

Madness and the Middle Passage
Warner-Vierya's *Juletane* as a Paradigm
for Writing Caribbean Women's Identities

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"Off the coast of Senegal, Gorée, the island before the open sea, the first step towards madness."

—Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*

Edouard Glissant argues in *Caribbean Discourse* that the Caribbean exists in a profound historical lacuna. The middle passage, the slave-ships' journey from Africa to the Caribbean, is a story of brutality, cultural destruction, and exile which left the Caribbean population stranded in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, torn from their homeland and trapped on unknown lands. In the citation above, Glissant argues that one result of this permanent exile has been the loss of the sense of self, an inability to make sense of the subject's position in the world, or, in his word, "madness."¹ This cultural and historical rupture challenges Caribbean authors trying to create a sense of self that acknowledges both the connections to, and separation from, Caribbean roots in Africa.

Juletane, the second novel by Myriam Warner-Vierya, a well-known Guadeloupean writer who has lived a large part of her life in Dakar, Senegal, explores the connections between the Caribbean experience of exile, madness, and the process of identity formation through writing.

Juletane is the story of a woman from the Caribbean who is orphaned at an early age and sent off to live with a maiden aunt in Paris where she meets and marries an African student, Mamadou. She returns with him to live in his homeland, traveling the middle

passage in reverse, and dreams that she will find herself in the original homeland. However, once in Africa, Juletane suffers a nervous breakdown, isolates herself from her family, and eventually kills her co-wife's children leading to her institutionalization. The novel takes the form of Juletane's diary, which is discovered and read after Juletane's death by her therapist, Helene, a fellow Caribbean who is also trying to make a life for herself in Africa. Throughout her diary, Juletane believes that she can put off her madness by writing a straightforward, linear narrative that will explain herself to her husband, Mamadou. Her faith in the narrative process becomes faith in her own sanity. When the narrative process fails in Juletane's understanding, she gives up her writing, her sanity, and her life.

While Juletane's madness is linked in the text to her Caribbean roots, Warner-Vierya, through the figure of Helene, tries to offer new ways of thinking about the process of narrating a Caribbean identity that do not succumb to a paralyzing "madness" that many argue is inherent in the Caribbean context. Helene successfully finds a source of identity that neither denies nor accepts her rupture with Africa; she successfully negotiates the ramifications of the maddening voyage by sea known as the Middle Passage.

The connections between the watery site of the Caribbean and the madness that Glissant claims as implicit in the Caribbean experience have long been a part of Western symbolism. In his introduction to Michel Foucault's *Madness and Reason*, José Barchilon writes, "Renaissance men developed a delightful, yet horrible way of dealing with their mad denizens: They were put on a ship and entrusted to mariners because folly, water, and sea, as everyone then 'knew' had an affinity for each other" (vi-vii). *Madness and Reason* traces what Foucault calls the "archeology" of our current constructions of madness. Foucault begins his discussion of constructions of madness with an account of the Middle Age experience of leprosy because madness during the Renaissance, he argues, had much the same social significance that leprosy had for the earlier era. He writes "leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost from memory; these structures remained . . . with an altogether new meaning and in a very different culture, the forms remain—essentially, that major form of a rigorous division which is social exclusion but spiritual integration" (7). While the former leprosy houses were physically transformed into mad houses, madness came to occupy leprosy's social role of insuring the grace of

those who were not afflicted. The exclusion of the mad from the city or community became the promise of sanity for those who remained.

One of the more obviously symbolic methods of accomplishing this was the Renaissance phenomenon of the "ship of fools." Foucault explores the ritual and social significance of this treatment of madmen in a chapter titled "Stultifera Navis." Of the practice of putting these unfortunates out to sea, Foucault remarks that more than just pragmatics were involved: "What matters is the vagabond madmen, in the act of driving them away, their departure and embarkation do not assume their entire significance on the plane of social utility or security. Other meanings much closer to rite are certainly present . . ." (10). Foucault goes on to suggest that these ritualistic elements depend on the association of madness and water, making the "ships of fools" particularly significant because the madman becomes the "passenger par excellence." He writes that for the madman, forcibly deported from various cities by boat, "the land he will come to is unknown—as is, once he disembarks, the land from which he comes. He has his truth and his homeland only in that fruitless expanse between two countries that cannot belong to him" (11). The madman has no destination or origin, just the passage across what Foucault calls the infinite crossroads of the sea. The eternal wanderings of the mad assure the rootedness of those who would be sane. In much the same way, the forced exile of the African population in the Caribbean assured the material wealth and comfort of parts of the European population.

Foucault's assessment of the ritual importance of the exiled madmen set adrift comes back to the Caribbean through the words of Glissant who labels the voyage out of Africa and into the "open sea" the beginning of that particular madness that shapes the Caribbean. In Glissant's own discourse, the Caribbean islands become "ships of fools." The suggestiveness of this metaphor for the Caribbean is obvious: like the ships of fools set adrift during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with their captive passengers, the people of the Caribbean by and large were forced to undertake their journeys into the Caribbean. And like the unfortunate madmen Foucault claims can belong neither to the city they come from nor the city they arrive at, the Afro-Caribbean population is stuck between the lost land of Africa and the unreachable land of Europe.² The Caribbean was the middle point in the triangular trade that began in Africa and ended in Europe for the European purveyors of this trade,

but which subjected the Africans forcibly deported from their homelands and stranded in the Caribbean to a permanent state of liminality.

The Caribbean population has historically been denied any knowledge of or connection to its origin in Africa and yet is never fully able, no matter how well assimilated, to be a part of Europe. As Edouard Glissant writes in *Caribbean Discourse*, "Martinicans lead an agitated existence, violently and irrevocably severed from the motherland of Africa and improbably cut off from the dreamland of France" (9). When describing the Caribbean population's separation from Africa in the next sentence, Glissant makes the same connection between water and madness that Foucault makes in his 1965 text. Glissant writes, "off the coast of Senegal, Gorée, the island before the open sea, the first step towards madness" (9). In reinventing themselves after colonialism, many writers from Caribbean societies have tried to overcome this historically produced and enforced lacuna by establishing a connection with their origins in Africa through writing or rewriting their histories on national and personal levels. This story, however, cannot be written as a linear narrative; Caribbean authors must find a way to negotiate the temporal and geographical gaps that define them. One consequence of this effort is the search for new narrative forms. J. Michael Dash describes the goals of many Caribbean authors as:

The rejection of a linear and 'totalizing' historicism leads inevitably to strategies of narrative deficiency in their novels. . . . [This strategy] allows the author to escape the conventions of plot, characterization and chronology. [The author] is freer to track down, explore, and linger over the peculiarities, paradoxes, and multiple intricacies of his experience of the world. (xxxiii)

While Dash has perhaps an infelicitously negative vocabulary, he points to the opening up of narrative spaces against Western norms, which in turn opens up the possibility of describing a non-Western sensibility that better reflects the heterogeneous and non-linear constructions of identity and history experienced by Caribbean writers.³

The metaphor of madness and the ship of fools is extended through *Juletane* at least implicitly, to describe the process of writing. Traditional European paradigms of writing and identity de-

pend on a sense of a unified subject and linear narration. Madness is defined as a separation or "alienation" from the self. What recourse is there then, for a population that is permanently exiled? How can the lived experience of the Middle Passage be written into a narrative? What Caribbean theorists such as Dash, Glissant, and Taylor argue is precisely that it cannot. The Middle Passage cannot be recuperated into a linear narrative and the root of the Caribbean identity lies in accepting the condition of liminality as essential to subject definition. In this context, Juletane's diary becomes a case study in how the Caribbean experience cannot be expressed in linear narratives, especially the Afro-centric narrative of the uncomplicated return to the "motherland" of Africa. Juletane's efforts to find herself, her family, and her past in Mamadou and Africa are shown to be illusions that cannot withstand the constant intrusions of a reality that marks Juletane's difference as a Caribbean person in the African context. Juletane's diary is a desperate attempt to deny that difference and bring coherence into her life by writing it all down and confining experience to an orderly pattern. Throughout her narration, Juletane places great faith in the ability of writing to bring her to sanity, to carry her to a safer land. In this, Juletane's mad writings are similar in character to the mad voyages of the ships of fools. The diary has no real origin; it is discovered quite accidentally by Helene. It also has no real destination, as the original intended reader, Mamadou, dies before the process can be completed. Because the act of writing has a specific social significance for Juletane, her failure to live up to the paradigm of narrative as voyage is experienced as defeat and hence a type of madness.

For Juletane, the process of writing her personal history fails to reconcile the Africa she lives in with the Africa she dreams of because she seeks to elide the part of her story that takes place in the Caribbean. In Juletane's case, the failure to deal with the ambiguity or flux that marks her Caribbean identity leads to madness and death. Part of Juletane's failure to make sense of her story lies in her unwillingness to see narration beyond the bounds of a linear narrative that she finds so comforting and into which she tries to force her own non-linear life. Juletane's approach to narrating her identity is critiqued by Warner-Viera through the presentation of Helene who successfully negotiates her presence in Africa through an acknowledgment of her Caribbean roots and her willingness to think of her life in terms of the circular and communal stories of

women that Juletane neglects. The promise of a return to Africa that Juletane invested so much in is a promise to wipe out the effects of the Middle Passage and return "home" to the motherland.⁴ A careful examination of African and Caribbean literature, however, shows that while many male authors hold up the figure of Mother Africa as a promise of home and identity, female authors tend to have a much more complicated relationship to the figure of Africa. As opposed to Helene's open-ended and inclusive process of identity formation, Juletane seeks to order her life exclusively through her relations with men, Mamadou in particular. When Mamadou dies, Juletane gives up on the possibility of making sense of her own life, saying that Mamadou will now never be able to read this diary that she is keeping for him. In accepting the paradigm of identity as linear narrative or voyage, Juletane denies herself the possibility of writing the circular or repeating narrative that women experience together in this novel. Juletane feels that narrative is senseless without arrival and analogously that her life is senseless without Mamadou and the promise of a return to Africa.

Helene, however, offers another possibility for ways of reading and writing through the experiences of women's lives. Through her reading of Juletane's text, Helene shows us the possibility of creating an identity that is relational and cyclical, that constructs meaning through repetition and contingency, not on progression and arrival as Juletane tries to do. While Helene and Juletane are twinned in many ways by the narrative, Helene fares better than Juletane because she can relate parts of her identity to other women. Warner-Vierya suggests that Juletane gives in to the sense of disorder because she is not open to the possibilities that Helene represents.

Erasing The Middle Passage: The Return to Africa

One of Juletane's primary preoccupations when she meets Mamadou is her search for a home and family, and she hopes that her marriage to Mamadou will become her way of achieving this. In the article "Des Antilles à l'Afrique," Thécla Midiohouan suggests that a common theme in Antillean literature is a description of, "des femmes antillaises, plus nombreuses, qui souvent vivent leur mariage avec un africain comme un retour vers la Mère-Patrie" 'women of the Antilles, more numerous, who often experience their marriage with an African as a return to the Motherland' (39).

Midiohouan's description of Antillean women is indeed accurate in describing Juletane's motives but, as Jonathan Ngate points out, Juletane fails to deal with the African continent on its own terms. Juletane's efforts to find an identity in Africa through Mamadou are bound to fail for at least three reasons: she refuses to accept the African paradigm of a family, she has no real knowledge of Africa but does have many illusions about it, and her Caribbean origins consistently assert her difference from Africa that she wants to deny.

Juletane constantly recounts how she invested Mamadou with all her longings for a family. She writes, "In my eyes he was perfect. I had no relatives, few friends, so Mamadou became my whole world" (13). Or again, "I thought I had found in Mamadou the family I missed, so I did not love him only as a lover, a husband. I transferred to him all the filial affection which was overflowing in me as well" (15). In the next day's entry, Juletane writes again, "When I married him, it was more than a husband, it was a whole family that I had found. He had become the father who had died too soon . . ." (24). She admits that this was an illusion that she willingly believed: "I was living a wonderful dream, Mamadou loved me, he was taking me to live in his country, in Africa" (13). Juletane's frenzied repetition of her desire to find in Mamadou a husband, a father, and a homeland emphasizes the importance for her of this search.

However, as suggested above, Juletane's illusions are bound to fail in the end because of her inability to accept the reality of Africa in place of her dream, an inability due largely to her early separation from the Caribbean. She claims in a rather off-hand manner that Mamadou's cultural context was quite different from anything she knew. She writes, "So until I met Mamadou I had lived very far indeed from any echo of the colonial world" (12). Yet, Juletane had lived in the Caribbean for ten years and spent the following eight years in Paris during a time when the eventual fate of the colonies was a prominent topic of public discourse. Through her marriage to Mamadou, Juletane tries to insert herself into an African context, but her stated ignorance of her own colonized context makes her efforts to read Africa unfruitful. Her claim to know nothing of the colonized context erases her Caribbean heritage. She cannot recognize the origin of her separation from Africa, the Middle Passage. Juletane, in fact, lets men mediate all her relations with her history: Mamadou and his friends teach her about colonialism in Africa, and she later acknowledges her connection to the Carib-

bean through her father (her homeland is very much the land of her father).⁵ When she marries Mamadou, she admits that it was in part an effort to reclaim Africa all the while claiming ignorance of her own colonized past in the Caribbean.

Juletane's lack of knowledge allows her to create her own Africa at the expense of her immediate experiences of Africa. For example, Juletane refuses to learn the indigenous language. After living in Africa for five years, Juletane still resents Mamadou for holding conversations in his indigenous tongue and yet she is not willing to learn even the rudiments of his language. Similarly, she refuses to accept the African social mores that govern relations between family members. At one point, early in her marriage, Juletane remarks that she was relatively happy but there was a shadow on her happiness: "For me, the only cloud on our happiness continued to be the numerous visits from the aunts, uncles, cousins, on all sides" (33). She continues to remark on the relatives' habit of showing up at or staying for mealtime. She berates Mamadou for giving money to all his relatives, especially his uncle whom she perceives to be financially comfortable. All of these resentments, aimed at Mamadou's family, are remarkable in a woman who came to Africa to find a family.

At certain points in the text Juletane seems to be aware, at some level of consciousness, that her dream of Africa as her *home* is precisely a dream and that her Caribbean origins have marked her, despite her stated ignorance of her own history. In leaving the Caribbean too soon, Juletane did not have learn what it meant to be part of the Diaspora. For example, when she describes her introduction to Africa through Mamadou and his friends she writes, "I knew nothing about my own homeland. . . . At ten after my father's death, I had left my island to go and live in Paris . . ." (10).⁶ The association of her father with her homeland later in the text becomes marked as a specifically Caribbean concept. In a telling dream Juletane recognizes the importance of re-claiming her Caribbean heritage: "Then all at once I heard a call that had been resounding in my mind for years. 'Come back to your island' " (73). Towards the end of her diary Juletane dreams, "Last night, my father came to see me. He reproached me for having forgotten him and spoke to me about my mother" (77). Juletane's search for an African family leads to her neglect of her immediate Caribbean background and family.

The most consistent image that keeps Juletane distinct from her place in Africa is that of the water that surrounds "her island." Juletane's association with water is most bizarrely marked by a patient who shares a room with her during her first stay at the mental ward of the hospital:

There were two beds; in one a young woman, who stared at me apparently without seeing me. I said good morning as I came in. . . . Several minutes later, coming back from her long distant journey, my companion said to me: "You are not from here either, I can tell."

"No, I come from the islands. And you," I asked.

"I am a child of the water. Soon, I will go back to the banks of my river, the Congo. . . . Here there is no water, look how dry everything is all around us. I am thirsty, nothing can quench my thirst." (31)

The woman who "apparently" did not see Juletane is the one character who remarks on the element that is at the core of Juletane's innermost self. In describing her self-imposed isolation, Juletane sets up the retreat into herself as the retreat to an underground river. The river is populated by people who are all "on an inward journey" (70) and Juletane remarks, "I feel calm and rested, the water is so cool" (71). The other few moments in her diary when Juletane feels at peace are also marked by water. On Friday August 25, she writes about taking a shower:

The water is cool on my skin, like a gentle caress. It is a good feeling; I forget about myself, I am lulled into sleep, I dream about streams and waterfalls. I am back in my island, a child again, on the banks of a clear-running stream. I wade in, my weariness dissolves in the clear water. My heart swells with happiness. This is the first time since *I have been here* that I have thought about *my homeland*. (29 emphasis mine)

The dream in which Juletane hears the call to return to her homeland is similarly laden with images of water, "A sweet smell, coming from far away and long ago, reminded me of an emerald countryside. A cool, limpid stream gurgled in my ear" (73). The contrasts with Juletane's African environment are obvious; she repeatedly describes the heat that assails her day after day. Her only view

is of a cement courtyard swept constantly because of the dust. In the courtyard grows a solitary mango tree, but the barrenness of the tree mocks its verdure. Juletane even describes African people by the dryness of their land; she remarks that her neighbor, Binta, has "heels cracked like the earth in the dry season" (3).

Juletane's difference from her African context is thematized through the naming of Juletane by African characters. When a third wife, Ndeye, joins the family, Juletane refuses to acknowledge her presence. Ndeye remarks to Mamadou, "I have just met your *toubabesse*. She is crazier than I imagined her, she refused to say good morning" (42). In calling Juletane a *toubabesse*, Ndeye identifies Juletane as a European and distances her as far as possible from any African context. Juletane recognizes this distancing move of Ndeye's and reacts strongly to it, but reacts in such a way that denies the manicheism of the term, not necessarily the separation from Africa. She writes:

She was quite simply identifying me with the white wives of colonials. She was even stripping me of my identity as a black woman. My forefathers had paid dearly for my right to be black, spilling their blood and giving their sweat in hopeless revolts to enrich the soil of the Americas so that I might be born free and proud to be black. (42-3)

Juletane's reaction immediately leads her to the Americas not to Africa. She identifies her blackness not with Africa as a source, but with the "New World," where her ancestors cleared the ground for her existence. Even when Juletane discusses her naming, not necessarily name calling, she names herself in connection to her island homeland of the recent past. She writes, "Even my name, Juletane, because my father's name was Jules, is a distant memory. . . . I am 'the mad woman' " (63). Juletane's marriage to Mamadou robs her of her name and replaces it with an epithet. As an orphan in Paris, she had lost her identification with her father/island and finds no new identity in her husband/Africa except madness. Juletane's ignorance of her immediate Caribbean background coupled with the loss of her illusions of Africa once she arrived there leave her with no easily available sense of identity.

Linear Narratives of Male Identification *versus* Cyclical Experiences of Women as Paradigm for Caribbean Writing

Juletane tries to counter her intensifying madness by writing her diary. Her experiences of alienation and separation lead her to see her madness as a fragmentation of her self into pieces that she tries to draw back together through writing. In an effort to order her past and control her ever increasing madness, Juletane turns to her diary:

Thanks to my diary, I discover that my life is not in pieces, that it had only been coiled deep down inside of me. . . . For years I had wavered between abject depression and raging despair with no one to turn to. It had never occurred to me that putting down my anguish on a blank page could help me to analyze it, to control it. . . . (30)

Even after Juletane is committed to the mental hospital, she retains her faith in the value of writing. When another patient asks her what she is writing, Juletane replies, "I explain to her that I am trying to remember my life and that she should do the same, because it helps one to take stock of oneself" (76-77). Juletane's effort to "take stock" of herself or to find the "thread of [her] memories" (9) is a direct reaction to her perception of madness as falling to pieces or perhaps more aptly as flying off in too many directions. When Juletane is at her maddest, she describes her head as "like an enormous kettle with a thousand explosive thoughts boiling up inside" (70). These explosive thoughts occur at the point in the text where Juletane hints that she had poisoned her co-wife's three children. For the first time, Juletane admits that her narration of an event in the diary and reality are not the same and this contradiction throws her into one of her "inward journeys." When she sees reality, as it were, from multiple perspectives, lacking the unifying principle she is looking for in writing, she sinks further into madness.

Juletane cannot negotiate the possibility of many perspectives converging. She cannot give herself over to the voyage. Warner-Viera links this to her experience as a Caribbean woman: Juletane cannot understand how she is both African and Caribbean. The ocean voyage becomes like the passage of words and both are characterized by the threat of being set aimlessly adrift when the destination

is lost sight of. To Juletane, writing makes no sense without a man to lend it a meaning. Without Mamadou, she is quite simply "the madwoman" drifting aimlessly. If the madman is the "passenger par excellence," knowing neither the land at which he arrives nor the land from which he comes, then Juletane is the lunatic par excellence, because she is caught in the historical trap of the Middle Passage. Her efforts to overcome the lacunae that mark the Caribbean identity through writing are bound to fail. However, the novel suggests that in alternate visions of narrative lie alternate visions of identity. Juletane is thrilled by the possibilities of narrative to order and regulate the experience of a single subject. She is entranced by the rules of grammar and sure that writing will enable her to reach Mamadou. In accepting the paradigm of the linear voyage and the linear narrative, Juletane denies herself the possibility of writing the non-linear, circular narrative that the other women in this novel share. This inability to connect with women is constantly pointed to by the narrative itself which over and over again asks the reader to draw parallels between Juletane's story and the story of the women around her.

Juletane's story is the story of many of the women in the book; Warner-Vierya makes Juletane a paradigm of women's experiences of alienation. Juletane's writing, literally brought to light through Helene's reading, points to the similarities existing between many women under mental stress and their narratives. Helene and Juletane both experience an alienation from society brought about by their relationships with men. This alienation engendered by men forms a refrain that repeats time and again throughout the novel. Helene draws out a parallel case from her own experience as a social worker:

A woman recently married. The husband emigrates to France to work, she is to join him as soon as possible. When she arrives, a few months later, she finds one of her friends . . . living with her husband. Alone, far from her family, from her home, she cannot stand the shock. She becomes ill. (44)

Juletane also finds women in similar circumstances when she stays at the mental hospital: "Her name is Oumy. Her husband, she told me, had locked her up in one room for two years and was living with another woman. . . . They said she was mad and one day she was brought here" (75). Another woman in the hospital with Juletane and Oumy, Nabou, shares the same story:

She had gone to Paris to join her husband. When she got to France, where she could not speak French, she found herself completely cut off from the traditional family lifestyle of her village. Her husband was away at work all day, so she was alone, locked up, without being able to communicate with anyone. A few months later she fell ill. (77)

These four women—Juletane, Helene's patient, Oumy, and Nabou—share a common story: alienation from society because of their relationships with men which leads to mental dysfunction.

Warner-Vierya uses Juletane's diary to make explicit the commonality of the women's problems. Alienation is the refrain that echoes throughout Juletane's diary. On Wednesday, August 30, Juletane writes:

An appropriate tune comes to mind. I have forgotten the words.
I make up others that are within keeping with my situation:

*I am frustrated, depressed,
I have no home,
I am an exile, an alien,
They say I've lost my mind.
I am a wreck, drifting in the wind,
I have lost all my illusions. (60)*

In words that recall Foucault's description of the "ship of fools," Juletane's song connects the themes of exile, frustration and being labeled mad by others that run through the stories of these women through the image of a ship drifting without aim on the open sea. Through Juletane, Warner-Vierya asks the reader to draw comparisons, to see the alien in all the female characters, to see the result of exile. In the narratives of these five women, the tune remains the same and even the words change little.

The missing connection between Juletane and the women around her is most poignant with the case of Helene. Both natives of the Caribbean, Helene and Juletane are mirror images of each other, one repeating the image of the other with only slight differences. The layering of readers and narrators involved in the recounting of the experiences of Juletane and the other female characters creates a situation where reader and narrator become alike and the

acts of writing and reading assume great significance. The similarity between Juletane and Helene is made obvious in two passages where each questions her role in this narrative process. Juletane writes:

I wonder if it was a good thing to have started this diary, to be trying to remember a past more filled with sorrows than joys; to dwell on a present built on troubles, on solitude, despair and on a vague feeling of acceptance of a numb existence to which regrets and resentments of the past have given way? Stirring up all that, isn't it provoking a sleeping tiger? (25-26)

Helene echoes the sentiment:

Had she begun reading this diary at an opportune moment? She felt in some confused way that reading it was going to change her life. She was at an important crossroads. For the first time in years, she had, of her own accord, stopped rushing around, trying to gain time. Just to read a true story. To reflect, look back, to question her usual attitude. And she was discovering that her life was very empty. (56)

Both women question the appropriateness of their engaging in the narrative process, Juletane through writing, Helene through reading. Both women feel threatened by the ability of this process to evoke a past shaped in part by their interactions with men that threatens their present sense of identity. Juletane tries to remember the past as it relates to her steadily disintegrating marriage to Mamadou, Helene remembers her first love, Hector, while preparing to marry a much younger man, Ousmane. A pain inflicted by Hector led Helene to withdraw emotionally from society; his betrayal of Helene "proved to be a real vaccination" against falling in love, and Helene then "barricaded her heart with a block of ice" (27-28).

Juletane's effort to organize her past and sanity through writing are echoed in Helene's attempt to deal with her past through reading. Juletane's narrative evokes a flood of memories in Helene. Warner-Viera writes:

She [Helene] never took the time to dream or even just to think about the past. . . . She was very immersed in the present and deliberately focused on the future. This evening, reading these

lines, fragments of her own life came back to her and forced her to make comparisons. (18)

The "fragments of [Helene's] life" rising unbidden and perhaps unwelcome, "forced" upon her by reading reprise Juletane's fear of fragmentation. Helene fears the power of her memory to affect her current course of action when she asks if this is the "opportune moment" for reading this diary. As a woman who previously thought herself "vaccinated" against love, Helene has some doubts about her impending marriage to Ousmane. Reading Juletane's diary, she claims, forces her to face her past and the questions she has about her future. After she has finished the diary, Helene is deeply moved: "She felt a certain melancholy. . . . Now in her turn, she asked herself the questions which had been preoccupying her: could she have a child at her age? Was she right to be getting married?" (78-79). The phrasing "in her turn" suggests that Helene's self-questioning was an inevitable result of reading Juletane's diary. Helene, too, is taking stock of herself through her memories. Her reading, like Juletane's writing, is connected to a process of remembering the past, of ordering the past, that she might better grasp the present.

The mirror imaging of Juletane that Helene assumes in her reading of Juletane's diary lends a new weight to the first sentence of the novel. Helene, who is in the process of moving out of her single apartment and into the conjugal home thinks, "they say a removal is as bad as a fire. That's not quite true. After a removal you can prune, choose to keep or throw out, uncover long forgotten objects, which may prove to be more interesting than they seemed before. After a fire, what is left in the ashes is almost never of any use" (1). The use of the term "removal" suggests that Helene's transition occurs on more than one level. Her process of moving becomes directly related to her process of changing her life. In moving from one stage of life to another Helene stops to discover "long forgotten objects" and goes through the process of deciding what to keep and what to throw out in that move. Unlike Juletane, Helene is able to uncover objects without being consumed by them, she is able to discard some things at will. Helene's ability to distance herself, however, is at the expense of Juletane. Helene lives her past through its similarity to Juletane's; it is the "removal" from her own life provided by Juletane's text that allows Helene to review her own. Juletane had to fail, because she had no distance between herself

and the locale of narration. She was not able to separate herself from her story. Helene, by living vicariously through Juletane's story, is able to avoid the chaos that accompanies the construction of a narrative. While Juletane cannot conceive of her own text without the references that the men in her life provide, Helene is able to read Juletane and use another woman's experience as a coda for her own life and a context for thinking through her decision to marry Ousmane. The ability to read through women is ultimately what saves Helene: she needs both the male and female stories to make her own life story complete.

Through its complicated narrative stance, disjunctures in time, and thematic repetitions, *Juletane* suggests a form of narrative that does not seek to limit reality to one point of view or a linear progression in time. Through the use of both Helene and Juletane as narrators, Warner-Vierya presents the reader with two views of the main characters: Juletane, for example is both the sympathetic character that the reader knows from her diary and the obviously disturbed individual who refuses Helene's help and cruelly murders the children of her co-wife. Similarly, Warner-Vierya gives several different sets of references for the passing of time in the novel. The reader simultaneously reads the story of Juletane's years of marriage, told by Juletane across the 18 days of the diary, broken down even further by Juletane into the hour of the day, and the story of Helene reading the diary in one evening while she remembers parts of the last 15 years of her life. This narrative structure simultaneously invokes at least four different time frames. The text maintains coherence through its repetition of thematic elements such as the experiences of women in patriarchal systems, the connections that Caribbean people build with Africa, and the colonial context that partly shapes both Caribbean and African societies. With *Juletane*, Warner-Vierya creates a narrative that, as J. Michael Dash suggests, "escapes the convention of plot, characterization, and chronology" in order to leave the author freer to "explore, and linger over the peculiarities, and paradoxes of his [sic] experience of the world" (xxxiii). Part of the peculiarity of Juletane's world is the history of the Middle Passage which stranded millions of Africans in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean with no hope of reaching home or of arriving at a desired destination. Writers that come from these "ships of fools" (the Caribbean islands), like Warner-Vierya, find gaps inherent in their efforts to write an identity into being. The narrative that will best reflect their experiences of this world will

not look like the orderly narrative of classical European experience and for this reason appear "mad."

Warner-Vieyra, after all is said and done, has an ambivalent relation to the act of writing; writing, in the end does not save Juletane, and from the author's own dedication, it is linked to the very madness that Juletane tries to escape. Warner-Vieyra refers to her own alienation from her daughter because of her daughter's more "rational" approaches to her life versus Warner-Vieyra's "wandering" pen. She links madness to the very process that her heroine turns to in order to save herself from madness. Juletane's struggle to control her madness, described as the boiling, seething, or flowing element inside of her, is futile. Writing cannot stem the flow, cannot fix the self down to a point. Instead, it becomes an element like water, offering endless possibilities with no intrinsic hope of reaching an end. Like the sea in Foucault's "ship of fools," writing offers infinite choices and no guarantee of reaching the desired destination. Juletane's narrative defies logical time sequences through its confused temporality. It does not start at the beginning or end at the end much as the voyage of the madmen defies normal spatial arrangements. It is the passage from nowhere to nowhere, the movement that does not progress. Madness and water become like Juletane's, and perhaps Warner-Vieyra's, writing. *Juletane* suggests that a dependence on linear construction of narrative and self is limiting for women, especially when taken in conjunction with the historical lacunae created by the Middle Passage. The distance from writing experienced by Helene protects her from the maddening process of production, the consumer is not consumed, and yet her peace at the end of the novel strikes a false note in the reader. The reader of this narrative cannot be sure that Helene is any safer from the madness in her own life simply because of this act of reading/receiving than the medieval townsmen were when they saw these ships of fools approach their harbors and contemplated their own rationality. The writer, on the other hand, seems never to be able to escape the boundless sea of words that Warner-Vieyra suggests leads to both madness and new possibilities for self-identification, especially for the Caribbean.

Juletane's early separation from the Caribbean leaves her marked in a way that she cannot "read" and for Juletane this illegibility leads to madness. Her watery origins become the sign of her madness. This is the flux that she tries to control with writing, a

doomed effort given the fluid nature of writing itself. Juletane's dependence on men to make sense of her sources of identity may be her largest difference from Helene. Helene learns to read other women providing herself with a source of identification that does not depend directly on the men that surround her. Warner-Vierya, in the figures of the six women that Juletane comes to represent, points to the danger of depending on only one source of identity. In the end Helene learns both from men and women, from the Caribbean and Africa, both reading and writing, to provide a multifaceted and fluid sense of self. It is Helene who survives.

Notes

1. Many critics of Caribbean literature have remarked that madness is consistently both a theme and model of Caribbean discourse. For example, see Clarisse Zimra, "Negritude in the Feminine Mode: The Case of Martinique and Guadeloupe," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 12:1 (Spring 1984): 53-77.
2. This formulation unfortunately ignores the status of the indigenous Caribbean population, though by the time the slave trade had reached its apogee, the Europeans had already gone far towards exterminating the indigenous populations. In at least the European mind of the time, the Caribbean islands were indeed blank spaces, having been wiped "clean" (read wiped out) by the series of colonizations that began with Columbus' second voyage in 1495. See Kirkpatrick Sale's *Conquest of Paradise* for a discussion of Columbus' and Europe's reading of the presence of indigenous peoples in the Caribbean.
3. It may be interesting to note the parallel between Dash's description of the course of Caribbean writing and Patrick Taylor's description of the same as the search for a narrative of liberation. See Taylor's *The Narrative of Liberation: Perspectives on Afro-Caribbean Literature, Popular Culture, and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).
4. The image of Africa as the motherland often put forward by male authors, both from Africa and the Diaspora, becomes a paradoxically masculinized mother figure. This had led to a questioning of the rhetoric of Africa as motherland by female authors who otherwise invest a great deal in representing female relations/relationships as crucial to forming female identity. See for example Ken Bugul's *Le Baobab Fou* or Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*. Juletane accepts the masculine discourse about the mother but rejects female discourse as meaningful.

5. Juletane's identification of the Caribbean with the voice of her father is discussed below.
6. This echoes Laye Camara's statement that he "left his father's house too soon" in his famous autobiography *L'Enfant noir*. For a discussion of the importance of this early separation from the source of knowledge in Laye's novel, see Christopher Miller's *Theories of Africans*.

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