

*A Clear-Sighted Witness: Trauma and Memory in Maryse
Condé's Desirada*

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Desirada is not the first of Maryse Condé's novels to posit the search for identity as a central motivation for a young Caribbean protagonist.¹ But while a characteristic skepticism of the notion of a return to African origins still marks this text, Condé shifts her attention here to the epistemological problem of inaccessibility. In *Desirada* the search for identity hinges on an individual trauma, an event that provides the potential key to the protagonist's personal narrative and yet remains shrouded in secrecy. The heroine's inability to access this crucial information, particularly as it is negotiated through the narrative, raises important questions about how to articulate knowledge about an event that escapes the field of perception. In this essay I will examine the ways in which Condé treats the problem of memory as a specific means of accessing the past, first on the level of the protagonist's own experience and then on the second and more complicated level of the effort to apprehend the experience of another. What I find striking about this particular model of the identity quest novel is the fact that the narrative's pivotal crisis ultimately proves to be the unyielding impasse between two individuals. Condé's penetrating look at her young heroine's experience suggests that although it may be possible to create knowledge about a past that has been lost, there are also significant contextual distinctions to be made. While the formal inscription of perception in

this text presents a hopeful case for the recovered experience of the individual, it impels us nonetheless to reconsider the representability of trauma in the context of a collective desire for history.

The existence of *Desirada's* heroine is, significantly, an act of defiance, as Marie-Noëlle is born despite her mother Reynalda's attempt at suicide. Ranélise, the cook at a local restaurant, discovers Reynalda's adolescent body in the sea, and learns after nursing her back to health that shame at her pregnancy drove the young woman to throw herself into the water. When Reynalda disappears soon after giving birth, Ranélise continues to care for Marie-Noëlle, seeing in this child a precious gift and recompense for the children she herself had lost through miscarriages. When Marie-Noëlle turns ten, however, a letter from her mother shatters the tranquil life she has built with Ranélise: Reynalda is in Paris, has married and had a second child, and demands that Marie-Noëlle come to live with her in her cold and impersonal apartment in the *métropole*. With this displacement comes a new array of relationships, rivalries and travels for Marie-Noëlle as throughout her adolescence and adulthood she attempts to determine the truth about her mother's pregnancy.

The "desired" narrative signaled by the novel's title, then, is that of Marie-Noëlle's mother.² In Marie-Noëlle's mind, Reynalda holds the key to her identity, knows who her father was, and thus by extension knows who she is. Marie-Noëlle's existence is fundamentally marked by the shame that pushed her mother to attempt suicide, and by the silence that accompanies that shame. It is therefore Reynalda's lived experience that Marie-Noëlle has resolutely set out to reconstruct, so that, she believes, she will finally reach an understanding of herself. The impasse she inevitably confronts, however, is the fact that the "truth" of what happened to her mother is obscured by layers of partial and conflicting information. Through conversations with family members and with those who knew her mother, Marie-Noëlle encounters the slowly emerging suggestion that Reynalda was raped by the Polish-Italian jeweler for whom she and her mother Nina worked. This account further implies that Nina stood silently and even complicitly by during the rape of her daughter. No sooner has Marie-Noëlle unraveled this accusation, and even heard it evoked by her mother, than she finds it passionately contradicted by others who knew her mother, and, not without a certain amount

of self-interest, by Nina herself. Unable to accept any single version of events as credible or complete, she confronts a seemingly endless set of frustrating detours and labyrinthine questions in her attempt to devise a satisfactory understanding of her origins.

Marie-Noëlle's endeavor is essentially one of piecing together fragments of information, rejecting some while attempting to deduce others based on what she may provisionally choose to believe. All she has at her disposal, in fact, are traces, remains of an experience that is concealed in the past. In this sense her project resembles what Toni Morrison has termed a "literary archeology," in that she is attempting to reassemble a narrative that has been refused her based on the hope that the events she seeks to understand will have left some sign, some temporal trace that can be apprehended in the present. Condé's narrative thus suggests a reading of the past that examines the hidden corners of what is said to learn what is not said, and attempts to arrive at a more nuanced notion of truth.

Morrison explores this particular creative endeavor in her essay "The Site of Memory," an examination of slave narratives published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the United States. She notes that despite the volume of production and reflection on slavery, the authors of these works repeatedly drew a "veil" of silence across descriptions of the most extreme instances of colonial violence. Since, Morrison writes, "popular taste discouraged the writers from dwelling too long or too carefully on the more sordid details of their experience," the pace of these narratives would often change suddenly to pass through or omit certain events: "In shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent about many things, and they 'forgot' many other things" (110). Beyond the ironic characterization of the reasons for these silences as "popular taste," Morrison does underline here the political motivations for her project of unveiling absent narratives, describing it as a process that is essential for any member of a marginalized category who has historically been excluded from discourse. At stake in this project is an effort to conceive a form of knowledge which would criticize the totalizing authority asserted by official discourse, one which would instead allow for a reading of the past sensitive to its gaps, to its silences, and to the traces of unheard narratives.

For Morrison, memory is essential, since memories are in themselves the traces of the veiled stories she means to read. In order to participate in this process of unveiling, however, the memories must also be accompanied by the imagination. Morrison implies here that the memory or the trace delineates absence but does not correspond to it, and that one can approach an expression of that absence through the workings of the imagination:

It's a kind of literary archeology: on the basis of some information and a little guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image—on the remains—in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of a truth. (112)

What is interesting about Morrison's notion of truth here is that for her the important distinction is not between fact and fiction, but between fact and truth, since "facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot" (113). Truth involves an act of perception, a reading stance that both acknowledges and contests the limits of what is considered known. By the very indication of its own limits, this kind of knowledge surpasses those limits, in that it expresses a silence that is paradoxically beyond its capacities of expression. By proposing itself as a knowledge that is incomplete, this mode of perception is by definition indicating what it is unable to express.

In the final passage of her essay, Morrison uses the image of the Mississippi River as a way to think about the relationship between memory and the trace:

[T]hey straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. "Floods" is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our "flooding." (119)

Here the "traces" left by the river's "true" path are only accessed by

these moments of remembering, and it is only through this remembering that the path becomes visible. The characterization of these events as “floodings” connotes an idea of excess, as if the river were behaving in an unnatural way, refusing its prescribed form. The river’s straightened path proclaims a space that has no reference point outside of itself, which is entirely coincident with itself. Any deviation from this self-contained state can therefore only be termed an aberration, an inaccuracy. The markings of the river’s previous location are in fact not only ignored but covered by the construction of houses and farmland, so that even the trace of the original path disappears, and can only be recovered by the “floods.” These floods thus present a literal threat to the existence of these constructions, and at the same time expose the boundaries of the straightened river as not outer but *inner* spaces: during these floodings, the straight lines of the synthetically formed river indicate not its limits but its *distance from* the river’s earlier form. Instead of neatly separating fact from fiction, or truth from falsehood, these official lines are reread as entirely relative, arbitrary points within the now visible traces of the past.

A forceful refusal of such arbitrary divisions is particularly evident in the formal composition of *Desirada*. Following Morrison, we can read Marie-Noëlle’s piecing together of Reynalda’s story as a kind of flooding: hers is a creative endeavor, an attempt to weave together various accounts of the past and to read them “archeologically,” pushing aside the boundaries of what is given to her as fact. Condé makes deft use of narrative perspective to inscribe the uncertainty created by overlapping versions of events: while the main frame of the novel is in the third person and centered on Marie-Noëlle, there are several sections representing the first-person point of view of various characters, either set apart from the rest of the narrative or introduced as passages in direct discourse. The text echoes formally the importance of a multi-dimensional reading of events, in that there is a constant refusal of any singular version of events. In this sense the narrative reads as a series of evasive maneuvers, so that no single “straightened” version of the past takes precedence over any other.

The interdependence of memory and knowledge, of imagination and experience, is perhaps most striking in Condé’s treatment

of Marie-Noëlle's point of view. For despite the protagonist's struggle to arrive at a single answer to her questions, the third-person narrative of Marie-Noëlle's experience fails to provide a clear division between the known and the unknown. To the contrary, this voice is subject to many of the same ambiguities as the conflicting stories of the different characters. The blurring of lines between memory and experience, between first—and second—hand knowledge, for example, is established with the novel's opening passage:

Ranélise lui avait tant de fois raconté sa naissance qu'elle croyait y avoir tenu un rôle; non pas celui d'un bébé terrorisé et passif . . . mais celui d'un témoin lucide; d'un acteur essentiel, voire de sa mère, l'accouchée, Reynalda elle-même qu'elle s'imaginait assise raide, lèvres pincées, bras croisés, une mine de souffrance indicible sur la figure.

Ranélise had described her birth to her so many times that she believed she had actually played a part—not that of a terrorized and submissive baby . . . but that of a clear-sighted witness, a major role, her very mother, the mother in labor, Reynalda herself, whom she imagined sitting rigid, lips pursed, arms crossed, and a look of inexpressible suffering on her face. (13; 3)

In this striking opening scene, the evocation of the protagonist's origins is a hybrid narrative—part first-hand memory of a story, part second-hand memory of the event, interspersed with vague convictions of first-hand objective experience. Marie-Noëlle returns to the “site” of her birth *through* the story told to her by her adoptive mother, and invents an imagined perspective in order to reread the experience as a lived one.

The link between Marie-Noëlle's strategy and the mixing of memory and imagination is clearly designated in the novel by the term “souvenir imaginaire” ‘imaginary memory,’ used to describe the above passage and a series of key events in the character's life, including Marie-Noëlle's baptism. Later, however, these pivotal moments are put in direct contrast to a subsequent event, of which Marie-Noëlle claims no appropriated knowledge: “Par contre, et Ranélise avait bien dû lui en faire le récit aussi fréquemment, Marie-Noëlle ne gardait aucun souvenir du départ de sa mère” ‘Curiously enough, although Ranélise must have recounted the incident fairly

frequently, Marie-Noëlle had no memory of her mother leaving' (18; 8-9). The fact that details of the event follow this statement illuminates the levels of truth and invention at work in Condé's formal inscription of knowledge in this novel. By denying any memory of the event, Marie-Noëlle effectively severs herself from the voice of the narrative. The details of her mother's departure appear without any markings or indication of source, and therefore force a reevaluation of the previous passages, since there is nothing to distinguish formally this event, presumably absent from her memory, from those Marie-Noëlle claims to remember.

Condé pushes this narrative flexibility even further at another crucial point in Marie-Noëlle's life: upon receiving the letter of summons from her estranged mother, she becomes gravely ill and falls into a coma. The significance of this condition cannot be overlooked given Condé's attention to memory and knowledge in this text, and it is in these passages that the author clearly establishes the particular fabric of this third-person narrative. Marie-Noëlle is of course unable to remember or describe with any precision events that occurred while she was unconscious. Nonetheless, the narrative establishes that "Jusqu'au jour d'aujourd'hui, Marie-Noëlle devait garder quelque part dans sa tête les sensations, les images qui y avaient défilé pendant son coma à l'Hôpital général" 'Years later Marie-Noëlle still retained the sensations and images that flickered through her head while she was in a coma at the General Hospital' (31; 20), and goes on to describe these sensations, suggesting Marie-Noëlle as the source of information even as it insists that she did not have access to these events. Phrases such as "elle se croyait" ("she thought herself") and "il lui semblait" ("it seemed to her") emphasize Marie-Noëlle's first-hand experience of these events, as if to enact the narrative she surely would have produced at the time had she been conscious. The implication in this scene is that the text is in some way able to recuperate these lost impressions, to access these traces of information kept "quelque part dans sa tête" 'somewhere in her head,' and yet to preserve them as impressions, as the way events seemed to her, and not as objective facts corroborated by a second observer.

The description of Marie-Noëlle's arrival in Paris in the novel's third chapter forcefully illustrates the multiple narrative levels at

work in *Desirada*. The passage begins in a seemingly straightforward objective narration, but suddenly interrupts itself in a simple description of the weather:

Dehors, le ciel tremblait gris et lourd au ras des toitures. Il neigeait. Est-ce qu'il neigeait? Il neige rarement à Paris. Et pas le 1^{er} novembre. En tous les cas, il tombait dans le souvenir de Marie-Noëlle de gros flocons qui voltigeaient comme des insectes de nuit autour de la flamme d'une lampe à pétrole.

Outside the sky shimmered gray and overcast, skimming the rooftops. It was snowing. Was it snowing? It seldom snows in Paris. And not on November 1. In any case in Marie-Noëlle's memory big snowflakes were falling and fluttering like insects around the flame of an oil lamp. (35; 25)

The detail with which Condé describes these snowflakes is a characteristic sign of the irony that inevitably runs through her texts.³ This *clin d'œil* to the reader gives narrative authority to Marie-Noëlle's memory while at the same time casting considerable doubt on the accuracy of that source. Its light-hearted "En tous les cas" 'In any case' and its exuberant description of the potentially nonexistent (or non-experienced) snow defy the very question of accuracy or authority. The trace left by the memory of that Paris day has thus potentially lost all connection to the event itself; and yet as Condé evokes it here she insists on that possibility as an essential part of the memory, and on Marie-Noëlle's experience as fundamentally tied to that possible snowfall.

This detachment of memory from event is crucial, and points to the importance of subjectivity in this particular identity quest. For despite the extent of Marie-Noëlle's archeological efforts, she does not have the answer to her question, and continues to search for *one* name that will tie her to a specific lineage. The inaccessibility of this experience continues to haunt her: as much as she may listen, remember, and imagine, there will always be an insurmountable distance between her gaze and the experience itself. If we return to the crisis at the novel's beginning, it is clear that Marie-Noëlle's absent narrative in fact points to a crisis of *witnessing*. When Marie-Noëlle thinks of herself as a "témoin lucide" 'clear-sighted witness' to her own birth, this can paradoxically only be an impression, as in fact she is in a sense everything *but* a witness to this critical event.

As the unfolding of the novel reveals, the superimposition of Marie-Noëlle onto her mother's point of view described in this scene is a frustrating impossibility for the protagonist. It is above all the direct experience of this event, and particularly of an event shrouded in shame and deception, that will remain withheld from Marie-Noëlle, despite all of her attempts to reach it.

Recent studies on the problem of trauma offer revealing ways of thinking about the representability of inaccessible events. For the crisis of witnessing that is at the heart of Condé's novel is also fundamental to the experience of trauma, and the complexities of Marie-Noëlle's narrative are due in great part to a kind of testimonial impasse.⁴ In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub examine the political and psychological consequences of attempting to address events of World War II, in particular of formulating conceptions of truth and memory about the Holocaust. The argument that underpins their analysis is that the Holocaust was an event that produced no witnesses, or as Laub proposes in the third chapter of the volume, that "[the] collapse of witnessing is precisely . . . what is central to the Holocaust experience" (80).⁵ This collapse occurs, he explains, not only because of the physical elimination of those who experienced the Holocaust, but because the dehumanizing nature of the event itself rendered the act of witnessing impossible. In this historical circumstance there could be no "independent frame of reference" that would allow one to establish a subjectivity, to be heard or recognized as a subject. The absence of such a frame of reference is based on the impossibility of positing an Other to whom one might speak or by whom one might be heard; this impossibility in turn leads to the impossibility of considering or observing oneself as an Other, and thus to a world in which one cannot bear witness even to oneself. The consequence of this crisis of witnessing is a narrative which "could not be articulated" (85).

This concept of the untold story, however, is not in itself a failure. For the representability of the traumatic experience is precisely what is and should be put into question by the crisis in witnessing. The articulation of such a narrative can be seen as paradoxical or even, as Claude Lanzmann claims, morally wrong, in that it would assume an understanding of an event that defies understanding,

normalizing it as a comprehensible experience.⁶ Felman, in a later chapter of *Testimony*, thus configures the unrelatable narrative as a secret and emphasizes the importance of preserving that secret in Holocaust testimonies. While she is not advocating silence, and concurs with Laub that the stories must absolutely be told, what she demands is that the silences from which these narratives arise be as fundamentally a part of their truth as the stories they tell. This kind of understanding requires a refined notion of witnessing, one that does not allow a facile reproduction of the unproblematic transfer of information. Felman investigates the ramifications of a literary response to the Holocaust by juxtaposing Camus's novels *The Plague* and *The Fall* in order to identify a contrast in the relationship of each of these texts to silence. She proposes that while *The Fall* puts authority into question by acknowledging the impossibility of a historical narrative of certain events, *The Plague* posits witnessing as a transparent activity, and "fall[s] victim in its turn to the complicity, or the complacency, of its own unquestioned faith . . . in the *integrity* (wholeness and truthfulness) of its own testimony" (195-96). The belief in a narrative of the Holocaust without silence, without opacity, therefore, is represented as entirely misguided and even complicitous. The concept of a complete or completely accessible narrative of these events would presumably be as empty and meaningless as the utter refusal of narrative.

Felman's emphasis on the idea of integrity is illuminating in the consideration of unheard narratives. The term, as Felman indicates, draws out the ideas of wholeness and truthfulness as if to equate them: what proposes itself as whole gains by virtue of that wholeness a weighty legitimacy, while what claims itself as truth asserts an absolute that leaves no room for gaps or fragments. This conflation of the two concepts provides the illusion upon which official historical narratives are based, an illusion that refuses to acknowledge silence as a mode of discourse. Like Morrison's disciplined river, the lines of such narratives proclaim themselves as the outer boundaries of truth. Felman also underlines the incidence of the conceptual conflation between wholeness and truth on the position of the narrator as witness: the suggestion here is that the conceptualization of the narrator can also fall prey to the "complacency" of accessibility, and that the integrity of narrative voice can also ring false. In this

sense, a narrator who presents an uncomplicated perspective on a silenced event is as illusive as the wholly accessible narrative.

The heterogeneous narrative voice of Condé's *Desirada* can thus be seen as an effort not only to refuse any singular version of events, but also to preserve the inherent silence of those events. Marie-Noëlle's frustration at the lack of definitive resolution to her search is in this sense intentional, fundamentally necessary to the expression of her mother's experience; the tangled web of conflicting narratives not only undermines the concept of interpretive authority, but also prevents Reynalda's secret from being told in any transparent way. Each version of events, in exposing the other versions as relative, furthermore points to the problem of representability, as none of these versions can claim a direct relationship to the experience they mean to recount. The immediate first-hand experience of the events remains immutably severed from these myriad narratives; in this sense Condé suggests here that the most appropriate way to tell an inaccessible story may be to tell its inaccessibility. As with Morrison's literary archeology, then, it is not in the facts that might be recovered in such situations, but rather in the material around and about those facts that one might find productive ground for the investigation of truth.⁷

The version of the Caribbean identity quest that Condé chooses to tell here thus has important implications for the potential formation of collective memory. Condé would seem to propose that the fractures brought about by the Middle Passage and by the violence of slavery in the Caribbean cannot and in fact should not be repaired, and that the inaccessibility of these experiences should be preserved. The broken links to African ancestors, the untold tales of horror, the voices of unknown victims, can be imagined and reinvented, but never rendered transparent, because the collective memory which might seek to recuperate these narratives must also recognize the trauma that is its source. Just as Marie-Noëlle cannot be a lucid witness to her mother's experience, a collective Caribbean memory must acknowledge the necessary inaccessibility of the past. In essence, Condé's novel can be seen as a warning against the illusion of integrity in the formation of collective identity in the Antilles: Marie-Noëlle's individual trajectory suggests that the idea of a regional or national identity that is "whole" will not necessar-

ily be truthful. A search for identity on the collective scale that is resolved by a single linear narrative composed of discrete recovered facts would be in this sense a collapsing of the necessary distance between event and experience.

In fact, Condé goes even further by weaving into this caveat a disturbing comment on the concept of collective identity itself, underlining the fact that the symbolic leap from Marie-Noëlle's search for the identity of her father to the general question of ancestry in the Caribbean should not be made too easily. For as it is evoked in *Desirada*, the crisis of witnessing is not a collective one, but a painfully individual one: it is because Marie-Noëlle is *not* Reynalda that the critical experience is inaccessible. The collapse of subjectivity brought about by the experience of trauma is unfolded onto two separate characters, and the unknowability of the events plays out as the alterity of the individual. Condé thus points out that the very notion of collective memory is premised on the idea that the experience of another can be shared despite rifts brought about not only by trauma, but more generally by temporal, spatial, and interpretive divides.

The comment made by *Desirada* on the relationship between memory and trauma is in this respect an unsettling one, since the existence of the event itself is in a way entirely obscured. If we look more closely at Marie-Noëlle's search, we find that her distance from her mother's account of her experience is linked not only to its traumatic source, but perhaps more closely to the fact that Marie-Noëlle cannot verify this information for herself; she cannot and will not ever be certain of the identity of her father. The unknowability of Reynalda's experience arises primarily from Marie-Noëlle's inability to share it; hence the very existence of trauma is bracketed as equally out of reach. Reliability, although a frustrating obstacle in Marie-Noëlle's search, is not actually the problem on a functional level. Condé thus effectively bypasses the question of Reynalda's credibility; for even if Marie-Noëlle chose to believe her mother, the traumatic event would still elude her.⁸ The physical and empirical separation of Marie-Noëlle from her mother therefore illuminates the problem of absent narrative in a different and important way: collective memory is always in some sense an illusion, an *elision* of fundamentally divided perspectives, and the traumatic experience,

as Condé proposes it, is almost irrelevant in the face of an insurmountable crisis of collective experience.

The novel's conclusion further emphasizes this modulation of the traditional identity quest. For Marie-Noëlle, still mystified by the identity of her father, finds this isolation particularly acute as she thinks of her friend Anthea, who has left for Ghana in search of her ancestral roots. As she awaits the return of her friend, Marie-Noëlle imagines the sweeping and grandiose stories of African heritage that Anthea will bring with her, and predicts that

En échange, je n'aurai à lui confier que mes petites misères à moi, la véritable raison de mon voyage en Europe et les circonstances de mon nouvel échec . . . Honteuse, je me tairai donc en attendant qu'à mon tour j'apprenne à inventer des vies.

In exchange I shall have only my own little tales of misfortune to tell her, the real reason for my journey to Europe, and the circumstances of yet another failure . . . Ashamed, I shall keep silent until I too learn to invent a life. (281; 259-60)

Here Condé sets up the resolution of the search for origins in Africa as an invented narrative, juxtaposing it with what Marie-Noëlle calls the "monstrosity" of her identity: "D'une certaine manière, ma monstruosité me rend unique. Grâce à elle, je ne possède ni nationalité ni pays ni langue" 'In some way or other my monstrosity makes me unique. Thanks to it I have no nationality, no country, and no language' (281; 259). Despite the evocation of shame and misfortune in these passages, this moment marks an affirmative turn for Marie-Noëlle, as she seems to have found a way to align her sense of self not to the past or to the experience of others but to her own creative myriad of memories and inventions.

In this sense the "puzzle pieces" of Condé's novel take priority in and of themselves, regardless of their relevance to a larger, more coherent image. For Marie-Noëlle, to find the definitive "answer" to her question would mean the annihilation of all but one of the narratives she had encountered during her search, including most importantly her own imagined ones. The novel's concluding passages suggest furthermore that this "unnatural" narrative signals a freedom from such collective markers as nationality and identity.

Unlike Anthea's triumphant claim to collective ancestry, Marie-Noëlle's story will make no gesture towards transparency but will instead maintain its silence, the inaccessibility of its experience. Instead of resolving Marie-Noëlle's link to the past, the novel's final chapter emphasizes individual, subjective interpretation, as Marie-Noëlle's voice unexpectedly finds the first-person perspective, and closes with a description of a second fictional snowfall.

Notes

1 Two of Condé's earlier works, *Heremakhonon* and *La Vie scélérate*, suggest perhaps the most explicit engagements with the identity quest model; on a thematic level, however, the search for individual history is no less fundamental to a number of her other novels, including most notably *Moi, Tituba sorcière . . . noire de Salem* and *Traversée de la mangrove*. Leah Hewitt offers an informative analysis of *Heremakhonon* as both a version and a questioning of the identity quest in her book on autobiographical writing by women (160-90).

2 Condé's use of the Spanish *Desirada* instead of the French *Désirade* to evoke this desolate satellite island of Guadeloupe is intriguing in that it seems to align the colonial act of naming with the notion of the transparent narrative of experience. Within the narrative, Reynalda significantly claims to share this appropriated image of her native land with the original colonial gaze: "[P]our moi, petite fille, c'était vraiment 'Desirada,' l'île désirée surgie sur la mer devant les yeux des marins de Christophe Colomb après des jours et des jours" '[F]or me, as a little girl, it was really "Desirada," the desired island, looming up out of the ocean in front of the eyes of Christopher Columbus's sailors after days and days at sea' (62; 51). For further discussion of the novel's title, see Bosshardt 151-52.

3 The choice of snow as the image upon which to turn this instability cannot be overlooked, since it recalls a recurrent trope in francophone literature of snow as a visceral symbol of cultural alienation in the *métropole* (as, for example, for the figure of the Caribbean grandmother in such novels as Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia* and Agnant's *La Dot de Sara*).

4 In *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Dominick LaCapra defines trauma as an experience that "brings about a lapse or rupture in memory that breaks continuity with the past, thereby placing identity in question to the

point of shattering it" (9). For further readings on memory and trauma, see also LaCapra's *Representing the Holocaust* and *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, as well as the collection of essays edited by Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*.

5 Laub also discusses this point in his essay in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (61-75).

6 See Lanzmann's essay "Hier ist kein warum" (279).

7 Dori Laub evokes a similar distinction between facts and truth in his discussion of accuracy in video footage of Holocaust testimonies (59-60). See also LaCapra's discussion of this passage in the third chapter of *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (86-113).

8 Susan J. Brison discusses the double bind presented by the question of credibility in *Aftermath*, pointing out that in order to maintain validity as a victim of trauma one by definition cannot recover from it (70-71).

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