déclarations dans son sac à main tandis qu'il farfouillait à la recherche de cigarettes, et qu'il la confronta à sa découverte, en brandissant les cartes devant son visage.

« Kitty, nom d'un chien... qu'est-ce que c'est que ça ? »

« Qu'est-ce tu fais dans mon sac, man ? » Elle était gênée tout à coup.

« Peu importe... Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça, bordel ? »

« Le bordel, c'est sintin. C'est pas tes oignons. »

« T'esquive pas, femme. T'es devenue folle ? Tu veux perdre ton job ? »

« J'veais pas perdre job à mwen, frè. »

« Oh que si, si Monsieur B. trouve ça. »

« Comment il les trouverait ? Allez, man, c'est juste on biten que je fais pour m'amuser. »

Puis ils se turent.

She was sitting on a second-hand straight-backed rocker staring at the television. Robert Young kissed Jane Wyatt on his return home and Kitty sucked her teeth.

"Busha, is maybe time we cut the cotta . . . what you think?" She broke the silence, addressing him as overseer, with reference to divorce among the slaves who had been among their ancestors. Slicing the device on which their burdens balanced. She spoke in code because the girls were in the kitchen washing the dishes. Still, her words fit.

"Why you call me 'busha,' woman? I don't drive you. I don't push you against your will." Boy, frightened.

She smiled at him. "You preffer 'slave' . . . 'massa'? Is what your American friends call you?"

Suddenly, she was in control. Silence again. And then he moved to kiss her and tell her he needed her and loved her more than life itself, and, as God is my witness, we will return soon. Soon as we get enough money. He put his arms around her and begged her just to be careful and not let Mr. B. catch she. That night they made love and he thought the cutting of the cotta was forgotten, not realizing, as she drew herself away to fold into sleep, she was not at rest.

She slid into a sleep in which she dreamed. On a green hillside she took to be her mother's land, ruinate, a small dark figure robed in gold and lit around by gold light was leading a procession. It seemed in the dream that La Morenita floated up the hill, as those behind her, unlit beings, scrambled and fell, tripping in the thick growth. Kitty felt herself present but did not see herself in the crowd. Darkness then. The light was gone. The dark lasted into confusion. Suddenly La Morenita beckoned through the dark, raising her arm, tongues of fire shooting from her armpit. They were inside the house of Kitty's mother, grown large in the dream. The fiery Virgin and the other pilgrims were gone. Kitty was left to find her mother in this house, which loomed larger than it had ever been. All was emptiness. On one wall was etched *This Do in Remembrance of Me*.

Kitty woke, prepared breakfast, dressed, and left for

Elle était assise sur un rocking-chair à dos droit acheté en seconde main et fixait la télévision. Robert Young embrassa Jane Wyatt à son retour à la maison et Kitty « tchipa ».

« Komandè, il est peut-être temps qu'on coupe le cotta... ka ou ka penser ? » Elle brisait le silence, l'appelait surveillant, et désignait le divorce chez les esclaves qui avaient compté parmi leurs ancêtres. Trancher le dispositif sur lequel leurs fardeaux s'équilibraient. Elle parlait en langage codé parce que les filles faisaient la vaisselle dans la cuisine. Pourtant, ses mots faisaient leur effet.

« Pourquoi tu m'appelles 'komandè', femme ? Je ne te donne pas d'ordre. Je ne te force pas contre ta volonté. » Boy, effrayé.

Elle lui sourit. « Ou ka préférer 'esklav'... 'mèt' ? C'est comme ça que tes amis américains t'appellent ? »

Tout à coup, elle contrôlait la situation. Nouveau silence. Mais alors il s'approcha pour l'embrasser et il lui dit qu'il avait besoin d'elle et qu'il l'aimait plus que tout et, Dieu m'en soit témoin, nous rentrerons bientôt. Aussitôt qu'on aura assez d'argent. Il mit ses bras autour d'elle et la supplia d'être prudente et de ne pas laisser Monsieur B. attraper'y. Cette nuit-là, ils firent l'amour et il pensa qu'il n'était plus question de couper le cotta, ne se rendant pas compte, comme elle se retirait pour sombrer dans le sommeil, qu'elle n'était pas calmée.

Elle glissa dans un sommeil dans lequel elle fit un rêve. Sur le flanc vert d'une colline qu'elle prit pour la terre de sa mère, laissée à l'abandon, une petite silhouette noire parée d'or et nimbée d'une lumière dorée était à la tête d'une procession. Il lui semblait dans le rêve que La Morenita montait la colline en flottant, tandis que ceux derrière elle, créatures non éclairées, peinaient et tombaient, trébuchant dans l'épaisse végétation. Kitty sentait qu'elle était présente, mais ne se voyait pas parmi la foule. Obscurité ensuite. La lumière avait disparu. L'obscurité se prolongea dans la confusion. Soudain, La Morenita fit un signe dans le noir, levant son bras, son aisselle décochant des langues de feu. Ils étaient à l'intérieur de la maison de la mère de Kitty, devenue immense dans son rêve. La Vierge ardente et les autres pèlerins avaient disparu. Kitty était seule et découvrait sa mère dans cette maison, qui apparaissait encore plus grande qu'elle ne l'avait jamais été. Tout n'était que vide. Sur un mur était gravé *Faites ceci en mémoire de moi*.

Kitty se réveilla, prépara le petit-déjeuner, s'habilla, et partit au

work. It was time to end her nonsense once and for all. Once and for all. She took a stack of letterheads and colored in the pink face of Mrs. White. She drew a balloon next to each dark face. HELLO. MRS. WHITE IS DEAD. MY NAME IS MRS. BLACK. I KILLED HER.

She felt free, released. She spent the afternoon tucking the sheets of paper into clean linen. Sending her furious Aunt Jemima into the world.

She left at the end of the day and thought no more about what she had done.

When she returned to work the next morning, she was met by Mr. B., who was fussing around the office, scattering confectioner's sugar wildly in his passion. At first unable to speak to her, he pointed into the packing room. Kitty peered inside; the room was empty.

"Where are Georgia and Virginia?"

With this question the man caught his breath. "I . . . I . . . had to let them go."

"But why? They are good workers."

"Yes, and they have worked here for quite a few years and I have been very good to them. But look at this, my dear. Just look at this."

He thrust in her face a picture of Mrs. Black.

"Where did you get that?"

"Someone brought it here this morning. In person, mind you. As shocked as I was. He also brought instructions to discontinue serving as their laundry. One of my oldest clients . . . and there have been similar messages . . . telephone calls. . . . How could they do this to me? What did I ever do to them, except treat them right? I mean, it's not easy for them to find this kind of job . . . and they will starve before they get any references from me." He dusted confectioner's sugar from his vest. "But, you know, that kind is just no good. Unstable. You know what I mean."

Kitty barely shook her head. He explained.

"Something missing . . . something missing upstairs . . . a screw loose." He pointed to his head.

travail. Il était temps d'en finir avec ses idioties une fois pour toutes. Une fois pour toutes. Elle prit une pile d'en-têtes et coloria le visage rose de Mme White. Elle dessina une bulle à côté de chaque visage noir. BONJOUR. MME WHITE EST MORTE. JE M'APPELLE MME BLACK. JE L'AI TUEE.

Elle se sentit libre, libérée. Elle passa l'après-midi à glisser les feuilles de papier dans le linge propre. Lâchant dans la nature sa furieuse Tante Jemima.

Elle partit à la fin de la journée et ne pensa plus à ce qu'elle avait fait.

Quand elle retourna au travail le lendemain matin, elle tomba sur Monsieur B., qui s'agitait dans le bureau, répandant partout du sucre glace dans sa colère. Tout d'abord incapable de lui parler, il lui indiqua du doigt la salle d'emballage. Kitty regarda à l'intérieur d'un air dubitatif ; la salle était vide.

« Où sont Georgia et Virginia ? »

Sur ces mots, l'homme retint son souffle. « J'ai... j'ai... dû les renvoyer. »

« Mais pourquoi ? Ce sont de bonnes travailleuses. »

« Oui, cela fait déjà pas mal d'années qu'elles travaillent ici et j'ai été très bon avec elles. Mais regardez ça, ma chère. Regardez ça. »

Il lui flanqua sous le nez une image de Mme Black.

« Où avez-vous trouvé ça ? »

« Quelqu'un l'a apportée ici ce matin. En personne, figurez-vous. Aussi choqué que je l'étais. Il a également donné des instructions pour que notre blanchisserie cesse de les servir. Un de mes plus anciens clients... et j'ai eu d'autres messages identiques... des appels téléphoniques... Comment ont-elles pu me faire ça ? Je les ai toujours si bien traitées. Je veux dire, ce n'est pas facile pour elles de trouver ce genre de travail... et elles pourront mourir de faim avant d'obtenir des références de ma part. » Il épousseta le sucre glace de sa veste. « Mais, vous savez, ces gens-là ne valent rien de bon. Ils sont instables. Vous voyez ce que je veux dire. »

Kitty fit non de la tête, presque imperceptiblement. Il s'expliqua.

« Il y a quelque chose qui manque... quelque chose qui manque là-haut... un boulon. » Il montra sa tête du doigt.

"I don't understand." Kitty was unprepared for this. "I just don't understand. Why did you fire both of them?"

"Because neither of them would admit to this . . . this desecration. But they always stick together."

"Mr. B., I did it. I am the one responsible."

"A nice girl like you? Don't be crazy."

"But I did."

"No. No, I can't believe that."

She took her leave that afternoon. Throwing the blasted letterheads into the wastepaper basket. She had committed an act of luxury. She had no way to reach either woman. And did not know what she would do had she that knowledge. That night she announced to Boy that she had had enough. In a week she took the younger girl, the one who favored her, back home, and told the elder one to look after herself and her father.

« Je ne comprends pas. » Kitty n'était pas préparée à cela. « Je ne comprends vraiment pas. Pourquoi les avez-vous renvoyées toutes les deux ? »

« Parce qu'aucune des deux ne voulait avouer cette... cette profanation. Mais ces gens-là se serrent toujours les coudes. »

« Monsieur B., c'est moi qui ai fait ça. C'est moi la responsable. »

« Une gentille fille comme vous ? Ne dites pas de bêtises. »

« Mais, c'est moi. »

« Non. Non, je ne peux pas croire ça. »

Elle remit sa démission cette après-midi-là. Jetant les fichues en-têtes dans la corbeille à papier. Elle avait agi de façon inconsidérée. Elle n'avait aucun moyen de contacter les deux femmes. Et elle ne savait pas ce qu'elle aurait fait si elle avait su comment les joindre. Cette nuit-là, elle annonça à Boy qu'elle en avait assez vu. Une semaine plus tard, elle prit la plus jeune des deux filles, celle qui lui ressemblait le plus, et rentra à la maison, en disant à l'aînée de prendre soin d'elle et de son père.

IV

WHITE CHOCOLATE

*Où allez-vous ma femme marron ma restituée ma cimarronne il vit à pierre
fendre et la limaille et la grenaille tremblent leur don de sabotage dans les eaux
et les saisons. . . .*

*(Where are you going my maroon woman my restored one my cimarron it is so
alive the stones are freezing and the filings and the pellets tremble their gift of
sabotage in the waters and the seasons. . . .)*

—AIMÉ CÉSAIRE, "Autre Saison"

IV CHOCOLAT BLANC

*Où allez-vous ma femme marron ma restituée ma cimarronne il vit à pierre fendre
et la limaille et la grenaille tremblent leur don de sabotage dans les eaux et les
saisons....*

—AIMÉ CÉSAIRE, « Autre Saison »

Captive people have a need for song.

The thirty-six-year-old woman Clare Savage is standing in the back of a truck climbing through the Cockpit Country. Her story is a long story. How she came to be here. For she had once witnessed for Babylon. Had been ignorant of the wildness of the Maroons. There are many bits and pieces to her, for she is composed of fragments. In this journey, she hopes, is her restoration. She has traveled far. Courted escape. Stopped and started. Some of the details of her travels may pass through her mind as she stands in the back of this truck—NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN. She may interrupt her memory to concentrate on the instant, on the immediate and terrible need.

You have seen her before this. She was the light-skinned girl vomiting into the swimming pool at Buster Said's Christmas party. In her twenties then—visitor to her homeland. Not answerable to her place of birth. Citizen of an-

Les gens en captivité ont besoin de chansons.

La femme de trente-six ans Clare Savage est debout à l'arrière d'un camion qui monte dans le Cockpit Country. Son histoire est une longue histoire. Comment elle est arrivée ici. Car elle avait jadis témoigné en faveur de Babylone. Elle n'avait rien su alors de la fureur des Marrons. Il y a de nombreux petits morceaux en elle, car elle est composée de fragments. Dans ce voyage, espère-t-elle, se trouve sa restauration. Elle a voyagé loin. Elle a courti la fuite. Elle s'est arrêtée et est repartie. Il se peut que certains détails de ses voyages traversent son esprit tandis qu'elle se tient à l'arrière de ce camion — NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN. Elle interrompt peut-être son souvenir pour se concentrer sur l'instant, sur la nécessité immédiate et terrible.

Vous l'avez vue avant cela. C'était elle la jeune fille à la peau claire qui vomissait dans la piscine à la soirée de Noël chez Buster Said. La vingtaine à cette époque — en visite dans sa patrie. Aucun compte à rendre à son pays de naissance. Citoyenne d'un autre pays,

other, greater, country. Student of the motherland. Motherless. Paul H. was someone she knew, not well. They danced the meringué the evening of the party and spoke very briefly—about how they might be related, money, England, Jamaica, America. “Hey, Jude.” It was a stiff exchange. Their hearts were not really in it. Far easier for them to go into the poolhouse and wander over each other’s bodies without speaking than to carry on a conversation. He thought her kind of cool, in the sense of standoffish, even after she let him stick his cock into her and moaned as he sucked her nipples. Even so, she seemed to want to get it over—he could tell—and moved away too quickly once he came into her. He was finished with her but used to girls drawing little pictures on his chest with their long nails afterwards. Something they imitated from the romance comics passed from hand to hand in the strict all-girls’ schools. She said nothing, traced no little houses or palm trees across him, just got up and walked out of the poolhouse and back to the party. She poured herself champagne, filling one of Buster’s mother’s Waterford water tumblers to the brim, sitting by the pool alone. Until she threw up into it, and Harry/Harriet came over to her with a towel, saying, “Cock-juice don’t mix with champagne, sweetheart,” making her smile.

Paul was ignorant of this exchange, remaining for a while on his back on the air mattress, thinking this girl considered herself better than him. Nuh mus’? She had escaped the island, nothing held her here. Was living, going to university, in London. While he was stuck in his father’s business and in his mother’s house. Held fast. Chuh, man. Well, the girl could have London. It was cold and damp and filled with people who hated them. So dem say.

Clare could entrust her body to this boy she barely knew and watch herself as he fondled her and feel pleasure in her parts but still be apart from him. Feeling free, the word she put to it then. So apart, so free, she could walk away and be glad they were done with each other. Him with his postures, talk of his cyar, house in the hills, bird-shooting. As

plus grand. Étudiante de la mère-patrie. Orpheline de mère. Paul H. était quelqu'un qu'elle connaissait, un peu. Ils dansèrent le meringué le soir de la fête et parlèrent très brièvement — des liens familiaux qu'ils pourraient avoir, de l'argent, de l'Angleterre, de la Jamaïque, de l'Amérique. « Hey Jude. » Ce fut un échange guindé. Le cœur n'y était pas vraiment. C'était beaucoup plus simple d'aller dans le pavillon de la piscine et de parcourir leurs corps sans parler plutôt que d'entretenir une conversation. Il la trouvait assez froide et distante, même après qu'elle l'eut laissé fourrer sa bite en elle et gémi tandis qu'il lui suçait le bout des seins. Malgré cela, elle semblait pressée que cela se termine — il le voyait bien — et elle se retira trop vite une fois qu'il eut joui en elle. Il en avait fini avec elle, mais il était habitué à ce qu'après, les filles tracent de petits dessins sur sa poitrine avec leurs longs ongles. Un truc qu'elles imitaient d'après les BD à l'eau de rose qui passaient de main en main dans les écoles strictes pour filles. Elle ne dit rien, ne dessina pas de petites maisons ni de palmiers sur lui, elle se leva simplement et sortit du pavillon pour retourner à la fête. Elle se versa du champagne, remplissant à ras bord l'un des verres en cristal de Waterford de la mère de Buster, et s'assit au bord de la piscine toute seule. Jusqu'à ce qu'elle vomisse dedans, et qu'Harry/Harriet la rejoigne avec une serviette, en lui disant, « Le jus de bite ne se mélange pas bien avec le champagne, mon cœur, » ce qui la fit sourire.

Paul ne sut rien de cet échange, restant un moment allongé sur le matelas pneumatique, en pensant que cette fille se croyait supérieure à lui. Pas normal ? Elle s'était échappée de l'île, rien ne la retenait ici. Elle habitait Londres, y allait à l'université. Alors que lui était coincé dans les affaires de son père et dans la maison de sa mère. Il tenait bon. Oui, man. Eh bien, la fille pouvait bien avoir Londres. C'était froid et humide et rempli de gens qui les détestaient. Antouka, c'est ce qu'on raconte.

Clare pouvait confier son corps à ce garçon qu'elle connaissait à peine et s'observer tandis qu'il la caressait et ressentait du plaisir dans ses parties intimes tout en restant indépendante de lui. Se sentant libre, le mot qu'elle choisit alors. Si indépendante, si libre, qu'elle pouvait s'en aller et être contente qu'ils en aient fini l'un avec l'autre. Lui, avec ses poses, tant de mots sur sa bagnole, sa maison dans les collines, ses chasses aux oiseaux.

he spoke she focused her mind on her escape from this mess of a place in a few days' time. He assumed, like so many of them, that Jamaica was the world; he said so. Not realizing, or willing to admit, that it was only one of the saddest pieces of the world. But geopolitics was of course not the only thing that came between them.

When she heard the next afternoon, lying on the black sand at Cable Hut alongside Harry/Harriet in his/her Pucci bikini, his/her furry chest getting the odd stare, when she heard what had happened to Paul and his people, she felt shock but no real sorrow. She did not think of his sperm congregating in her, so that his line might not have ended. In a few days she bled. She was free of him. Free as a free-martin.

She watched people on the beach, listened as they stirred to the news, some with rum-stunned brains, in bright swimsuits against volcanic refuse and flawless sky, seeming only slightly more impressed than they had a week before, when news reached the beach of a man eaten by sharks after his cabin cruiser foundered in high seas and his right foot caught in some neger's fishing net.

They lived with the unexpected here. The sea.

A few tourists were scattered across the beach, ghostly, ignored—native color could be found here, someone tipped them—but they did not note any stir among the inhabitants. Were they expecting limbo? Their attention was soon drawn by a pink flounder of a woman surprised by a sinkhole. One of their own. They gathered the sputtering woman in their arms and returned to Courtleigh Manor, whence they had come. This place was too wild.

Jamaicans smiled.

Clare watched. Of these people.

These people who called the murders of the night before the *latest incident*. These people who made her think of her family. Not her father and mother—her mother was dead by that time, of a natural death. Her father was living in Brooklyn with an Italian-American wife. Her sister was a

Tandis qu'il parlait, elle concentrait son esprit sur le fait qu'elle allait quitter cette saleté d'endroit dans quelques jours. Il imaginait, comme tant d'entre eux, que la Jamaïque était le monde ; c'est ce qu'il disait. Ne se rendant pas compte ou ne voulant pas reconnaître que ce n'était rien qu'un des coins les plus tristes de la planète. Mais la géopolitique n'était évidemment pas le seul obstacle qui venait se mettre entre eux.

Quand elle apprit l'après-midi suivant, allongée sur le sable noir à Cable Hut aux côtés de Harry/Harriet en bikini Pucci, sa poitrine velue qui attirait les regards, quand elle apprit ce qui était arrivé à Paul et sa famille, elle en éprouva un choc mais pas de réelle tristesse. Elle ne pensa pas à son sperme qui pullulait en elle, si bien que sa lignée n'eût peut-être pas disparu. Après quelques jours, elle saigna. Elle était libérée de lui. Aussi libre qu'un free-martin.

Elle observait les gens sur la plage, les écoutait réagir à la nouvelle, certains au cerveau embué de rhum, dans des maillots de bain colorés contre les débris volcaniques et le ciel parfait, semblant à peine plus impressionnés qu'ils l'avaient été une semaine plus tôt, quand la nouvelle atteignit la plage qu'un homme avait été dévoré par les requins après que son yacht avait sombré en haute mer et que son pied droit s'était pris dans le filet de pêche d'un nèg.

Ici ils vivaient avec l'imprévu. La mer.

Quelques touristes étaient éparpillés sur la plage, fantomatiques, ignorés — on pouvait trouver de la couleur locale ici, les avait-on renseignés — mais ils ne remarquèrent aucune agitation chez les habitants. Espéraient-ils voir danser le limbo ? Leur attention fut bientôt attirée par une femme rose qui se débattait, surprise par un trou marin. Une des leurs. Ils recueillirent dans leurs bras la femme qui crachotait et retournèrent à Courtleigh Manor, d'où ils étaient venus. Cet endroit était trop sauvage.

Les Jamaïcains souriaient.

Clare regardait. Ces gens.

Ces gens qui parlaient des meurtres de la nuit précédente comme du *dernier incident en date*. Ces gens qui lui faisaient penser à sa famille. Pas à son père ou sa mère — sa mère était morte à cette époque-là, de mort naturelle. Son père vivait à Brooklyn avec une épouse Italo-américaine. Sa sœur était une

junkie in Bed-Stuy—shipped to the mainland a few years before on their mother's death. Slipping in and out of an American high school, she slid into the street.

Clare thought not of these disintegrated people behind her, former members of a shattered little entity. She thought of her mother's side, staunch to the island then, big fish in a little pond, her father would have said. Was their world about to come to an end? The pond scum vaporized by blue vitriol, cleansing the waters once and for all. No. Not according to them. No matter how many times a similar act happened—to those they saw at garden parties with cut-glass bowls of planter's punch displayed on white linen, those in the crescent drives of private schools to collect their uniformed children, those strolling their tidy well-dressed selves through the paddock at Caymanas, those eating salads at the Sheraton alongside aluminum executives, those congregating in the hills behind their stucco walls—no matter how many times it happened, and the happy few lost another member, they explained it away as an isolated incident, a single display of wuthlessness, of rude bwaihood, no more.

Clare turned the news of Paul H. and his family around in her mind, returned to the motherland and graduate school, and tried to forget the details for a very long time. Except they would strike her in flashes. Like when the Queen Mother, chancellor of her university, visited the Institute and Clare was chosen to greet her in the reading room. Along with other students, carefully chosen as to demeanor and looks—and the fact that they represented parts of the Empire. As she took the tiny woman's gloved hand, lowering herself into a curtsy, she thought to say, Did you know the boy I let fuck me over Christmas had his head cut from his shoulders? Small talk. For whom did she feel more contempt? The old lady standing in front of her, smiling like a parakeet, or the people, her people, who believed in isolated incidents and random violence and the sanctity of the birdlike old lady?

She buried herself in books.

camée à Bed-Stuy — arrivée sur le continent par bateau quelques années auparavant, à la mort de leur mère. À force de manquer les cours, elle avait échoué dans la rue.

Claire ne pensait pas à ces gens désintégrés derrière elle, ex-membres d'une petite entité brisée. Elle pensait au côté de sa mère, alors fidèle à l'île, gros poisson dans un petit étang, aurait dit son père. Leur univers était-il sur le point de disparaître ? L'écume de l'étang vaporisée au vitriol bleu, nettoyant les eaux une fois pour toutes. Non. Pas selon eux. Peu leur importait combien de fois cela arrivait — à ceux qu'ils voyaient à des garden-party avec des bols en cristal taillé remplis de punch planteur disposés sur du linge blanc, ceux dans les allées d'écoles privées qui venaient récupérer leurs rejetons en uniforme, ceux qui promenaient leur petite personne soignée et bien habillée dans le paddock à Caymanas, ceux qui mangeaient des salades au Sheraton côte à côte avec les cadres de l'aluminium, ceux qui se réunissaient dans les collines derrière leurs murs de stuc — peu leur importait combien de fois cela arrivait, et combien de fois les privilégiés perdaient un de leurs membres, ils l'expliquaient comme un incident isolé, une unique manifestation à méchansté, à délinkans, rien de plus.

Clare enfouit dans son esprit ce qui était arrivé à Paul H. et sa famille, rentra à la mère-patrie et à ses études de troisième cycle, et elle essaya d'oublier ces détails pendant très longtemps. Mais ils revenaient la frapper par flashes. Comme lorsque la Reine Mère, présidente de son université, vint visiter l'Institut et que Clare fut choisie pour l'accueillir dans la salle de conférence. Avec d'autres étudiants, choisis avec soin pour leur conduite et leur apparence — et le fait qu'ils représentaient différentes parties de l'Empire. Au moment où elle prenait la main gantée de la petite femme, faisait sa révérence, elle pensa à lui dire, Savez-vous que le garçon que j'ai laissé me baiser à Noël s'est fait couper la tête ? Menus propos. Pour qui éprouvait-elle le plus de mépris ? Pour la vieille dame qui se tenait devant elle, souriant comme une perruche, ou pour les gens, les siens, qui croyaient à des incidents isolés, à la violence aveugle et à la sainteté de la vieille dame perruche ?

Elle s'enterra dans les bouquins.

*

You knew her also as the girl left behind in the Brooklyn apartment. The albino gorilla moving through the underbrush. Hiding from the poachers who would claim her and crush her in a packing crate against the darker ones offended by her pelt. Make ashtrays of her hands, and a trophy of her head. She cowers in the bush fearing capture. Waiting for someone to come. Crouching. Not speaking for years. Not feeling much of anything, except a vague dread that she belongs nowhere. She fills her time. In schools, playgrounds, other people's beds. In pursuit of knowledge, grubs, and, she thinks, life. Her loss remains hidden—over time a fine thick moss covers her skin. She does not speak of it. She does not speak of it. She does not gather branches to braid into a nest. She moves. Emigrated, lone travel, the zoologist would have recorded. Time passes. The longing for tribe surfaces—unmistakable. To create if not to find. She cannot shake it off. She remembers the jungle. The contours of wildness. The skills are deep within her. Buried so long, she fears they may have atrophied. Distant treks with her dark-pelted mother. With a solid urgency they may emerge but she must also give herself to the struggle. She belongs in these hills. And she knows this choice is irrevocable and she will never be the same.

She is the woman who has reclaimed her grandmother's land.

She is white. Black. Female. Lover. Beloved. Daughter. Traveler. Friend. Scholar. Terrorist. Farmer.

She is not cool in the standoffish way. Not now. She has a coolness that she nurtures. How she became cool is her story.

On the truck in the heat a question passes through her mind—we may as well begin here. A fragment of memory. "And why do you want a child from us?" The inquiry recalls a scene a few years before. In a yellowed nineteenth-century edifice, close, cast back, the inquisitor's voice clipped,

*

Vous l'avez aussi connue comme la fille qu'on a laissée à l'appartement de Brooklyn. Le gorille albinos qui se déplace dans les sous-bois. Se cachant des braconniers qui la prendraient et l'écraseraient dans une caisse contre des gorilles plus foncés, offensés par sa fourrure. Feraient des cendriers de ses mains et un trophée de sa tête. Elle se recroqueville dans les broussailles craignant d'être capturée. Attendant que quelqu'un vienne. Tapie. Ne parlant pas pendant des années. Ne ressentant pas grand-chose, sauf la vague crainte qu'elle ne soit nulle part chez elle. Elle remplit son temps. Dans les écoles, les cours de récréation, les lits des autres. À la recherche de la connaissance, de nourriture et, pense-t-elle, de la vie. Sa perte reste cachée — avec le temps, une mousse épaisse recouvre sa peau. Elle n'en parle pas. Elle n'en parle pas. Elle ne ramasse pas de branches pour tresser un nid. Elle se déplace. Émigrée, voyageuse solitaire, aurait rapporté le zoologiste. Le temps passe. L'envie d'une tribu fait surface — indubitable. À créer si elle ne la trouve pas. Elle n'arrive pas à s'en débarrasser. Elle se souvient de la jungle. Des contours de la nature sauvage. Le savoir est ancré profondément en elle. Enfoui depuis si longtemps qu'elle craint qu'il ne soit atrophié. Randonnées lointaines avec sa mère à la peau sombre. Avec une insistance ininterrompue, il se peut que ce savoir émerge, mais elle doit aussi se donner à la lutte. Elle appartient à ces collines. Et elle sait que ce choix est irrévocable et qu'elle ne sera plus jamais la même.

Elle est la femme qui a réclamé la terre de sa grand-mère.

Elle est blanche. Noire. Femme. Amante. Aimée. Fille. Voyageuse. Amie. Érudite. Terroriste. Fermière.

Elle n'est pas froide et distante. Plus maintenant. Ce qui est froid chez elle, c'est son sang, et ce sang-froid, elle le cultive. La façon dont elle l'a acquis, c'est son histoire.

Sur le camion, dans la chaleur, une question traverse son esprit — autant commencer ici. Un fragment de souvenir. « Et pourquoi voulez-vous un de nos enfants ? » Cette question fait ressurgir une scène vieille de quelques années. Dans un édifice jauni du dix-neuvième siècle, proche, remémoré, la voix de l'inquisiteur sèche,

British, as if she is asking, "And when did you last see your father?"

Memory crosses memory crosses memory. She sees the dour Roundhead questioning the blue-suited Cavalier child in a painting she once scanned in a seminar on the reconstruction of the past in art. For the life of her she cannot remember the artist. Names fly in her brain—Holman Hunt, Burne-Jones, Watts, Millais—no, none of these. No. Give it up. But I knew once. Yes. Peering at the boy in her mind who is standing on a stool, as the mother and sister quiver in the background, terrified the son will be innocent, honest. Where does your father hide? Why have your mother and sister abandoned you to the inquisitor? She sees the painting full-color in her mind—all Victorian earnestness and literal-mindedness, she knows this aspect of the motherland—as she passes through the mountains of the Maroons, as far from the motherland as the mountains of the Moon, and the truck jolts. The painting dims and memory switches, once the truck has calmed and her hands relax from grasping the splintery sides. She remembers the apartment in Brooklyn, long nights when she waited dinner and her father did not return. His heaviness when he did. She was his dandified child for a while—until she left, suddenly. She recalls the original question which brought these memories. "And why do you want a child from us?" Her mind returns to the nineteenth-century edifice in Constant Spring. The voice of the inquisitor bounced in a building named for Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Colonial contrivance. Institution for light-skinned foundlings. As was she. I expect I want a child from you because I want to save one from you, she thinks. Sharp, very fresh, my girl, but not completely true. Does she think a child will complete her? Make her whole? I want one with curly brown hair and green eyes. One who has no family to speak of. These are the facts as I believe them. But as you are no doubt well aware, there are no facts in Jamaica. Not one single fact. Nothing to join us to the real. Facts move around you. Magic moves through you. This we have been taught. This fact that there are no facts. Wait. I

britannique, comme si elle demandait, « Et quand avez-vous vu votre père pour la dernière fois ? »

Le souvenir traverse le souvenir traverse le souvenir. Elle voit la Tête ronde austère interroger l'enfant Cavalier en costume bleu dans une peinture qu'elle a étudiée un jour lors d'un séminaire sur la reconstruction du passé dans l'art. Elle n'arrive pas à se souvenir du nom de l'artiste. Des noms volent dans sa tête — Holman Hunt, Burne-Jones, Watts, Millais — non, aucun de ceux-ci. Non. Laisse tomber. Mais je l'ai su. Oui. Scrutant dans son esprit le garçon qui se tient sur un tabouret, tandis que la mère et la sœur tremblent à l'arrière-plan, terrifiées que le fils soit candide, honnête. Où se cache ton père ? Pourquoi ta mère et ta sœur t'ont-elles abandonné à l'inquisiteur ? Elle voit la peinture en couleur dans son esprit — gravité et prosaïsme victoriens, elle connaît cet aspect de la mère-patrie — tandis qu'elle traverse les montagnes des Marrons, aussi éloignée de la mère-patrie que les montagnes lunaires, et le camion avance en cahotant. La peinture s'estompe et ce souvenir fait place à un autre, une fois que le camion s'est calmé et que ses mains peuvent arrêter de s'accrocher aux parois pleines d'échardes. Elle se souvient de l'appartement de Brooklyn, des longues nuits où elle attendait pour dîner et que son père ne rentrait pas. De sa lourdeur quand il rentrait. Elle fut son enfant chéri pendant un moment — jusqu'à ce qu'elle parte, tout à coup. Elle se souvient de la première question qui a ravivé ces souvenirs. « Et pourquoi voulez-vous un de nos enfants ? » Son esprit retourne à l'édifice du dix-neuvième siècle à Constant Spring. La voix de l'inquisiteur résonne à l'intérieur d'un bâtiment auquel lady Mary Wortley Montagu avait donné son nom. Invention coloniale. Institution pour orphelins à la peau claire. Tout comme elle. Je suppose que je veux un de vos enfants parce que je veux en sauver un de vos griffes, pense-t-elle. Incisif, très frais, ma fille, mais pas tout à fait vrai. Pense-t-elle qu'un enfant la complètera ? La rendra entière ? J'en veux un avec des cheveux bruns frisés et des yeux verts. Un qui n'a pour ainsi dire aucune famille. Voilà les faits tels que je les crois. Mais comme vous en êtes sûrement bien conscients, il n'y a pas de faits en Jamaïque. Pas un seul fait. Rien pour nous unir au réel. Les faits bougent autour de vous. La magie vous traverse. C'est ce qu'on nous a appris. Ce fait qu'il n'y a pas de faits. Attendez. Je

can call up one fact. "The adamantine refusal of the slave-women to reproduce"—a historian report that. What of Gamesome, Lusty Ann, Counsellor's Cuba, Strumpet called Skulker—not racehorses, mi dear, women: barren. Four furious cool-dark sistren. Is nuh fact dat? Fact, yes, but magic mek it so.

In the end they wouldn't give a child to her. She was not qualified, they said. Had she a child would she be on this truck? On her way to restoration?

BEWARE OF THE 21 FAMILIES reads the graffito white-washed on a rock the truck passes. Her mind returns to the present.

After her mother left her, in the days before she started school, Clare remained in the apartment until her father reappeared, abiding by his rule that she was to leave the house on no condition. So she stayed in, keeping house and watching television, moving within the space of her loss. But not allowed to be lost because her father said the family would be reattached. Soon.

She was taken by the magic of the television, and of her ability to conjure images by a switch, to change the images as she wished. Jamaica had not this sort of magic, this curious and wondrous choice; all man-made images were channeled into the cinemas, whose programs changed once a week, and over these selections there was no control. The island took what it was sent, not so different from the little black box catching waves in the Brooklyn apartment.

Jamaicans came in droves to see the pictures, to glimpse the world beyond the island, lose themselves, whether in theaters or in country gathering places—the picturegoers carried the images away with them, transforming them, eager always for more. In the streets and in the yards, Brer Anansi, about whom their grandparents taught them, Rhyging, about whom their mothers warned them, Sasabonsam, whose familiar image terrorized them, mixed in their games with Wyatt Earp, Legs Diamond, Tarzan the Apeman, and King Kong.

peux évoquer un fait. « Le refus adamantin des femmes esclaves de se reproduire » — c'est un historien qui en parle. Et Gamesome, Lusty Ann, Counsellor's Cuba, Strumpet appelée Skulker — pas des chevaux de courses, ma fi, mais des femmes : stériles. Quatre sœurs d'une noirceur fraîche, furieuses. C'est pas un fait ça ? Un fait, oui, mais c'est maji qui fait ça.

Finalement, ils ne voulurent pas lui donner d'enfant. Elle ne remplissait pas les conditions, dirent-ils. Si elle avait eu un enfant, serait-elle dans ce camion ? Sur le chemin de la restauration ?

BEWARE OF THE 21 FAMILIES indique le graffiti écrit à la chaux sur un rocher que le camion dépasse. Son esprit revient au présent.

Après que sa mère l'avait abandonnée, tant qu'elle n'avait pas commencé l'école, Clare restait à l'appartement jusqu'à ce que son père réapparaisse, respectant sa règle selon laquelle elle ne devait quitter la maison sous aucun prétexte. Elle restait donc à l'intérieur, à garder la maison et regarder la télévision, se déplaçant dans l'espace de sa perte. Mais elle n'était pas autorisée à se sentir perdue car son père disait que la famille serait réunie. Bientôt.

Elle était prise par la magie de la télévision, et par sa capacité à faire apparaître des images avec un bouton, à changer les images comme elle le souhaitait. La Jamaïque n'avait pas ce genre de magie, ce choix curieux et extraordinaire ; toutes les images artificielles étaient canalisées vers les cinémas, dont les programmes changeaient une fois par semaine, et il n'y avait pas de contrôle sur leur sélection. L'île prenait ce qu'on lui envoyait, pas si différente de la petite boîte noire qui recevait les ondes dans l'appartement de Brooklyn.

Les Jamaïcains venaient en foule pour voir les films, apercevoir le monde au-delà de l'île, se perdre, que ce soit dans les cinémas ou dans les lieux de rassemblement à la campagne — les gens emportaient les images avec eux, les transformant, toujours avides d'en voir plus. Dans les rues et dans les cours des maisons, Frère Anansi, dont leurs grands parents leur parlaient, Rhyging, à propos duquel leurs mères les mettaient en garde, Sasabonsam, dont l'image familière les terrorisait, se mélangeaient dans leurs jeux avec Wyatt Earp, Legs Diamond, Tarzan l'homme-singe et King Kong.

Playing in the dusk with Alexander, the boy of fourteen who kept the outside clean, while Clare waited for Dorothy to fix her supper, evenings when her parents were away, each child became a movie character. Alexander being Paul Newman being Billy the Kid, asking Clare to be the girl he rescued. These were forbidden games. And when her parents returned early one evening and caught the two circling a wagon train, Alexander was fired and Clare was condemned by her father for being "as thick as two thieves with a gardenboy."

In the dark of the basement apartment, trying to dismiss her mother, she watched pictures. Pictures she had not seen before. A white-haired butler teaching a little white girl to dance down stairs. When her father came home, Clare mentioned the movie to him and he told her about Bill Robinson and how he had tap-danced up Broadway once. His mother had written him about it from America when he was a boy and she worked the stage. Boy explained to his daughter what Broadway was and the difficulty of Robinson's task. Tapping up the sinking-rising cobblestones downtown, up the pitted avenue into Harlem. He talked on and on, telling his daughter how brave Robinson was, not just in dancing up Broadway but in making his way through America.

When she asked about the little girl in the picture, her father said that she was Shirley Temple, America's favorite child—no more, no less. Nothing was said about the little girl being as thick as two thieves with a butler. This was another country. This was make-believe.

"But, Clare, you mustn't spend all your time in front of that thing, you know; for it is a true time-waster. Read a book. You need to prepare yourself for school."

But Clare did not stop.

A large Black woman cooking and singing and laughing for Claudette Colbert and Monty Woolley in *Since You Went Away*. Clare recognized the woman (the large Black woman wearing a tiny little white cap) from *Gone With the Wind* (white cap replaced there by a plaid tiehead), which the third

Jouant à la tombée de la nuit avec Alexander, le garçon de quatorze ans qui s'occupait du nettoyage de l'extérieur, tandis que Clare attendait que Dorothy prépare son souper, les soirs où ses parents étaient sortis, chaque enfant devenait un personnage de film. Alexander était Paul Newman qui était Billy the Kid, demandant à Clare d'être la fille qu'il secourait. Ces jeux étaient interdits. Et quand ses parents rentrèrent plus tôt un soir et les surprirent tous les deux en train d'encercler un convoi de chariots, Alexander fut renvoyé et Clare fut condamnée par son père pour être « copains comme cochons avec un jardinier. »

Dans l'obscurité de l'appartement en sous-sol, tentant d'écarter le souvenir de sa mère, elle regardait des images. Des images qu'elle n'avait pas vues avant. Un majordome aux cheveux blancs qui apprenait à une fillette blanche à danser dans les escaliers. Quand son père rentra à la maison, Clare lui parla du film et il lui raconta l'histoire de Bill Robinson qui avait fait des claquettes à Broadway. Sa mère lui en avait parlé dans une lettre d'Amérique quand il était enfant et qu'elle travaillait dans le monde du théâtre. Boy expliqua à sa fille ce qu'était Broadway et la difficulté de la tâche de Robinson. Tapant du pied les pavés irréguliers du centre-ville, remontant l'avenue pleine de nids-de-poule jusqu'à Harlem. Il parla encore et encore, lui racontant à quel point Robinson était courageux, pas simplement parce qu'il dansait à Broadway mais parce qu'il avait réussi en Amérique.

Quand elle l'interrogea au sujet de la petite fille du film, son père lui dit que il s'agissait de Shirley Temple, l'enfant chérie de l'Amérique — ni plus, ni moins. Il ne dit rien au sujet de la petite fille qui était copains comme cochons avec un majordome. C'était un autre pays. On faisait semblant.

« Mais, Clare, tu ne dois pas passer tout ton temps devant ce truc, tu sais ; c'est une vraie perte de temps. Lis un livre. Tu dois te préparer pour l'école. »

Mais Clare n'arrêta pas.

Une grosse femme noire qui cuisinait, chantait et riait pour Claudette Colbert et Monty Wooley dans *Depuis ton départ*. Clare reconnut la femme (la grosse femme noire qui portait un minuscule petit bonnet blanc) d'*Autant en emporte le vent* (le bonnet blanc remplacé ici par une coiffe en madras), que la troisième

form of St. Catherine's had seen at the Carib—during one of the annual showings of the film on the island. They were escorted by a teacher, a red-haired sunburned American woman who seemed confused. Who was led from King's Parade one Saturday morning for picking up a pair of pink pussboots in Bata's and neglecting to pay for them. Poor woman. Her color rose higher. Downtown Kingston is a very small place, where nervous red-haired white women stand out, and her story made the front page of the Sunday *Gleaner*. It was too good to miss. She assured the police that one of the other patrons had asked her to hold the shoes for a minute, and when the police didn't believe her, she told them she had fully intended to pay for them but had taken the shoes outside to see how they looked in the sun. She was, after all, a member of the faculty of St. Catherine's School for Girls, so she could be no thief. "Anyone can teef, missis," the constable told her.

"Nigger," she muttered—no one caught it.

Fired from school for causing embarrassment. Also for teaching the girls American history—she had told the headmistress she was a Canadian and would instruct the girls on the Commonwealth. A white woman washed up in Jamaica. What had possessed her to take on the American Civil War? Desperate. To lead, literally by the hand, a line of girls in burgundy tunics and sea island cotton blouses into the darkness of the Carib one afternoon when they should have been playing rounders, to see a "documentary," as she put it, of this "tragic phase," as she put it, of American history? Poor Miss America (which the girls called her behind her back; her name was Miss Peterkin), pacing the rows in the quiet cinema, telling girls impatient for the picture to begin, girls rustling their sweetie wrappers and surreptitiously slipping mangoes from their bookbags—exhorting them, in fact—telling them they needed to learn the lesson of the film, as the situation depicted therein was so similar to the situation on their island. Poor woman—where was her judgment? "Order is meant to be maintained," she stated vaguely to the fidgeting girls, whose color ranged from dark to light

année secondaire de Ste Catherine avait vu au Carib — durant l'une des projections annuelles du film sur l'île. Elles étaient escortées par une enseignante, une Américaine rousse brûlée par le soleil qui semblait désorientée. Qui fut emmenée de King's Parade un samedi matin pour avoir pris une paire de bottillons roses chez Bata en oubliant de les payer. Pauvre femme. Elle devint encore plus rouge. Le centre de Kingston, c'est un petit monde, où les rousses nerveuses se font remarquer, et son histoire fit la une du *Gleaner* du dimanche. C'était trop beau pour le laisser passer. Elle assura à la police qu'un des autres clients lui avait demandé de tenir les chaussures une minute, et comme la police ne la crut pas, elle leur dit qu'elle avait toujours eu l'intention de les payer mais qu'elle avait pris les chaussures dehors pour voir à quoi elles ressemblaient à la lumière du jour. Elle était, après tout, professeur à l'école pour filles Ste Catherine, elle ne pouvait donc pas être une voleuse. « Tout moun peut voler, madanm, » lui dit l'agent de police.

« Nègre, » siffla-t-elle entre ses dents — personne ne l'entendit.

Virée de l'école pour avoir été une source d'embarras. Également pour avoir enseigné aux fillettes l'histoire américaine — elle avait raconté à la directrice qu'elle était canadienne et qu'elle leur enseignerait le Commonwealth. Une femme blanche échouée en Jamaïque. Qu'est-ce qui lui avait pris de s'attaquer à la guerre de Sécession ? Très mauvaise idée. D'amener, littéralement par la main, un rang de fillettes en tuniques bordeaux et chemisiers en coton de Sea Island dans l'obscurité du Carib une après-midi, alors qu'elles auraient dû être en train de jouer au rounders, pour voir un « documentaire », comme elle disait, sur cette « phase tragique », comme elle disait, de l'histoire américaine ? Pauvre Miss Amérique (c'est ainsi que les filles l'appelaient dans son dos ; elle s'appelait Miss Peterkin), qui arpentait les rangs du cinéma silencieux, disant aux fillettes impatientes que le film commence, les fillettes qui froissaient leurs papiers de bonbon et retiraient subrepticement des mangues de leurs cartables — les exhortant, en fait — leur disant qu'il fallait qu'elles retiennent la leçon du film, car la situation qui y était dépeinte était très proche de la situation de leur île. Pauvre femme — où était donc passé son bon sens ? « L'ordre est fait pour être maintenu, » déclara-t-elle distraitemment aux filles qui s'agitaient et dont la couleur allait du foncé au clair

and back again. "A conflagration could take your nation down." Pause. "Do you want to forage for carrots and wear a dress made of draperies?" The girls kept silence, fighting the laughter in them. Her voice, already nasal in pitch, ran up the scale, out of control as her passion increased.

The picture began. Watching the burning of Atlanta, the teacher screeched suddenly, like a chicken disturbed at her roost, then bowed her head in tears. The girls assumed she was a fool.

She was the first American Clare ever met.

Sitting in the damp of the basement during a weekday afternoon, recognizing Hattie McDaniel, Clare remembered that other afternoon. She remembered the teacher. This led her to the other girls, her classmates, to whom she was not allowed to say goodbye because Boy owed the school money and was afraid of the complications should they find out Clare was leaving. So she didn't say goodbye. She merely disappeared from their lives. And they from hers.

Just like Miss America.

Once her mother and sister departed. Once the door slams in her head signaling their sudden return ceased. Once she realized the departure was not a mistake and was irrevocable. Once she lost faith in the *soon* she had been promised—Clare tried to settle in to life with her father.

The absence of the two other people was noted differently by each. Clare tried to wipe them from her mind, yet caught herself, even while watching the mind-wiping moving pictures on the television, passing her eyes and hands across still pictures of the family unit which she held in her lap. At these times she came to with almost a shudder. What had happened? Why was her mother gone?

Boy spoke often of his absent wife, speaking again and again his belief that her return was imminent. "Your mother will be back. Mark my words. Your mother will be back. Mark my words. Wait and see. She can't live without me."

Kitty wrote letters addressed to the two of them, which annoyed Boy. There was no question that she and her hus-

et du clair au foncé. « Un cataclysme pourrait démolir votre pays. » Pause. « Est-ce que vous aimeriez fouiller le sol à la recherche de carottes et porter des robes faites de tentures ? » Les fillettes gardaient le silence, combattant les rires qui montaient en elles. Sa voix, déjà nasale, montait dans les gammes, incontrôlable à mesure que sa frénésie s'intensifiait.

Le film commença. En regardant l'incendie d'Atlanta, l'enseignante poussa soudain un cri strident, comme un poulet que l'on dérange sur son perchoir, puis pencha la tête, en larmes. Les fillettes en conclurent qu'elle était idiote.

C'était la première Américaine que Clare rencontrait.

Assise dans l'humidité du sous-sol durant une après-midi de la semaine, en reconnaissant Hattie McDaniel, Clare se souvint de cette autre après-midi. Elle se souvint de l'enseignante. Ceci l'amena à penser aux autres filles, ses camarades de classe, auxquelles elle ne fut pas autorisée à dire au revoir parce que Boy devait de l'argent à l'école et qu'il avait peur des complications s'ils avaient découvert que Clare s'en allait. Elle ne dit donc pas au revoir. Elle disparut tout simplement de leurs vies. Et elles de la sienne.

Tout comme Miss Amérique.

Un jour, sa mère et sa sœur s'en allèrent. Un jour, elle comprit brutalement qu'il n'y aurait plus de prompt retour. Un jour, elle se rendit compte que leur départ n'était pas une erreur mais qu'il était irrévocable. Un jour, elle ne crut plus au bientôt qu'on lui avait promis — alors, Clare tenta de se faire à la vie avec son père.

Chacun d'eux remarquait l'absence des deux autres personnes de façon différente. Clare essayait de les effacer de son esprit, pourtant elle se surprenait, même quand elle regardait les images mouvantes et lobotomisantes de la télévision, à passer ses yeux et ses mains sur des images immobiles de la famille qu'elle tenait sur ses genoux. Dans ces moments-là, elle revenait à elle presque avec un frisson. Que s'était-il passé ? Pourquoi sa mère était-elle partie ?

Boy parlait souvent de son épouse absente, exprimant encore et toujours sa foi dans l'imminence de son retour. « Ta mère reviendra. Tu verras. Ta mère reviendra. Tu verras. Attends voir. Elle ne peut pas vivre sans moi. »

Kitty envoyait des lettres qui leur étaient adressées à tous les deux, ce qui agaçait Boy. Il n'était pas question qu'elle et son

band should cut the cotta, she wrote. Why should they? When Boy came to his senses he would return to Jamaica and the family would be one again. Meanwhile, Kitty advised, Clare should take her mother's place—it would be good training for her, she added, without conviction.

For Kitty and her other daughter, Jennie, there were two rooms at an auntie's in Mountainview Gardens. Kitty got her old job back. She was prepared to wait out her husband's stubbornness. *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*, she ended one letter. Could so easily turn to *Out of sight, out of mind*.

No one made a move. September came. Each partner seemed reconciled to the distance between them, talking of missing all the while. Boy took his daughter to the local school for enrollment.

The truck lurches. She grabs the hand of the comrade at her left. The matériel under the tarp shifts and rolls. Still the truck climbs. The sun has come out—hot. And the khaki is stuck to her back, and trickles of moisture collect under her breasts. When the truck steadies she lifts her breasts and blots the wet spaces with the khaki.

Boy took Clare to a high school. The principal, brass ornament indicating she was Mrs. Taylor, a woman with a flushed face and thin body, timepiece dangling on a chain around her neck, greeted the two of them, asked them to be seated. They faced her in heavy oak chairs. Immediately she told them it was a matter of course in New York City schools to have foreign students begin a year behind so they wouldn't get "lost." The woman stated this custom perfunctorily, expecting to quell any objection. Boy let her have her say and then suggested an exception might be made for his daughter—after all, she was proficient in Latin and French, was beginning Greek, and had studied algebra and geometry since she was ten. In addition the girl had read many of the classics: Dickens, Shakespeare, Milton. He rested his case.

The woman said this made no difference. None. "That

mari coupent le cotta, écrivait-elle. Pourquoi le feraient-ils ? Quand Boy retrouverait la raison, il reviendrait en Jamaïque et la famille serait à nouveau réunie. En attendant, recommandait Kitty, Clare devait prendre la place de sa mère — ce serait pour elle une bonne préparation, ajoutait-elle sans conviction.

Pour Kitty et son autre fille, Jennie, il y avait deux chambres chez une tante à Mountainview Gardens. Kitty récupéra son ancien travail. Elle était disposée à patienter jusqu'à ce que l'entêtement de son mari lui soit passé. *Les cœurs les plus proches ne sont pas ceux qui se touchent. Ce qui pouvait si facilement se transformer en Loin des yeux, loin du cœur.*

Aucun des deux ne fit un geste. Septembre arriva. Les deux conjoints semblaient se résigner à la distance qui les séparait, tout en disant qu'ils se manquaient. Boy emmena sa fille à l'école du quartier pour l'y inscrire.

Le camion fait une embardée. Elle attrape la main du camarade à sa gauche. Le matériel sous la bâche bouge et roule. Mais le camion continue de monter. Le soleil se montre — chaud. Le kaki est collé à son dos et des gouttes d'humidité s'accumulent sous ses seins. Quand le camion se stabilise, elle soulève ses seins et sèche les zones humides avec son kaki.

Boy emmena Clare dans un lycée. La directrice, une plaque de cuivre indiquant qu'il s'agissait de Mme Taylor, une femme au visage pourpre et au corps mince, une montre se balançant à une chaîne autour de son cou, les accueillit, leur demanda de s'asseoir. Ils lui faisaient face dans de lourds fauteuils de chêne. Tout de suite, elle leur dit que les écoles new-yorkaises faisaient automatiquement commencer les étudiants étrangers une année en arrière pour ne pas qu'ils soient « perdus ». La femme énonçait cet usage pour la forme, espérant réprimer toute objection. Boy la laissa dire ce qu'elle avait à dire puis suggéra qu'une exception soit faite pour sa fille — après tout, elle était très compétente en latin et en français, elle commençait le grec, et elle avait étudié l'algèbre et la géométrie depuis ses dix ans. De plus, la jeune fille avait lu bon nombre de classiques : Dickens, Shakespeare, Milton. Sa plaidoirie était conclue.

La femme dit que cela ne faisait aucune différence. Aucune. « Cela

is all beside the point, Mr. . . . ah, Mr.”—she glanced at the card in front of her—“Savage.”

“I don’t understand.”

“We are professional educators here. We are talking about degrees of emotional development. Children develop differently. Children from underdeveloped countries develop at a different rate than American children. Believe me, it’s for the girl’s own good.” She lifted the timepiece from between her breasts, glanced at it, allowing her abstraction to sink in. “I am sorry, Mr. Savage. I am sorry but that is our rule. There are no exceptions.”

“I see.” Boy acquiesced, never once asking where this was written, and could he see the guidelines of the Board of Education.

“Now . . . now that we have an understanding, let me go over the form with you. I will take down the information, to save you any difficulty with our language.” She smiled at the man who spoke to her in the King’s tongue.

Boy said nothing at all.

“I will take down the information and send it to the elementary school in your district.”

“I could do that.”

“Not necessary. Our job. . . . Race?” She met his eyes over her bifocals.

“White . . . of course.” As soon as it was out of his mouth he realized his grave error in appending the “of course.” But the woman, the damn virago, he said to himself, had thrown him off. He had expected name, address, telephone to come first. He should have let *white* stand boldly. There was equivocation. And she immediately caught on. The lie colored his face more deeply.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, quite sure.” Clare felt her stomach twist. Boy barreled on. “My grandfather—”

“And your grandmother, Mr. Savage? Are we to hear of your entire family tree—slave and free?” The specialist smirked at her rhyme.

She did not wait for his reply.

n'a rien à voir du tout, M... ah, M. » — elle jeta un coup d'œil à la fiche devant elle — « Savage. »

« Je ne comprends pas. »

« Ici, nous sommes des éducateurs professionnels. Nous parlons de degrés de développement affectif. Les enfants se développent différemment. Les enfants des pays sous-développés se développent à un rythme différent de celui des enfants américains. Croyez-moi, c'est pour le bien de la jeune fille. » Elle prit la montre qui pendait entre ses seins, la regarda, permettant à son abstraction de faire son effet. « Je suis désolée, M. Savage. Je suis désolée, mais c'est la règle. Nous ne faisons pas d'exception. »

« Je vois, » acquiesça Boy, sans même demander où cela était écrit, ni s'il pouvait voir les directives du Conseil d'établissement.

« Maintenant... maintenant que c'est entendu, permettez-moi d'examiner le formulaire avec vous. Je vais prendre note des informations, pour vous éviter toute difficulté avec notre langue. » Elle sourit à l'homme qui lui parlait dans l'anglais du Roi.

Boy ne dit rien du tout.

« Je vais prendre note des informations et les envoyer à l'école primaire de votre quartier. »

« Je pourrais le faire moi-même. »

« Pas nécessaire. Cela fait partie de notre mission... Race ? » Elle chercha son regard par-dessus ses lunettes à double foyer.

« Blanche... évidemment. » Ces mots à peine prononcés, il se rendit compte de la grave erreur qu'il avait commise en ajoutant le « évidemment ». Mais la femme, cette espèce de mégère, se dit-il à lui-même, l'avait déstabilisé. Il s'était attendu à d'abord entendre nom, adresse, téléphone. Il aurait dû laisser le *blanche* se tenir avec assurance. C'était équivoque. Et elle le saisit tout de suite. Le mensonge colorait plus profondément le visage de Boy.

« En êtes-vous sûr ? »

« Oui, tout à fait sûr. » Clare sentit son estomac se tordre. Boy fonça. « Mon grand-père... »

« Et votre grand-mère, M. Savage ? Allons-nous devoir écouter toute l'histoire de votre famille — esclave et affranchie ? » La spécialiste eut un petit sourire satisfait pour sa rime.

Elle n'attendit pas la réponse de Boy.

"Well." She smiled at Clare, the first time she had addressed her. "You see"—she turned to Boy—"I am familiar with you island people. My husband and I vacation in Montego Bay occasionally."

This woman acted as if she had been hired by the government to track down Savages trying to pass for white.

"My family is one of the oldest families—"

"And your wife's family, Mr. Savage?"

"My wife and I are separated." Silly declaration. The first time he had admitted his changed state, but senseless in this context. Would Kitty's blood now be erased?

"Mr. Savage, please." A new sternness was in the woman's voice. She was through with his games. Her time was valuable. "Mr. Savage, my husband is a physician. One of the very few Christian doctors left in this city, if you know what I mean."

"Oh, yes. Yes, I do." Boy nodded eagerly. Common ground?

"As such he has had to meet *them* more than halfway. He works for the public health service. In charge of maintaining the obstetrical well-being of Spanish-speaking women in his care." The euphemisms confused her audience. "He is a very witty man. Do you know what he would call you?"

"No," Boy responded, having no idea what was coming next.

"He would call you white chocolate. . . . I mean, have you ever seen a child's expression when he finds a white chocolate bunny in his Easter basket? He simply doesn't understand . . . he thinks it strange. I do not want to be cruel, Mr. Savage, but we have no room for lies in our system. No place for in-betweens."

Time passes. Monday. September 16, 1963. Adjusted to America after a fashion, the girl Clare sits in a green room with red geraniums on the windowsill. Dark green shades flap against the glass. Her father calls this their adopted country. They have lived here for three years. Time passes. Her mother continues to write but her letters hold no res-

« Bon. » Elle sourit à Clare, pour la première fois qu'elle s'adressait à elle. « Voyez-vous » — elle se tourna vers Boy — « Je vous connais bien vous les gens des îles. Mon mari et moi-même passons nos vacances à Montego Bay à l'occasion. »

Cette femme se comportait comme si elle avait été engagée par le gouvernement pour traquer les Savage qui tenteraient de se faire passer pour blancs.

« Ma famille est une des plus anciennes familles ... »

« Et la famille de votre femme, M. Savage ? »

« Ma femme et moi sommes séparés. » Déclaration idiote. Première fois qu'il avait admis son changement d'état, mais absurde dans ce contexte. Le sang de Kitty serait-il désormais effacé ?

« M. Savage, s'il vous plaît. » La voix de la femme était teintée d'une sévérité nouvelle. Elle en avait assez de ses jeux. Son temps était précieux. « M. Savage, mon mari est médecin. Un des rares docteurs chrétiens que compte encore cette ville, si vous voyez ce que je veux dire. »

« Oh, oui. Oui, je vois. » Boy acquiesçait avec impatience. Terrain d'entente ?

« À force, il a appris à les connaître, *ces gens-là*. Il travaille pour le Service de santé publique. Il est responsable du bien-être obstétrique des femmes hispanophones. » Les euphémismes laissaient ses auditeurs perplexes. « C'est un homme plein d'esprit. Savez-vous comment il vous appellerait ? »

« Non, » répondit Boy, sans avoir la moindre idée de ce qui allait suivre.

« Il dirait de vous que vous êtes du chocolat blanc... Je veux dire, avez-vous déjà vu l'expression d'un enfant lorsqu'il trouve un lapin en chocolat blanc dans son panier de Pâques ? Il ne comprend tout simplement pas... il trouve cela étrange. Je ne veux pas être cruelle, M. Savage, mais nous n'avons pas de place dans notre système pour les mensonges. Pas de place pour ceux qui sont entre les deux. »

Le temps passe. Lundi. 16 septembre 1963. Tant bien que mal adaptée à l'Amérique, Clare est assise dans une pièce verte avec des géraniums rouges sur l'appui de fenêtre. Des stores vert foncé battent contre la vitre. Son père appelle cela leur pays d'adoption. Cela fait trois ans qu'ils y vivent. Le temps passe. Sa mère continue à écrire, mais ses lettres n'ont pas d'écho —

onance—she “keeps in touch.” The cotta remains intact. The two sides stand off. Boy suggests that he and his elder daughter may pay a visit. Yes, Kitty writes, that would be a nice thing. Let me know when and I will arrange a place for you to stay. But, he responds, money is short. They will visit as soon as he can make the fare and buy presents for everyone. Hesitation. What *is* he afraid of?

There is quiet until the next exchange. The two maintain a grace of connection—neither expects things to change.

Boy takes up golf. Trades in the '52 Plymouth for a '61 Chevy. Christmas gifts fly to Mountainview Gardens—unaccompanied. Now he sells televisions in the appliance department of Abraham & Straus. A lot of people seem to have credit—business is good.

Through all this—this new life—he counsels his daughter on invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement. Blending in. The uses of camouflage.

September 16, 1963. The girl Clare sits on a high stool in front of her homeroom, chosen by Mrs. Douglass, a Black woman from Americus, Georgia, to read the morning paper to the class. Mrs. Douglass believes in keeping her students informed. Today there is a story which should have caused the sun to eclipse the earth—something . . . something in the heavens should have objected.

In thick dark letters, stark: SUNDAY SCHOOL BOMBED—next line, smaller print: FOUR CHILDREN DEAD. A picture accompanies the letters. More pictures inside, they promise. A stained-glass window. Fragments of images dangle from its leaden boundaries. The face of Jesus is ruined. Dark space where the bomb has torn it off. His hands and crook intact. The legend of the window—willing workers—half there, half absent. Clare reads the text, the names, the ages attached to the names. She monotonizes her voice for she is afraid of being moved—and this news has brought her dangerously close. She is afraid of embarrassing herself in front of this class of children who fidget as she speaks.

elle « garde le contact. » Le cotta reste intact. Les deux parties gardent leurs distances. Boy laisse entendre que lui et sa fille aînée pourraient venir en visite. Oui, écrit Kitty, ce serait bien agréable. Dis-moi quand et je vous trouverai un endroit où dormir. Mais, répond-il, l'argent manque. Ils viendront dès qu'il pourra payer le voyage et acheter des cadeaux pour tout le monde. Hésitation. De quoi a-t-il donc peur ?

Silence jusqu'à l'échange suivant. Ils préservent tous les deux un rapport gracieux — ni l'un ni l'autre ne s'attend à ce que les choses changent.

Boy se met au golf. Échange la Plymouth de 52 pour une Chevrolet de 61. Les cadeaux de Noël sont expédiés par avion vers Mountainview Gardens — non accompagnés. Désormais, il vend des télévisions au rayon électroménager chez Abraham & Strauss. Beaucoup de gens semblent avoir de l'argent — les affaires sont bonnes.

À travers tout ceci — cette nouvelle vie — il donne à sa fille des conseils sur l'invisibilité et les secrets. S'effacer. Se fondre. Les usages du camouflage.

16 septembre 1963. Clare est assise sur un haut tabouret devant sa classe, choisie par Mme Douglas, une noire d'Americus en Géorgie, pour lire le journal à la classe. Mme Douglas est convaincue de l'importance de tenir ses élèves informés. Aujourd'hui, il y a une histoire qui aurait dû pousser le soleil à éclipser la terre — quelque chose... quelque chose dans les cieux aurait dû protester.

En grosses lettres noires, brut : UNE ÉCOLE DU DIMANCHE ATTAQUÉE À LA BOMBE — ligne suivante, plus petits caractères : QUATRE ENFANTS MORTS. Une photo accompagne les mots. Plus d'images à l'intérieur, promettent-ils. Un vitrail. Des fragments d'image se balancent à ses bords de plomb. Le visage de Jésus est abîmé. Un espace sombre là où la bombe l'a arraché. Sa main et sa crosse intactes. La légende de la fenêtre — ouvriers de bonne volonté — à moitié là, à moitié absente. Clare lit le texte, les noms, les âges attachés aux noms. Elle parle d'une voix monotone car elle a peur d'être émue — et cette nouvelle l'y a conduite dangereusement près. Elle a peur de se ridiculiser devant cette classe d'enfants qui gigotent tandis qu'elle parle.

"Addie Mae Collins, 14; Denise McNair, 11; Carole Robertson, 14; Cynthia Wesley, 14."

She is able to hold two things in her head at the same time. To read fluently while her mind is tracing something else. She has a chemistry quiz that morning and reviews, as she reads, the elements in the periodic table—dissolving the immediate like someone in solitary. First column: Hydrogen, H; Lithium, Li; Sodium, Na; Potassium, K. But she is troubled. Her mind recites, of its own accord: Hydrogen, 14; Lithium, 11; Sodium, 14; Potassium, 14. She has already forgotten the names, but the ages persist. She is older than all of them.

Her voice reads on.

"The Sunday School lesson that morning was 'Love thy neighbor.' It was in the middle of the lesson that witnesses heard a car slow down outside the Sixteenth-Street Baptist Church. Witnesses report that there was a distinct silence, followed by a rush of air, then a deafening explosion. In addition to the four dead, there are twenty-one injured. A man standing in the rubble of the hundred-year-old church was heard to scream, 'Love them? Love them? I hate them!'"

Clare's voice stopped. *How could he not?* The class was still in motion. *Had they not heard?* Passing notes. Copying homework. Aligning their books on their desktops spine to spine. She glanced at Mrs. Douglass, head up and down as she kept busy with her Delaney cards, recording attendance by sight. There was no rush of air in the room. No explosion. Clare folded the newspaper and returned it to the teacher's desk. She muttered, "I'm sorry," the phrase she had been taught for people bereft, and felt foolish. Unable to go further.

The next morning, on her way to school, she put a nickel in the blind man's plastic dish at the mouth of the subway and picked up a copy of the *News*. On the front page was the picture she needed to see. A girl in a coffin, open. Girl,

« Addie Mae Collins, 14 ; Denise McNair, 11 ; Carole Robertson, 14 ; Cynthia Wesley, 14. »

Elle est capable de faire deux choses en même temps dans sa tête. De lire avec aisance tandis que son cerveau poursuit autre chose. Elle a un test de chimie ce matin-là et elle révise, tandis qu'elle lit, les éléments du tableau périodique — dissolvant l'immédiat comme quelqu'un en isolement. Première colonne : Hydrogène, H ; Lithium, Li ; Sodium, Na ; Potassium, K. Mais elle est troublée. Son esprit récite de lui-même : Hydrogène, 14 ; Lithium, 11 ; Sodium, 14 ; Potassium, 14. Elle a déjà oublié les noms, mais les âges restent. Elle est plus âgée qu'elles toutes.

Sa voix continue de lire.

« Le thème de la leçon ce matin-là était 'Aime ton prochain'. C'est au milieu de la leçon que des témoins ont entendu une voiture ralentir devant l'église baptiste de la seizième rue. Des témoins rapportent qu'il y a eu un net silence, suivi d'une bouffée d'air, puis une explosion assourdissante. Aux quatre mortes s'ajoutent vingt et un blessés. Un homme qui se tenait dans les décombres de l'église centenaire a été entendu en train de crier, 'Les aimer ? Les aimer ? Je les hais !' »

La voix de Clare s'arrêta. *Comment pourrait-il ne pas les haïr ?* La classe continuait. *N'avaient-ils pas entendu ?* Ils se passaient des petits mots. Recopiaient leurs devoirs. Alignaient leurs livres dos-à-dos sur leurs bancs. Elle lança un regard à Mme Douglas, qui levait et baissait la tête, occupée avec ses cartes Delaney, enregistrant les présences du regard. Il n'y eut pas de bouffée d'air dans la classe. Pas d'explosion. Clare replia le journal et le déposa sur le bureau de l'enseignante. Elle marmonna, « Je suis désolée, » l'expression qu'on lui avait apprise pour les gens frappés par le deuil, et se sentit ridicule. Incapable de continuer.

Le matin suivant, sur le chemin de l'école, elle mit une pièce de cinq cents dans l'assiette en plastique de l'aveugle à la bouche du métro et prit un exemplaire du *News*. En première page se trouvait l'image qu'il lui fallait voir. Une fillette dans un cercueil, ouvert. Fillette,

coffin, platform, all draped in a fine white cotton, like a delicate mosquito netting protecting her from the tiny marauders of a tropical night. A curtain to protect onlookers from the damage. The veiled girl identified in the caption as "one of the victims of Sunday's bombing." There she was—still and whole. As if sleeping, the undertaker might have advertised. Clare wondered what the veil hid, then was ashamed for wondering, confusing the sleeping pose with resting in peace. She cut the picture from the paper and put it in a celluloid pocket in her wallet—to glance at it even when they buried the President and she and her father watched the television nonstop for three days.

It was during that strange weekend in November that her father caught her glancing at the picture of the dead girl. He asked her what was keeping her attention so. She replied, "Nothing." Thinking perhaps a movie star was stealing her mind from American history in the making, he demanded to see the picture. She held her wallet toward his chair. They came to grief over it.

"Girl, do you want to labor forever as an outsider?"

"I don't know, Daddy."

"You are too much like your mother for your own good." His voice was ragged, sharp. "You are an American now. You need to realize what that means." He slid the picture from the celluloid, casually folding it into his shirt pocket. "This is for the best," he told her, in a softer voice. "You must not ponder these things so. We are not to judge this country . . . they give us a home. Your mother could never understand that . . . she blamed the whole place for a few ignorant people . . . that's why we lost her."

A soldier at Arlington sounded taps as Boy spoke. He turned from his daughter as his eyes misted.

It did not matter that the picture was gone—it was in her mind. Connecting her with her absent mother.

The picture, and what it represented, like the meeting with the woman principal, the departure of Kitty, encircled a subject which became taboo between father and daughter.

cercueil, estrade, le tout drapé de fin coton blanc, comme une délicate moustiquaire en mousseline la protégeant des minuscules maraudeurs d'une nuit tropicale. Un rideau pour protéger l'assistance. La petite fille voilée identifiée dans la légende comme « une des victimes de l'attaque à la bombe de dimanche. » Elle était là — immobile et entière. Comme si elle dormait, s'était peut-être vanté l'entrepreneur des pompes funèbres. Clare se demanda ce que cachait le voile, puis fut gênée de s'être posé la question, confondant la pose endormie avec le repos éternel. Elle découpa l'image du journal et la glissa dans une pochette en celluloïd à l'intérieur de son portefeuille — pour y jeter un coup d'œil, même lorsqu'ils enterrèrent le Président et qu'elle et son père regardèrent la télévision sans interruption pendant trois jours.

C'est durant cet étrange week-end de novembre que son père la surprit en train de regarder la photo de la petite fille morte. Il lui demanda ce qui retenait autant son attention. « Rien, » répondit-elle. Pensant que c'était peut-être une star de cinéma qui détournait l'esprit de sa fille de l'histoire américaine en train de se faire, il exigea de voir la photo. Elle tendit son portefeuille vers la chaise de son père. Ils se disputèrent à propos de la photo.

« Ma fille, tu tiens vraiment à rester une étrangère pour toujours? »

« Je ne sais pas, Papa. »

« Tu ressembles trop à ta mère et c'est pas bon. » Sa voix était irrégulière, cassante. « Tu es une Américaine maintenant. Il faut que tu te rendes compte de ce que ça veut dire. » Il sortit la photo de la pochette de celluloïd, en la pliant négligemment dans la poche de sa chemise. « C'est pour ton bien, » lui dit-il d'une voix adoucie. « Tu ne dois pas réfléchir autant à ces choses-là. Nous ne devons pas juger ce pays... ils nous accueillent chez eux. Ta mère n'a jamais pu le comprendre... elle a condamné le pays tout entier à cause de quelques ignorants... c'est pour ça que nous l'avons perdue. »

Un soldat à Arlington exécutait la sonnerie aux morts pendant que Boy parlait. Il se détourna de sa fille et ses yeux s'embruèrent.

Peu importe que l'image ne soit plus là — elle était dans son esprit. La rattachant à sa mère absente.

L'image, et ce qu'elle représentait, tout comme la rencontre avec la directrice, le départ de Kitty, cernaient un sujet qui devenait tabou entre le père et la fille.

Should a newscast refer to the "burgeoning civil rights movement," her father took care to distract her, and himself, with talk of something else. Not realizing his daughter could hold two things in her mind at once.

When Kitty Freeman Savage died, her brother Frederick telephoned her husband in America, barely able to contain the bitterness in his voice. Then he buried his sister in Kingston, in a cemetery which held no history for her family—burial in her mother's ground was not a question. The ties had been broken. The land was ruinate.

Clare returned home from school—she was a sophomore in college by that time, working three evenings and all day Saturday at Abraham & Straus, a position achieved because of her father's expertise in sales. She returned that particular evening to her father's weeping. He held a glass into which he stared. "Your mother is gone," he told his daughter.

At first Clare thought he was confused—reliving Kitty's departure of five years before. Then he raised his red-rimmed eyes at her and she knew. Just like that. "How?" she asked. She did not cry.

"Your uncle said a brain hemorrhage in the night. . . . He said she had been suffering from headaches. . . . They asked her to see a doctor . . . begged, he said . . . to go to Miami if necessary . . . but she wouldn't leave. . . . Your mother was the soul of stubbornness." He sat before his daughter, thinking, Yes, that was it, Kitty brought it on herself.

In her last letters to them nothing had been said to indicate to them she was suffering. "I am glad you are studying," she wrote a P.S. to her elder daughter. "I hope someday you make something of yourself, and someday help your people." A reminder, daughter—never forget who your people are. Your responsibilities lie beyond me, beyond yourself. There is a space between who you are and who you will become. Fill it.

Si un bulletin d'informations évoquait « la naissance du mouvement pour les droits civiques », son père prenait soin de la distraire, et de se distraire lui-même, en parlant d'autre chose. Ne se rendant pas compte que sa fille pouvait avoir deux choses différentes à l'esprit en même temps.

Quand Kitty Freeman Savage mourut, son frère Frederick téléphona à son mari en Amérique, à peine capable de contenir l'amertume de sa voix. Il enterra ensuite sa sœur à Kingston, dans un cimetière qui n'avait aucune histoire pour sa famille — il n'était pas question d'un enterrement dans la terre de sa mère. Les liens avaient été rompus. La terre était à l'abandon.

Clare rentra de l'école — elle était en deuxième année à l'université à cette époque-là, et travaillait trois soirées par semaine et toute la journée du samedi chez Abraham & Strauss, un emploi obtenu grâce au chiffre d'affaires de son père. Elle rentra cet après-midi-là, pour trouver son père en larmes. Il tenait un verre dans lequel son regard se perdait. « Ta mère est partie, » dit-il à sa fille.

Clare crut tout d'abord qu'il était désorienté, qu'il revivait le départ de Kitty cinq ans auparavant. Il leva alors vers elle ses yeux aux bords rougis et elle comprit. Simplement comme ça. « Comment ? » demanda-t-elle. Elle ne pleura pas.

« Ton oncle a parlé d'une hémorragie cérébrale pendant la nuit... Il a dit qu'elle s'était plainte de maux de tête... Ils lui ont demandé d'aller voir un médecin... supplié, il a dit... d'aller à Miami si nécessaire... mais elle ne voulait pas partir... Ta mère était l'obstination incarnée. » Il était assis devant sa fille, à penser, Oui, c'est ça, Kitty l'avait bien cherché.

Dans les dernières lettres qu'elle leur avait adressées, elle n'avait rien dit qui ait pu leur indiquer qu'elle était souffrante. « Je suis contente que tu étudies, » écrivit-elle dans un P.-S. à sa fille aînée. « J'espère qu'un jour, tu feras quelque chose de ta vie, qu'un jour, tu aideras les tiens. » Un rappel, ma fille — n'oublie jamais qui sont les tiens. Tes responsabilités me dépassent, te dépassent. Il y a un espace entre la personne que tu es et celle que tu deviendras. Remplis-le.

This death came without warning. No dogs howled. Had they done so, the daughter would not have sensed the significance of their noise.

She woke at twenty to find herself a motherless child—plainly.

What would her mother think of her on this truck? Of the task ahead of all of them? Could she love her for it?

At breakfast the morning after the news arrived, Boy pressed her. "Have you cried for your mother yet?" He spoke behind eyes newly wet.

"No." Her voice did not break.

In a sudden he was on her. "You callous little bitch. I suppose you have more feeling for niggers than for your own mother." Out it slid. The fury he had been holding in him escaped—the cause of his loss. Again, he aligned his daughter with his wife, who had abandoned him to strangers and died without a word.

Clare breathed deep, looked full into his furious face. "My mother was a nigger"—speaking the word at him.

His five long fingers came at her, as she had expected, marking her cheekbone, making her weep in shock.

"And so am I," she added, softly.

She left the table to splash cold water on her face and get away from him for a moment. When she returned, he spoke to her as if nothing had passed between them, as if they had just joined one another at breakfast. He spoke to her without enthusiasm. "Your sister will be coming here."

And so she did. Speaking her mother's language, while Clare spoke her father's adopted tongue. One daughter raised in captivity, the other in the wild—so it seemed to Clare. Jennie came to them as to two strangers.

For her Kitty was vivid. They had slept in the same room in Mountainview Gardens, in the shadow of Wareika Hill. She had heard her mother cry out, "Jesus! Tek me now!" She was not able to tell these people about it. She

Cette mort était arrivée sans prévenir. Les chiens ne hurlèrent pas. S'ils l'avaient fait, Clare n'en aurait pas deviné le sens.

Elle se réveilla à vingt ans pour se découvrir orpheline de mère — tout simplement.

Que penserait sa mère en la voyant dans ce camion ? Que penserait-elle de la tâche qui les attendait ? Pourrait-elle l'aimer pour cela ?

Au petit-déjeuner le jour suivant celui de la nouvelle, Boy la pressa. « Est-ce que tu as enfin pleuré pour ta mère ? » Il parlait derrière des yeux fraîchement humides.

« Non. » Sa voix ne se brisa pas.

Tout à coup, il fondit sur elle. « Espèce de garce sans cœur. J'imagine que tu éprouves plus de pitié pour les nègres que pour ta propre mère. » C'était sorti. La colère qu'il avait gardée en lui s'échappait — la cause de sa perte. À nouveau, il associait sa fille avec sa femme, qui l'avait abandonné à des étrangers et était morte sans rien dire.

Clare inspira profondément, le regarda droit dans ses yeux furieux. « Ma mère était une négresse, » lui lança-t-elle.

Ses cinq longs doigts atterrirent sur son visage, comme elle s'y était attendue, laissant une marque sur sa joue, et le choc la fit pleurer.

« Et moi aussi, » ajouta-t-elle doucement.

Elle quitta la table pour aller s'asperger le visage d'eau froide et lui échapper un instant. Quand elle revint, il lui parla comme si rien ne s'était passé entre eux, comme s'ils venaient juste de se rejoindre pour le petit-déjeuner. Il lui parla sans allant. « Ta sœur va venir ici. »

Et ce fut le cas. Elle parlait la langue de sa mère, tandis que Clare parlait la langue d'adoption de son père. Une fille élevée en captivité, l'autre dans la nature — c'est ce qu'il semblait à Clare. Ils étaient comme deux étrangers pour Jennie.

Pour elle, Kitty était vivante. Elles avaient dormi dans la même chambre à Mountainview Gardens, à l'ombre des collines de Wareika. Elle avait entendu sa mère hurler, « Seigneur ! Prends-moi vite ! » Elle ne pouvait pas en parler à ces gens-là. Elle

sensed that they envied her, that they did not know what to do with her. She existed in an afterlife where her mother surrounded her; she thought her mother could see her every move. Her dreams told her that.

"Did she leave anything behind?" Clare questioned the bluefoot sitting across from her.

"What you mean? She lef' me."

"No. Did she leave anything behind? I would like to have something of hers . . . a keepsake."

"Only this ring." Jennie lifted the wedding band for Clare to see. It hung around her neck on a length of string.

"Did she wear that?"

"Yes. From time to time."

"You better not let him see it; he'll take it for himself."

"Him will have to cut me to get it."

Silence. Then Clare spoke again, tentatively posing the one question she needed answered.

"Did she ever say why she left?"

The girl just stared at the ring around her neck.

"Why she left this place so suddenly? I know she couldn't stand it . . . could not make herself at home . . . and she had just lost Grandma . . . but did she ever say why she didn't take me as well?"

The girl spoke without looking at her sister. "One time she say she feel you would prosper here. She say is because you favor backra, and fe you Daddy. Don't feel bad, man."

Silence again. Clare fought herself, not wanting to weep in front of this girl, who meant well by advising her not to regret their mother's choice, as foolish as that was.

"What ever happened to Grandma's place?"

"Oh, it all overgrown by now. Rat live there. None of the family want to business wid it. It possess itself."

"You ever visit it?"

"Few time we go down fe mango season, and fe drink and wash wid de water. She say is de purest water in de world dat."

The years with her mother in the sun had rendered the

devinait qu'ils l'enviaient, qu'ils ne savaient pas quoi faire d'elle. Elle existait dans une vie après la mort où sa mère l'entourait ; elle croyait que sa mère pouvait voir le moindre de ses gestes. C'est ce que ses rêves lui disaient.

« Est-ce qu'elle a laissé quelque chose ? » demanda Clare à l'étrangère assise en face d'elle.

« Ka ou vouloir dire ? Elle m'a laissée, mwen. »

« Non. Est-ce qu'elle a laissé quelque chose ? J'aimerais avoir quelque chose qui lui ait appartenu... un souvenir. »

« Juste cette bag. » Jennie leva l'alliance pour que Clare la vit. Elle était accrochée à une ficelle passée autour de son cou.

« Elle la portait ? »

« Oui. Kèk-fwa. »

« Vaudrait mieux qu'il la voie pas, sinon il la gardera pour lui. »

« Il devra piquer mwen avant. »

Silence. Puis Clare recommença à parler, pour poser timidement la seule question à laquelle il lui fallait une réponse.

« Est-ce qu'elle a jamais dit pourquoi elle est partie ? »

La jeune fille se contentait de fixer des yeux la bague autour de son cou.

« Pourquoi elle est partie d'ici aussi soudainement ? Je sais qu'elle détestait cet endroit... qu'elle n'arrivait pas à se sentir chez elle...et elle venait juste de perdre Grand-mère... mais est-ce qu'elle a jamais dit pourquoi elle ne m'avait pas prise avec elle aussi ? »

La jeune fille parla sans regarder sa sœur. « On jou, elle a dit qu'elle sentait que ou té réussir ici. Elle a dit que c'est paks ou ka ressembler les backras et pou ton papa. Faut pas culpabiliser, man. »

Nouveau silence. Clare luttait contre elle-même, ne voulant pas pleurer devant cette fille, dont les intentions étaient bonnes en lui conseillant de ne pas regretter le choix de leur mère, même s'il avait été stupide.

« Qu'est-ce qui est arrivé à la maison de Grand-mère ? »

« Oh, elle est complètement envahie par les mové zèb à prézan. Il n'y a plus que les rats ka rester là. Pèsonn an famille-la veut s'en occuper. La kaz est possédée par elle-même. »

« T'es déjà allée y faire un tour ? »

« Kèk-fwa, on y est allées pou tuer mango et pou boire et baigner an rivière-la. Elle disait que c'était meilleure dlo au monde. »

Les années passées au soleil avec sa mère avaient rendu la

younger sister dead-gold. Clare struggled within her city skin, birthright gone paler, an image of the river with her mother almost breaking her heart.

She left Jennie to her wanderings in the city. Left Boy to his newfound love—not his rediscovered daughter but an Italian-American widow who sold cosmetics on the main floor of A&S. The woman tried to be kind to Jennie, silently wondering when she would lose her tan, bringing her vials of sample scents, tubes of sample lipsticks, discouraging the girl when she returned from suspicious places with strange victuals. It upset her father too much, the woman told her, to smell curried goat after all this time.

As soon as she finished school, Clare left home. She borrowed money from her mother's brother Frederick, pledging to repay him, took a student fare to London, and began to explore. Nothing held her.

The truck stopped briefly at a settlement outside of Accompong Town. An old man approached the truck and spoke briefly with the driver. Others—people of the bloodlines of the Maroons—came out of their small houses and gathered around NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN. They smiled in welcome of the people in the truck-back, several women passing cups of sorrel and ginger cooled with a block of ice amongst the soldiers. The soldiers unloaded the food they carried and handed over these provisions to the people. The old man squatted, sucking on the stem of his chalice, and gave directions in exchange—in Coromantee, a tongue barely alive.

A tongue she could not speak. She who was educated in several tongues, the mastery of which should have kept her from that truck and stifled her longing to know Coromantee.

plus jeune des deux sœurs toute dorée. Clare se débattait dans sa peau de citadine, droit d'aînesse devenu plus pâle, une vision de la rivière avec sa mère lui brisant presque le cœur.

Elle laissa Jennie à ses pérégrinations dans la ville. Laissa Boy à son nouvel amour — non pas sa fille retrouvée mais une veuve italo-américaine qui vendait des cosmétiques à l'étage principal de A&S. La femme essayait d'être gentille avec Jennie, se demandant en silence quand elle perdrait son hâle, lui rapportant des échantillons de parfum, des échantillons de rouge à lèvres, essayant de dissuader la jeune fille quand elle revenait d'endroits suspects avec d'étranges victuailles. Cela dérangeait trop son père, lui expliqua la femme, de sentir le curry de chèvre après tout ce temps.

Dès qu'elle eut fini l'école, Clare quitta la maison. Elle emprunta de l'argent au frère de sa mère, Frederick, en promettant de le rembourser, prit un billet étudiant pour Londres, et commença à explorer. Rien ne la retenait.

Le camion s'arrêta brièvement dans un village à l'extérieur d'Accompong Town. Un vieil homme s'approcha du camion et parla brièvement au chauffeur. Les autres — des gens de la lignée des Marrons — sortirent de leurs petites maisons et se rassemblèrent autour de NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN. Ils adressaient des sourires de bienvenue aux gens à l'arrière du camion, et plusieurs femmes faisaient passer parmi les soldats des tasses d'oseille et de gingembre rafraîchis par un glaçon. Les soldats déchargèrent la nourriture qu'ils transportaient et passèrent les provisions aux gens. Le vieil homme s'accroupit, suçant le tuyau de son calice, et indiqua le chemin en retour — en coromantin, une langue presque éteinte.

Une langue qu'elle ne savait pas parler. Elle qui avait étudié plusieurs langues, leur maîtrise aurait dû la tenir à l'écart de ce camion et étouffer son désir de connaître le coromantin.

VII

MAGNANIMOUS WARRIOR!

VII
GUERRIÈRE
MAGNANIME !

Magnanimous Warrior! She in whom the spirits come quick and hard. Hunting mother. She who forages. Who knows the ground. Where the hills of fufu are concealed. Mother who brews the most beautiful tea from the ugliest bush. Warrior who sheds her skin like a snake and travels into the darkness a fireball. Mother who catches the eidon and sees them to their rest. Warrior who labors in the spirit. She who plants gunga on the graves of the restless. Mother who carves the power-stone, center of the world. Warrior who places the blood-cloth on the back of the whipped slave. She who turns her attention to the evildoer. Mother who binds the female drumhead with parchment from a goat. Warrior who gathers grave-dirt in her pocket. Pieces of chalk. Packs of cards. Bits of looking-glass. Beaks. Feet. Bones of patoo. Teeth of dogs and alligators. Glass eyes. Sulfur. Camphor. Myrrh. Asafoetida. Frankincense. Curious shells. China dolls. Wooden images. She writes in her own blood across

Guerrière magnanime ! Elle en qui les esprits viennent vite et fort. Mère chasserresse. Elle qui part en exploration. Qui connaît le terrain. Qui sait où se cachent les collines de fufu. Mère qui prépare le plus beau des thés avec le plus laid des buissons. Guerrière qui se défait de sa peau tel un serpent et qui avance dans l'obscurité telle une boule de feu. Mère qui attrape les eidon et leur donne la paix. Guerrière qui travaille dur dans l'esprit. Elle qui plante l'ambrevade sur la tombe des âmes errantes. Mère qui grave la pierre de pouvoir, centre du monde. Guerrière qui place la compresse sur le dos de l'esclave fouetté. Elle qui prête attention au malfaiteur. Mère qui attache la peau de tambour des femmes avec un parchemin en chèvre. Guerrière qui remplit ses poches de poussière de tombe. De bouts de craie. De jeux de cartes. De morceaux de miroir. De becs. De pattes. D'os d'ibijau. De dents de chiens et d'alligators. D'yeux de verre. De sulfure. De camphre. De myrrhe. D'ase fétide. D'encens. De coquillages curieux. De poupées de porcelaine. D'images en bois. Elle écrit dans son propre sang sur

the drumhead. Obeah-woman. Myal-woman. She can cure. She can kill. She can give jobs. She is foy-eyed. The bearer of second sight. Mother who goes forth emitting flames from her eyes. Nose. Mouth. Ears. Vulva. Anus. She bites the evildoers that they become full of sores. She treats cholera with bitterbush. She burns the canefields. She is River Mother. Sky Mother. Old Hige. The Moon. Old Suck.

Rambling mother. Mother who trumps and wheels counterclockwise around the power-stone, the center of the world. Into whose cauldron the Red Coats vanished.

What has become of this warrior? Now that we need her more than ever. She has been burned up in an alms-house fire in Kingston. She has starved to death. She wanders the roads of the country with swollen feet. She has cancer. Her children have left her. Her powers are known no longer. They are called by other names. She is not respected. She lies on an iron bedstead in a shack in Trench Town. She begs outside a rumshop in Spanish Town. She cleans the yard of a woman younger than she. She lies in a bed in a public hospital with sores across her buttocks. No one swabs her wounds. Flies gather. No one turns her in the bed. The pain makes her light-headed. They tell her she is senile. They have taken away her bag of magic. Her teeth. Her goat's horn. We have forgotten her. Now that we need her more than ever. The nurses ignore her. The doctors make game of her. The priest tries to take her soul.

Can you remember how to love her?

la peau de tambour. Femme Obeah. Femme Myal. Elle peut soigner. Elle peut tuer. Elle peut donner du travail. Elle est porteuse d'une seconde vue. Mère qui avance en projetant des flammes hors de ses yeux. Nez. Bouche. Oreilles. Vulve. Anus. Elle mord les malfaiteurs pour qu'ils se couvrent de plaies. Elle soigne le choléra avec le géri tout. Elle brûle les champs de canne à sucre. Elle est la Mère Rivière. Mère Ciel. Vieille Sorcière. La Lune. Vieux Vampire.

Mère qui divague. Mère qui claironne et tourne dans le sens inverse des aiguilles d'une montre autour de la pierre de pouvoir, le centre du monde. Dans son chaudron disparurent les Tuniques Rouges.

Qu'est devenue cette guerrière ? Alors que nous avons besoin d'elle aujourd'hui plus que jamais. Elle a péri dans l'incendie d'un hospice à Kingston. Elle est morte de faim. Elle erre sur les routes du pays, les pieds enflés. Elle a le cancer. Ses enfants l'ont abandonnée. Ses pouvoirs sont oubliés. Ils portent d'autres noms. Elle n'est pas respectée. Elle est couchée sur un châlit dans une cabane de Trench Town. Elle mendie devant un bar à rhum à Spanish Town. Elle nettoie la cour d'une femme plus jeune qu'elle. Elle est couchée dans un lit d'un hôpital public avec des plaies sur les fesses. Personne ne nettoie ses blessures. Les mouches s'agglutinent. Personne ne la retourne dans son lit. La douleur lui donne le vertige. Ils lui disent qu'elle est sénile. Ils lui ont pris son sac à magie. Ses dents. Sa corne de chèvre. Nous l'avons oubliée. Alors que nous avons besoin d'elle aujourd'hui plus que jamais. Les infirmières feignent de ne pas la voir. Les docteurs se moquent d'elle. Le prêtre essaye de lui prendre son âme.

Vous souvenez-vous comment l'aimer ?

X

THE GREAT BEAST

No one black dies a natural death.

—JAMAICAN PROVERB

X LA GRANDE BÊTE

Aucun noir ne meurt d'une mort naturelle.

—PROVERBE JAMAÏCAIN

*

Small plain room in a tenement yard.

Tell us about yourself.

What would you like to know?

What comes to mind?

I am a Jamaican. My mother is dead. My father lives in New York. We are not in touch.

What else?

I have lived in the States, in New York, and in Europe—London and elsewhere.

You stress place, it seems.

I thought you wanted to know my history.

How do you feel . . . about what we are asking you?

What do you mean exactly?

To whom do you owe your allegiance?

I have African, English, Carib in me.

Can we trust you?

I believe things must change. . . .

Truly?

How could anyone not believe that?

There are those who do not, as you well know.

Yes, of course. I . . . if anything, I owe my allegiance to the place my grandmother made.

Place again?

It represented a labor of love—once.

Will you let us use this land?

Yes.

Are you sure?

Yes. I have thought about it. My grandmother believed in using the land to feed people. My mother as well . . . communists, I guess (smile).

We do not offer the standard form of nourishment. . . .

I am aware of that . . . but once you clear the land, you will distribute the surplus to the people around? That is what I was given to understand.

Yes; we will. But that is not our main purpose.

[...]

*

Une petite pièce nue dans la cour d'un immeuble.

Parle-nous de toi.

Qu'aimeriez-vous savoir ?

Qu'est-ce qui te vient à l'esprit ?

Je suis jamaïcaine. Ma mère est morte. Mon père vit à New York. On n'est plus en contact.

Quoi d'autre ?

J'ai vécu aux États-Unis, à New York, et en Europe — à Londres et ailleurs.

Tu insistes sur les lieux, on dirait.

Je croyais que vous vouliez connaître mon histoire.

Qu'est-ce que tu penses... de ce qu'on te demande ?

Que voulez-vous dire exactement ?

À qui dois-tu allégeance ?

J'ai du sang africain, anglais et caraïbe en moi.

Pouvons-nous te faire confiance ?

Je crois que les choses doivent changer...

Vraiment ?

Comment pourrait-on ne pas croire ça ?

Il y en a qui ne le croient pas, comme tu le sais.

Oui, bien sûr. Je... si je dois allégeance, c'est au lieu que ma grand-mère a créé.

Encore le lieu ?

Cela représentait un travail d'amour — autrefois.

Nous laisseras-tu utiliser cette terre ?

Oui.

Tu en es sûre ?

Oui. J'y ai réfléchi. Ma grand-mère croyait qu'il fallait utiliser la terre pour nourrir les gens.

Ma mère aussi... c'étaient des communistes, j'imagine (sourire).

Nous n'offrons pas la forme habituelle de nourriture...

J'en suis consciente... mais dès que vous aurez défriché la terre, vous distribuerez le surplus aux gens des alentours, non ? C'est ce qu'on m'a laissé entendre.

Oui, certainement. Mais ce n'est pas notre objectif principal.

I know that.
 Do you think you are morally superior to someone of
 my color?
 No.
 Politically?
 No.
 Intellectually?
 No.
 Are you certain?
 You are the color of my grandmother.
 As you well know, that could be as nothing.
 I am as certain as I can be.
 But?
 No "but."
 But it was taken in with your mother's milk . . . so to
 speak. To deny that is to deny reality.
 I am aware of that reality.
 From personal experience . . . or observation?
 Both.
 Do you consider yourself a fighter?
 I have fought that particular reality, yes.
 Could you tell me one instance of your struggle?
 It's not that simple . . . that easy to tell.
 Please try.
 I can't at the moment . . . perhaps later.
 We need to know where you stand in all this.
 I have lost people . . . is that enough?
 That is loss, not struggle.
 The struggle comes . . . came . . . later.
 How would you feel about killing someone?
 What do you mean?
 Under what circumstances would you kill another hu-
 man being?
 Why are you asking me this?
 We need to know who you are. . . . Under what cir-
 cumstances—
 Defending myself (spoken tentatively).
 What about defending your home?

Je le sais.

Penses-tu être moralement supérieure à quelqu'un de ma couleur ?

Non.

Politiquement ?

Non.

Intellectuellement ?

Non.

Tu en es sûre ?

Tu es de la même couleur que ma grand-mère.

Comme tu le sais, ça pourrait ne rien vouloir dire.

Je suis aussi sûre que je peux l'être.

Mais ?

Pas de « mais ».

Mais c'est passé dans le lait de ta mère... pour ainsi dire. Le nier c'est nier la réalité.

Je suis consciente de cette réalité.

Par ton expérience personnelle... ou par observation ?

Les deux.

Est-ce que tu te considères comme une combattante ?

J'ai combattu cette réalité-là, oui.

Pourrais-tu me donner un exemple de ta lutte ?

Ce n'est pas si simple... si facile à raconter.

Essaye s'il te plaît.

Je n'y arrive pas pour l'instant... peut-être plus tard.

Nous avons besoin de savoir où tu te situes.

J'ai perdu des proches... ce n'est pas suffisant ?

Tu parles de perte, pas de lutte.

La lutte vient... est venue... après.

Qu'est-ce que tu éprouverais à l'idée de tuer quelqu'un ?

Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire ?

Dans quelles circonstances tuerais-tu un autre être humain ?

Pourquoi me demandes-tu ça ?

Nous avons besoin de savoir qui tu es... Dans quelles circonstances...

Pour me défendre (hésitation).

Et pour défendre ce qui est à toi ?

Yes . . . I imagine.

What about defending a friend?

Yes (looking at Harriet).

Would you kill to eat?

You mean wring the neck of a chicken after church on Sunday? (A flash of her mother sitting on an upended box, as a chicken, headless, flailed beneath.)

No. Would you kill someone standing between you and food?

No. I don't think so.

Then you have never really been hungry.

Not for food, no. That is . . .

Yes?

Never mind.

No; please continue.

I have been without food from time to time, as few haven't . . . but I have not suffered the lifelong consequences of hunger, as many have. . . . My bones are not bent.

Would you kill if your child got polio, and you knew this was a result of government policy, and you knew exactly whom to blame?

I don't have any children.

Imagine that you did.

Yes. I'll try. (Thoughts of missed motherhood flooded her; facts, myths she had heard. Weren't women supposed to accomplish superhuman feats when their children were endangered? Would she? Had her own mother? She had read about a female alligator who returned to her nest and found it fenced around with anchor steel. The humans nearby wanted to see if her eggs would hatch and the babies develop without nurture. They got more than they expected as the mother alligator shredded the fence with teeth and tail . . . roaring. Would she have done such a thing? She had heard of the cobra who slithered into a village in Turkey to find her nest empty—not knowing the villagers sensed a flash flood and moved the eggs to a higher ground. She spat into the barrel which held the village water supply, then

Oui... je crois.

Et pour défendre un ami ?

Oui (lançant un regard à Harriet).

Tu tuerais pour de la nourriture ?

Tu veux dire, tordre le cou d'un poulet après la messe du dimanche ? (Un flash de sa mère assise sur une boîte retournée, tandis qu'un poulet sans tête s'agitait dans tous les sens à ses pieds.)

Non. Tuerais-tu quelqu'un s'il se trouvait entre la nourriture et toi ?

Non. Je ne pense pas.

Alors, tu n'as jamais vraiment eu faim.

Pas faim de nourriture, non. C'est-à-dire...

Oui ?

Non, rien.

Non ; continue s'il te plaît.

Il m'est arrivé de temps en temps de rester sans manger, comme peu n'en ont jamais fait l'expérience... mais je n'ai pas souffert des conséquences à vie de la faim, comme beaucoup... Mes os ne sont pas déformés.

Tuerais-tu si ton enfant avait la polio, et que tu savais que c'était le résultat de la politique du gouvernement, et si tu savais exactement qui était responsable ?

Je n'ai pas d'enfant.

Imagine que tu en as.

Oui. Je vais essayer. (Des regrets de maternité la submergèrent ; des faits, des mythes qu'elle avait entendus. Les femmes n'étaient-elles pas censées accomplir des exploits surhumains lorsque leurs enfants étaient en danger ? Le ferait-elle ? Sa propre mère l'avait-elle fait ? Elle avait entendu l'histoire d'une femelle alligator qui était retournée à son nid pour découvrir qu'il avait été entouré d'une clôture en acier. Les humains qui vivaient tout près avaient voulu voir si ses œufs éclosaient et si les petits se développeraient sans protection. La mère alligator dépassa toutes leurs espérances lorsqu'elle déchiqueta la clôture avec ses dents et sa queue... en rugissant. Aurait-elle fait de même ? Elle avait entendu l'histoire d'un cobra qui était entré dans un village en Turquie pour trouver son nid vide — ignorant que les villageois avaient pressenti une inondation soudaine et qu'ils avaient déplacé les œufs vers un endroit surélevé. La femelle cobra cracha dans le baril qui fournissait le village en eau, puis

slithered away only to find her eggs by chance, recognizing them instantly. Back to the village she stretched her body to its tautest and embraced the water barrel, collapsing its sides. Would she have such a keen sense of justice and the strength to carry it out? Had she known the blood clots were the beginning of a child with half a brain would she be angry?) Yes. I think I would. I am trying to be honest. You are asking things which are difficult to answer. It is easy to feel I do not own any of this.

Can you believe we love the children of this island?

Yes.

You have recently returned to your homeland.

I have been back the past two years or so.

And what have you done with your time?

I thought Harriet told you.

Tell us in your own words.

I have been teaching . . . reading and writing and history. I have been teaching children in a secondary school downtown . . . near to where Harriet and I live. I have approximately forty students.

Do you enjoy teaching?

I care about my students, yes. I . . .

So . . . it's not just place with you, then?

That was your assumption.

Sorry . . . please go on.

My students range in age from thirteen to sixteen. Some of them have responsibilities I do not have . . . I am thirty-five. Responsibilities to other children, for one thing. But you know this sort of thing. Some of their mouths have no front teeth. I have all my teeth, save one.

Do they trust you?

Some do. Some don't. Why should they?

What drew you to this work . . . back to this place?

Nothing pure and simple. . . . My own needs, for the most part.

Say more, please.

I returned to this island to mend . . . to bury . . . my mother. . . . I returned to this island because there was

elle s'en alla et découvrit ses œufs par hasard, les reconnaissant instantanément. De retour au village, elle tendit son corps au maximum et étreignit le baril d'eau, faisant s'effondrer ses parois. Aurait-elle un sens aussi aigu de la justice et la force de la rendre ? Si elle avait su que les caillots de sang étaient le commencement d'un enfant avec un demi-cerveau, serait-elle en colère ?) Oui, je crois que je le ferais. J'essaye d'être sincère. Tu me poses des questions auxquelles il est difficile de répondre. C'est facile de voir que je n'ai pas vécu cette expérience.

Peux-tu croire que nous aimons les enfants de cette île ?

Oui.

Tu es revenue dans ta patrie récemment.

Cela fait à peu près deux ans que je suis revenue.

Et qu'as-tu fait de ton temps ?

Je croyais qu'Harriet vous l'avait dit ?

Dis-le nous avec tes propres mots.

J'enseigne... la lecture, l'écriture et l'histoire. J'enseigne à des élèves dans une école secondaire du centre... près de l'endroit où Harriet et moi vivons. J'ai approximativement quarante élèves.

Est-ce que tu aimes enseigner ?

Je me soucie de mes élèves, oui. Je...

Donc... il n'y a pas que les lieux qui comptent pour toi alors ?

C'était votre supposition.

Désolée... continue s'il te plaît.

Mes élèves ont entre treize et seize ans. Certains ont des responsabilités que je n'ai pas... J'ai trente-cinq ans. Des responsabilités vis-à-vis d'autres enfants, d'une part. Mais vous connaissez ce genre de choses. Certains d'entre eux n'ont plus leurs dents de devant. J'ai toutes mes dents, sauf une.

Ils te font confiance ?

Certains, oui. D'autres, pas. Pourquoi devraient-ils me faire confiance ?

Qu'est-ce qui t'a attirée dans ce travail... qu'est-ce qui t'a fait revenir ici ?

Rien de précis... Mes propres besoins, essentiellement.

Dis-nous en plus, s'il te plaît.

Je suis revenue sur cette île pour réparer... pour enterrer... ma mère... Je suis revenue sur cette île parce que je n'avais

nowhere else. . . . I could live no longer in borrowed countries, on borrowed time. There is danger here—in sounding . . . seeming foolish.

That concerns you.

Seems to.

What drew you to this work . . . teaching?

I am suited for little else.

Like what?

I don't know . . . nursing, for example. The laying on of hands.

What history do you bring to your students?

The history of their . . . our homeland.

How have you found this history?

I have educated myself since my return. Spoken with the old people . . . leafed through the archives downtown . . . spent time at the university library . . . one thing leads to another. I have studied the conch knife excavated at the Arawak site in White Marl . . . the shards of hand-thrown pots . . . the petroglyphs hidden in the bush . . . listened to the stories about Nanny and taken them to heart. I have seen the flock of white birds fly out at sunset from Nannytown . . . duppies, the old people say.

Duppies?

Ghosts; the spirits of Maroons.

What else . . . what other sources?

Stories of Anansi . . . Oshun . . . Shàngó . . . I have walked the cane . . . poked through the ruins . . . rusted machines marked Glasgow . . . standing as they were left. I have swum underwater off the cays.

History can be found underwater.

Yes—some history is only underwater.

This is a departure for you.

Yes.

It says here (glancing at a folder on the table) that you did graduate work in England . . . the Renaissance . . . am I correct?

Yes. It feels like a very long time ago.

Don't apologize. I did a tripos in classics at Girton, so

nulle part d'autre où aller... Je ne pouvais plus vivre dans des pays empruntés, sur du temps emprunté. C'est dangereux ici — j'ai l'air... l'air bête.

Ça te préoccupe.

On dirait bien.

Qu'est-ce qui t'a attirée dans ce travail... l'enseignement ?

Je ne suis pas faite pour grand-chose d'autre.

Comme quoi ?

Je ne sais pas... infirmière, par exemple. L'imposition des mains.

Quelle histoire apprends-tu à tes élèves ?

L'histoire de leur... de notre patrie.

Comment as-tu découvert cette histoire ?

Je me suis instruite depuis mon retour. J'ai parlé avec des personnes âgées... j'ai parcouru les archives du centre-ville... j'ai passé du temps à la bibliothèque de l'université... une chose mène à une autre. J'ai examiné le couteau en conche déterré au site Arawak à White Marl... les tessons de poterie tournée à la main... les pétroglyphes cachés dans la broussaille... j'ai écouté les histoires sur Nanny et elles m'ont beaucoup touchée. J'ai vu les nuées d'oiseaux blancs s'envoler de Nannytown au coucher du soleil... des duppies, disent les vieux.

Des duppies ?

Des fantômes ; les esprits des Marrons.

Quoi d'autre... quelles autres sources ?

Des histoires sur Anansi... Ogun... Shàngó... J'ai parcouru les champs de canne à sucre... farfouillé dans les ruines... des machines rouillées portaient encore l'estampille de Glasgow... telles qu'on les y a laissées. J'ai nagé sous l'eau au-delà des récifs.

On peut trouver l'histoire sous l'eau.

Oui — une partie de l'histoire ne se trouve que sous l'eau.

C'est un changement de direction pour toi.

Oui.

Je lis ici (jetant un coup d'œil au dossier sur la table) que tu as fait de la recherche en Angleterre... la Renaissance... est-ce exact ?

Oui. J'ai l'impression que c'était il y a très longtemps.

Ne t'excuse pas. J'ai un diplôme en lettres classiques de Girton, donc

I am hardly in a position to judge. Tell me, why did you do it?

Because it did not concern me . . . I was looking for something to take me out of myself . . . it worked, for a while.

No stake?

Oh, I suppose . . . a stake in showing them, proving I could do it.

Yes. I left my mother's village empty-handed, and returned weighted down with paper—to be framed and nailed above her bed, next to her cross and a goldminer's photograph, my father. . . . Anyway, did you?

What?

Prove it? To them; yourself?

Something pulled me away . . . I didn't finish . . . but, yes, I suppose I proved it. Tell me something?

What?

Does your mother know about your affiliation?

My mother died at the funeral of a friend . . . several years ago.

I'm sorry.

Indeed . . . now, you tell me something?

Yes?

This new sort of history . . . that you have taken on; is there proof involved in it as well?

It's not as simple as that. I am in it. It involves me . . . the practice of rubbing lime and salt in the backs of whipped slaves . . . the ambush tactics of Cudjoe . . . the promised flight of Alexander Bedward in rapture back to Africa . . . cruelty . . . resistance . . . grace. I'm not outside this history—it's a matter of recognition . . . memory . . . emotion. When I study Tom Cringle's silk cotton tree, I wonder about the fact that I have never been able to bear a necklace around my throat . . . not even a scarf.

How would you sum up this experience of teaching, learning?

It's the best thing I have done. It's the only thing I have

je ne suis pas vraiment en position de te juger. Dis-moi, pourquoi l'as-tu fait ?

Parce que ça n'avait rien à voir avec moi... Je cherchais quelque chose pour me changer les idées... ça a marché, pendant un moment.

Pas d'enjeux ?

Oh, je suppose... que c'était un enjeu pour moi de leur montrer, de leur prouver que j'étais capable de le faire.

Oui, moi, j'ai quitté le village de ma mère les mains vides, et j'y suis retournée les mains chargées de papier — pour les encadrer et les clouer au-dessus de son lit, à côté de sa croix et de la photo d'un mineur, mon père... Enfin soit, tu l'as fait ?

Quoi ?

Tu leur as prouvé ? À eux ; à toi-même ?

Quelque chose m'en a écartée... Je n'ai pas terminé... mais, oui, je suppose que je le leur ai prouvé. Dis-moi quelque chose.

Quoi ?

Est-ce que ta mère est au courant de ton affiliation ?

Ma mère est morte à l'enterrement d'un ami... il y a plusieurs années.

Je suis désolée.

Oui... maintenant, c'est à ton tour de me dire quelque chose.

Oui ?

Ce nouveau genre d'histoire... que tu as décidé d'enseigner ; est-ce qu'elle s'appuie aussi sur des preuves ?

Ce n'est pas aussi simple que ça. Je suis dedans. Cela me concerne... la pratique qui consistait à frotter un mélange de sel et de chaux sur le dos des esclaves fouettés... les tactiques d'embuscade de Cudjoe... la promesse de l'envolée extatique d'Alexander Bedward vers l'Afrique... la cruauté... la résistance... la grâce. Je ne suis pas étrangère à cette histoire — c'est une question de reconnaissance... de mémoire... d'émotion. Quand j'étudie le kapokier de Tom Cringle, je m'aperçois que je n'ai jamais rien pu supporter autour du cou, pas de collier... pas même un foulard.

Comment résumerais-tu ton expérience de l'enseignement, de l'apprentissage ?

C'est la meilleure chose que j'ai faite. C'est la seule chose que j'ai

done. That would be one way of saying it—but too tidy.

Say more, please.

I have told you the best I can. I am not a missionary, nor a Peace Corps volunteer. I have not been sent from somewhere. I came here because I could not go elsewhere. Perhaps you would judge all this too much an individual statement . . . a confession of need . . . personal . . . mawkish . . . I don't know.

Do you love these children?

Yes.

Would you kill for them?

Are we back to that?

Never mind. . . . If you have been here for the past two years, then you realize all progress is backward, and the gaps become wider. People are being left for dead—more than ever. You have no doubt observed these things? The increased madness, fury, in the streets?

Yes.

You know then that the rivers run red . . . and the underground aquifers are colored . . . from the waste of the bauxite mines and the aluminum refineries? We do not speak of past here, but present, future.

These things are connected.

Of course, but this is now . . . immediate. Children drink from this water every day of their lives. Women wash in it. Men fish from it. Brew coffee. Clean tripe. Immerse believers. The waste leaches into the land. And people for miles around are covered with a fine dust which invades them. Do you have any idea of the power of such things . . . for future generations . . . for the future of your homeland? Do you not realize that this is but one example of contamination from the outside? And you are but one infected nation? Do you realize the contempt in which you are held? And that your leaders invite it? What good is your history to a child with bone cancer . . . polio . . . TB . . . a damaged brain?

My history brought me to this room. The history I have

faite. C'est une façon de le dire — mais c'est trop propre.

Dis-nous en plus, s'il te plaît.

Je te l'ai dit du mieux que je peux. Je ne suis pas une missionnaire, ni une volontaire des Peace Corps. On ne m'a pas envoyée ici. Je suis venue parce que je ne pouvais aller nulle part ailleurs. Peut-être allez-vous juger que c'est une déclaration trop individuelle... un aveu de nécessité... personnelle... mièvre... je ne sais pas.

Est-ce que tu aimes ces enfants ?

Oui.

Tu tuerais pour eux ?

On recommence avec ça ?

Peu importe... Si tu étais ici ces deux dernières années, tu t'es rendu compte que le progrès ne fait que reculer, et que les écarts se creusent. On laisse les gens pour morts — plus que jamais. Tu l'as sans doute remarqué ? La folie qui augmente, la fureur, dans les rues ?

Oui.

Donc tu sais que les rivières rougissent... et que les nappes phréatiques se colorent... à cause des déchets des mines de bauxite et des affineries d'aluminium ? Nous ne parlons pas du passé là, mais du présent, de l'avenir.

Ces choses sont liées.

Évidemment, mais c'est un problème actuel... immédiat. Les enfants boivent cette eau chaque jour que Dieu fait. Les femmes y font la vaisselle. Les hommes y pêchent. Font du café. Nettoient des tripes. Baptisent les croyants. Les déchets s'infiltrant dans la terre. Et les gens à des kilomètres à la ronde sont recouverts d'une fine poussière qui les envahit. Est-ce que tu as la moindre idée du pouvoir de ces choses-là... pour les générations futures... pour l'avenir de votre pays ? Ne vois-tu pas que ce n'est qu'un des nombreux exemples de contamination extérieure ? Et que vous n'êtes qu'une des nombreuses nations infectées ? Est-ce que tu te rends compte à quel point on vous méprise ? Et que vos dirigeants invitent ce mépris ? À quoi sert votre histoire à un enfant qui a un cancer des os... la polio... la tuberculose... des lésions cérébrales ?

Mon histoire m'a conduite dans cette pièce. L'histoire que j'ai

learned . . . rather, recognized . . . since my return is something else. I know only that the loss, the forgetting . . . of resistance . . . of tenderness . . . is a terrible thing. Look, I want to restore something to these children. . . . And of course you are right: what good is imagination . . . whatever the imagery available to it . . . to a dying child? A child damaged beyond imagining? I . . . it seems I contradict myself.

Not really . . . what you feel is true.

Yes.

We—neither of us—want for these children a harsh, unnatural end.

No . . . I told you, you can use the land. I have given this a lot of thought.

You realize you could be held accountable . . . even if you claim not to be one of us.

Yes; I do.

You are certain, then?

My mother told me to help my people. At the moment this is the closest I can come.

Perhaps you will go further . . . sometimes it is the only way. We are not thugs, you know. . . . You speak of the knowledge of resistance . . . the loss of this knowledge. I ask you to think of Bishop. Rodney. Fanon. Lumumba. Malcolm. First. Luthuli. Garvey. Mxembe. Marley. Moloise. Think of these who are gone—and ask yourself how, why . . . ? Now, I must return to my own country. I will be back. *Amandla*.

The two women shook hands.

apprise... ou plutôt reconnue... depuis mon retour est différente. Tout ce que je sais c'est que la perte, l'oubli... de la résistance... de la tendresse... est une chose terrible. Écoute, je veux rendre quelque chose à ces enfants... Mais bien sûr, tu as raison : à quoi sert l'imagination... quel que soit le langage imagé qu'on utilise... à un enfant mourant ? Un enfant atteint au-delà de l'imagination ? Je... j'ai l'air de me contredire.

Pas vraiment... ce que tu ressens est sincère.

Oui.

Nous — aucun de nous — ne souhaite pour ces enfants une mort violente et prématurée.

Non... je vous l'ai dit, vous pouvez utiliser la terre. J'y ai beaucoup réfléchi.

Tu te rends compte que tu pourrais être tenue responsable... même si tu prétendais ne pas être l'une des nôtres.

Oui ; je m'en rends compte.

Tu en es sûre, donc ?

Ma mère m'a dit d'aider mon peuple. En ce moment, c'est le mieux que je puisse faire.

Peut-être que tu iras plus loin... parfois, c'est la seule façon. Nous ne sommes pas des brutes, tu sais... Tu parlais de la connaissance de la résistance... de la perte de cette connaissance. Je te demande de penser à Bishop. Rodney. Fanon. Lumumba. Malcolm. First. Luthuli. Garvey. Mxembe. Marley. Moloïse. Pense à eux, qui sont morts — et demande-toi comment, pourquoi...? Maintenant, il faut que je retourne dans mon propre pays. Je reviendrai.

Amandla.

Les deux femmes se serrèrent la main.

XI

FILM NOIR

*In their faint photographs
mottled with chemicals,
like the left hand of some spinster aunt,
they have drifted to the edge
of verandas in Whistlerian
white, their jungle turned tea-brown—
even its spiked palms—
their features pale,
to be pencilled in:
bone-collared gentlemen
with spiked mustaches
and their wives embayed in the wickerwork
armchairs, all looking colored
from the distance of a century
beginning to groan sideways from the ax stroke!*

*Their bay horses blacken
like spaniels, the front lawn a beige
carpet, brown moonlight and a moon
so fallow, so pharmaceutical
that her face is a feverish child's,
some malarial angel
whose grave still cowers
under a fury of bush,
a mania of wild yams
wrangling to hide her from ancestral churchyards.*

—DEREK WALCOTT, "Jean Rhys"

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carpet, brown moonlight and a moon
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some malarial angel
whose grave still covers
under a fury of bush,
a mania of wild yams
wrangling to hide her from ancestral churchyards.*

XI

FILM NOIR

*(Dans leurs pâles photographies
marbrées de produits chimiques,
comme la main gauche d'une tante célibataire,
ils ont dérivé vers le bord
des vérandas peintes en blanc
whistlérien, leur jungle devenue brun-thé —
même ses palmiers hérissés —
leurs traits blêmes,
à crayonner :
gentlemen en col amidonné
aux moustaches effisées
et leurs femmes cloîtrées dans les fauteuils
d'osier, paraissant tous colorés
depuis la distance d'un siècle
commençant à gémir sous le coup de hache !*

*Leurs chevaux bais noircissent
tels des épagneuls, la pelouse de devant
un tapis beige, clair de lune brun et une lune
tellement cireuse, tellement pharmaceutique
que son visage est celui d'un enfant fiévreux,
un ange de paludisme
dont la tombe se tapit encore
sous une furie de buisson,
une manie d'ignames sauvages
se querellant pour la cacher des cimetières ancestraux.)*

—DEREK WALCOTT, « Jean Rhys »

Clare slithered beneath her grandmother's house, drawing her head through widows' webs, pulling herself through the hard black leavings of rats, hands scraping against fragments of shells embedded in the ground, which signaled the explosive birth of the island. The sound of a scorpion readying its sting stopped her. She took a book, the closest thing to hand, and flattened her enemy. The ooze of the scorpion stained the already rat-bitten book, bits clinging where the cloth puckered from damp.

Under this house she found solace from the rest of the company. She found her mother's things from childhood—schoolbooks, thread-spool dollies, vehicles with wheels of shoe-polish tins. Her mother's schoolbooks—history, literature, geography—opened their wormed pages to a former world. Things, beings, existed in their rightful place—destiny, order were honored. God's impatient hand feared. Clare wiped the remains of the scorpion from the book and gath-

Clare se glissa sous la maison de sa grand-mère. En accrochant sa tête aux toiles d'araignées, elle avança entre les déchets noirs et durs laissés par les rats, tandis que ses mains s'éraflaient sur des morceaux de coquillage enfouis dans le sol, qui rappelaient la naissance explosive de l'île. Le bruit d'un scorpion qui préparait son dard l'arrêta. Elle prit un livre, la première chose qui lui tomba sous la main, et écrasa son ennemi. Le jus du scorpion tacha le livre rongé par les rats, des bouts restèrent collés là où l'humidité fronçait la toile.

Sous la maison, elle trouva du réconfort loin du reste de la compagnie. Elle découvrit les objets d'enfance de sa mère — livres d'école, poupées en bobines de fil, voitures aux roues en boîte de cirage. Les livres d'école de sa mère — histoire, littérature, géographie — ouvrirent leurs pages mangées aux vers sur un monde passé. Les choses, les êtres, existaient à la place qui leur revenait — le destin, l'ordre étaient respectés. La main impatiente de Dieu était crainte. Clare enleva du livre les restes du scorpion et rassembla

ered her mother's girlhood into a crocus sack. Working a broad piece of shell free of the earth, she began to scrape the packed ground.

"Girlfriend?" Harriet's voice traveled into the underground.

"I'm here," Clare called back.

"We need you out here now."

"Cyaan wait a few minutes?"

"No. There is a new plan. We will have to leave soon."

"I'll be there."

Clare tucked the ends of the crocus sack into the loosened earth, placing the piece of shell on top.

Jamaica, which is about an hour and a half south of Miami by jet, is a little smaller than Connecticut and has some of the most varied terrain in the world. It not only has all the beaches, sparkling clear water and foliage you would expect to find on a tropical island, but it also has mountains that rise to more than 7,000 feet, waterfalls, caves, wide open areas that resemble the African plain and even arid sections that will pass for desert.

In addition, it has an abundance of Spanish and British colonial buildings dating back to the 1500s. It has concrete and glass cities, elegant suburban homes, ramshackle slums and villages with thatched huts. It also has a racially mixed population of many hues and ethnic distinctions, which . . . includes a number of people willing to serve as extras. The national language is English, and you can drink the water.

—Special to *The New York Times*, August 27, 1984

Two whitemen sat in a rumshop, out of place, drinking too-pink daiquiris. The bartender, used to men ordering their rum straight, white, in water tumblers, was hard-pressed to make the likeness of a tourist drink and was heavy-handed with the grenadine, which he snatched from his wife's snowball cart, parked in the yard behind the shop. The cart bore

dans un sac de jute l'enfance de sa mère. Libérant de la terre un grand morceau de coquillage, elle se mit à racler le sol en terre battue.

« Ma chérie ? » La voix d'Harriet voyagea sous la terre.

« Je suis ici », répondit Clare.

« On a besoin de toi, là. »

« Ça peut pas attendre kèk minit? »

« Non. Le plan a changé. Il faut qu'on parte bientôt. »

« J'arrive. »

Clare enfonça le sac de jute dans la terre meuble, en posant le morceau de coquillage par dessus.

La Jamaïque, qui est à environ une heure et demi de vol au sud de Miami, est légèrement plus petite que le Connecticut et possède un des reliefs les plus variés au monde. Non seulement elle possède les plages, l'eau scintillante et la végétation que l'on s'attend à trouver sur une île tropicale, mais on y trouve également des montagnes qui s'élèvent à plus de 2000 mètres, des cascades, des grottes, de grands espaces ouverts qui ressemblent à la plaine africaine et même des zones arides désertiques.

De plus, elle regorge de bâtiments coloniaux espagnols et britanniques qui remontent au XVI^e siècle. On y trouve des villes de béton et de verre, d'élégants pavillons de banlieue, des quartiers pauvres délabrés ainsi que des villages de huttes de chaume. Sa population est mixte, composée de nombreuses nuances de couleurs et de distinctions ethniques et elle... comprend un grand nombre de personnes disposées à servir comme figurants. La langue nationale est l'anglais et l'eau y est potable.

— Supplément au *New York Times* du 27 août 1984

Deux blancs étaient assis dans un bar à rhum, où ils détonnaient, à boire des daiquiris trop roses. Le barman, habitué à voir les hommes commander leur rhum sec, blanc, dans des verres à eau, avait beaucoup de difficulté à préparer un semblant de boisson de touriste et il eut la main lourde sur la grenadine, qu'il chipa dans le chariot à glace de sa femme, parqué dans la cour derrière le bar. Le chariot portait

the legend SO JAH SEH and was waiting repair for a broken wheel.

"Christ . . . they call this a daiquiri? I thought they invented the bloody things."

"No . . . no, that was Cuba . . . before the revolution."

"Ever work there?"

"Yeah, babe. In 'fifty-eight. War movie. What a place . . . shit, you could get anything. Anything your little heart desired. . . ."

The two men sat at the only table in the rumshop, under a calendar sporting a naked woman and advertising assurance.

"Still, you'd think they'd have learned to make a decent one by now. . . . I wonder if I can get anything to eat?"

"I wouldn't."

Both men were suntanned and sunglassed. There was an impatience about them.

"Christ," said the first one again. "Christ . . . if they can't make a bloody daiquiri, how in hell are they going to provide us with what we need?"

"You think this place is bad . . . Jesus! Have I seen places . . . the Congo—"

"We're not going to hear about the African bloody Queen again."

"Sorry." The American pronounced the word with British intonation.

"And all the bloody dysentery and the bloody bugs and running out of bloody gin—or was that the film?"

"Okay . . . you made your point. As far as this place is concerned, don't worry. They'll manage. You can't beat the prices. And, besides, they need the money . . . real bad. They'll shape up . . . they have to. They're trapped. All tied up by the IMF. All thanks to Manley and his bleeding heart."

"We are the international expert, aren't we."

"I just love the way you English ask questions which are statements."

la légende SO JAH SEH et attendait qu'une de ses roues soit réparée.

« Bon dieu... ils appellent ça un daiquiri ? Je croyais que c'était eux qui avaient inventé ces saloperies. »

« Non... non, c'est Cuba... avant la révolution. »

« T'as déjà travaillé là-bas ? »

« Ouais, mon vieux. En cinquante-huit. Un film de guerre. Quel endroit... bordel, tu pouvais avoir tout ce que tu voulais. Tout ce que ton petit cœur désirait... »

Les deux hommes étaient assis à la seule table du bar à rhum, sous un calendrier exhibant une femme nue, publicité pour une assurance.

« Mais quand même, on pourrait espérer qu'ils aient appris comment en faire des corrects depuis lors... Je me demande s'il y a moyen de manger quelque chose ? »

« Si j'étais toi, je ne le ferais pas. »

Les deux hommes étaient bronzés et portaient des lunettes de soleil. Il y avait quelque chose d' impatient chez eux.

« Bon dieu, dit à nouveau le premier. Bon dieu... s'ils ne sont pas foutus de faire un daiquiri, comment vont-ils nous fournir ce dont on a besoin ? »

« Si c'est pas à ton goût... bordel ! J'en ai vu de ces endroits... le Congo... »

« On va pas encore se retaper ton histoire de Reine Africaine. »

« Désolé. » L'Américain prononça ce mot avec une intonation britannique.

« Et ces saloperies de dysenterie, d'insectes et de pénurie de gin — ou est-ce que c'était dans le film ? »

« C'est bon... j'ai compris. En ce qui concerne cette île, ne te tracasse pas. Ils vont gérer. Tu ne peux pas trouver meilleur marché. Et, en plus, ils ont besoin de cet argent... méchamment besoin. Ils seront à la hauteur... ils n'ont pas le choix. Ils sont pris au piège. Coincés par le FMI. Tout ça à cause de Manley et de son petit cœur sensible. »

« C'est nous les experts internationaux, n'est-ce pas. »

« J'adore la façon dont vous, les Anglais, vous posez des questions qui sont en fait des affirmations. »

"Sorry."

"And how you say sorry on any conceivable occasion."

"Sorry . . . we *are* bloody testy today. Is it the heat? Or this bloody drink that tastes like cough mixture?"

"Fuck. Can't you talk about anything besides your god-dam drink? It's nothing. I'm probably getting too old for the work is all . . . too much running around. Anyway, this gig shouldn't be too bad. As the saying goes, they need us a helluva lot more than we need them, babe. They'll even give us their fucking army if we need it—God help us—talk about the gang that couldn't shoot straight. They'll give it to us for a price. But not a bad price . . . not at all."

"With helicopters marked MADE IN USA?"

"Who cares? Just be grateful this isn't Haiti."

"Ah, yes, *The Comedians* . . . Richard Burton . . . Elizabeth Taylor . . . and you chasing zombies off the set."

"Fuck you. Just be glad you're working with someone who's got experience in this part of the world."

"About the army . . . there isn't any danger, is there? I mean, they *are* offering the army to us strictly as . . ."

"Ah, a real question. Now you want my expertise, huh? Just like the rest of the babies in this business. Afraid your butt might end up in a sling. . . . No. I don't think so, if you're asking what I think you're asking. No.

"Jamaicans will do anything for a buck. . . . Look around you . . . the hotels . . . the private resorts where you have to get an invite . . . the reggae festivals for white kids . . . Jesus! The cancer spas for rich people. Everyone from the hookers to the prime minister, babe. These people are used to selling themselves. I don't think they know from revolution. That brief shit with Manley was the exception. Oh, the poor followed him; the poor occasionally protest about prices, shortages, that kind of thing—"

"Where?"

"*New York Times*, business section, mostly."

"Oh."

"Yeah, but not any real threat . . . none at all. And even the poor . . . Jesus Christ! Where could you find peo-

« Désolé. »

« Et la façon dont vous dites désolé à n'importe quelle occasion. »

« Désolé... Merde, qu'est-ce qu'on est irritables aujourd'hui ! Est-ce que c'est la chaleur ? Ou cette saloperie de boisson qui a le goût d'un sirop pour la toux ? »

« Bordel. Y'a pas moyen que tu parles d'autre chose que de ta putain de boisson ? C'est pas grave. Je dois me faire trop vieux pour ce travail, c'est tout... à courir dans tous les sens. Enfin soit, ce job devrait être plutôt pas mal. Comme on dit, ils ont vachement plus besoin de nous que nous n'avons besoin d'eux, mon vieux. Ils nous donneront même leur putain d'armée si nous en avons besoin — que Dieu nous vienne en aide — y'a pas plus mauvais tireurs. Ils nous la donneront si on met le prix. Mais pas un mauvais prix... loin de là. »

« Avec des hélicoptères MADE IN USA ? »

« On s'en fout ! Sois déjà heureux que ce ne soit pas Haïti. »

« Ah, oui, *Les Comédiens*... Richard Burton... Elizabeth Taylor... et toi qui chassais les zombies du plateau. »

« Va te faire foutre. Sois content de travailler avec quelqu'un qui a de l'expérience dans cette partie du monde. »

« À propos de l'armée... ce n'est pas dangereux, n'est-ce pas ? Je veux dire, ils nous offrent leur armée uniquement comme... »

« Ah, une vraie question. Tu veux mon avis d'expert maintenant, hein ? Tout comme les autres bébés du business. Tu as peur que ton petit cul finisse en écharpe... Non, je ne crois pas, si tu me demandes ce que je crois que tu me demandes. Non. »

« Les Jamaïcains feraient n'importe quoi pour un dollar... T'as qu'à regarder autour de toi... les hôtels... les plages privées pour lesquelles il faut une invitation... les festivals de reggae pour gosses de blancs... Bordel ! Les établissements thermaux pour riches cancéreux. Tout le monde, des putes au Premier ministre, mon vieux. Ces gens sont habitués à se vendre. Je ne crois pas qu'ils aient déjà entendu parler de révolution. Cette connerie avec Manley est l'exception qui confirme la règle. Oui, les pauvres l'ont suivi ; les pauvres protestent de temps en temps à propos des prix, des pénuries, ce genre de trucs... »

« Où ça ? »

« *New York Times*, pages affaires, principalement. »

« Ah. »

« Ouais, mais il n'y a pas de vraie menace... pas de menace du tout. Et même les pauvres... Bon Dieu ! Où voudrais-tu trouver des gens

ple demonstrating, burning tires, blocking roads, and then accepting tips from tourists to let them pass?"

"Just about anywhere, I expect."

"Nah. I don't think so. Anyway, babe, about your fear, about revolution . . . the class system wouldn't permit. I mean, they're more English than the English in that regard. At least, the ones on top are. The ones who call the shots."

"Do you have any personal—"

"I worked here on *Dr. No*—didn't I tell you? Later, on a couple of TV shoots. . . . I had a buddy on *The Harder They Come*. I know what I'm talking about.

"But if there's trouble, we're well set. We have enough natives employed as scouts and advisers, so-called, that if there was a problem we'd be the first to know.

"These people may not know much, but they know how to protect him that's got the bucks.

"*Burn!* Now there was a movie."

His companion let him have his reminiscence. Brando. Martinique. Revolution. Sixties enthusiasm for turning everything upside down. Christ! This was the eighties.

"Still, it's a fucking marvelous place, isn't it." The Englishman broke the silence. "I found a location looks just like the fucking South of France, except for all the black bums on the beach."

"They'll stay away for a per diem."

"Right. We have an island. Landscape. Extras up the ass. Weather. And a fucking army complete with helicopters—"

"Say, where is that guy, anyway?"

"Why don't you check with the bartender; and while you're at it, get us a couple more of these—but tell him to go easy on the grenadine."

The American got up and walked over to the bar, a distance of about five feet—and that was stretching it. The bartender was rubbing a piece of rag across the zinc surface. "Sah?" the man acknowledged, not indicating by his tone, or manner, that he had heard any of the conversation.

qui manifestent, brûlent des pneus, coupent les routes, et en même temps, qui acceptent des pourboires de touristes pour les laisser passer ? »

« À peu près n'importe où, j'imagine. »

« Nan. Je crois pas. Quoi qu'il en soit, mon vieux, concernant ta peur d'une révolution... le système de classes ne le permettrait pas. Ce que je veux dire c'est qu'ils sont plus anglais que les Anglais à ce sujet. Du moins, ceux qui sont au pouvoir. Ceux qui mènent la barque. »

« Est-ce que tu as personnellement... »

« J'ai travaillé ici sur *Dr. No* — je ne te l'ai pas dit ? Ensuite, sur un ou deux tournages pour la TV... J'avais un pote sur *The Harder They Come*. Je sais de quoi je parle. »

« Mais, s'il y a du grabuge, nous sommes prêts. On a assez d'indigènes qui travaillent pour nous comme éclaireurs et conseillers, comme ils disent. Donc, en cas de problème, on serait les premiers au courant. »

« Ces gens-là ne savent peut-être pas grand-chose, mais ils savent comment protéger celui qui a les biftons. »

« *Queimada*, ça c'était un film. »

Son compagnon le laissa à ses souvenirs. Brando. La Martinique. La révolution. L'enthousiasme des années soixante pour tout mettre sens dessus dessous. Bon dieu ! Maintenant, c'était les années quatre-vingt.

« Mais putain, c'est quand même un endroit merveilleux, tu ne trouves pas ? », dit l'Anglais, brisant le silence. « J'ai déniché un coin pour tourner en extérieur qui ressemble comme deux gouttes d'eau au sud de la France, à l'exception des culs noirs sur la plage. »

« Ils resteront à l'écart en échange d'une indemnité journalière. »

« Parfait. On a une île. Le paysage. Des figurants par-dessus la tête. Le soleil. Et toute une putain d'armée avec des hélicoptères ... »

« Dis, à propos, où il est, le mec ? »

« Pourquoi n'irais-tu pas voir ça avec le barman ; et tant que tu y es, commande-nous deux autres de ces trucs — mais dis-lui d'y aller mollo sur la grenadine. »

L'Américain se leva et se dirigea vers le bar, à une distance d'environ deux mètres — en exagérant un peu. Le barman était occupé à astiquer la surface de zinc avec un chiffon. « Misié ? » demanda-t-il, rien ne laissant paraître dans son ton, ni dans son attitude, qu'il avait entendu la conversation.

"Give us a couple more of these, will you? And go easy on the grenadine."

The man poured white rum almost to the brim of each tumbler and slid in one ice cube each.

"Say, do you have a number where we can reach this guy?"

"Sah?" The bartender rubbed slowly across the zinc, carefully avoiding the two beading tumblers. Ice melting fast.

"The guy you scouted for us . . . the one we paid you fifty dollars for?"

"Oh, De Watchman . . . no, sah, De Watchman him don't have no numba, sah. But him will be in soon now . . . soon come, yes, sah."

"Well, we don't have all day."

"Yes, sah. Me understand, sah. But him will be ya, sah."

"How can you be so certain?"

"Oh, him come in ya so same time every day, sah. Him sweep, me give him to drink."

The American took charge. "Okay. But you better be right. If he's not here by the time we finish these, then we'll find us another boy, understand?"

"Indeed, sah."

"How much do we owe you?"

"Ah . . . four drink, sah? That will be twenty dollar, sah—American, not Jamaican. For a hundred more, me will throw in mi mumma and cure fe you cancer as well."

"You talk about finding a place like the South of France," the American said back at the table, assuming his companion had heard everything spoken at the bar. "Well," he continued, "that won't exactly fit with this shoot."

"Whose idea was it anyway?"

"You mean the whole thing?"

"To do a picture about them."

"Good story. Goodwill. You know."

"Some producer—"

"Some producer down here at someone's hideaway found

« Remets-nous en deux autres. Et vas-y mollo sur la grenadine. »

L'homme remplit deux verres à eau de rhum blanc et glissa un glaçon dans chacun.

« Dis, tu aurais un numéro auquel joindre ce gars ? »

« Misié ? » Le barman astiquait lentement le zinc, évitant avec soin les deux verres sur lesquels l'humidité perlait. La glace fondait vite.

« Le gars que tu as déniché pour nous... celui pour lequel on t'a payé cinquante dollar ? »

« Oh, Le Gardien... non, Misié. Le Gardien, il a pas niméro, Misié. Mais il sera bientôt là, oui, Misié. »

« Bien, parce qu'on a pas que ça à faire. »

« Oui, Misié. Mwen ka comprendre, Misié. Mais il va arriver, Misié. »

« Comment peux-tu en être aussi sûr ? »

« Oh, il vient ici tou lé jou à même là-la, Misié. Il vient balayer, et mwen ka servir lui à boire. »

L'Américain prit la situation en main. « Ok. Mais t'as intérêt à avoir raison. S'il n'est pas arrivé quand on a fini nos verres, on se trouvera un autre mec, compris ? »

« C'est ça même, Misié. »

« Combien est-ce qu'on te doit ? »

« Ah, quatre bwason, Misié ? Ça ka faire vingt dollars, Misié — américains, pas jamaïcains. Pour cent de plus, mwen ka offrir manman à mwen et mwen ka soigner cancer à vous. »

« T'as parlé d'un décor qui ressemble au sud de la France, » dit l'Américain de retour à la table, supposant que son compagnon avait entendu tout ce qui s'était dit au bar. « Eh bien, » poursuivit-il, « ça ne va pas vraiment coller avec ce tournage. »

« Au fait, c'est l'idée de qui ? »

« Tu parles de tout le truc ? »

« De faire un film sur eux. »

« Bon scénario. Bon fonds. Tu sais. »

« Un producteur ... »

« Un producteur qui était dans la planque de quelqu'un par ici s'est trouvé

a book to read himself to sleep and thought it would be a good idea. It's actually pretty solid. Lots of action."

"Right." He was unconvinced.

The doors to the rumshop, slatted and scalloped like the doors to a western saloon, swung open. Preceded by his iron walking staff, De Watchman entered, draped in his split crocus sack, snake-haired, walking up to the bar.

"Beg pardon, sah"—the bartender interrupted the two white men—"Here is de man me did tell you about."

At the bartender's signal, the two walked up to the bar to meet De Watchman.

"Okay." The American spoke. "You look pretty good to me. Can you howl for us?"

"Sah?"

"Howl, you know."

The man's stench began to fill the tiny establishment, and the two white men edged back as far as they could.

"Sah, if me should howl, den every dog in Kingston gwan come." He smiled at the men, toothless.

"Okay." The American relented. "But would you be willing to howl for the part? That is, if we put you in a movie, would you howl for us?"

"Sah?"

"A movie. You know. You have seen a movie, haven't you?"

"I don't know, sah."

"Jesus Christ!"

"No need fe call him name, sah."

"No; okay. I think you'll be fine. Your hair, the look in your eyes. Look, Brian. Look, Watchman, I don't want you to change a thing. We'll pick you up here in one week—understand? Same time. There's a hundred dollars for you if you come with us."

"What you want me fe do, sah?"

"Just sit in a tree and howl. That's all. You can do that, can't you?"

"Yes, sah."

*

un livre à lire pour s'endormir et il a pensé que ce serait une bonne idée. À vrai dire, c'est plutôt pas mal. Bourré d'action. »

« Ouais. » Il n'était pas convaincu.

Les portes du bar à rhum, aux lamelles semblables à celles d'un saloon de western, s'ouvrirent en battant. Précédé de sa canne de fer, Le Gardien entra, drapé de son sac de jute déchiré, la chevelure gorgonesque, et se dirigea vers le bar.

« Excusez-mwen, Misié » — le barman interrompit les deux hommes blancs — « C'est le misié mwen té parler à vous. »

Au signal du barman, les deux hommes se dirigèrent vers le bar pour rencontrer Le Gardien.

« Bien. » C'était l'Américain qui parlait. « Tu m'as l'air très bien. Tu pourrais hurler pour nous ? »

« Misié ? »

« Hurler, tu sais. »

La puanteur de l'homme commençait à se répandre dans le petit établissement, et les deux hommes blancs reculaient petit à petit, aussi loin qu'ils le pouvaient.

« Misié, si mwen ka hurler, tout chyen Kingston ké arriver. » Il adressa un sourire édenté aux deux hommes.

« Bien. » L'Américain céda. « Mais est-ce que tu serais prêt à hurler pour le rôle ? C'est-à-dire, si on te mettait dans un film, tu hurlerais pour nous ? »

« Misié ? »

« Un film. Tu sais. T'as déjà vu un film, non ? »

« Mwen pas savoir, Misié. »

« Nom de Dieu ! »

« Pas jurer lui comme ça, Misié. »

« Non ; c'est bon. Je crois que tu seras parfait. Tes cheveux, ce regard dans tes yeux. Écoute, Brian. Écoute, Gardien, je ne veux pas que tu changes quoi que ce soit. On viendra te prendre ici dans une semaine — compris ? Même heure. Il y a cent dollars pour toi si tu viens avec nous. »

« Ka vous vouloir mwen faire, Misié ? »

« Juste t'asseoir dans un arbre et hurler. C'est tout. T'es capable de faire ça, non ? »

« Pas ni pwoblèm, Misié. »

*

The truck had reached its destination. The group got off, quickly, gathered their weapons, and set off into bush. It was night. Dark and cool. The air thin. Harriet grasped Clare's hand. Walk safe, girlfriend, walk safe. Clare squeezed her friend's hand in return and moved off on her own.

As they lay in preparation for their act, hidden by dark and green, separate, silent—as silent as Maroons—they watched the scene below them. The valley was lit by a harsh, unnatural light, sending deep shadows into the hollows of landscape, creating false contrasts. They lay in night, beneath them was day. On a flat, cleared space in this light people mingled in old-fashioned dress. Hovering above these anachronistic people men sat on cranes, shouting directions, advising them, the ones below, the actors, on movement, carriage, how things had been in Jamaica several hundred years before. They were a lively, busy crowd.

"Let's go, people! Let's make it real!" The people stopped moving. "Action!"

Two figures stood out in the costumed group. One, a woman, the actress called in whenever someone was needed to play a Black heroine, any Black heroine, whether Sojourner Truth or Bessie Smith, this woman wore a pair of leather breeches and a silk shirt—designer's notion of the clothes that Nanny wore. Dear Nanny, the Coromantee warrior, leader of the Windward Maroons, whom one book described as an old woman naked except for a necklace made from the teeth of whitemen—sent by the orishas to deliver her people. Wild Nanny, sporting furies through the Blue Mountains. Old. Dark. Small. But such detail was out of the question, given these people even knew the truth. Or cared. Facing the elegant actress was a strapping man, former heavyweight or running back, dressed as Cudjoe, tiny humpbacked soul.

These two spoke back and forth, exchanging phrases of love in the screenwriter's version of Coromantee—which was, for all intents and purposes, pidgin. The dialogue coach a retired civil servant.

Clare was lying flat in a bitterbush.

Le camion avait atteint sa destination. Le groupe descendit, rapidement, rassembla les armes, et s'enfonça dans les broussailles. Il faisait nuit. Sombre et frais. L'air était léger. Harriet saisit la main de Clare. Prends garde à toi, mon amie, prends garde à toi. Clare serra en retour la main de son amie et partit de son côté.

Tandis qu'ils étaient couchés en préparation à leur action, cachés par l'obscurité et la verdure, séparés, silencieux — aussi silencieux que des Marrons — ils regardaient la scène en contrebas. La vallée était éclairée par une lumière artificielle crue, qui envoyait des ombres profondes dans les creux du paysage, créant de faux contrastes. Ils étaient couchés dans la nuit, au-dessous se trouvait le jour. Dans une zone plane et dégagée illuminée par cette lumière, des gens vêtus de façon désuète se mêlaient les uns aux autres. Voltigeant au-dessus de ces anachronismes vivants, des hommes étaient assis sur des grues, à crier des instructions, leur donnant des conseils, à ceux en dessous, les acteurs, sur leurs mouvements, leur maintien, la façon dont c'était en Jamaïque plusieurs siècles auparavant. Ils formaient une foule vivante et affairée.

« Allez, tout le monde ! Donnons vie à tout ça ! » Les gens arrêtaient de bouger. « Action ! »

Deux silhouettes se détachaient du reste du groupe costumé. Une d'elles, une femme, l'actrice qu'on appelait à chaque fois qu'il fallait quelqu'un pour jouer le rôle d'une héroïne noire, n'importe quelle héroïne noire, que ce soit Sojourner Truth ou Bessie Smith, cette femme portait une culotte de cheval et une chemise en soie — la vision qu'avait le styliste des vêtements que portait Nanny. Chère Nanny, la guerrière coromantine, chef des Marrons du vent, qu'un livre décrivait comme une vieille femme nue à l'exception d'un collier fait de dents d'hommes blancs — envoyée par les orishas pour libérer son peuple. Farouche Nanny, poursuivant des furies dans les Montagnes Bleues. Vieille. Sombre. Petite. Mais de tels détails étaient négligés, étant donné que ces gens ne connaissaient pas la vérité. Ni ne s'en préoccupaient. Un homme costaud faisait face à l'élégante actrice, un ancien poids lourd ou quarter back, habillé en Cudjoe, un minuscule bossu.

Ces deux-là parlaient chacun à leur tour, échangeant des expressions d'amour dans la version du coromantin imaginée par le scénariste — en fin de compte, du sabir. Le répétiteur des dialogues était un fonctionnaire à la retraite.

Clare était couchée à plat ventre dans un buisson de géri tout.

To the side of the scene, beyond the principals, beneath the gaze of the technical people, in the fiercely lit night, stood De Watchman. Got up as Sasabonsam. Forest God. His human body covered in a suit of long red hair, fiery, thick. Lord Jesus he was hot. Sweat making the costume stick to his naked skin.

"In the tree, man, up in the tree!" The director shouted through his bullhorn from the crane. "We're going to shoot the scene where the monster attacks Nanny, and Cudjoe rescues her."

De Watchman hauled his heavy hot self into the breadfruit tree and dangled his legs, waiting further direction. The bright-green fruit swung around him, some dropping as the tree settled with his weight.

"Howl!"

"Sah?"

"Howl! Howl! I want you to bellow as loud as you can. Try to wake the dead. . . . Remember, you're not human. Action!"

De Watchman complied, as they had rehearsed him, and the air of the valley was split with his huge wails. Clare imagined she could feel them through her belly, resting on the earth. His eyes, fitted with lenses, reflecting red, a nocturnal glare, as the light suddenly dimmed. He became the focus, his bellows carrying into the darkening country.

Then the light was gone. And the people hidden in the bush, waiting for the soft signal of the abeng, were confused. This was not meant to happen; it had not been in the plan.

Sasabonsam did not let up in the pitch dark. Had his noise extinguished light? His howls became larger, longer—for a time his noise masked other noises. Of the actors and technicians, retreating the scene and locking themselves in trailers, as they had been warned. Someone opened a bottle of rum and passed it hand to hand, as they sat on the floor of an Airstream, waiting for this to pass.

Those hidden in the bush could do little but listen to the chaos of the forest god, until a new sound drowned him

Sur le côté du décor, derrière les acteurs principaux, sous le regard des techniciens, dans la nuit féroce­ment éclairée, se tenait Le Gardien. Déguisé en Sasabonsam. Dieu de la forêt. Son corps humain recouvert d'un costume de longs poils rouges, flamboyants, épais. Bon Dieu qu'il avait chaud. La sueur faisait coller le costume à sa peau nue.

« Dans l'arbre, man, monte dans l'arbre ! » Le réalisateur criait dans son mégaphone du haut de sa grue. « On va filmer la scène où le monstre attaque Nanny, et où Cudjoe vient la sauver. »

Le Gardien hissa sa lourde carcasse en nage dans l'arbre à pain et laissa pendre ses jambes en attendant d'autres instructions. Les fruits d'un vert vif se balan­çaient autour de lui, certains tombaient comme l'arbre s'accommodait à son poids.

« Hurle ! »

« Misié ? »

« Hurle ! Hurle ! Je veux que tu mugisses aussi fort que tu peux. Essaie de réveiller les morts... Souviens-toi, tu n'es pas humain. Action ! »

Le Gardien s'exécuta, comme on le lui avait fait répéter, et l'air de la vallée fut déchiré par ses hurlements terribles. Clare imagina qu'elle pouvait les sentir dans son ventre, couchée sur la terre. Les yeux du Gardien, pourvus de lentilles aux reflets rouges, renvoyaient un regard nocturne, comme la lumière déclinait soudainement. Il devint le centre d'attention, ses hurlements se propageant dans le paysage qui s'obscurcissait.

Puis la lumière disparut. Et la confusion s'empara des gens cachés dans les broussailles, dans l'attente du doux signal du lambi. Ce n'était pas censé arriver ; ça ne faisait pas partie du plan.

Sasabonsam ne s'arrêta pas dans la nuit noire. Ses hurlements avaient-ils éteint la lumière ? Ils devenaient plus forts, plus longs — pendant un moment, le bruit qu'il produisait couvrit tout autre bruit. Ceux des acteurs et des techniciens, qui fuyaient le plateau et s'enfermaient dans leurs caravanes, comme on leur avait dit de le faire. Quelqu'un ouvrit une bouteille de rhum et la fit passer de main en main, tandis qu'ils étaient assis sur le sol d'une Airstream, en attendant que ça passe.

Ceux qui étaient cachés dans les broussailles ne pouvaient pas faire grand-chose d'autre que d'écouter le chaos du dieu forêt, jusqu'à ce qu'un nouveau bruit couvre le sien.

out. And lights came over them from above. Who had been the quashee? some asked. Lights played and skidded across their hiding places, as helicopters spun into the valley. Lights sliding over, guns hot. Spraying the breadfruit tree. Sasa-bonsam fell, silent. Spraying across the bushes.

Some returned the fire—but were no match for the invaders. Some could not—surprise and sadness held them still. There was no time left to them.

Shots found the bitterbush.

O je t'adore, O je t'adore, O je t'adore
Poor-me-one, poor-me-one, poor-me-one
Tres-tontos-son, tres-tontos-son, tres-tontos-son
Kitty-woo, kitty-woo, kitty-woo
Whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip
Back-raw, back-raw, back-raw, back-raw, back-raw

She remembered language.

Then it was gone.

cutacoo, cutacoo, cutacoo
coo, cu, cu, coo
coo, cu, cu, coo
piju, piju, piju
cuk, cuk, cuk, cuk
tuc-tuc-tuc-tuc-tuc
eee-kah, eee-kah, eee-kah
krrr
krrr
krrr-re-ek
cawak, cawak, cawak
hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo
be be be be be be be be be be be be be be be
kut ktu ktu kut ktu ktu
cwa cwa cwa cwaah cwaah cwaah

Day broke.

Et des lumières apparurent au-dessus d'eux. Qui avait été le quashee ? demanda quelqu'un. Des lumières jouaient et glissaient sur leurs cachettes, tandis que les hélicoptères tournoyaient dans la vallée. Des lumières qui glissaient, des fusils brûlants. Pulvérisant l'arbre à pain. Sasabonsam tomba, sans bruit. Pulvérisant les broussailles.

Certains répliquèrent — mais ils ne faisaient pas le poids contre les envahisseurs. Certains ne purent pas le faire — la surprise et la tristesse les immobilisaient. Il ne leur restait plus de temps.

Les balles trouvèrent le buisson de géri tout.

Ô je t'adore, Ô je t'adore, Ô je t'adore

Pauvre-de-moi, pauvre-de-moi, pauvre-de-moi

Tres-tontos-son, tres-tontos-son, tres-tontos-son

Kitty-woo, kitty-woo, kitty-woo

Whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip-whip

Back-raw, back-raw, back-raw, back-raw, back-raw

Elle se souvint de la langue.

Puis elle n'était plus là.

cutacou-cutacou-cutacou

cou, cu, cu, cou

piju, piju, piju

cuk, cuk, cuk, cuk

tuc-tuc-tuc-tuc-tuc

iii-kah, iii-kah, iii-kah

krrr

krrr

krr-re-ek

cawak, cawak, cawak

hou hou hou hou hou hou hou hou hou

be be be be be be be be be be be be be be be

kut ktu ktu kut ktu ktu

cwa cwa cwa cwaah cwaah cwaah

Le jour se leva.

Glossaire

CRÉOLE GUADELOUPÉEN

A fòs fréquenter chyen, ou ka attraper puces : À force de fréquenter les chiens, tu attrapes des puces

à prézan : maintenant

an : dans, de

antouka : en tout cas

bag : bague

biten : truc

bwason : boisson

chyen : chien

délinkans : délinquance

dlo : eau

esklav : esclave

fi : fille

frè : frère

gôj : gorge

jou : jour

ka¹ : *marque du présent*

ka² : quoi, qu'est-ce que

kann : cannes à sucre

kaz : maison

kèk : quelques

kèk-fwa : parfois

komandè : surveillant d'esclaves

kon : comme

lè : heure

madanm : madame

maji : magie

mango : mangue

manman : maman, mère

méchansté : méchanceté

mèt : maître

minit : minute

misié : monsieur, homme

moun : les gens

mové zèb : mauvaises herbes

mwèn : je, moi

niméro : numéro

nèg : nègre

nòmàl : normal

on : un(e)

ou : tu

paks : parce que

pèsonn : personne

piquer : poignarder, tuer

pou : pour

pwoblèm : problème

rèd : dur

sintin : certain

tchiper : *Action qui consiste à produire un son particulier en aspirant le stock de salive présent derrière les dents afin d'exprimer le dégoût, l'irritation ou l'impatience. Ce geste impertinent, originaire d'Afrique, est très répandu dans les Antilles.*

té : *marque du passé*

ti : petit

tou lé jou : tous les jours

tout : tous, toutes

tout moun : tout le monde

vi : vie

'y : lui, elle

zyé : yeux

RÉFÉRENCES AUX CULTURES JAMAÏCAINE ET AMÉRICAINE

backra : Blanc; identifié comme blanc. Probablement du mot africain *mbakara*, celui qui entoure ou gouverne. Certains Jamaïcains pensent que ce mot est dérivé de *back-ran*, l'état du dos d'un esclave après avoir été fouetté. (p. 76)

cotta : Coussin de tissu rond, utilisé pour équilibrer des charges sur la tête. (p. 32)

duppy : Fantôme, esprit (p. 24, 96)

eidon : L'esprit ou les esprits des bébés non baptisés. (p. 82)

fufu : Igname jaune; Ashanti. (p. 82)

ibijau : Chouette. (p. 82)

quashee : Traître; du nom de l'esclave Quashee. (p. 126)

Rhyging : Célèbre bandit jamaïcain. (p. 52)

cartes Delaney : Les cartes Delaney constituent une méthode de gestion des classes, utilisée dans la zone urbaine de New York depuis les années 1950. Chaque carte reprend le nom d'un élève, ainsi que son adresse, numéro de téléphone et autres informations importantes. (p. 68)

Tante Jemima : Aunt Jemima (« Tante Jemima » en français) est une marque américaine de produits pour le petit-déjeuner, dont l'image est une domestique afro-américaine souriante. En anglais américain, ce terme est passé dans l'usage courant pour faire référence à la version féminine de l'Oncle Tom, et dans l'argot, « Aunt Jemima » désigne une servante noire qui est particulièrement servile et concernée par les intérêts des blancs. (p. 34)

COMMENTARY

INTRODUCTION

THE AUTHOR

Michelle Cliff is a Jamaican-American writer born in Kingston on November 2, 1946 into a mulatto family. When she was three years old, she and her family moved to New York in search of better economic conditions. Seven years later, the Cliffs returned to Jamaica for a few years. They then moved back to New York where Michelle eventually graduated from high school and from the Wagner College on Staten Island. Following her graduation, she went to England, earned a bachelor's degree at the Warburg Institute and completed a master's degree in philosophy at the University of London with a dissertation on the Italian Renaissance. There she also began the process of coming out as a lesbian and became involved in the women's movement. Back to the United States, Cliff worked in publishing and teaching and began writing poetry. Her first collection of prose poems, called *Claiming An Identity They Taught Me To Despise*, was published in 1980, and was supplemented in 1985 by *The Land Of Look Behind*, a second collection of prose poetry. In 1984, her first novel *Abeng* came out. Its sequel, called *No Telephone to Heaven*, followed in 1987. Cliff's third and most recent novel is called *Free Enterprise* and was published in 1993. Michelle Cliff is also the author of the collections of short stories, *Bodies Of Water* in 1990 and *The Store Of A Million Items* in 1998, as well as numerous works of criticism. She has frequently contributed to publications such as "Ms." and "The Village Voice". More recently, Cliff published in 2008 a work of non-fiction entitled *If I Could Write This in Fire*, which includes personal essays and translations of poetry by Federico García Lorca and Pier Paolo Pasolini, and it was followed in 2009 by *Everything is Now: New and Collected Stories*, a third collection of short stories. Her forthcoming publications are the novel *Into The Interior* and the essay collection *Apocalypso*. Cliff has been the recipient of many fellowships at several universities and she has taught creative writing at Stanford, the University of Massachusetts, and the University of California among others. She now lives in Santa Cruz, California, with her friend, the poet Adrienne Rich.

Cliff's work is strongly tinged with autobiography as it deals with her own experiences growing up in post-colonial Jamaica and the United States. Born with a fair skin, wavy hair and green eyes, she was raised to think of herself as white and that she should take advantage of this 'privilege', disowning her coloured heritage. As an adult, Cliff has chosen to revive her roots and claim "this identity she was taught to despise". Her work reflects her feeling of identity fragmentation and addresses the issues of racism, homophobia, family relations, and history as a

means of resistance.

THE NOVEL

No Telephone to Heaven is the sequel to Michelle Cliff's first novel *Abeng*. This second novel continues the story of her semi-autobiographical character Clare Savage, a light-skinned Jamaican in search of her identity. It recounts her adolescence and young adulthood in the United States, England and Jamaica, marked by her experiences of racism and loneliness. Through flashbacks, we discover her fragmented identity: born of a light-skinned father, proud descendent of an English slave owner, and a darker-skinned mother, whose deeper colour is the legacy of her Maroon ancestors, Clare feels divided between her father's ideal whiteness and the blackness her mother cherishes, and torn between the Western World and Jamaica. Over the course of encounters and experiences, she gradually approaches identity wholeness, whose climax is symbolized by her ultimate return to Jamaica and commitment into revolutionary struggle, but she dies before actually reaching this wholeness.

Short Summary of *No Telephone to Heaven*

When Clare is fourteen years old, her family migrates to the United States looking for better economic prospects. While Boy adapts to his country of adoption, Kitty is unable to find her place and feels terribly homesick. She eventually goes back to Jamaica with her younger daughter Jennie, leaving Clare and her husband behind. Clare spends the next few years in complete loneliness, her only comfort being the promise of her mother's return and the television. When Clare is nineteen, her mother dies of a brain haemorrhage and Jennie joins them in New York. After graduating college, Clare leaves her now remarried father and her junkie sister for England, where she starts on history studies. There she leads a studious and lonely life. During a Christmas holiday break in Jamaica, Clare meets Harry/Harriet, a transsexual who encourages Clare's political awakening. Back to England, she meets Bobby a Vietnam War veteran who suffers from the physical and mental after-effects of war. Together, they decide to travel Europe and Clare gives up her studies. When Clare tells him she might be pregnant, he leaves her without warning. Then Clare goes back to Jamaica, where she immerses herself in Jamaican culture and history and becomes a teacher. Through her friend Harriet, she eventually joins a clandestine rebel group that struggles for the poor and the oppressed. As the group is about to assail a film set, army helicopters attack the rebels and Clare dies.

Presentation of the Translated Chapters

Chapter III: The Dissolution of Mrs. White (p. 72–84)

After the death of Kitty's mother, nothing holds the Savage family in Jamaica, especially not their precarious economic situation, and in 1960 they leave for the United States. On their arrival in the South of the country, they have their first experience of American racism in a segregated motel. They finally arrive in New York, where Kitty's relatives welcome them. After a while, they find an apartment and jobs in a laundry. But, while Boy is happy with his new life, Kitty is distressed by the constant racism and hatred she encounters.

Chapter IV: White Chocolate (p. 87–106)

In the previous chapter, Paul H., a young Jamaican, and his family are killed by their garden boy, Christopher. During the night of the massacre, Paul attended a party at a friend's place, Buster Said (whose half brother/sister is a transsexual called Harry/Harriet), and slept with Clare. Back to his house, he discovers that his whole family has been murdered during the night. He then runs into his garden boy and asks him for help, not knowing that Christopher is actually the murderer, and he is killed in his turn. Christopher is an orphan who was raised in Kingston shantytown and whose family had been in the service of Paul's family for many years. His murderous act is motivated by his boss' refusal when he asks him for a patch of land to bury his grandmother.

This chapter alternates passages from different moments in Clare's life. In some of them, Clare is a grown woman who has come back to Jamaica and joined a revolutionary group. In others, she is in her twenties, a student in England, and she is spending her holidays in Jamaica. There are also flashbacks to her childhood in Jamaica and descriptions of her lonely adolescence in the United States.

Chapter VII: Magnanimous Warrior! (p. 163–164)

This short chapter focuses on the evolution of the Obeah woman's status in Jamaican society.

Chapter X: The Great Beast (p. 189–196)

After giving up her studies in London and travelling Europe with her boyfriend Bobby, Clare returns to Jamaica. There she spends her first days in hospital for a womb infection, which is the probable consequence of a miscarriage, and learns that she might be sterile. She starts teaching history in a secondary school and moves in with her friend Harriet—who is now simply Harriet and not Harry/Harriet anymore. Initiated by Harriet, Clare wants to join a clandestine

group of rebels whose intention is to serve the poor and the oppressed and bring some justice to their country. She has an interview with a member of the group.

Chapter XI: Film Noir (p. 199–208)

While Clare, Harriet and the other rebels are leaving Clare's grandmother's land, a film crew is preparing the shoot of a movie about the Maroons in Jamaica. Two producers are conversing in a bar, waiting for the Watchman to come, whom they have hired as an extra. The Watchman is Christopher's new name. He has never been punished for his crimes and has become a kind of mad prophet famous all over Kingston. During shooting, Clare and the rebel group are about to attack the film set when they are killed by army helicopters.

THE LINGUISTIC SITUATION OF JAMAICA: ENGLISH AND PATOIS

Jamaica's official language is English, but it cohabits with a recognized regional language, Jamaican Patois. This Patois developed in the 17th century when African slaves brought to the New World were in contact with the dialectal and vernacular forms of their British masters. While English is the lexical base of Patois, it also drew part of its lexicon from French, Spanish, Hindi, Arawak and the African languages spoken by the slaves. Contrary to some received ideas, Jamaican Patois is not a dialect of English but a language with its own grammar and vocabulary. However, given its status as a fundamentally oral language, Patois does not possess a standardized spelling system.

In order to understand the linguistic situation of Jamaica, it is necessary to have in mind that English and Patois do not live in two separate worlds but they intermingle, forming what we will call "Jamaica Talk"¹. Jamaica Talk has two main forms, each of them located at the end of a continuum. At the one end is the form that aims at Standard English or 'educated' English, while, at the other end, we find the folk talk, "the inherited talk of peasant and labourer, largely unaffected by education and its standards. This is what the linguist calls 'creolised' English, that is, an English learned incompletely in slave days, with a strong infusion of African influences, and continued traditionally in much the same form down to the present."² And between these two extremes are many intermediary modes, more or less marked with grammatical and lexical 'Jamaicanisms'. The usage of one variety or the other is essentially determined by education and the context. Educated English is the language of public life and business, while folk talk is oral and limited to private life and informal situations.

¹ Cassidy, *Jamaica Talk: Three Hundred Years of The English Language In Jamaica*, p. 2.

² Ibid., p. 2.

Michelle Cliff, who is as able to express herself in Standard English as in Patois, uses this skill in her novel. In my translation commentary, I thus had to refer to the different modes of the continuum but, because the linguistic situation of Jamaica is complex, it was difficult to designate them properly. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, I have chosen to refer to anything (sentences, words or spelling) that is foreign to the standard use of English and peculiar to Jamaica as 'Patois'.

WHY THIS TRANSLATION?

It is possible to wonder if the translation of a text was necessary, if it was legitimate to translate a text into a language, and therefore a culture, alien to its author, and if it was useful to bring to a culture a piece of another culture. This question is all the more relevant when we know that translation rhymes with treason, that it is always a distortion since it is impossible to transmit *exactly* the source text into a language and a culture that are not its own. But the undertaking, as unfaithful as it is, remains valid. Translation gives the text the opportunity to diffuse and to enrich the other culture with the glimpse of a different reality. Therefore, when one has read Cliff's novels, it is really surprising to discover that no French translation of her work has ever been published so far. Despite the critical acclaim, her novels, collections of poetry and essays remain largely unknown to the public. This is unfortunate because her texts, in addition to being beautifully written, tackle fundamental issues of post or neo-colonial societies and of the world in general, such as identity, class, sexism, racism, homophobia, erroneous or incomplete received versions of history, and resistance among others. This lack of translation and diffusion is all the more regrettable since, through her revision of history and her uncompromising presentation of the world that surrounds her, Michelle Cliff's desire is to touch as many people as possible. A committed writer, she truly believes in the necessity of educating people if we want things to change. I am therefore really glad to have translated a piece of her text into French and contributed, to some extent, to the diffusion of her novel and the broadening of her readership.

TRANSLATION DIFFICULTIES: MY STRATEGY

Any translator starting a new translation is faced sooner or later with difficulties he/she has to solve. To do this, he/she must make choices, sometimes motivated, sometimes arbitrary or instinctive. Some of these difficulties arise as the translating process goes along, independently of one another and the translator will have to treat them individually, but there are also some

recurrent problems for which it is necessary to determine a translation strategy from the beginning. In my translation of *No Telephone to Heaven*, I also had to take a certain course of action, and stick to it throughout my work so that the result was coherent and homogeneous.

Among the difficulties of literary translation for which strategic decisions are necessary, some are common to all translators, like the translation (or not) of characters' names, place names and cultural references, and some are inherent to French-English translation, which is the case of the rendering of 'you' either by 'tu' or 'vous', or the choice between 'passé composé', 'passé simple' and 'imparfait' for the English past tense.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the translation of the second-person personal pronoun 'you' was not complicated. The choice of the French pronoun 'tu' or 'vous' was determined by the context: in formal relations and dialogues between distant characters, I naturally opted for 'vous' while I used 'tu' to express familiarity.

The same does not apply to the translation of the English past tense in the narration. The translation of narrations written in the first person of past tense demands that the French-speaking translator chooses between 'passé simple' and 'passé composé', whose effects are really different. Indeed, the use of 'passé simple' is regarded as literary and connotes a bygone past whereas 'passé composé' is more natural in speech and does not create such distance between the reader and the story. But in the translation of *No Telephone to Heaven*, there is no such dilemma: the narrator is an omniscient third person, therefore it was necessary to use the ordinary tense for historical accounts, the 'passé simple'. On the other hand, the choice between 'passé simple' and 'imparfait' was sometimes problematic. In English, the past tense can have a perfective or an imperfective aspect, that is to say, describe an action viewed as a whole or describe habitual actions and ongoing states. (For ongoing actions, the tense that is used is the past progressive.) But in French, we use two different tenses to refer to these two different kinds of action: the 'imparfait' for the imperfective and the 'passé simple' for the perfective. Even if in general the English sentence leaves no doubt about the tense to use in French, there are cases when both the 'imparfait' and the 'passé simple' are possible. In these situations, the choice belongs to the translator who must trust his intuition. This is exactly what I did in my translation of Cliff's novel.

As for general translation difficulties such as characters' names, place names and cultural references, the decision to translate them or not depends on the translator's intention, the kind of text translated and the target readers. In my translation of *No Telephone to Heaven*, my strategy was to keep as many alien elements as possible, even when they were translatable. This decision was motivated by the fact that places and the cultures related to these places are very important in this novel that recounts the personal journey of emigrated characters who suffer from uprooting and feel the need to belong somewhere. It was Cliff's intention to write about Jamaica

and the United States, her two homelands, and I had to respect it. Nonetheless, there are situations in which preserving the foreignness had to take second place to the reader's comprehension, and a translation was therefore necessary. In the following translation commentary, I try to explain the cultural references the French-speaking reader might not know and justify the decision to translate them whenever I did translate them. With regard to the characters' names depicted in the novel, my strategy was the same because they are also related to the cultural context depicted in the novel.

Another problem I was confronted with is peculiar to any translation of a bilingual literary text: how to render the two different languages present in the source text into the target text? The answer to this question depends naturally on the text, the languages in question and the relationships between them, as well as on the translator's linguistic resources. In the case of the translation of *No Telephone to Heaven*, a Standard English text punctuated with elements of Jamaican Patois, the French translator is lucky because he/she has a solution to convey the creoleness of the original text and the frequent code-switching: the use of a Creole of the French Antilles. Indeed, the French Antilles and Jamaica have comparable socio-linguistic situations. In both regions of the Caribbean, a 'prestigious' European language cohabits with, and generally dominates, a Creole variety, and both Creoles result from the contact between the languages of the African slaves imported to the New World and their masters' metropolitan tongues. This resemblance is enough to validate a translation into French as the 'prestigious' language and French Creole as equivalent of Jamaican Patois. Now then, it is necessary to point out that there is not one French Creole but that each island possesses its own variety, in general very close to one another. The variety of Antillean Creole that appears in my translation is Guadelupian Creole, because the person who helped me to translate the passages into Creole is a young woman native of Guadeloupe. I have mentioned above that the translator's linguistic resources also influence the decision to translate a bilingual source text into a bilingual or a monolingual target text. Indeed, a French-speaking translator who does not master French Creole might at first envision a monolingual translation, and so did I. But it soon appeared to me unthinkable to deprive the translation of Cliff's novel of its creoleness and significant code-switching. The integration in *No Telephone to Heaven* of the unofficial and often despised Patois is a conscious choice on the Cliff's part. More than a mere question of realism, it reflects her desire to mark her text with the creoleness she cherishes. Furthermore, code-switching is a stylistic device that corresponds to the idea of fragmentation that impregnates her text. It was therefore essential not to lose the confrontation between the dominant language and the dominated one in the process of translation. Despite its inherent inaccuracy, my French-French Creole translation tried to overcome the difficulty of this bilingual text and render the cultural richness of Cliff's novel.

TRANSLATION COMMENTARY

In the following commentary, I deal with the specific translation difficulties that arose as I was translating *No Telephone to Heaven*, and the way I handled them. My intention is not to give an exhaustive account of all the obstacles I encountered, but rather provide representative examples of the novel's main problematic aspects and explain my translating strategy.

I. THE JAMAICAN ELEMENT

To begin with, I want to broach in my translation commentary the presence of the Jamaican element in *No Telephone to Heaven*. In this novel that takes place partly in Jamaica and whose main characters are native of this Caribbean island, the Jamaican language and culture are so important that I thought it wiser to treat them separately from the rest of the translation difficulties I was confronted with. Therefore, I will dedicate this first point to the examination of the different aspects of what I call 'the Jamaican element', that is to say, Patois and Jamaican cultural references. I illustrate with examples how I rendered Patois into Guadelupian Creole in my French translation and I give precisions regarding the references peculiar to Jamaican culture and the way I translated them—when I did.

1.1. Patois

As I have explained in the introductory part of this translation commentary, *No Telephone to Heaven* is a novel in Standard English strewn with words and sentences in Jamaican Patois.

For Cliff, inserting Patois in her novel is as much a way to show that this language inherited from the slaves is worthy to be of part of literature, as it is a means to reflect Jamaica's linguistic reality, where Patois is used by most of the population, to various degrees. Therefore, it is natural for Cliff to have her Jamaican characters express themselves in their island's language. Since Patois, by virtue of its oral nature, is usually limited to informal situations, it appears in the novel principally in the passages of dialogue. Practically all the interlocutors intervening in those dialogues are characters who also master English, when English is not simply their mother tongue, like Clare and her father, for example. The Patois used by Cliff's characters is thus an intermediate variety, very close to English, and actually quite easy to understand for the English-speaker. For instance, the Patois grammar that it appears in the novel differs only slightly from Standard English. We simply observe a systematic amputation of verb endings and the use of the Patois subject pronouns, like "me" in the first person and "him" in the third one. Among other examples, the use of the preposition "fe" instead of "to" and "for" is also noticeable. As for

Patois spelling in *No Telephone to Heaven*, even if we find many forms reflecting Jamaican pronunciation—like “den” (“then”) in which the sound “th” has become “d”, and the final “er” replaced by “a” in words like “bredda” and “numba”—in essentials, Cliff resorts to Standard English spelling. In the end, the number of Patois words used by Cliff is relatively restricted and these few terms are all appended in a glossary at the end of the novel, which ensures the complete comprehension of the English-speaking reader.

Generally speaking, when we look at the lexical, grammatical and orthographical choices made by Cliff throughout the novel, the impression emerges clearly that she integrated Patois following a certain logic and systematically resorting to the same processes. The recurrence of these phenomena, combined with the limited range of strictly Patois vocabulary, enables Cliff's reader to familiarize with this new information, assimilate it, and eventually continue his/her reading with always less difficulty.

Finally, however accessible to the reader, Patois, when used alternately with English, is also a means for Cliff to create stylistic contrast, as I explain in detail in the literary analysis following this translation commentary. Patois, the dominated language, contrasts with English, the dominant language. In opposition to the official and public English, it is the language of orality and familiarity. Through her bilingual dialogues, Cliff thus locates her characters according to their attachment to one language or the other and, in so doing, she supplies her reader with precious information about them. Considering the importance Patois assumes in Cliff's novel, it was essential to be faithful to that aspect of her work. But how could I recreate the effect achieved by Patois in my French translation?

1.1.1. Translation from Patois into Guadelupian Creole

My initial idea to transmit Patois and its effects in my translation was, as I have mentioned before, to use a variety of Creole from the French Antilles. However, this idea was very difficult to implement since I was working alone and did not master Creole. In the primary stages of the translating process, I thus resorted to a partial translation into Creole. My first strategy was to incorporate as many Creole words as possible in my text, but I preferred not to embark on improvised constructions that would imitate the Creole language and might have sounded like ‘petit-nègre’. Therefore my sole recourse to suggest the frequent code-switching in the text was to adopt a less formal register of language. I have thus translated the passages in Jamaican Patois into colloquial French, in order to transmit the familiarity Patois brings to the original text. Yet, this solution was not satisfactory because the contrast between familiar French and Standard French was not sufficiently obvious and the French-speaking reader missed the significant original bilingualism of Cliff's novel.

Consequently, I appealed to a resource-person native of Guadeloupe, whose mother tongue is French, but who writes and speaks Creole fluently. With her help, I was finally able to transpose the code-switching, without playing on the register of language. Following this second stage of translation, the presence of the Creole element was henceforth palpable, and like Patois in the original, it recreated in the French text the stylistic contrast that is dear to Cliff.

However, I had to carry out a third stage of translation of the Creole passages. Indeed, as my resource-person had presented it, Guadelupian Creole really handicapped the uninitiated reader's comprehension of the text, which was logical since Creole is a language in its own right, with its own grammar, vocabulary and spelling. Torn between the desire to respect my resource-person's work and the same desire to give the reader a text which was as readable as the original, I tried to find a happy medium. Therefore, despite my scruples to transform Creole, the language we find in my translation has been strongly Frenchified, which makes it a hybrid language. But, after all, aren't all languages hybrids?

As an illustration of the evolution of Creole in my text, the work done on page 21 provides an interesting comparison of the three stages of the translating process:

She left the big marble and granite building—**hard as dem heart hard**, she muttered—and walked over to the old Episcopal cemetery and sat on the grave of Marcus, FAITHFUL SERVANT. She wept. Then caught herself. **This t'ing a fact of life. Face it, gal. Your mama counsel you not to venture where you nuh welcome.** She took the subway back to the laundry. (p. 20)

1. *Elle quitta le grand bâtiment de marbre et de granite — aussi dur que leurs cœurs, marmonna-t-elle — et elle alla faire un saut dans le vieux cimetière épiscopal, s'assit sur la tombe de Marcus, FAITHFUL SERVANT. Elle pleura. Puis elle se ressaisit. Ça fait partie de la vie. Regarde les choses en face, mafi. Ta mère t'avait conseillé de ne pas t'aventurer là où on ne veut pas de toi. Elle prit le métro pour retourner à la blanchisserie.*
2. *Elle quitta le grand bâtiment de marbre et de granite — aussi rèd que leurs cœurs rèd, marmonna-t-elle — et elle alla faire un saut dans le vieux cimetière épiscopal, s'assit sur la tombe de Marcus, FAITHFUL SERVANT. Elle pleura. Puis elle se ressaisit. La vi konsa. Ouvè zyé aw ma fi. Manman-w té ja di-w pa ay la moun pa vlé-w. Elle prit le métro pour retourner à la blanchisserie.*
3. *Elle quitta le grand bâtiment de marbre et de granite — aussi rèd que leurs cœurs rèd, marmonna-t-elle — et elle alla faire un saut dans le vieux cimetière épiscopal, s'assit sur la tombe de Marcus, FAITHFUL SERVANT. Elle pleura. Puis elle se ressaisit. La vi comme ça. Ouvre tes zyé, ma fi. Ta manman t'a déjà dit pas aller où moun pas vouloir de toi. Elle prit le métro pour retourner à la blanchisserie.*

Hereafter, I intend to show in detail in what this hybrid Creole consists, with regard to both its vocabulary and grammar.

a) Vocabulary and Spelling

First, I would like to broach the translation focusing on vocabulary and the resulting difficulties.

While Antillean Creole borrowed a few words from African, Amerindian and colonial languages (English and Spanish in particular), French is its lexical base. The French-speaker might therefore expect Creole vocabulary not to be too difficult to understand. But actually, these borrowings from French have undergone, over the centuries, important phonological and semantic modifications, which have transformed them into fully-fledged new words, often difficult to identify for the French-speaker.

With regard to semantic modifications, we find in my translation such examples of words that have acquired a different meaning from the French term on which they formed and which must be considered as misleading false friends. It is, for instance, the case on page 74, where “piquer” has taken on the meaning of “to stab”.

Him will have to cut me to get it. (p. 74)

*Il devra **piquer** mwèn avant.*

Likewise, on the same page, “tuer mango” actually means “to pluck mangoes”.

Besides these semantic transformations, which are in the end relatively anecdotal in my work, Creole vocabulary mostly differs from French in its spelling, which reflects the phonological changes undergone by the French loan words. Like Jamaican Patois, Antillean Creole is also an essentially oral language and it does not have a standardized spelling system either. Similarly to the writers of Patois, the writers of Creole thus generally spell their language as they wish, adopting sometimes a spelling complying with French orthographical rules, sometimes a phonetic spelling which mirrors Antillean pronunciation(s). Nevertheless, there have been a number of standardization proposals, especially one made by the GEREC-F (Groupe d'études et de recherches en espace créole et francophone) which has offered, since the seventies, a spelling system close to phonetic transcription, and which, despite not being unanimous, is now widely used in the Antilles¹. So, according to that phonetic spelling which implies that every sound is transcribed by a single symbol, the sound [ã], for example, is always

¹ “L'écriture du Créole”

URL: <http://creoles.free.fr/Cours/ecriture.htm>

written “an” while the sound [k] is spelt “k”, and as we write the sound [s] with “s”, [ɛ] and [e] are respectively represented by the symbols “è” and “é”.

The argument defended by the writers of Creole who advocate a phonetic spelling, such as the one proposed by the GEREC-F, is that, Creole being a language in its own right, it would not be appropriate to apply the French spelling system to it, since French is another language, with another history and different demands. I am myself convinced of the validity of that position, and I wish I could have been faithful to it and have adopted such spelling in the relevant passages of my work. Unfortunately, this spelling departs so much from French that it makes it very difficult for the French-speaking reader to draw the parallel between the Creole words and their French cognates. For this reason, I deliberately chose to spell the majority of the vocabulary that appears in the passages where Creole intervenes according to French spelling, and to apply Creole spelling only to a limited number of words, easily understandable from the context or their resemblance with French. To cite only one example, I decided to write all the infinitives in their French form—the verb being a fundamental element of meaning in the sentence, without which it would be hard for the reader to understand it.

Likewise, when I had the choice between several Creole synonyms, I always opted for the word which was closest to French. For instance, I preferred “misié” to “boug-la”, just as I used “à prézan” instead of “jodijou”.

Finally, I must add that the words I chose to write in their Creole forms are generally sufficiently numerous to transmit the stylistic contrast existing in some passages of the original text. Moreover, in some cases, the presence of Creole would have actually passed unnoticed if I had not used this phonetic spelling, which is exemplified on page 44, for instance:

[...] no matter how many times it happened, and the happy few lost another member, they explained it away as an isolated incident, a single display of wuthlessness, of rude bwaihood, no more. (p. 44)

*[...] peu leur importait combien de fois cela arrivait, et combien de fois les privilégiés perdaient un de leurs membres, ils l'expliquaient comme un incident isolé, **une unique manifestation à méchansté, à délinkans**, rien de plus.*

In this example, Cliff chooses to spell the words “ruthlessness” and “boyhood” so as to reflect Jamaican pronunciation. In Antillean Creole, the equivalents of these two words, “méchansté” and “délinkans”, have undergone no major phonological alteration and they are thus pronounced like in French. But, thanks to Creole spelling, they stand out in the sentence and enable the reader to feel, like the English-speaking reader, the insertion of Creole in the narrative, which signals the intrusion of a little piece of free direct speech (the voice of the “happy few” seems to take over the narrator’s voice). In order to intensify the presence of Antillean accent in this

passage, my resource person also suggested the replacement of the preposition “de” with its Creole equivalent “a”.

This sentence on page 18 also illustrates this situation:

From one lickkle piece of gristle in me t'roat (p. 18)

*D'un **ti** morceau de cartilage dans ma **gôj***

To conclude this point, I must add that, as Cliff did with her original text, I also appended to my translation a glossary with all the Creole words found in my translation, whether they are different from French in spelling or meaning. Finally, I must also mention that the form in which these few Creole words appear was dictated by my resource person and it is also a phonetic spelling, very close to the one we find in the *Dictionnaire pratique du créole de Guadeloupe: Marie-Galante* by Henry Tourneux and Maurice Barbotin.

b) Grammar

The translation of syntactic constructions involving Creole grammar also deserves some explanation.

Antillean Creole grammar differs from French grammar in many respects, especially in its verb system, pronominal system, noun phrase formation and syntax. These grammatical features peculiar to the Creole language represent, like vocabulary, important obstacles which hamper the French-speaker's comprehension.

With the awareness of the efforts the reader must make to get access to the meaning of Creole sentences, I tried to limit the reading difficulty by minimizing the use of pure Creole constructions in my translation. But, after deciding to write most of the vocabulary in the Creole passages according to French spelling, it was quite necessary to preserve some foreign grammatical characteristics in order not to completely deprive these passages of the Creole mark. Following a line of conduct similar to Cliff's, I thus chose to keep certain elements of Creole grammar while I suppressed others, and all this as systematically as I could.

Among the different aspects of Creole grammar I deliberately used in my translation, Creole verb system is one of the most important. Creole verbs, unlike French ones, are not determined by inflectional affixation, but they are composed of a verbal base and a preverbal particle. Verb tenses are thus expressed by invariant particles that precede the verb: for example, “ka” indicates the action in progress, “ké” the future, while “té” marks the past. Of course, this is disconcerting for the French-speaker, who very often cannot lean on the Creole verbal base to understand this construction. But, since I chose to always use the French infinitive instead of the Creole verbal base, he/she can rely on the rest of the sentence and the context to grasp the general meaning of

the verb and the tense of the action. In my translation, I thus kept those preverbal particles, as this sentence on page 74 exemplifies:

One time she say she feel you would prosper here. She say is because you favor backra, and fe you Daddy. (p. 74)

*Un jour, elle a dit qu'elle sentait que ou **té réussir** ici. Elle a dit que c'est paks ou **ka ressembler** les backras et pou ton papa..*

Creole subject and object personal pronouns represent another reading difficulty, aggravated by their great recurrence. Like in French, Guadelupian Creole pronominal system has six persons, but no pronoun to express the polite “vous”: “an” and “mwen” (“I”, “me”), “ou” (singular “you”), “i” (“he”, “she”, “him”, “her”), “nou” (“we”, “us”), “zòt” (plural “you”) and “yo” (“they”, “them”). In my translation, it would have been possible to use all the elements of the Creole pronominal system, but I preferred to keep only those whose meaning is lit by the context and whose recurrence is sufficient to enable the reader to familiarize with them, “ou” and “mwen”. For instance, “ou” is used in the confrontation opposing Kitty and her husband on page 31, as well as on page 76, in the dialogue between Clare and her sister. In both cases, since the dialogues involve only two persons, very close to one another, it is rather easy to identify the Creole pronoun as expressing ‘tutoiement’. As for the first-person subject and object pronoun “mwen”, mostly found on pages 117 and 119, I preferred it to the most common “an” because its meaning is more easily identifiable for the French-speaker.

In the case of second and third-person singular object pronouns, these are attached to the verb with an apostrophe and they undergo some orthographical modifications: “ou” becomes “w” and “i” becomes “y”. Since this construction is really unfamiliar to the French-speaker, I only used it once, on page 31, because it was the only way to transmit the presence of Creole in that passage:

He put his arms around her and begged her just to be careful and not let Mr. B. catch **she**.

*Il mit ses bras autour d'elle et la supplia d'être prudente et de ne pas laisser Monsieur B. **attraper'y**.* (p. 31)

Moreover, I must add that, in Creole, all object pronouns always appear behind the verb. In some passages of my translation, I kept that peculiar word order, even if I did not use the Creole pronouns:

Him sweep, me give him to drink.

*Il vient balayer, et mwen **ka servir lui** à boire.* (p.118)

No need fe call him name, sah.

*Pas **jur**er lui comme ça Misié. (p. 120)*

With regard to possessive adjectives, they are identical to object pronouns. They are always located after the noun and preceded by the preposition “a” or “an”, except in the singular second and third persons. In that case, they are separated from the noun by an apostrophe, just like the object pronouns. Whenever I decided to keep the Creole pronoun, I wrote the preposition according to its French spelling “à”, as on page 29, for example:

Nuh gwan lose me job, bredda.

*J'vais pas perdre job **à mwen**, frè. (p. 29)*

Furthermore, the postposition of the determiner that we can notice above is a recurring phenomenon in Creole noun phrase formation. In Creole noun phrases, the definite article “la” comes after the noun, whatever its gender. In my text, I only kept a few examples of such postposition of the determiner, but we find one on page 117:

Oh, him come in ya so same time every day, sah.

*Oh, il vient ici tou lé jou à même **lè-la**, Missié. (p. 117)*

Incidentally, we can notice in the sentence above that “lé”, the Creole word for “hour”, has the distinctive feature of having included the French determiner that usually precedes it. The same happened with “dlo”, the Creole word for “water”, on page 75.

Another important difference from French can be found on page 119:

Sah, if me should howl, den every dog in Kingston gwan come.

*Misié, si mwen ka hurler, **tout chyen** Kingston ké arriver. (p. 119)*

“**Tout chyen**”, which means “every dog” or “all dogs”, exemplifies the Creole grammatical rule according to which nouns and adjectives do not agree in gender and number. But apart from this case, I chose to apply the plural mark to the words which required it.

Finally, Creole grammar also differs from French in its syntax, and in particular, in the construction of subordinate clause. In order not to increase further the reading difficulty of the sentences involving Creole, I did not apply Creole syntax to them. Yet, on my resource person’s advice, I kept the few typically Creole syntactic constructions that came naturally to her mind. The following two sentences are illustrations of Creole relative clauses, in which the relative pronoun is missing:

Here is de man me did tell you about.

C'est le misié mwen té parler à vous. (p. 119)

What you want me fe do, sah ?

Ka vous vouloir mwen faire, Misié ? (p. 119)

As for this last example, it is an infinitive clause, in which the intrusion of Creole grammar is marked by the absence of the preposition “de”, necessary in such French construction:

Your mama counsel you not to venture where you nuh welcome.

Ta manman t'a déjà dit pas aller où moun pas vouloir de toi. (p. 21)

Through all the translation choices I have examined above, I tried to transmit in my French text the presence of the Creole element, while making it as accessible as possible to the French-speaker. Naturally, I could be criticized for not following a logic as coherent and systematic as Cliff's, but my impression is that, to achieve that, I would probably need to fully master the Antillean language. Since I rubbed some of its characteristics, the Creole appearing in my translation cannot be considered as “real” Creole, but rather as an artificial hybrid adjusted to meet the French-speaking reader's needs. Although I lament this situation, as I chose to bring Antillean Creole closer to French, I have not only ensured the reader's comprehension, but I also tried to remain faithful to Cliff's text, in which Patois is also a literary construction which does not hamper its reading.

1.2. Jamaican Cultural References

In the English version of the novel, Michelle Cliff provides her reader with a glossary of Jamaican terms that are unfamiliar to her American audience. These terms are either Jamaican Patois words, or references to Jamaican culture, and especially to the island's colonial past, folklore and fauna and flora. In the glossary appended to my work, these cultural references are also listed, and their explanations are themselves translations or adaptations of Cliff's own glosses. It would have been possible to add more entries for the remaining unexplained cultural references, but I thought it not useful to favour the French-speaking reader with more information than the English-speaking reader. It was Michelle Cliff's desire to let some words unexplained and I had to respect her decision.

1.2.1. References to the colonial past of Jamaica

During three centuries, Jamaica was a colonial society. It is inevitable to find in its language the mark of this past. We find in *No Telephone to Heaven* many socio-historical references related to slavery. Some of these references are not peculiar only to Jamaica but to the whole Caribbean, which makes their translation very easy.

It is for example the case of the runaway slaves called “**Maroons**” (p. 38, 76) who are known in French as “Marrons”.

On page 30, Kitty calls her husband “**busha**”, a Jamaican word meaning “overseer”. In the French plantation societies, the man who supervised slaves was called “commandeur” and we also find this word under its Creole form “komandè”. This is the one I used.

“**Massa**”, on page 20 and 30, refers to the way the slaves called their “master”. In French Creole exists the word “mèt”, which I chose in my translation.

As for “**abeng**” (p. 122), this conch shell was used both by the overseers to call their slaves to work and by the slaves among themselves as a signal for rebellion or war and it gave its name to Michelle Cliff’s first novel². I translated it by “lambi”, a word used in the French Antilles to designate the *Strombus Gigas*, scientific name of the enormous gastropod.

The two following words are specific to Jamaica, but nonetheless, they have French equivalents:

“**Coromantee**” (p. 76, 120) is the ancestral language in which the Maroons in *No Telephone to Heaven* express themselves, a variant of the Twi tongue of the Ashanti. This word is derived from “Koromantine”, a coastal town of the Gold Coast (Ghana) from which the English exported many of their slaves. And used as an adjective, “Coromantee” is synonymous of native of the Gold Coast. Just like Michelle Cliff chose an anglicised spelling of this word known under many forms, I used the Frenchified spelling “coromantin”, which is not frequent but existing.

And the “**Windward Maroons**” (p. 120), that is to say the Maroons who settled in the eastern part of Jamaica, are “Marrons du Vent” in French.

Beside these socio-historical references that are ‘translatable’, there are terms I did not translate for two types of reason. Either because they do not have an equivalent in French or in French Creole, like the word “**quashee**” (p. 124), defined in the glossary at the end of *No Telephone to Heaven* as a “betrayal; from the slave Quashee”³, or the word of African origin “**cotta**” (p. 30, 58 and 64), this “round cushion of cloth, used to balance burdens on the head”⁴ and also used in the expression “to cut the cotta”, a colourful way to say “divorce” among the slaves. Or I did not translate them because it was preferable to keep these terms as they are in

² Cliff, *Abeng*, New York, Penguin, 1995. (1st ed. 1984)

³ Glossary of *No Telephone to Heaven*, p. 210.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

the original in order to preserve the text's incrustation in the Jamaican context. It is the case of "**backra**" on page 74. In the Jamaican class society, the word "backra" designates a white descending from the first colonists and belonging to the ruling class, and by extension, a white person in general. Even if there are equivalent terms in French Creole, like "béké" for instance, I found it more judicious not to lose this precise reference to Jamaican colonial society.

1.2.2. Folk, mythological and religious characters

In this novel that is also a recording of Jamaica's (unofficial) history, we find references to some important figures of Jamaican mythology, folklore and religions.

"**Oshun**" (p. 94) and "**Shango**" (p. 8 and 94) are "**Orishas**" (p. 120), that is to say, gods in the mythology of the West African Yoruba people. They are also worshipped today in the Cuban Santeria. Oshun reigns over love and fertility, while Shango is the god of thunder.

"**Myal-woman**" (p. 82) or "Myal man" is the name the West African Ashanti slaves gave to their priests in opposition to the practice of the Central African slaves that they used to call negatively with the Ashanti word "Obeah", meaning "sorcery". Thus according to this definition, "**Obeah woman**" (p. 82) is an evil sorceress. However, today the word "Obeah" is used in the West Indies to refer to religious practices, sorcery and folk (dark or good) magic from Central and West African origins. This syncretic religion arose from the combination of the slaves' traditional practices with their masters' Christian beliefs.

We find in the whole Caribbean similar religions originating from the meeting of ancestral African traditions and Christian traditions. There are obvious parallels to be drawn between Haitian voodoo, the Quimbois of the other French Antilles, Cuban Santeria and the Obeah of the British West Indies, to mention just a few. These religions also involve the belief in supernatural creatures, like the "**duppies**" (p. 22, 94) for example. A duppy is a ghost in Jamaican culture. Its equivalent in the folklore of the French Antilles is "zombi" or "zesprit". In my translation, I kept "duppy" as it is. I did not want to use "zombi" because this word, in the French language, is now simply synonymous of "living dead", with no known link with the voodoo from which it comes. And it was necessary, on page 94, for the term Clare mentions during her interview to be as foreign to the French-speaking reader as it is to the non Jamaican English-speaking reader. Moreover, on page 112, one of the two film producers uses the word "zombies" in English, which I translated as "zombies". The fact that Michelle Cliff used two different words according to the context reinforced my conviction that it was better to use "duppy" in the Jamaican context.

"**Old Hige**" (p. 22, 82) and "**Old Suck**" (p. 82) are two words referring, in the Obeah tradition, to an evil old woman who takes off her skin at night and flies into the air searching for fresh blood, especially new-borns' blood. This vampire is also described as having flames spurting

out of her armpits. In Quimbois for example, we find a similar creature: the “Soucougnan”, also called “Volant”. But in my translation I thought it better to ignore “Soucougnan”. First, because in French the word is masculine and it was important in the passages where this word appear to render it with a feminine word. Indeed, the whole chapter called “Magnanimous Warrior!” is dedicated to the Obeah woman. Moreover, even if the non Jamaican English-speaking reader does not know this figure of the island folklore, he can form a picture of her from the literal meaning of “Old Hige” (or “hag”) and “Old Suck”. The same does not apply to the non Creole French-speaking reader when faced with “Soucougnan”. For these reasons, I opted for a literal translation in French: “Old Hige” becomes “Vieille Sorcière” and “Old Suck” becomes “Vieux Vampire”.

“**Sasabonsam**” (p. 50, 122) is a forest monster in the Ashanti belief. “According to the Ashanti, the hairy Sasabonsam has large blood-shot eyes, long legs, and feet pointing both ways. Its favorite trick is to sit on the high branches of a tree and dangle its legs so as to entangle the unwary hunter.”⁵ In my translation, I kept his name as it is.

“**Anansi**” (p. 50, 94) is a trickster in the Ashanti culture and it has become one of the most important characters in West Indian and West African folklore. It is a spider, although often depicted as a man, and the hero of many tales. Anansi is also known under many other names such as Anase, Kweku Ananse, Anancy and Aunt Nancy in the United States. On page 50, it is called “Brer Anansi” and I translated it by “Frè Anansi”, using the French Creole for “frère”.

1.2.3. Vocabulary of fauna and flora

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the references to tropical flora are numerous in the passages dealing with Jamaica. Since this flora is common to other Caribbean islands, to the French Antilles among others, it was very easy to find equivalent terms in French.

The “**fufu**” (p. 80) is an edible paste made from cassava or maize flour mixed with boiled water, eaten in West and Central Africa. We also find it spelt as “foufou” in French.

The “**gunga**” (p. 80) is a grain legume cultivated in the tropical and sub-tropical countries of the world. In French, it is called either “pois cajan”, “ambrevade” or “pois d’Angole”. I chose the latter in my translation.

The “**breadfruit tree**” that appears on pages 122 and 124 is commonly translated by “arbre à pain”.

As for the “**silk cotton tree**” (p. 96), it is one of the largest trees in the tropical regions of America, and it is often found in French under the name of “bois coton”, “fromager”, or

⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of World Mythology* [Online]
URL: <http://www.enotes.com/wm-encyclopedia/sasabonsam>

“kapokier”. I opted for the latter solution because it appeared to me as the one that enabled most easily the reader to understand that it is a tree, which is not the case of “fromager”. It is worth noting that “**Tom Cringle’s silk cotton tree**” is a tree that was located in the Jamaican town of St. Catherine and which collapsed in 1971. It was named after *Tom Cringle’s Log*, a popular 19th century novel written by Michael Scott. It was used as a marker between plantations and as a directional aid on maps. Tom Cringle’s Cotton Tree was said to have been used as a hanging tree and that it was haunted by the duppies of the hanged men.

Another botanical term is “**bitterbush**” (p. 82, 120 and 124), a bush that grows in tropical regions such as Jamaica and whose scientific name is *Eupatorium Odoratum*. Its leaves are used in the preparation of a bitter tea with healing properties. The bitterbush is known in the whole Caribbean under various vernacular names. In the French Antilles, it is called “géri-tout”, “géri two vit”, “fléri nowèl”, “boule de neige” and “lang (a) chat”. The allusion to the fact that this bush blossoms at Christmas time had no place in the passages where this word appear, while, on the contrary, in the chapter dedicated to the Obeah woman, the medicinal qualities of the plant were in the foreground. Therefore I chose “géri tout”, a choice that even brings a light note of irony, accessible to any French-speaking reader, in the last pages of the novel. It is indeed under a bush of géri tout that the heroine Clare Savage dies.

Finally, there is also a reference to a representative of Jamaican fauna, the “**patoo**” on page 80. Patoos are nocturnal birds living in the tropical regions of South and Central America. They are also called “poor-me-ones”, which enables us to understand one of the bird calls in the last lines of the novel. Their name in French is “ibijaux”.

1.2.4. One expression

Beside the points examined above, there is in *No Telephone to Heaven* one expression peculiar to West Indian culture: “**to suck one’s teeth**”. On page 30, while quarrelling with her husband, Kitty Savage has this gesture, which is so common in Jamaica and yet completely unknown to most of us. It consists in doing a particular noise by sucking the saliva behind the teeth in order to express disgust, irritation or impatience. This impertinent gesture, probably a legacy of the African culture imported during slavery days, is as widely used in the French Antilles. There, it is called “tchipper” (also found as “tipper” or “tchouper”) with reference to the sound produced. Since Cliff ignored the onomatopoeic equivalents that also exist in Jamaican English, with verbs like “stchoops” and “chups”, I hesitated with a literal translation. But even if “sucer ses dents” might have been slightly more evocative to the French-speaking reader, it seemed more reasonable to use the perfectly Creole “tchipper” instead of a pure invention. In my text, I put the word between quotation marks and I provided its translation in my glossary.

1.2.5. One word

The word “**man**” used as an appellative appears very often in *No Telephone to Heaven*. In the dialogues in Standard English, I did not hesitate to translate it, either by “*mec*” or “*mon vieux*” for example. But when it intervenes in dialogues between characters expressing themselves in Patois, as it is the case between Clare and her sister on page 74 and between Kitty and Boy on page 28, my option was to keep the word “**man**” as it is in order to recall the Jamaican presence in these passages. Moreover, this word is also very common in French Creole.

II. AMERICAN CULTURAL REFERENCES

A large part of *No Telephone to Heaven* takes place in the United States, where the Savages migrated. It is therefore not surprising to find numerous references to American culture in the passages involved. Among these references, many of them are related to television and cinema, which are one of Clare’s passions. When she was a child in Jamaica, the movie projections were the only way to catch a glimpse of the outside world. In the United States, the telly was the lonely girl’s best friend: it was her sole company and way out as well as a means not to think of her missing mother.

2.1. Cinema references

As regards characters’ names and film titles, it was very easy to find their equivalent in French. Indeed, all these refer to popular movies of the thirties, forties, fifties, sixties and seventies that enjoyed international success and that were distributed in France and dubbed into French. All I had to do was take their French names from the Internet.

While film titles and characters are not problematic, some actors’ names are sometimes not as famous in French culture as Paul Newman (p. 52) and Shirley Temple’s (p. 52). In general, the context is enough to identify clearly the reference to an actor even if the French-speaking reader does not know it, but there is one passage, on page 14, where I had to add to some information because nothing in the sentence indicated that Michelle Cliff was referring to actresses of the thirties.

Inspired by Fay Bainter, Selena Royle, Jane Darwell, as Mr. B. sat in the Brooklyn Loews during the Depression, perfecting his English. (p. 14)

Inspirée par Fay Bainter, Selena Royle, Jane Darwell, les actrices que Monsieur B. avait vues enfant quand, pendant la Grande Dépression, il allait perfectionner son anglais au cinéma Loews de Brooklyn.

For the American reader who does not know these actresses, the allusion to the Brooklyn Loews is enough to understand the sentence, since, unlike the French-speaking reader, he/she probably knows that the Loews is a chain of cinema. This is why I made the sentence more explicit, adding further information about the movie theatre.

2.2. Other American cultural references

In “White Chocolate” and “The Dissolution of Mrs. White”, the two chapters dealing with the New York life of the Savage family, we also find many details of the American culture surrounding them, such as names of streets and neighbourhoods, brand names, and newspaper names. I did not translate these in order for Cliff’s text to keep its American roots. But there are some American references I had to translate in order to make them comprehensible in French.

On page 32, Kitty colours in Mrs. White’s face, the little White woman on the hint cards the laundry gives to its customers, and transforms her into a black woman, “her furious **Aunt Jemima**”. Aunt Jemima is an American brand of breakfast products, whose image is a smiling Afro-American maid, archetype of the mammy character. This term passed into ordinary usage to refer to the feminine version of Uncle Tom, and in slang, “Aunt Jemima” designates a Black servant who is especially servile and concerned with the interests of the Whites. While the reference is obvious for an American reader, it evokes nothing to the French-speaking reader. I wished to convey the image of the mammy figure in my translation, but unfortunately, there are no equivalent in French culture. If the gender of the character did not matter, I might have appealed to the famous butler Uncle Ben. But it was necessary for Mrs. White’s alter ego to be a woman. Therefore, I simply translated “Aunt Jemima” by “Tante Jemima”, and added it in the glossary.

On page 62, the principal explains to Clare and her father that her husband is a doctor who works for the “**public health service**”, the main division of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. My first intention was to use the French “official” equivalent but “Direction départementale des affaires sanitaires et sociales”, or its acronym DDASS, was too typical of France. I thus opted for the literal translation “service de santé publique”, which is clear and easy to understand for the French-speaking reader, and moreover used in Switzerland and Belgium.

As for the “**Delaney cards**” on page 66, I translated it by “cartes Delaney”. But I found it necessary to explain it in the glossary for the French-speaking reader, so that he/she could understand that these cards are not playing cards but a method of class management used in the metropolitan area of New York.

Finally, I also had to deal with a term coming from the American sports field, “**running-back**”, which appears on page 120 in the description of the actor who plays the role of Cudjoe. The “running-back” is “the position of a player on an American or Canadian football team who usually lines up in the offensive backfield.”⁶ In French, there is no translation for this word, except maybe for the vague “porteur de ballon”, which can be easily explained by the fact that American football is far from being as popular in the French-speaking world as soccer or rugby, for example. And for the same reason, most French-speakers do not know what this term refers to. In my translation, I thus had to give up the English word in order to ensure the reader’s comprehension, and find a more familiar equivalent, one that would also evoke a well-built athlete. After some hesitation with the more general “joueur de football américain”, I eventually chose to use “quarter back”, the name of another offensive and massive American football player, and which has the advantage of being very well-known to most French-speakers.

III. LEXICAL ADAPTATIONS

3.1. Quotations, proverbs and idioms

3.1.1. Epigraphs

Out of the eleven chapters of *No Telephone to Heaven*, seven are preceded by an epigraph, which is either a proverb, an hymn or a quotation. And among those I have translated, there is only one chapter, “Magnanimous Warrior!”, that is not introduced by an epigraph. The presence of all these cultural and intertextual references to other West Indian authors enables Michelle Cliff to complete or sum up what she wants to express in the following chapter. Moreover, by doing so, the author reveals what her influences are and of which tradition she feels part—a tradition of socially committed and anti-colonialist writers.

Since I found no existing French translation for the hymn and the proverbs, I had to translate them into French. As for the quotations, one of them comes from “Autre Saison”, a poem taken from Aimé Césaire’s collection *Les Armes miraculeuses* and it is given with the French original and an English translation. The other quotation is a poem by Derek Walcott “Jean Rhys”, taken from *The Fortunate Traveller*. A French translation exists for this work, entitled *Heureux Le Voyageur*, but I did not use it. It seemed to me more amusing to try this little stylistic exercise.

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Running_back

a) Hymns and proverbs

On page 8, the epigraph of third chapter of *No Telephone to Heaven* is the English translation of a Yoruban hymn dedicated to the thunder god Shàngó. Yoruba is a language of Nigerian origin spoken in the West Indies by the descendents of the slaves native of this African region. The meaning of the proverb being rather clear, I translated it literally, only modifying the order of the sentence elements (object and object complement) in order to give more rhythm to the sentence.

I have an assassin for a lover.—Yoruban hymn to Shàngó (p. 8)

J'ai pour amant un assassin.—Hymne yoruba à Shàngó

For the proverb introducing the tenth chapter (p. 84), I thought about giving it a completely literal translation, but I finally opted for the French expression “mourir de sa belle mort”.

No one black dies a natural death—JAMAICAN PROVERB (p. 84)

Aucun noir ne meurt de sa belle mort—PROVERBE JAMAÏCAIN

b) Quotations

On page 102, in Derek Walcott's poem that serves as an introduction to the novel's last chapter, the word “**spiked**” is repeated twice: “spiked palms” in the last line and “spike mustaches” in line 11. I would have preferred to keep this repetition in order to stick as close as possible to the original, but, unfortunately, it was very difficult to find a term applying both to palms and moustaches—“hérissé” being inappropriate to evoke the image of the well-stroked pointed moustache. Eventually, I translated “spiked palms” by “palmiers hérissés” and “spiked mustaches” by “moustaches effilées”. Another difficulty was “sideways” in line 15. Since it did not deprive the line of its meaning, I simply ignored it in my translation.

3.1.2. In the text

We also find idiomatic expressions and proverbs in the text itself, which are often characteristic of oral language. They can seldom be translated literally, but there exist equivalents in French, whose meaning is close or identical.

a) Proverbs

On page 16, Kitty Savage recalls a comment her mother, Miss Matie, often passed to her about her marriage: “**You lie wid dog, nuh mus' get up wid flea?**” It is an adaptation in Jamaican Patois of the English proverb “He that lies down with dogs shall rise up with fleas”, a

colourful way of saying that bad company corrupts morals. Fortunately, this proverb, which exists in French as “Qui se couche avec les chiens, se lève avec des puces”⁷, is also widely spread in Guadeloupe, where people say: “A fòs frékanté chyen, ou ka trapé pis.” In my text, I slightly modified the Creole proverb to make it easier to understand, but it nonetheless preserves its original creoleness.

You lie wid dog, nuh mus’ get up wid flea? (p.16)

A fòs fréquenter chyen, ou ka attraper puces, non ?

Whereas the “out of sight, out of mind” on page 58 posed no translation problem, the same does not apply to the proverb preceding it on the same page, “**Absence makes the heart grown fonder**”. A literal translation would have been possible, “L’absence rend le cœur plus tendre”, but the French-speaking reader might have not felt that it was a proverb, and I found it more interesting to find an existing proverb. In my searching, the two most common translations I found were “Loin des yeux, mais près du cœur” and La Rochefoucauld’s maxim “L’absence diminue les médiocres passions et augmente les grandes, comme le vent éteint les bougies et allume le feu”. The first proverb being only a derivative of “Loin des yeux, loin du cœur” that appears a few lines below in the novel, I would have really impoverished the text if I had chosen this solution. As for the French moralist’s maxim, it seemed too long, too literary and too passionate in the context. Finally, I used a proverb which is maybe less obvious because it is from Chinese origin, but I found it nice and more adequate. It is a simple sentence, easily identifiable as a proverb and that conveys Kitty’s half-heartedness:

Absence makes the heart grow fonder. (p. 58)

Les cœurs les plus proches ne sont pas ceux qui se touchent.

b) Expressions

To start with, on page 52, the expression “**to be as thick as two thieves**” appears twice when Clare’s father scolds her because she played boy games with the garden boy. I chose one of its common French translations, “être copains comme cochons”.

Alexander was fired and Clare was condemned by her father for being “**as thick as two thieves** with a gardenboy.” (p. 52)

*Alexander fut renvoyé et Clare fut condamnée par son père pour être « **copain comme cochon** avec un jardinier. »*

⁷ Dictionnaire de la langue française “Littre” [Online]
URL: <http://litre.reverso.net/dictionnaire-francais/>

Nothing was said about the little girl being **as thick as two thieves** with a butler. (p. 52)

*Il ne dit rien au sujet de la petite fille qui était **copain comme cochons** avec un majordome.*

After this very simple case, I was faced with another one that was more complicated: the expression that appear on page 24, when Kitty tries to explain to the Puerto Rican shopkeeper that she has her period, “**to have the curse**”. Since this familiar expression is very common in English, I needed such a familiar and widespread equivalent in French. The two possibilities I found were “les Anglais ont débarqué” and “j’ai mes ragnagna”. I opted for the second one because it fits better into the dialogue: since “los Ingleses han desembarcado” also exists in Spanish, it would have been very strange for the shopkeeper not to understand what Kitty was telling her.

I’m having my...**the curse**. (p. 24)

*J’ai mes... **ragnagna**.*

“**To be a flower on the wall**”, that appears on page 22, also gave me trouble. Here, Michelle Cliff transforms the expression “I wish I could be a fly on the wall”, which is often translated into French by “J’aimerais être une petite souris”. I could have ignored Cliff’s modification and chose the option of the little mouse, without changing the meaning of the original sentence. But I thought it better to keep the new image created by the author, therefore translating the expression more literally. However, I chose to say “être une fleur sur le papier peint” instead of “être une fleur sur le mur” in order to avoid ambiguity. For me, the image this expression conveys is not a (real) flower climbing on a wall but the one of a flower that belongs to the floral design that covers the wall.

That she might be **a flower on the wall**. (p. 22)

*Qu’elle puisse être **une fleur sur le papier peint**.*

As for “**to make the best of it**” on page 16, its common translation in French is “faire contre mauvaise fortune bon cœur”. But the French expression did not work in the passage in which it appears, because of the following sentence in the text. Therefore I opted for another expression: “faire son chemin”. Even if it does not exactly respect the original meaning, this solution works in the context:

[...] her mother who had told her to **make the best of it**. Whatever **it** might be. (p. 16)

*[...] sa mère qui lui avait dit de **faire son chemin**. **Quel que soit le chemin**.*

Finally, I must mention an expression I was not able to translate by another expression in French, but whose loss does not seem very detrimental to the text. The sentence in question is “**the door slams in her head**”, which appears on page 56 and in which we can identify the expression “to slam the door in someone’s face”. This expression, whose most common usage is literal, is here used figuratively and has the meaning of “suddenly withdraw an opportunity from someone.”⁸ The main idea of this sentence is thus that Clare suddenly loses faith in her mother and sister’s promised return. This realization is a like a shock that hits her full in the face, she who had closed her eyes until then and denied the truth of her abandon. Since I had not such imagery at my disposal in French, I simply translated this expression by “comprendre brutalement”. This choice certainly implies the loss of the image, but I found it preferable to a literal translation, which would have been little comprehensible for the reader in this context:

Once the door slams in her head signalling their sudden return ceased. (p. 56)

Un jour, elle comprit brutalement qu’il n’y aurait plus de prompt retour.

3.2. Equivalence

Education systems varying from country to country, it is not always easy to find perfect equivalence between school grades. And the task is especially delicate in the case of Clare Savage’s school career, which is divided between Jamaica, England and the United States. It was necessary to translate the school references in *No Telephone to Heaven* if I wanted the reader to understand them, but I chose to use rather “neutral” equivalents, that is to say terms that are neither too typical of France nor too specific of Belgium’s educational system, in order for the text to keep its Anglo-Saxon flavour.

On page 70, we learn that Clare was a “**sophomore** in college” when her mother died. This typically American term designates a student in his second year in senior high school (14–15 years old) or college (18–19 years old). My translation is “en deuxième année à l’université”.

On pages 52–54, Clare remembers a school outing to the cinema when she was in the “**third form**”. Jamaica’s education system is quite similar to Great Britain’s and the third form is the ninth grade, counting from the first year of primary school. Therefore it is the third year of secondary school and this is why I translated it as “la troisième année secondaire”.

As for the “**tripos** in classics at Girton” on page 94, it refers to a bachelor’s degree in Cambridge, Girton being one of the constituent colleges of the famous English university and the first residential college for women in England. The equivalent of this three-year degree is the

⁸ <http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/slam+the+door+in+face>

French “licence”. But I found it easier to translate “tripos” by “diplôme” since there could have been some equivocation with the four-year long Belgian “licence”.

3.3. Rhyming pattern

There is only one example of rhymed construction in the parts of the text I translated, but it was absolutely essential to find a rhymed equivalent in French since the text nearby made explicit mention of the rhyme. It is the acid comment the principal makes to Clare’s father on page 60. I had to ignore the literal translations of “family tree” and “free”, which do not rhyme at all in French. In the end, I used neither “arbre généalogique” nor “libre” and I built my rhyme on another sound, ‘ie’:

“And your grandmother, Mr. Savage? Are we to hear of your entire family **tree**—slave and **free**?” The specialist smirked at her rhyme. (p. 60)

« Et votre grand-mère, M. Savage ? Allons-nous devoir écouter toute l'histoire de votre **famille** — esclave et **affranchie** ? » La spécialiste eut un petit sourire satisfait pour sa rime.

3.4. Invention

When the Watchman is introduced on page 118, he is described as “**snake-haired**”. One of its meaning is “having snakes for hair”⁹ and in its definition, it is always specified that it relates to monsters, especially Gorgons. In the novel, we easily understand that it is an allusion to the Watchman’s head that is crowned with dread locks, which indeed look like snakes. While the image is really clear in English, it was complicated to find such an adequate term in French. When applied to hair the French word “serpentin” does not work: it implies the idea of sinuous movement (when one does not simply think of the Carnival rolls of paper), but does not convey the allusion to any monstrous creature. Eventually, I used the word “gorgonesque”. I call it an invention because I did not find it in any French dictionary, but I found many occurrences of the word on the Internet.

“snake-haired” (p. 118)

« la chevelure gorgonesque »

3.5. Suppression of redundant elements

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, there are two instances in which some elements of sentences are redundant, in the sense that they convey the same meaning.

⁹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/snake-haired>

In the first case, I translated the synonymous “mocking” and “making fun” by only one adjective, “moqueur”:

Her lips indicating a smile [...] —reassuring, **never mocking or making fun**. (p. 14)

*Ses lèvres dessinant un sourire [...] — rassurant, **jamais moqueur**.*

In the second case, I made one sentence out of two since the adjective “foy-eyed”¹⁰ is defined in the glossary of *No Telephone to Heaven* as meaning “possessing second sight”, which is exactly the same as “bearer of a second sight”:

She is foy-eyed. The bearer of second sight. (p. 82)

Elle est porteuse d’une seconde vue.

IV. SYNTACTIC ADAPTATIONS

4.1. Syntactic reorganization

4.1.1. Complex sentences

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Michelle Cliff alternates very short sentences with extremely long and complex ones. This is a very important stylistic characteristic of her work and it was necessary to respect it in the translation. But in some cases, these complex constructions are not natural or comprehensible once translated into French. Therefore, I sometimes had to make changes in the syntactic organization.

For example, I divided the following sentence into two, using a semicolon, and I added a few words to introduce the new sentence:

Because there was little clerical work, she was also assigned the task of sending out “helpful hints” to the laundry’s customers, sticking them into the stiff plackets of the shirtfronts or between the folds of bedsheets in the backroom, where the packers—two middle-aged Black women—bundled the cleansed linen for delivery. (p. 10)

*Comme il y avait peu de travail administratif, on lui avait également confié la tâche d’envoyer des « conseils utiles » aux clients de la blanchisserie, les fourrant dans les doubles pattes rigides des plastrons ou entre les plis des draps de lit ; **cela se passait** dans l’arrière-boutique, où les emballeuses—deux femmes noires d’âge moyen—empaquetaient le linge propre pour la livraison.*

On page 106, I also made two sentences out of one. Therefore I had to change an –ing form into an indicative and I added a subordinating conjunction to introduce the next clause:

¹⁰ Glossary of *No Telephone to Heaven*, p. 210.

Clare slithered beneath her grandmother's house, **drawing** her head through widows' webs, **pulling herself** through the hard black leavings of rats, **hands scraping** against fragments of shells embedded in the ground, which signaled the explosive birth of the island. (p. 106)

*Clare se glissa sous la maison de sa grand-mère. **En accrochant** sa tête aux toiles d'araignées, **elle avança** entre les déchets noirs et durs laissés par les rats, **tandis que ses mains s'éraflaient** sur des morceaux de coquillage enfouis dans le sol, qui rappelaient la naissance explosive de l'île.*

On the other hand, the following two sentences, which actually convey only one idea, are so long that they are not natural in English. They were obviously constructed to reflect Kitty's weariness. Therefore, I kept the "abnormal" nature of the sentences in my translation and made no changes in their structure in order to respect the author's choice:

When it seemed, after similar interviews, similar insults, similar assumptions that because she spoke in accented language she was illiterate—when it seemed, after months in this new country, that she would labor forever as Mrs. White, walking the streets of Brooklyn on her lunch hours, visiting her home away from home in secret, traveling each evening back to the small apartment where she cooked dinner for the girls, waiting for Boy to reappear, now he had traded his paints for the camaraderie he found in the bar. She, watching the infernal television, thinking it would take her mind off her troubles, suffering as she was from a weariness which did not promise to leave her, wishing her life away, as the days got shorter, giving in more and more to Boy's warnings about Bed-Stuy, unable to return with the food she cherished—when all this got to her so she could not bear this place and the prospect of the cold with her thin blood, Kitty amused herself by sending more messages. (p. 26-28)

Quand il lui sembla clair, après des entrevues similaires, des insultes similaires, des suppositions similaires qu'elle était illettrée parce qu'elle parlait avec un accent — quand il lui sembla clair, après des mois passés dans ce nouveau pays, qu'elle travaillerait à jamais sous les traits de Mme White, parcourant les rues de Brooklyn pendant ses heures de déjeuner, rendant visite en secret à son chez elle loin de chez elle, rentrant chaque soir au petit appartement où elle préparait le souper des filles, attendant que Boy réapparaisse, maintenant qu'il avait échangé ses peintures contre la camaraderie qu'il trouvait au bar. Elle, regardant la satanée télévision, en pensant que cela détournerait son esprit de ses ennuis, souffrant comme elle le faisait d'une lassitude qui ne promettait pas de la quitter, souhaitant échapper à sa vie, comme les jours raccourcissaient, cédant de plus en plus aux avertissements de Boy à propos de Bed-Stuy, incapable de rentrer avec la nourriture qu'elle chérissait — quand tout ceci lui sembla si clair qu'elle ne put plus supporter ni cet endroit ni la perspective du froid avec son sang fluide, Kitty s'amusa à envoyer d'autres messages.

4.1.2. Fragmented and "amputated" sentences

Besides these long and complex constructions, we also find in *No Telephone to Heaven* numerous successions of shorter sentences. Very often, these grouped sentences convey a sole idea, and, in that sense, we might regard them as forming only one sentence (as if the periods

were actually commas). As Cliff spreads out the meaning over several sentences, she thus gives her text a voluntarily fragmented nature. It was therefore essential to transmit this stylistic characteristic, even if some adjustments were necessary. Indeed, while the first sentence of these groups generally has a subject and/or a verb, the following ones are often “incomplete”. In the English text, these “amputated” sentences are functional, but it is not always the case once they are translated into French. For this reason, I sometimes provided these sentences with subjects and/or verbs, but I tried to respect the punctuation chosen by Cliff so as not to soften the impression of fragmentation:

So she stayed in, keeping house and watching television, moving the space of her loss. **But not allowed** to be lost because her father said the family would be reattached. Soon. (p. 50)

*Elle restait donc à l'intérieur, à garder la maison et regarder la télévision, se déplaçant dans l'espace de sa perte. Mais **elle n'était pas autorisée** à se sentir perdue car son père disait que la famille serait réunie. Bientôt.*

It was night. Dark and cool. The air thin. (p. 120)

*Il faisait nuit. Sombre et frais. L'air **était** léger.*

The dialogue coach a retired civil servant. (p. 120)

*Le répétiteur des dialogues **était** un fonctionnaire à la retraite.*

In the following example, I added a subject and also reorganized the first part of the sentence:

[...] she was the office girl. **Catching** water from the tap in the basin in the one washroom to make coffee in a stained percolator for the boss, **fetching** him doughnuts from the bakery two blocks away, dusting the confectioner's sugar from the desk where it settled like a pale pollen. (p. 10)

*[...] elle était la fille de bureau. **Elle préparait** le café du patron dans un percolateur sale avec de l'eau qu'**elle prenait** au robinet du lavabo dans l'unique toilette, **elle allait** lui chercher des doughnuts à la boulangerie deux rues plus loin, **elle époussetait** le sucre glace du bureau où il se déposait comme des grains de pollen clair.*

4.1.3. Change in the syntactic function of words

In some cases, I had to depart from the literal translation and change the original syntactic function of a word or noun phrase, and therefore change the syntactic structure of the whole sentence in order to make the French sentence more natural:

There was also the problem of their accents. (p. 14)

Leur accent posait également problème.

There was absolutely no visible outcome from Kitty's impetuosity. (p. 26)

Le geste impulsif de Kitty n'eut absolument aucun résultat visible.

There is not the privacy for women to wash them [...] (p. 26)

Les femmes n'ont pas l'intimité qu'il faut pour les laver [...]

4.1.4. Active/ Passive voice

Passive sentences are more common in English than in French. I therefore translated sometimes a passive sentence in English by an active one in French.

It was he **whose stupidity was made plain**. (p. 20)

*C'est lui **qui avait étalé sa bêtise**.*

The life you live will be visited on your children. (p. 28)

Vos enfants seront punis pour la vie que vous menez.

When she returned to work the next morning, **she was met by Mr. B.**, who was fussing around the office, [...] (p. 32)

*Quand elle retourna au travail le lendemain matin, **elle tomba sur Monsieur B.**, qui s'agitait dans le bureau, [...]*

The absence of the two other people **was noted differently by each**. (p. 56)

***Chacun d'eux remarquait** l'absence des deux autres personnes de façon différente.*

When the agent is not mentioned in English, I used the impersonal pronoun "on".

[...] a woman creating her own noise **was rarely attended** [...] (p. 22)

*[...] **on faisait rarement attention** à une femme qui crée ses propres interférences [...]*

Kitty sought the folded cloth **she had been taught** to use as a girl. (p. 24)

*Kitty cherchait les linges pliés **qu'on lui avait appris** à utiliser dans son adolescence.*

4.1.5. Emphasis

When emphasis was laid on some parts of sentences, it was sometimes necessary to change the syntactic organization or add some information to render it in French:

"But," he spoke in an assuring voice, "there *is* a vacancy in our executive washroom." (p. 18)

*« Mais, dit-il d'une voix convaincante, il y a **bien** une place disponible aux toilettes de notre direction. »*

Downtown Kingston is a very small place [...] (p. 54)

Le centre de Kingston, c'est un petit monde [...]

“[...] I wonder if I can get anything to eat?” “I wouldn’t.” (p. 110)

« [...] *Je me demande s’il y a moyen de manger quelque chose ?* » « ***Si j’étais toi, je ne le ferais pas.*** »

“Sorry... we *are* bloody testy today.” (p. 112)

« *Désolé... Merde **qu’est-ce qu’on est irritables aujourd’hui !*** »

4.1.6. Change in punctuation

While English rules for dialogues and direct speech inserted in narrative parts are rather simple, in French they are complicated and vary from one work to another. Since there are not so many dialogues in which the author does not introduce comments on the character’s actions and thoughts, I chose to always use quotation marks and no dashes. But there is one instance in which I could not respect the original punctuation, since I transformed a comment into an ‘introductory’ group:

“My mother was a nigger”—speaking the word at him.

« *Ma mère était une négresse, » lui lança-t-elle. (p. 73)*

Concerning dashes, I must add that, apart from dialogues, we find a great number of them in the rest of my French translation. Em dashes are used to frame interpolated propositions, and thus have the function of quasi-parentheses. In French typography, they have the same value, but they are generally less common than in English. Yet, I decided to keep these em dashes in my text instead of replacing them with other punctuation marks. This choice was motivated by the fact that the recurrence of these marks is so important in the English version of the novel that it can eventually be seen as almost “abnormal”, or at least noticeable, and I preferred to preserve this characteristic in French. The only time I replaced em dashes with other punctuation marks was when these dashes indicate that the sentence of a dialogue is not finished because the speaker is interrupted. In that case, I followed the French typographical rule and used suspension marks, as on page 111:

“You think this place is bad...Jesus! Have I seen places...the Congo—”

“We’re not going to hear about the African bloody Queen again.”

« *Si c’est pas à ton goût... bordel ! J’en ai vu de ces endroits... le Congo...* »

« *On va pas encore se retaper ton histoire de Reine Africaine.* » (p. 111)

4.2. Modification of the grammatical category of a word

4.2.1. –Ing forms

–Ing forms of all sorts are extremely frequent in *No Telephone to Heaven*. In English, they fulfil many functions: they can be used as adjectives, verbs or nouns. When used as adjectives or nouns, their translation is no more problematic than the translation of other adjectives or nouns. But in the sentences where –ing forms have a verbal function, their translation into French may require various constructions, depending on the sentence. According to context, I translated them either by a noun, an indicative verb, a relative or a conditional clause, or an infinitive.

a) Change into a noun

She did clerical work, of which there was actually little, **filing** and **typing** mostly [...] (p. 10)

Elle accomplissait quelques tâches administratives — en fait, il y en avait très peu, du classement et de la dactylographie principalement [...]

b) Change into an indicative

For the moment Boy and Kitty worked quietly, looking to further opportunity. Boy **picking up** white nylon bags filled with dirty clothes and linen, and **delivering** the carefully folded and tied parcels of laundry. Kitty **using** her voice only as Mrs. White, or as the office's quiet girl. **Saving** her twang, her talk of home, for the shopkeepers of Bedford-Stuyvesant. (p. 14–16)

Pour le moment, Boy et Kitty travaillaient tranquillement, tout en cherchant d'autres opportunités. Boy ramassait des sacs de nylon blanc remplis de vêtements et de linge sales, et livrait les paquets de linge soigneusement pliés et attachés. Kitty n'utilisait sa voix que sous l'identité de Mme White, ou de la fille de bureau toiseuse. Elle réservait ses inflexions des îles, de chez elle, pour les commerçants de Bedford-Stuyvesant.

The class was still in motion. Had they not heard? **Passing** notes. **Copying** homework. **Aligning** their books on their desktops spine to spine. (p. 66)

La classe continuait. N'avaient-ils pas entendu ? Ils se passaient des petits mots. Recopiaient leurs devoirs. Alignaient leurs livres dos-à-dos sur leurs bancs.

c) Change into a relative clause

She did not think of his sperm **congregating** in her, so that his line might not have ended. (p. 42)

Elle ne pensa pas à son sperme qui pullulait en elle, si bien que sa lignée n'eût peut-être pas disparu.

A large Black woman **cooking** and **singing** and **laughing** for Claudette Colbert and Monty Woolley in *Since You Went Away*. (p. 52)

*Une grosse femme noire **qui cuisinait, chantait et riait** pour Claudette Colbert et Monty Wooley dans*
Depuis ton départ.

d) Change into an infinitive

To render an –ing form in a negative construction, I often used the preposition “sans” with an infinitive.

He held his tongue, **neither agreeing nor objecting**. (p. 16)

*Il se taisait, **sans acquiescer ni protester**.*

“I see.” Boy acquiesced, **never once asking** where this was written, and could he see the guidelines of the Board of Education. (p. 60)

*« Je vois, » acquiesça Boy, **sans même demander** où cela était écrit, ni s’il pouvait voir les directives du Conseil d’établissement.*

“No,” Boy responded, **having no idea** what was coming next. (p. 62)

*« Non, » répondit Boy, **sans avoir la moindre idée** de ce qui allait suivre.*

I must also mention the translation of the two –ing forms of the following sentence, which appear in the French text as a single infinitive introduced by a subordinating conjunctive phrase. Moreover, this clause also underwent an important syntactic adaptation, since it was impossible to translate it literally in French:

“**Slipping in and out of an American high school**, she slid into the street.” (p. 44)

*“**À force de manquer les cours**, elle avait atterri dans la rue.”*

e) Change into conditional clause

Would you kill someone **standing** between you and food? (p. 90)

*Tuerais-tu quelqu’un **s’il se trouvait** entre la nourriture et toi ?*

4.2.2. Conjugated verb changed into noun

Boy **drove a truck** for a laundry in Brooklyn [...] (p. 10)

*Boy **était chauffeur** pour une blanchisserie de Brooklyn [...]*

They **smiled** in welcome of these people in the truck-back [...] (p. 76)

*Ils **adressaient des sourires** de bienvenue aux gens à l’arrière du camion [...]*

4.2.3. Noun changed into verb

The advice varied only superficially, always concluding **with the reminder that** customers continue to use the services of White's Sanitary Laundry, est. 1945. (p. 12)

*Le conseil ne variait guère que dans la forme, se concluant toujours **en rappelant** aux clients de continuer à utiliser les services de la Blanchisserie Hygiénique de White, fondée en 1945.*

[...] the man eyed her curiously, stressing again **the duty of a receptionist** to create a positive impression on the public. (p. 18)

*[...] l'homme l'observait curieusement, en soulignant à nouveau **que la réceptionniste se devait de créer** une impression positive sur les clients.*

She broke the silence, addressing him as overseer, **with reference to** divorce among the slaves who had been among their ancestors. (p. 30)

*Elle brisait le silence, l'appelait surveillant, **et désignait** le divorce chez les esclaves qui avaient compté parmi leurs ancêtres.*

4.2.4. Noun changed into relative clause

Their attention was soon drawn by a pink **flounder** of a woman surprised by a sinkhole. (p. 42)

*Leur attention fut bientôt attirée par une femme rose **qui se débattait**, surprise par un trou marin.*

4.2.5. Adjective changed into noun

She took her ballpoint and, hiding the paper with her **curved** fingers, like a schoolgirl being examined, embellished one of Mrs. White's epistles [...] (p. 22)

*Elle prit son stylo-bille et, cachant le papier dans **la courbe** de ses doigts, comme une élève à un examen, embellit un des courriers de Mme White [...]*

“the **burgeoning** civil rights movement” (p. 70)

*« **la naissance** du mouvement pour les droits civiques »*

4.2.6. Adjective changed into relative clause

The jobs at the laundry were the jobs **available** to the Savages. (p. 14)

*Les emplois à la blanchisserie étaient **ceux auxquels les Savage pouvaient prétendre**.*

The bartender rubbed slowly across the zinc, carefully avoiding the two **beading** tumblers. (p. 116)

*Le barman astiquait lentement le zinc, évitant avec soin les deux verres **sur lesquels l'humidité perlait**.*

4.2.7. Adjective changed into adverb

She felt her mother's lost, **keen**. (p. 16)

*Elle ressentait la perte de sa mère, **profondément**.*

4.2.8. How + adjective changed into noun phrase

As they spoke—about his name and title, the job of receptionist and **how vital it was**, [...] (p. 18)

Tandis qu'ils parlaient — du nom et du titre de l'homme chauve, de l'emploi de réceptionniste et de l'importance capitale de ce poste, [...]

4.2.9. How + verb changed into noun phrase

They danced the meringué the evening of the party and spoke very briefly—about **how they might be related**, money, England, Jamaica, America. (p. 40)

*Ils dansèrent le meringué le soir de la fête et parlèrent très brièvement— **des liens familiaux qu'ils pourraient avoir**, de l'argent, de l'Angleterre, de la Jamaïque, de l'Amérique.*

V. THE UNTRANSLATED

At some points in the translation into French, I chose to keep a few short sentences in their original language. The first one, which is on page 20, is the inscription engraved in the slave's gravestone on which Kitty sits down and cries, "**FAITHFUL SERVANT**". Secondly, there is the sentence "**BEWARE OF THE 21 FAMILIES**", a statement marked in lime, which is mentioned on page 50. Later, on page 110, the bartender's snowball cart bears the legend "**SO JAH SEH**", written in Jamaican Patois.

Besides their more or less permanent nature, since they are either painted or carved in stone, these sentences, often written in capital letters, are above all part of the American and Jamaican landscape in which the characters who read them move. Therefore, I decided to keep them in their original language so as to preserve the American and Jamaican roots of the novel. This decision was even backed up by Cliff's own choice to quote, on page 24, the text on the sign in the Puerto Rican shop in Spanish, without translating it.

According to this logic, there is a sentence on page 30 that I could have also kept in English, and nonetheless, I translated it: "**This Do In Remembrance of Me.**" These words which appear in Kitty's dream, etched on the wall of Miss Mattie's house, are also an indelible message that locates the action in the English-speaking world of Jamaica. But contrary to the preceding engravings or paintings, this inscription is a quotation from the Bible which also naturally exists in French: "Faites ceci en mémoire de moi." For this reason, I did not see fit to use this

quotation of universal nature in order to situate the text in its English-speaking context and I translated it.

On pages 38 and 76, we find another sentence written in capital letters, whose translation or non-translation was more difficult to determine: “**NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN**”. This motto, which decorates the truck transporting Clare and the rebel soldiers, has become the name of the truck, and also gave the novel its title. Since I think it necessary to translate the novel’s title into French—in the 2000 German version, Margarete Längsfeld translated it as “Kein Telephon zum Himmel”, for instance—it seemed logical to translate this sentence into French in the rest of the novel, too. But because this motto also meets the criteria of the two above-mentioned examples, it was as sensible to keep it in its original language. My ultimate decision was not to translate it in the passages I worked on. However, I must add that I considered this option only after I imagined that, if I had to translate the whole novel, I would provide the motto’s translation when it appears for the first time—that is to say, on the 15th page of the novel, on which Cliff details the origin of this sentence and the meaning it assumes for those on the truck. That way, if at least once at the beginning of the novel, I juxtaposed its French translation to the English motto, the reader might be able to understand Cliff’s explanations and relate them to the title of the novel. Consequently, it would no more be problematic to keep the original motto in the rest of the text in order for the reader to feel the English-speaking context of the novel.

VI. THE UNTRANSLATABLE

Finally, I must mention one problem I was confronted with during the translation of *No Telephone to Heaven* and for which I was unable to render the effect of the source text into the target text.

This problem is of a lexical nature: it is the translation into French of the polysemic word “**cool**” in the following related sentences:

He thought her kind of **cool**, in the sense of standoffish, even after she let him stick his cock into her and moaned as he sucked her nipples. (p. 40)

*Il la trouvait assez **froide et distante**, même après qu’elle l’eut laissé fourrer sa bite en elle et gémi tandis qu’il lui suçait le bout des seins.*

She is not **cool** in the standoffish way. Not now. She has a **coolness** that she nurtures. How she became **cool** is her story. (p. 46)

*Elle n’est pas **froide et distante**. Plus maintenant. Ce qui est froid chez elle, c’est son sang, et ce **sang-froid**, elle le cultive. La façon dont elle l’a acquis, c’est son histoire.*

The first meaning of the word “cool”¹¹ is “moderately cold, lacking in warmth”. When applied to a person, it means “marked by a steady dispassionate calmness and self-control” or “lacking ardour or friendliness”, which has a rather negative connotation. But it can also have a very positive connotation when it is used in the sense of “nice”, “very good”, “popular” or “fashionable”. In the novel, Michelle Cliff plays with the different meanings of the word when she applies it to the character of Clare Savage. On page 40, the young Clare is described as cool in the sense of “standoffish”, while on page 46, she has become cool in the sense of “self-possessed”. What makes the translation of this word so complicated is the fact that the word “cool” in French only has the positive meanings of “relaxed” and “nice”. It was therefore impossible to play with it like Michelle Cliff does, just like it was impossible for me to find another equivalent in French to render this polysemic word.

This obstacle in the translation was still aggravated by the fact that Cliff also uses the noun “**coolness**”, which cannot be translated in French with a substantive formed on the adjective “cool”. Consequently, I chose the translation of “coolness” which was most appropriate in the context: “sang-froid”, in which “froid” might be seen as a reminder.

After that decision, I resigned myself to simply translating “cool” as “froid”, and thus completely eliminating the positive connotation. Of course, the initial possible ambiguity of the sentence on page 40 is lost on the French reader, but I tried to make up for it and created a new sentence on page 46 in which I deliberately made explicit the link between the ideas of “coldness” and “sangfroid”.

Unfortunately, my failure to find a way of rendering the three meanings of the word “cool” impoverishes my translation in comparison with the original text. My only merit is maybe to have tried to make this problematic situation as discreet as possible in order not to disturb reading.

¹¹ See the definition of “cool” on *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* [Online]
URL: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>
And on *Urban Dictionary* [Online]
URL: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/>

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Michelle Cliff's Decolonization of Literary Practices: Fragmentation of the Form in *No Telephone to Heaven*

Colonizing the world in a quest for power and wealth, the great European nations did not only alter geopolitics, but they also disrupted the lives of millions of men and women, who were uprooted, used and indoctrinated against their will. In order to exploit the lucrative potential of the colonies they established in the New World, they provided themselves with African labour force, and as they transformed these human beings into goods, the colonizers imposed on them their language and religion, and instilled in them the belief in the superiority of European whiteness and Christianity. Under the White Man's yoke for several centuries, the colonial societies that developed on the other side of the Atlantic thus internalized his superiority. When slavery was abolished and the colonies gained increasing independence from the European metropolitan countries, Eurocentric ideology was so deeply rooted that this legacy of the White Man continued to dominate former colonies' culture. Today, several decades after the beginning of emancipations, things have changed and, even if much remains to be done, these former colonies are progressively culturally and mentally decolonizing themselves.

Michelle Cliff, grew up in Jamaica, one of these post-colonial societies still dominated by the hegemony of the European master's ideology and whiteness. At that time, and even more than today, the island was a colourist class system, in which the power lied in the hands of a white (or white identified) minority dominating a large population whose colour ranged from dark to light. In the Jamaican schools of the fifties and sixties, children were taught a history of their island that only valued the dominant and depicted the colonized as dominated. Therefore, children grew up with the conviction of the legitimacy of white supremacy, while almost none of them, including those with the lightest skins, could pride on not having a drop of dark blood. Cliff, who was one of these children, explains: "As a child among these people, indeed of these people, as one of them, I received the message of anglocentrism, of white supremacy, and I internalized it."¹

Since she was born in the middle class with a fair skin, "tall" hair and green eyes, she was a privileged of the system, one who could claim belonging to the dominant. We might therefore have expected her to enjoy this birth gift and make the most of it. But Cliff was unable to take her place in the system. Her whiteness is indeed the legacy of European ancestors but she is

¹ Cliff, "A Journey into Speech", in *The Land of Look Behind*, p. 13.

above all the ‘lucky’ result of genetics that favoured her father’s light lineage rather than her mother’s, whose darker complexion betrayed her African origins. In a colour system like Jamaica, where no one can lay claim to a pure lineage after generations of racial mixing, whiteness is a relative notion that can only be assessed in terms of appearance. Cliff, who grew up surrounded by her mother’s ‘red’² family, knew that she was white according to Jamaican society’s standards but that there was also more in her—a part of blackness and Africanity that the system “taught her to despise.”³ For her, this internal division between what she was expected to be and what she really was became unbearable. As she became an adult, she felt her fragmentation deeper and realized she would not be allowed to be herself until she found wholeness. In a long process of political and personal awareness, going through a commitment into the feminist movement, writing and the struggle against colonial domination, Cliff has decided to recover the ‘dark’ part of herself which was denied to her, that is to say, to decolonize herself. In her work that reflects her slow and difficult personal progression from self-dividedness toward completeness, she describes Jamaica’s political reality and, in so doing, highlights the internal fragmentation of her still culturally colonized island. As a work of resistance and recovery of a hidden history that actually did not always favour the oppressors, Cliff’s essays and novels attempt to return to Jamaica its African part and challenge the island’s rigid colour stratification.

In her two novels *Abeng* and *No Telephone To Heaven*, Cliff presents us with her semi-autobiographical character, Clare Savage—whose name already reveals her duality—and recounts the personal journey of this young emigrated Jamaican who tries to recover the ‘savage’ part of her identity, but dies before totally managing it. In this quest for wholeness, Clare is accompanied and helped by the transsexual friend Harry/Harriet, who eventually reaches this ideal.⁴ Through her characters, Cliff thus creates colonized fragmented subjects who decolonize themselves and question the dominant system. Furthermore, in this literary project, Cliff does not limit her efforts to the construction of a multiple subject who rebels against domination, but she also creates an adequate form to represent that subject. To this end, she scorns the European literary conventions in whose respect she was educated. In her essay “A Journey into Speech”, she explains that she was taught that Standard English was the only worthy literary language in Jamaica: “One of the effects of assimilation, indoctrination, passing into the anglocentrism of British West Indian culture is that you believe absolutely in the hegemony of the King’s English and in the form in which it is meant to be expressed. Or else your writing is not literature; it is

² ‘Red’ refers “especially to the combination of a light or yellowish skin with crinkly hair and other negro features; often in derogatory use by negroes”, quoted from CASSIDY, F. G., *Dictionary of Jamaican English*.

³ See the title of her collection of prose poems *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise*.

⁴ At the end of the novel, Harry/Harriet eventually chooses to be a woman and changes her name into simply Harriet. The decolonization of Clare and Harry/Harriet is a vast and interesting subject, but I will not examine here for it is beyond the scope of this literary analysis.

folklore, and folklore can never be art.”⁵ Cliff was also taught conventional European canonical authors, whose correctness she was supposed to admire, while being assured by her white teachers that she would never be able to equal them. In her first works of prose-poetry, the young author is not yet emancipated from these values and still uses Standard English as her only means of expression. But, as her literary education progresses, as well as her identity quest, Cliff understands that it is necessary for her to escape these European ideals of correctness and standard, if she wants to fully express what she has to say. As she decides to struggle against domination, she realizes that she needs to decolonize the language and artistic forms that both shape and are shaped by the dominant ideology. In so doing, she begins to follow the steps of other West Indian authors who have, since (and even well before) the political independence of their region, striven for cultural independence, too. Like Claude McKay fifty years before, or V. S. Reid, Samuel Selvon and Louise Bennet, among many others, Cliff’s undertaking thus participates in the definition of a Caribbean literary aesthetic, emancipating from Western codes, which accompanies the definition of a Caribbean identity.

In her following works, Cliff finally recuperates her ancestors’ art forms and incorporates Patois in her English texts. Her integration of this hidden African part of Jamaican culture is not only a way for her to give it a place in literature, it also represents Cliff’s technique to dismantle the oppressor’s literary and linguistic tools from within. As she uses English and European literary forms to her own purpose, she also undermines them with creolization, and the result of this hybridization and subversion of literary conventions is a fragmented form and style that reflect her subject and Jamaica’s own fragmentation.

Cliff’s first novel, *Abeng*, is already a very good illustration of the author’s stylistic undertaking. Indeed, the frame the author gives to the young fragmented Clare, who is only beginning to become aware of her self-dividedness, is a fractured novel, as much in its structure as in its language. But, just as young Clare still needs to mature, *Abeng*’s hybridization is somewhat limited in comparison with its sequel, *No Telephone to Heaven*, in which Cliff subverts the form and the language further. In her second novel, as Clare’s quest for wholeness progresses, Cliff’s narrative techniques, structure and language perfectly accommodate the subject and reflect her struggle against the dominant ideology. Hereafter, I thus intend to examine, one by one, the aspects of Cliff’s decolonization of literary practices in *No Telephone to Heaven*.

As regards the convention of unity of discourse, Cliff dismantles it as she blends various genres of discourse in her novels.

⁵ Cliff, “A Journey into Speech”, p. 13.

The novelistic genre is defined as a fictional narrative, in opposition to an autobiography, for example, which is a narrative based on the author's real life. When Michelle Cliffs mentions *No Telephone to Heaven* and *Abeng* in her essays or interviews, she always refers to them as novels and the publisher's note that precedes these two works also assures the reader that what he or she is about to read is a work of fiction and that "names, characters, places and incidents either are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales are entirely coincidental."⁶ And yet it is not possible to regard the numerous similarities between Cliff's novels and her real life as only mere coincidences. Indeed, in her work, Michelle Cliff incorporates many non-fictional elements taken from her own life and experience. Her heroin Clare Savage, as I have already mentioned, is a semi-autobiographic character, that Cliff creates in her own image—"a thinly disguised alter ego of the author"⁷, according to Françoise Lionnet. Cliff provides her with the same physical features, the same background, the same kind of relationships with her parents, the same education and, above all, the same feeling of self-division, so much so that it is often possible to mistake the author with her character. The parallel between the character's life and the author's is even reinforced by the fact that many of Clare's experiences are based on real anecdotes that actually happened to Michelle Cliff. Similarly, most of her characters are built on details from persons Cliff knows. It is possible to know all these personal details by her biography and what the author reveals in interviews, but the main source of comparison is her works of non-fiction, in which the author already used her own existence as literary material. In her novels, Cliff thus includes personal anecdotes and thoughts she developed in her essays and works of prose-poetry. While this fictionalization of details taken from her non-fiction texts is especially important in *Abeng*, there are still instances of such borrowings in *No Telephone to Heaven*, like, for example, the reference to her mother's school books tunnelled by worms hidden under her grandmother's house⁸ or the people from her grandmother's village who mistake her with her mother.⁹ In Michelle Cliff's fictional works, the line separating fiction from reality is indeed so thin that Françoise Lionnet describes *Abeng* as "at once fiction and autobiography in the third person."¹⁰ The autobiographic nature of *No Telephone to Heaven* is not so pronounced, but the novel is nonetheless fed on the author's personal feelings and experiences. So, as Cliff mixes fiction with non-fiction, she challenges the notion of unity of discourse. Moreover, she also inserts in her text other kinds of texts such as newspaper articles, letters or African hymns, which represent other

⁶ See the introductory pages of *No Telephone to Heaven*.

⁷ Lionnet, "Of Mangoes and Maroons: Language, History, and the Multiracial Subject of Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*", p. 323.

⁸ Cliff, *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise*, p. 18.

⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁰ Lionnet, "Of Mangoes and Maroons", p. 322.

aspects of actuality. By mixing all these elements from different genres within her novel, Michelle Cliff hybridizes her text and decolonizes one of the dominant literary practices.

Just as she ignores and traverses the conventions of the unity of discourse, Michelle Cliff also scorns the rules that govern the unitary consciousness that controls knowledge, by multiplying narrative perspectives. When there is only one point of focalization that has access to knowledge, there is a risk of manipulation of that knowledge. As Agosto explains, “a single ‘focalizer’ imposes a monolithic view of represented reality, a view that conceals or neutralizes the on-going struggle for control of knowledge and harmonizes views to provide the illusion of order.”¹¹ In order to prevent this manipulation and, Cliff creates different “focalizers”, and, in so doing, she gives to the voices neglected by traditional history and fiction the possibility to express themselves.

While in *Abeng* the narrator is an omniscient narrator who has full control over knowledge and offers no other level of focalisation than Clare’s perspective, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff deprives her narrator of a part of its power by reducing the distance that separates it from the characters and by increasing the number of “focalizers”¹², that is to say, the number of characters on which the narration focuses.

Cliff’s strategy to reduce the narrator’s power is to mix the characters’ voices with the narrator’s, and she achieves this as she resorts to free indirect speech, a type of implicit indirect discourse, which conveys the character’s thoughts in the third person by mixing it with the narrator’s voice.¹³ It is for example the case on page 157, when Clare has had her period, or maybe a miscarriage, and has soiled the bed sheets of her hotel room: “God forbid that some fucking woman who overcharged them for the room, who whispered something to her dog each time they entered or left, whom Clare would never see again once she quits this place—god forbid this woman should know Clare bled.” In this sentence which is written in the third person, the word “fucking” shows a shift in the narrator’s rather neutral style. Clare’s voice seems to have mixed with the narrator’s, betraying Clare’s disappointment and anger. The irruption of Clare’s voice is discreet and it might be difficult to know if it is the narrator or Clare who is expressing these feelings. The same often occurs when the narration focuses on Kitty Savage: “She wept. Then caught herself. This t’ing a fact of life. Face it gal. Your mamma

¹¹ Agosto, *Michelle Cliff’s Novels: Piecing the Tapestry of Memory and History*, p. 153.

¹² Ibid., p. 153.

¹³ “Free indirect discourse (FID) can be defined as a *mode of speech and thought representation* which relies on syntactic, lexical and pragmatic features. On the syntactic level, passages of FID are constituted by non-subordination and (if applicable) temporal shifting in accordance with the basic tense of the report frame.”, on *The Literary Encyclopedia*
URL: <http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=444>

counsel you not to venture where you nuh welcome. She took the subway back to the laundry.”¹⁴ In this passage, for instance, it is really difficult to determine if the sentences in Patois are free direct speech, that is to say, Kitty’s thoughts reported without introduction and interrupting the narrator’s voice, or if her voice blends with the narrator’s, thus creating a hybrid voice. In a passage such as this one, it is clear that the narrator’s power over knowledge is greatly reduced and the characters seem able to take hold of the narration.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the reader discovers the story through Clare’s eyes but also from Christopher’s perspective, and both of them generate new perspectives on other characters’ views. The decision to integrate Christopher’s perspective in the novel, who is the third “focalizer” after the narrator and Clare, enables Cliff to let someone who is in the margin of society denounce his condition and show his strategies of resistance. Through the eyes of this orphan raised in the shantytown, the reader has access to a world in which Clare does not move and this shameful side of Jamaica is at last depicted.

Besides allowing Cliff to present the different faces of Jamaica, the shift of focalization also gives her the opportunity to provide the reader with two different versions of the same event, as it is the case with the massacre of Paul’s family by Christopher in chapter two. First, through Paul’s perspective, the reader is shocked by this violence which seems gratuitous, but when he discovers Christopher’s version of the facts, his reaction is softened as he can understand his rage. Therefore, the reader is able to amend his initial judgment and realize that truth is always relative. By challenging the narrative perspectives, Cliff highlights the fact that a story is always different according to the point of view from which it is told, and that, in order to know the truth, it is better to apprehend it from various angles. This is Cliff’s direct criticism of the fact that, for centuries, the history of colonization was only recorded by the colonizers who told a history to their advantage, erasing the other versions, and which enabled them to maintain their power over the colonized.

While Cliff subverts the unity of discourse and perspective, she also scoffs at the linearity of time, place and action as well as language and style, and substitutes for them a fragmentation that reflects the fragmentation of colonized people.

If *No Telephone to Heaven* had been a play, we might have said that Michelle Cliff merrily ignores the rules of the three unities, because, indeed, she respects neither the unity of time, nor the unity of place and action.

As regards time in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff’s narrative constantly jumps from the present to the past and from the past to the present. The story, that starts in the late eighties at the end

¹⁴ Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, p.77.

of Clare's internal and spatial journey, is interrupted by episodes of her past—her childhood in Jamaica, adolescence in the United States, young adulthood in England or her adult life back in Jamaica—which recounts her evolution and “how she came to be here.”¹⁵ Thus the linear progression of the story is fractured by unexpected leaps from a period of Clare's life to another. This non-linear representation of chronology, with its sudden movements back and forth in time, imitates Clare's own movements from one continent to another, from one culture to another. These abrupt changes between the different times of Clare's life not only create an impression of fragmentation, but also connect these events together and show the impact that actions regarded as past in our linear vision of time still have on the present—as if the frontiers between past and present were blurred. By linking together these episodes, Cliff provides her text with a cyclicity, which, according to Agosto, is peculiar to “black time”, a time “in which each moment embodies a recurrence of a past moment”, in opposition to “white time”, which is linear and always moves towards progress.¹⁶ To corroborate this idea, there even is in *No Telephone to Heaven* a sentence which reminds us that progress can go back to its starting point: “If you've been here for the past two years, then you realize all progress is backward, and the gaps become wider. People are being left for dead more than ever.”¹⁷ By adopting a cyclical time, peculiar to African culture, Cliff criticizes Western representation of time, which is an artificial construction that does not correspond to reality and was only built to favour the colonizers and their positivist philosophy.

Like time, actions and places are also depicted as fragmented and cyclical in Cliff's novel. The journeys of her emigrant and abandoned characters are marked by breaks and jolts, which recall the hard ascension in the Cockpit Country of the truck on which Clare stands with her rebel group. Clare's life is disrupted by sudden geographical changes, as she moves between Jamaica, the United States and Europe. But these movements in space are not only synonymous with fractures, since there is indeed some cyclicity in Clare's movements. Clare's journey eventually ends where it started some thirty-six years before, in Jamaica, where she has realized that she belongs. As Cliff comments in her essay “Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character”, “though essentially tragic, for her life has been so, I see it, and I envisioned it, as an ending that completes the circle, or rather the triangle, of the character's life. In her death, she has complete identification with her homeland; soon enough she will be indistinguishable from the ground. Her bones will turn to potash, as did her ancestor's bones.”¹⁸ Clare Savage's death is therefore not an end but a new start, as she takes her place in the life cycle. Thus, as she fractures actions and places to reflect the fractured lives of Jamaicans, Cliff once more shakes up Western literary

¹⁵ Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, p. 87.

¹⁶ Agosto, *Michelle Cliff's Novels*, p. 158.

¹⁷ Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, p. 195.

¹⁸ Cliff, “Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character”, p. 265.

conventions, while showing that, despite breaks and death, the struggle continues. This positive vision of Clare's death may cast new light on the seemingly pessimistic motto painted on the truck transporting Clare and the rebel soldiers, and which gave the novel its title—NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN. As Cliff explains at the beginning of the novel, this motto reflects Jamaican society's reality, where there is « no way of reaching out or up » and « so licke movement in this place. From this place. Then only back and forth, back and forth, over and again, over and again—for centuries. »¹⁹ The pessimistic idea which seems to emanate from it is thus that any movement, or attempt to change things, is hopeless if we are expecting outside help, divine or not. But, we may also understand the motto as meaning that spatial movement does not matter, and will not bring us the answers we are looking for, because these are actually inside ourselves. Therefore, according to this interpretation, Clare's own peregrination may be regarded as an escape, which prevented her from progressing in her identity quest, until she came back to her origins. Moreover, the never-ending repetition of these to and fro movements also seems to confirm that, though futile and always interrupted, attempts at changing reality always recur, just as resistance keeps organizing.

As she is resisting every literary convention, Cliff naturally also decolonizes one of the main mediums of ideology: language. Her strategy to free language from the domination of Western linguistic purity is to contaminate Standard English with the other Jamaican language, Patois. A linguistic legacy of slavery, regarded as the language of the uneducated, Patois has been forbidden or discouraged in official spheres, and therefore in literature. Just like any educated colonized child, Cliff grew up in the contempt of the folk language and the belief in the superiority of the master's language, which was held as the only language fit to produce decent literature. But, when she started writing as an author and realized that the appropriation of the master's language was not enough to express the multiplicity of her subject and write, "as a complete Caribbean woman"²⁰, Cliff decided to integrate in her English text the language of the "other", the one that connects Jamaica and herself to their African origins. She therefore started hybridising her language.

This decision to use the forbidden language in a literary text is a highly subversive practice that challenges the dominant literary conventions from within, as Lionnet explains: "If the discourse of an author is outside of the acceptable norms of common linguistic practice, and if or she wants to use it to disrupt or resist those dominant norms, one way is to undermine it from within, in order to avoid being too easily neutralized."²¹ And this is all the more relevant

¹⁹ Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, p. 16.

²⁰ Cliff, "A Journey Into Speech", p. 14.

²¹ Lionnet, "Of Mangoes and Maroons", p. 332.

considered that, as Agosto points out, Patois is the language the characters use to express defiance. This is clearly illustrated in the argument between Kitty Savage and Boy on pages 81 and 82. While her assimilated husband expresses himself in Standard English, Kitty, who feels threatened by his questions, answers directly in Patois to silence him. In such situations, Patois appears as a symbol for resistance against oppression. This is also a reminder of the fact that, contrary to what the colonizers recorded in their official version of history, colonized people, especially the slaves who were responsible for the creation of Creole languages, were able and did resist oppression.

In the example above of use of Patois as a means of resistance, we also see how post-colonial multiracial and bilingual characters, as Cliff says, “operate within a split consciousness.”²² Cliff’s fragmentation of the unity of language is thus a way to express the fragmentation of her characters and all Jamaicans. Clare and her mother Kitty are instances of bilinguals for whom each language is related with a certain part of their personality and a certain world: English is the language of the Western world while Patois has become a symbol for Jamaica, that is to say, home. This is clearly illustrated when the narration focuses on Kitty Savage for example. This woman who is obliged to speak the language of her so-called country of adoption at work, and even with her husband, often expresses her intimate thoughts in Patois. Cliff thus uses the shift from English to Patois and vice versa to reflect this divided consciousness, which is exemplified in Kitty’s silenced answer when the banker who interviews her asks where her musical voice comes from: “From one lickle piece of gristle in me t’roat, she thought to answer. Instead, she dropped her voice and responded, ‘I am a Jamaican.’”²³ The opposition between Patois and English enables the reader to feel the unbridgeable cultural gap between Kitty and her speaker and to understand Kitty’s internal linguistic and cultural division. The opposition between the two languages is also used in many dialogues throughout the novel as a reflection of the distance separating characters from different cultural backgrounds. As Clare spends her whole adolescence in the United States alone with her father, she loses her connection with her homeland and its language. Thus, when her sister eventually arrives in New York, the distance that separates both sisters is immense and it is reflected by the linguistic frontier between them: Jennie speaks “her mother’s language, while Clare spoke her father’s adopted tongue. One daughter raised in captivity, the other in the wild—so it seemed to Clare.”²⁴ The bilingual dialogue that expresses the reunion of the two sisters who have become strangers stresses the cultural gap between the two and Clare’s fragmentation who understands and knows Patois but

²² Cliff, “A Journey Into Speech”, p. 14.

²³ Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, p. 76.

²⁴ Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, p. 104.

who is now so assimilated that she does not use it anymore. In such dialogues, as Agosto suggests, Cliffs highlights “the contestatory nature of hybridity.”²⁵

Cliff’s hybridisation of language is not limited to a, confrontational or not, juxtaposition of Patois and English, but it goes further when she switches the code within a single sentence. This often happens in cases of free indirect speech as it is, for example, the case when Clare visit her grandmother’s place in the country and meets a shopkeeper of the village, Miss Cherry: “Clare identified herself through her female line, as was custom, and Miss Cherry nodded at her; confident, she had expected as much—was not too many fair pickney about, and Miss Mattie people had a certain turn to them.”²⁶ This sudden code-switching, which conveys the shift in perspective, gives Miss Cherry, a poor uneducated rural woman a voice. Therefore, we can see that Cliff’s hybridisation of language enables the marginal characters to inscribe themselves, with their own voice and language, in a language that usually does not allow them to express themselves.

But these uneducated characters are not the only ones who use Patois as their means of expression in *No Telephone to Heaven*. Contrary to Michelle Cliff’s first novel *Abeng* where Patois remained trapped along the barriers of social class, since, besides the bilingual character of Clare, the uneducated and rural characters were the only persons who spoke Patois, in its sequel, Cliff’s use of Patois is extended to middle-class and even upper middle-class characters, such as Mas Charles. This extension of Patois to all Jamaican characters better reflects the reality of Jamaica’s linguistic situation. Indeed, Patois has infiltrated Jamaican speech, so much so that, as Lionnet explains, “any attempt at establishing rigid demarcations between users of one or the other form of speech reveals itself to be an artificial gesture favoring a view of identity and subjectivity that perpetuates a false ideal of purity—an ideal that is, however, the aim of all assimilationist ideologies.”²⁷ Therefore, in her second novel, Cliff opens Patois to all her characters from all castes and completely dismantles the ideal of linguistic purity. In so doing, the author shows that not only the language, but the whole Jamaican society is impregnated with the Creole presence, that Jamaica is a creolized society.

In order to complete this examination of Cliff’s language in *No Telephone to Heaven*, it is necessary to add that, as Agosto points out, Cliff goes further in her hybridisation of language “by representing Clare’s final memory as an explosion of language that portrays language as the junction where history and culture intersects.”²⁸ While Clare is dying, her last memory is the one of nonsensical sentences in English, Spanish and French—three languages the European colonizers imposed in the Caribbean. Moreover, the allusion to slavery is made clear with the

²⁵ Agosto, *Michelle Cliff’s Novels*, p. 142.

²⁶ Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, p. 185.

²⁷ Lionnet, “Of Mangoes and Maroons”, p. 328.

²⁸ Agosto, *Michelle Cliff’s Novels*, p. 146.

repetition of the sound of the whip and the word “back-raw”, which designates the back of slave after whipping. After the sentence “She remembered language. Then [blank]²⁹ it was gone,”³⁰ in which Clare’s death is expressed by the disappearance of language, the following lines that close the novel represent bird calls, which mark the return to a preverbal language. For Michelle Cliff, this eventual dissolution of language seems the ultimate means to decolonize it, as if she was asking for the language to be completely deconstructed and dissolved in order to give way to a whole new language, more appropriate to express (de)colonized people’s reality.

A last point that is worth examining before moving to Cliff’s fragmentation of style is a disputed aspect of the author’s linguistic undertaking: the inclusion in her first two novels of glossaries. According to Noraida Agosto, who quotes Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, glossing words is a practice that “gives the translated word, and thus the ‘receptor’ culture, the higher status.”³¹ This view that implies that, by adding glossaries, Cliff subordinates Patois to English is contradicted by Françoise Lionnet, who rather draws the attention to the fact that Cliff introduces her glossary as a post-text, without informing her reader of its existence. It is therefore possible for the reader to read the whole novel and discover the glossary just when he/she reaches the last page, which can, for Lionnet, create a feeling of exclusion in the reader as he or she has no access to the comprehension of the Creole words that appear throughout the text. Lionnet adds that this happened to her American students, for whom “the nonlinear narrative and the unfamiliarity of Creole prevented them from appreciating this book as much as they did, say, Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* or Myriam Warner-Vieyra’s *Juletane*, which do not require as much sustained attention and involvement from the reader.”³² Therefore, Cliff includes the non-Jamaican reader by providing him/her with the translation of the Creole words with which he/she is unfamiliar, but at the same time, she excludes him/her since she does not inform him/her of the existence of the glossary. With such “hidden” glossary, it thus seems difficult to agree with Agosto when she says that Cliff shows deference to the Anglophone reader when she translates Patois. Patois simply appears as a language without whose knowledge a part of the richness of the text is lost. And, as Cliff offers the readers the possibility of not finding the translated words, she enables them to participate actively in the creation of meaning.

Like her language, Cliff’s style is also completely fragmented. Besides long syntactic constructions in which propositions are often juxtaposed without subordination, her text is

²⁹ In the original sentence, there is actually an empty space, which symbolises the silence following the disappearance of language and Clare’s death.

³⁰ Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven*, p. 208.

³¹ Agosto, *Michelle Cliff’s Novels*, p. 140.

³² Lionnet, “Of Mangoes and Maroons”, p. 342.

characterized by very short, sometimes incomplete sentences or even isolated words. In so doing, she scorns the literary convention according to which a sentence is supposed to express a complete thought, and she does it in a particularly abrupt way, with sudden stops and starts. We find the origin of this “broken” style in her essay “A Journey into Speech”, in which Cliff explains how difficult it was for her to express herself at the beginning of her career as a writer: “My dissertation was produced at the Warburg Institute, University of London, and was responsible for giving me an intellectual belief in myself that I had not had before, while at the same time distancing me from who I am, almost rendering me speechless about who I am.”³³ Cliff explains that her education, and thus colonization, had tamed what she had been taught to regard as her wildness, and that without this wildness, she “could speak fluently but not reveal.”³⁴ In her first pieces of writing, her style looked like notes which reflected her speechlessness. Then she adds that it was her rage of being colonized who shaped her writing and that this rage prevented her from “muddying the issue with conventional beauty, avoiding becoming trapped in the grace of language for its own sake, which is always seductive.”³⁵ For her novels, Cliff no more wants a beauty that could allow the reader to admire the form of what is expressed while neglecting the content of her message, and that would mellow the sordid realities she depicts. As she becomes confident in her writing and approaches herself as a subject, Cliff frees her style, regardless of approval, and gives her text the directness, and broken form, her rage inspires her, “as if measured prose would disintegrate under her fury.”³⁶ Therefore, Cliff’s literary style in *No Telephone to Heaven* is the exact reflection of that fragmented being who decides to recuperate the hidden part of herself that had been silenced so far, fed on the rage that is born from this manipulation. Her style is thus characterized by the rupture of fragmentation, but, with the frequent juxtaposition of words taken from distant realities, only separated by points and not organized according to hierarchic subordination, Cliff’s style also expresses connection.

Moreover Cliff’s staccato style gives her text a poetic, almost musical or oral quality. This orality produced by the nonlinear fragmented style of Cliff is an important characteristic of this subversive novel and it is also provided by the non-respect of the conventional linearity of time, action and place and, naturally, by the integration of Patois.

Creoles are fundamentally oral languages and their transfer into literacy is almost always a subversive practice against the dominant ideology that tried to crush them for so long. As she includes Jamaican Patois in her text, we can thus say that Cliff oralizes the written form. This

³³ Cliff, “A Journey into Speech”, p. 11.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

oralization is reinforced by the deconstruction of the conventional linearity of time action and style. Indeed, according to Agosto who quotes Walter Ong, “oral forms are characterized by additive, rather than subordinate thought and expression, undivided time, and episodic narration instead of a tight over-all plot.”³⁷ As we have seen above, these are exactly Cliff’s narrative techniques, with which she decolonizes the dominant system’s conception of writing. Nonetheless, it is necessary to point out that Cliff’s orality remains limited by the fact that her reference sources and her cultural influences are fundamentally literary and written. This paradoxical situation—“advocating an orality grounded on books”³⁸—can be explained by the fact that, even if Cliff has very often been in touch with Creole, and thus orality, she has nonetheless received an advanced literary education, from which she cannot separate herself. But, even if she transforms orality, as she sets Creole down on paper, Cliff oralizes her text with her fragmented narrative techniques; she hybridizes her work and makes it a reflection of her hybrid culture.

In *Free Enterprise*, Cliff’s third novel, the author further dismantles the oppressor’s tools. Among other examples, she adopts a new conception of language. In the multilingual context in which we find Annie Christmas, one of the novel’s main characters, English becomes, in the words of Agosto, a kind of “lingua franca to unite the oppressed and denounce global colonialism.”³⁹ Secondly, as she includes letters in her novel, Cliff multiplies narrative perspectives and eliminates the narrator’s voice, thus giving the storytellers full control over knowledge and the way they want to tell history. Moreover, the recourse to these storytellers also contributes to increase the novel’s orality. As for the conception of time in *Free Enterprise*, Cliff now enables her characters to move towards the future. However, what Cliff achieves in *No Telephone to Heaven* is nonetheless an impressive deconstruction of the literary legacy of the dominant ideology. By fragmenting one by one all the literary conventions in whose respect she was raised, Cliff decolonizes her text while she recuperates Creole as a recipient of African memory and validates it as a literary means of expression. Therefore the form she gives to her second novel is one that perfectly accommodates the hybridisation of Jamaican society.

While the world is said to be moving toward multiculturalism, despite persisting pockets of intolerance, Cliff’s creolization of her text, in its content and its form, also creolizes her reader and, in so doing, she enables him/her to put into question his or her fear of the other and realize the mutual enrichment different cultures can bring to each other.

³⁷ Agosto, *Michelle Cliff’s Novels*, p. 160.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 161.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 148.

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