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# Paradise Deferred: Utopia, Eutopia and Dystopia in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*

A story of a journey across the Atlantic, a broken mirror and a dog-eared diary – Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* juxtaposes familiar symbols of quest and fragmentation with symbols of failed self-expression and western hegemony in an excavation that ultimately exposes the weaknesses of western epistemologies through its exploration of the cultural identity of Guadeloupean women.[1] By highlighting western means of self-discovery and undermining their efficacy for those whose past is fragmented by conquest and departmentalization, the author heeds bell hooks' call "to rewrite, to reconcile, to renew" as she re-presents and then deconstructs the master's tools.[2] Simultaneously, where scholars including Chandra Mohanty and Trinh Minh-ha have sought to re-present the subjectivity of women of developing nations in a manner that reveals their autonomy from traditions both western and male, Warner-Vieyra reifies their scholarly quest through her characters. For Juletane, even her attempts to escape the violent history of conquest reveal her complete dependence on western thought: the only means through which she knows to seek freedom are western, and as a result, they fail her. But in Hélène, her counterpart, the author personifies the possibility of transcending what Stuart Hall has called the "two axes" of Afro-Caribbean cultural identity, namely, the axis of continuity and the axis of fragmentation.[3]

Guadeloupe's history, fragmented by conquest, informs *Juletane*. The island's history longs to be re-membered, uncovered and deciphered, but Juletane's journey to Europe and Africa ultimately mirrors the same loss, alienation and destruction that the Arawaks and Caribs experienced in the sixteenth century and that the imported slaves experienced during the Middle Passage to the Caribbean. Unlike Columbus's mercantile adventure across the Atlantic, Juletane's ocean-crossing "takes the form of a journey-as-alienation", a journey to what, without the accidental interference of a fellow emigrant, would be oblivion.[4] The main text, an old and half-forgotten diary, is literally the sole relic of Juletane's life, randomly uncovered by Hélène, a social worker who was asked to speak with Juletane before she died in a psychiatric hospital. If Hélène, the first reader of Juletane's diary, is forced to reconsider her own migration from Guadeloupe to Africa as a result of her confrontation with the text, then we, the second readers, are forced to consider the relationship between Juletane, who recapitulates onto herself the violation which Guadeloupe has suffered, and Hélène, who is poised to re-evaluate her heritage and assume a position of agency.

[1] Myriam Warner-Vieyra, *Juletane*, trans. by Betty Wilson (Portsmouth: Heinemann, [1982] 1987). Hereafter references in the text as *J.*

[2] bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 28.

[3] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in Padmini Mongia, ed., *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996), 43.

[4] Elizabeth Wilson, "'*Le voyage et l'espace clos*': Island and Journey as Metaphor: Aspects of Woman's Experience in the Works of Francophone Caribbean Novelists", in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds., *Out of the Kumbla* (Trenton: African World Press, 1990), 47.

Not only does the island's history turn Juletane's journey-as-discovery into a journey-as-alienation as she completes a passage to West Africa, but the avenue, namely writing, that she employs in her efforts to liberate herself from the past and its colonial legacy adds yet another layer to her orphanage and subjugation. Like her journey, writing only affirms the legacies of colonization, ultimately turning her life into an artifact of Guadeloupe's forgotten past. Writing and journey-as-discovery, then, become the two means through which Juletane fails to recreate herself but through which she bequeaths to Hélène the possibility of self-recovery. In fact, the non-western pattern of the narrative structure, specifically the dialogic structure established through repeated interruptions by Hélène, offers the novel's only hope that the artifact Juletane leaves might possibly turn a history of alienation into a future of self-discovery.[5] Though problematically, a French European education and the financial means it yields offer Hélène the hope of finding and sustaining what Juletane fails to find: a combined understanding of the past with the possibility of an active revolt against its determinism and a recovery of self.

Initially, Juletane holds onto the hope that writing will anchor and sustain her, but it is the first avenue of her failure to find and assert her own sense of self. As she confesses, she hopes that "Writing will shorten my long history of discouragement, will be something for me to cling to"; however, she immediately adds that her "rebellious soul wears itself out in useless attempts to revolt, which leave me even more broken, more defeated than ever" (*J*, 5). Here, Warner-Vieyra establishes the leitmotif of shattering that pervades the account and mirrors its narrative structure, that of a journal, broken into a number of daily, even hourly, entries that leave the remaining hours of Juletane's unknowable. If she believes that this diary offers a possible means "to remember a past more filled with sorrows than with joys", she is mistaken, for her past, like Guadeloupe's, cannot be re-membered or pieced back together so easily (*J*, 25). In fact, her own inability to recover "things about the past which escape" her will undermines her efforts to leave to her African husband, Mamadou, a "legacy" to replace the children she could not bear him (*J*, 51, 72); she will leave him nothing, for her failure to piece together a history of her own will set off a chain of events that leads to his death, as well as hers. Hélène, instead, will pursue the task of re-membering history as if to implement Mohanty's insistence that her readers not reproduce hegemonic epistemologies and hooks' call to women of color to "reunite fragments of being" (*J*, 31).

Where Bella Brodzki feels that Juletane's diary testifies to her mastery over her life and her mastery over French, "the language of her exclusion",[6] Françoise Lionnet contends that the process of writing only reinforces the heroine's loss of self.[7] In employing that same avenue of discovery and

[5] Of course, non-linear or dialogic structures are not exclusively non-western, but double-voiced discourse and a-chronological structures are patterns common among non-western authors who are often invoking ancient oral traditions. N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Nora Okja Keller, Erna Brodber, and Diamela Eltit are just a few examples of authors who employ non-linear structures.

[6] Bella Brodzki, "Reading/Writing Women in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*", *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*, 17 (1993), 72.

[7] Françoise Lionnet, "Geographies of Pain: Captive Bodies and Violent Acts in the Fictions of Myriam Warner-Vieyra, Gayl Jones, and Bessie Head", *Callaloo*, 16 (1992), 140.

reflection used by European explorers, Juletane is not turning her antagonist's weapon against him; instead, she is recapitulating Columbus's conquest-by-proclamation and, as a result, falls victim to the tyranny of the written word. In effect, by writing her story, Juletane reiterates her island's history of violation by attempting to inscribe meaning on her life through a typically western means of self-discovery, consequently transforming herself from an orphan of western occupation to a relic of its conquests. Paradoxically, at the same time that Juletane herself attempts to dominate others by writing their history for them and to manipulate Mamadou by leaving him this explanation of her actions, she forces herself into a powerless, fossilized state. Juletane is not using writing to gain voice and affirm her agency; instead, she is literally writing herself into a state of ostracism, insanity and death.

Juletane's diary not only isolates her from herself, but also keeps her from making significant connections with others around her. In fact, it is due to her writing that Juletane is initially viewed as suspect by the women in the African mental asylum where she ends her life. As one inmate tells her dismissively, "[writing] is a waste of time, white people's business" (*J*, 77). In her study of writing and exile, Yanick Lahens provides a framework for this African woman's response and Juletane's isolation:

> [Writing] comes to upset the immutable order of traditional society where knowledge is still accumulated in the form of collective wisdom ... The interruption of the peculiar figure of the writer threatens the relative immunity of the society with the uniqueness of his individual word ... The writer in the context of our traditional society appears then as a strange, misunderstood, useless and even dangerous figure.[8]

[8] Yanick Lahens, "Exile between Writing and Place", *Callaloo*, 15 (1990), 741-2.

Further illuminating the strange and dangerous figure of the individual writer, Brodzki has noted that literacy in Senegal is below ten per cent, lower for women.[9] Thus, the act of writing connects Juletane to the western world just as it reinforces her isolation within her immediate environment of women who probably cannot read. Her defiant act of individualism – choosing contemplative withdrawal – is antithetical to the needs of traditional African society where the contributions of a collective are valued above all else. Consequently, writing can only be perceived by her milieu as an act of hostility, self-indulgence or sloth, and Juletane exacerbates her alienation through the act she hopes will restore her relation to Mamadou and assuage her own pain.

[9] Brodzki, "Reading/Writing Women", 74-5.

Instead of serving as a catalyst for the protagonist's healing, writing keeps Juletane from starting her life anew, not only in the time she spends writing – alone – but also in her intent to change Mamadou's growing indifference to guilt. "I must finish my journal", she declares, for "it is the only legacy I am leaving to Mamadou. I hope he will read it and will

understand how far from my dream he was" (*J*, 72). Even Juletane's last attempt to reach her husband turns out to be an empty, dramatic gesture when he dies in a car accident before reading it. Her diary, descending from a long Christian/Catholic tradition which she will also invoke in her trials, cannot succeed as Saint Augustine's *Confessions* or Cardinal John Henry Newman's *Apologia pro vita sua* did: her confessions, unlike theirs, are orphaned artifacts of a history she knows only in pieces, a history that has left *her* in pieces.

Not only does Juletane's history mirror a shattered history of conquest and violation, but her choice to pursue a western means of self-therapy and apology has turned her efforts at revolt and re-membering into a relic unintelligible to her immediate African community. When she writes, "Thanks to my diary, I discover that my life is not in pieces", she is mistaken (*J*, 30). Indeed, her memories are not "[coming] back in huge raging waves" (*J*, ibid.); her Caribbean past is mentioned only five times in her journal and only briefly each time (*J*, 2, 10, 29, 49, 60). And like her distant past, her more recent past reveals itself to be undecipherable, in her words, "useless" (*J*, 76). Juletane has suffered a miscarriage, murdered Mamadou's first wife's children, disfigured the wife he took after learning that Juletane could bear no more children, and learned that her husband was killed in an accident after bringing her to the hospital. She had "wanted to see him suffer" but admits that her vengeance has been as fruitless as her efforts to piece together her own life in the form of a diary (*J*, 78). It is not, as Juliette Rogers has claimed, that Juletane's writing is an act of recovery; instead, her memories remain as fragmented and opaque as the diary itself, as "useless" (to the intended audience) and dismembered as this relic of her own subjugation to western ideals and history, including the mythic history of journey-as-discovery.[10]

With her Caribbean history essentially lost to Juletane, journey-as-discovery becomes the second means through which she is failed by western ideals and epistemologies. Twice, Juletane relates what little she knows of her own origins, both times emphasizing the fact that she was accidentally "conceived one night in Lent, a period of fast and abstinence", attributes which will define her isolation in Africa and which recall the hardships of slavery (*J,* 2, 60). Juletane herself associates the privation of Lent with the "three centuries of our people's history which my frail shoulders were to inherit" (*J,* 2). After she has been re-christened the madwoman, she, like many of her enslaved ancestors, is orphaned, having no parents and no name. And if the narrative structure of the journal entries emphasizes this fracturing of the past, then Juletane's own life mirrors the legacies of colonialism: "I knew nothing about my own homeland", having left at the age of ten when her father died (*J,* 10). Her ignorance reverberates with the history of an island robbed of

[10] Juliette M. Rogers, "Reading, Writing, and Recovering: Creating a Women's Creole Identity in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*", *The French Review*, 69 (1996), 595-604. Like Rogers, Brodzki also defends the "therapeutic and cognitive benefits" of writing ("Reading/Writing Women", 72), but Lionnet acknowledges that "the loss of self experienced by Juletane is reinforced by the writing of the diary", "Geographies of Pain", 140.

its indigenous people and forcibly repopulated with her African ancestors. Specifically, a teleologically-driven journey-as-discovery (and a linear narrative describing it) is a quintessentially western paradigm.[11] In utilizing the tool of the conquerors to pursue self-discovery and liberation, then, Antillean authors, as Edouard Glissant has explained, are seeking "to be reunited at a profound level with what we are".[12] However, in the case of Juletane, the history of violation precludes such a reunion: Juletane's journey to Paris and then to Senegal only repeats the history of violence dating back to Columbus's landing and to the slave trade and heightens the sense of alienation that haunts Guadeloupeans collectively and the heroine personally.[13]

Where Columbus sought the Orient and claimed to have found an exotic environment of waterfalls and bloody cannibals, Juletane does the opposite: she seeks a mythic land and finds a foreign one, thus finding herself victimized, erased and paralyzed by what she perceives as a cultural vacuum. In effect, like so many travelers before her, by dreaming "about streams and waterfalls" (*J*, 29), she seeks a eutopia, an ideal place, and instead finds a utopia, no-place.[14] Moreover, as Ann Elizabeth Willey has shown, Juletane will re-experience the mortifying effects of the Middle Passage by migrating from the Caribbean across the Atlantic after her father's death, completing the backwards journey to Africa after her godmother's death leaves her orphaned once again. Only as long as she remains in Paris and her husband-to-be remains shrouded in the mythic allure of his homeland, can Africa remain a eutopia. Mamadou, in fact, is a metonymy for all Africa offers, but only as long as the continent is as unfamiliar to Juletane as the island of Utopia is to Thomas More's narrator. As soon as she reaches it, eutopia transforms into utopia when she discovers that she has entered into a polygamous marriage. Upon this discovery, Juletane's quest to find herself and relocate her past is revealed to be just another recapitulation of her heritage. If the heroine feels she has been "erased from the register of time", her voyage has fulfilled the west's erasure of Guadeloupe's history and of her ancestors' African heritage (*J*, 2). To borrow Jamaica Kincaid's words in *A Small Place*, Juletane is left with "no motherland or fatherland, no gods, no mounds of earth for holy ground".[15]

Having completed the Middle Passage in reverse, Juletane seems to escape the "damp, dark" room she occupies after her godmother's death only to find herself trapped, this time, in an African community so alien to her Franco-Catholic upbringing that she cannot adapt (*J*, 7). She compares the polygamous family she has unknowingly entered to living in "another planet," and even more forcefully, confides: "This homecoming to Africa, ... had become a nightmare" (*J*, 23, 15). While Mamadou is transformed into a "deplorable coward" for keeping the truth from her, she finds herself

[11] As Elizabeth Ann Willey explains, "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 other women in this novel share", "Madness and the Middle Passage: Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* as a Paradigm for Writing Caribbean Women's Identities", *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature,* 21 (1997), 460.

[12] Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 34.

[13] Glissant writes, "Within departmentalization, economic dependency is acute; political impotence is increased through a tertiarization of the economy and the power of the prefect; social imbalances are produced… and cultural dislocation is induced by an artificial affluence and a new consumer culture. The end result is mental alienation", *Caribbean Discourse*, xix.

[14] In 1516 Thomas More called his imaginary world Utopia, after the Greek for no-place, punning on Eutopia, an ideal place.

[15] Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993), 32.

orphaned, once again, a stranger, an intruder (*J*, 15).[16] From the small, dark room of her Paris apartment, Juletane enters "a room of five paces by four" in Senegal (*J*, 26). Eventually, she will lock herself into the room, welcoming the tomb-like spaces which have oppressed her ancestors. She will even dream of her room as a grave-like pit and see her body "crawling with worms" (*J*, 60). For Juletane, no-place becomes a torturous prison for one who, as Glissant and others have argued, cannot overcome the legacy of the Middle Passage simply by retracing it, literally or in writing.[17] Thus, her sense of alienation intensifies as her subjugation to Guadeloupe's colonial history evolves into a profound sense of entrapment in an African void, a place that, for Juletane, is not a place, or, is a place so alien to her francophone education and her identification with the Antilles that she cannot recover its meaning to her or recover her own meaning within it.[18]

It is, then, withdrawal and self-abnegation, not "revolt", that characterize Juletane's experiences in Africa, beginning and ending in her namelessness, or more precisely, in her acquiescence to the violation of being un-named (*J*, 5). In her first journal entry, she confesses, "I have …. Not even a name anymore… Here, they call me 'the mad woman'" (*J*, 2). Although Jonathan Ngate feels that in "'accepting' the label of madwoman, Juletane is, in effect", turning madness into "a vehicle for self-revelation",[19] her efforts at self-revelation fail: first, when she concludes that her namelessness "is not important" (*J*, 2), she once again allows her own undoing in a manner which recalls the violence done unto her ancestors, when, as Jacques Derrida has shown, writing is the "arche-violence", the denial of presence, of agency.[20] Second, if her name, derived from her father's name, Jules, is merely a "distant memory" to her and if Mamadou will never read her diary, then her efforts to understand herself and her efforts to explain herself have been fruitless (*J*, 63). Indeed, her desire to "wake up in another world where mad people are not mad but wise and just" reveals that she has not come to know herself or to confront her conquerors (*J*, 78). After all, there is little difference between her previous dreams of finding a "home" in Africa and her final wish for a "long, restful night" in the afterlife – which is itself another eutopia (*J*, 13, 78). Self-knowledge, family, community, and finally, peace evade her at every turn because she seeks to re-member what cannot be re-membered, a past before her orphanage, a past before Guadeloupe's colonization or her ancestors' enslavement. The fact that the novel ends, for Juletane, where it begins – with her eternal namelessness as she dreams of her own unmarked grave – bears witness to the failure of her quest.

Juletane, a synecdoche for the island home she barely knows, embraces the history of violation infecting her spirit: certainly, Africa is an alien world to her, but reciprocally, she insists on viewing her environment

[16] The issue of polygamy in *Juletane* links the text to several francophone West African texts, including Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (1989) and *Le chant écarlate* (1981), as well as Aminata Maïga Ka's *Voie de salut* (1985).

[17] Willey, "Madness and the Middle Passage", 453.

[18] As Willey has noted, Juletane identifies her blackness primarily with slaves of the mainland, with the "'hopeless revolts ... of the Americans'" not with Africa, "Madness and the Middle Passage" 458, quoting *J,* 43.

[19] Jonathan Ngate, "Reading Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*", *Callaloo,* 29 (1986), 556.

[20] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) , 112.

through her personal lens of alienation, absence and loss. While the reader is given several clues that the unnamed country in the text is Senegal – the national language in question, Wolof, and the rice and fish Juletane consumes, *tieboudienne,* the national dish – the narrator generally suppresses these markers, signaling the protagonist's lack of interest in her surroundings. Further fostering her own alienation, Juletane turns an invective eye on her African milieu. Having been raised in the company of her conservative, Catholic godmother, she cannot accept the mores of the Senegalese extended family system. She feels oppressed by "the numerous visits from aunts, uncles, cousins, on all sides" (*J*, 33). In addition, she berates Mamadou for giving money to his relatives, especially to his uncle whom she perceives as financially comfortable and healthy. Most significantly, Juletane is filled with anguish by the continued weekly visits of Mamadou to his first wife, Awa. Juletane then retreats to a small room, adopting a stance of indifference, accepting a state of passivity: "I withdrew completely into my sorrow, spending days and days without going out, without eating, turning over and over the same thoughts, harking back to the same old story …. I no longer opened my door to visitors" (*J*, 36). Juletane has failed to recognize Audre Lorde's warning that "'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'", and as a result, she relives the enslavement of her ancestors.[21]

[21] Cit. in hooks, *Talking Back*, 36.

Finally, after having sacrificed her name and her community, Juletane even loses her ethnicity, which was a source of pride for her as a child. Her civil death, which began (long before meeting Mamadou) with her exile from Guadeloupe, is complete. Forecasting the diary's end, when she is accused by the fellow inmate of wasting her time with "white people's business", namely, writing; Ndeye, Mamadou's third wife, calls the heroine a "*toubabesse*", a term which designates a foreigner in Wolof, but also a white woman (*J*, 42). Initially enraged by what she considers as a brutal assault on her *identité nègre*, Juletane vows to seek retribution for this sin against her. Ndeye, she explains, "was quite simply identifying me with the white wives of the colonials, she was even stripping me of my identity as a black woman", in other words, erasing her identity once again as early colonists conquered what they assured themselves was *terra nullius* (*J*, 106). In a sense, and ironically for Juletane, in view of her own means of attempting to discover her identity (her quest and her journal-writing) and in view of her emphasis on individuality as opposed to collective identity, she has earned the appellation: Ndeye can hardly see her in any other way than as a product, if not a re-producer, of colonialism. And yet, as Lionnet explains, from Juletane's perspective, Ndeye is robbing her of the one identity she has "come to Africa to claim: that of a black woman" (*J*, 139). Finally, it is not in her name-calling alone that Ndeye strips the protagonist of the identity she seeks, for Mamadou hopes that his third wife will give him what Juletane could not – children.[22]

[22] As Irène Assiba D'Almeida has remarked in her study of *Francophone African Women's Writing* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994) for "an African woman, children are not only the reward of life, but life itself. To have children is seen as a woman's primary function, her *raison d'être*, and as a result a woman who has no children does not really exist", 87.

In her own last, futile effort at revolt, Juletane meets a final subjection to the western traditions that have failed her. She has gone so far as to replicate Christ's own broken flesh by starving herself and throwing herself against the wall, causing a wound to her forehead. Her emaciated and wounded body is symbolically transformed into an object of sacrifice. However, contrary to the medieval mystics whose efforts to emulate Christ's humility Juletane's sufferings recall, her self-mortification is not intended to achieve union with God, but to evoke the sympathy and remorse of Mamadou and to regain his love, and if not, avenge his indifference. In fact, in punishing herself without a spiritual motivation, Juletane invokes her homeland's loss of identity and the suffering and malnutrition endured by Africans during the Middle Passage more than she reifies a religious tradition. Thus, once again, her fate echoes with the forces that have shaped her history. Invoking the dehumanizing Middle Passage specifically through her marine imagery, Juletane likens herself to "a rudderless boat adrift in time and space" (*J*, 60). She welcomes the "silence and the emptiness" around her and concludes, "I have already ceased to exist", except as a sign, a relic (*J*, 60-1).

As Ndeye has already revealed in her denial of Juletane's blackness, the heroine has become a representative "member of the Caribbean diaspora, an exile from the African present".[23] Again, as a synecdoche for her homeland's history both in her role as victim and in her role as violator, Juletane experiences a fit of delirium, a profound loss of self and self-awareness, and poisons Awa's children. Reliving her own loss in the miscarriage at the same time as she is perpetuating a cycle of violence, Juletane embodies the multiple layers of suffering, haunting and abuse that infect the paradise she seeks, thereby turning Africa into a dystopia for herself and for her family. When she then disfigures Ndeye by pouring hot oil onto her face, both Ndeye's blindness and Juletane's own comments expose the reflexive nature of her violence and the pervasive nature of its disabling effects. Juletane, after all, is blind regarding her own future, and when she admits, after the event, "I was the victim of a fate over which I had no control", it is clear that she does not feel like an agent (*J*, 73). In effect, she becomes a monstrosity, a name she once applied to Mamadou for his cowardice, but in her case, a name signifying her profound alienation form this time and this place, one rooted in Guadeloupe's history and re-affirmed by her own efforts to magnify her otherness and distance herself from this world. In writing the story of her own death, she accepts victimization, mirroring the historical past of which she knows so little. Like Awa, she is childless and, essentially, dead: she has no feelings of love or hate and fears she has no soul. In her last journal entry, she speaks of herself in the past tense, wondering "Had my life been worth living? What had I contributed, what had I given?" (*J*, 78). Like Ndeye, she is blind, disfigured and undecipherable, even to herself.

[23] Brodzki, "Reading/ Writing Women", 70.

Juletane cannot transcend her history of violence and find her own sense of self; however, she may succeed in bequeathing the power of re-creation to Hélène. Applying Mohanty's terms, while Hélène is 'deconstructing' Juletane's past, she builds for herself and her readers the hope of 'constructing' a future that is not, as Juletane's life is, a reproduction of western hegemony.[24] This reconstruction begins in Senegal when Hélène rescues Juletane's diary from a stack of papers and sits down to read this relic of a psychiatric case. With Hélène's discovery, Juletane's life is given meaning, for her fate challenges Hélène's decision to marry an African and revives in her an acknowledgment of the women's shared liminality as Caribbeans of African descent. Before she has even finished reading the diary, Hélène is "ready to avenge [Juletane]" (*J*, 46), willing "to think of her life in terms of the circular and communal stories of women that Juletane neglects" in Africa by refusing the kindness of Awa and other women in her community.[25] The narrative progress that Juletane's shattered existence makes toward self-annihilation, then, is interrupted by and mediated through Hélène's empathy for this woman who refused to see her while hospitalized. Hélène, the reader who can and does provide a context and a history to the otherwise undecipherable relic Juletane has left, "shows us the possibility of creating an identity that is rational and cyclical, that constructs meaning through repetition and contingency, not on progression and arrival as Juletane tries to".[26] Hélène, in other words, can deconstruct and expose the truths of Juletane's life in order to define, or at least forecast, tools to dismantle old meanings and make new ones.

Where Juletane embraces her descent into non-existence by failing to recognize that the means through which she seeks understanding are bound to oppress her, Hélène may successfully revolt against western hegemony and its values and epistemologies. She may, in other words, find a new mode of meaning-making, one expressive of the realities of Afro-Caribbean women. Hélène has taken the same journey as Juletane, yet she is poised to reverse it. She has received even more French education than Juletane, yet she does not write her story; she is self-destructive yet she resists self-annihilation. Hélène succeeds where Juletane does not: through her journey into Juletane's diary, she recognizes history instead of mirroring it and offers an alternative to Juletane's fate by resisting petrification and becoming the potential heir to Juletane's creative fertility. If Hélène's fate is unknown at the novel's end, it is a testimony to her victory over what Glissant calls the "static time" in which anthropologists fossilize otherness.[27] The lack of closure is an assertion of her agency, at least potentially and symbolically. In fact, the deferral of her action, to borrow Derrida's terminology, though clearly complicating her role as a foil to Juletane, can be seen as an opposition to the western paradigm that Juletane has embraced: unlike her counterpart, Hélène cannot be objectified

[24] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 51.

[25] Willey, "Madness and the Middle Passage", 453-4.

[26] Ibid., 454.

[27] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 14.

or fossilized by language because her choice remains unrecorded. In her acts of empathy and mourning, she is poised to re-construct what has been deconstructed and offer an alternative to readers who have seen the failure of the western traditions embraced by Juletane.

While Hélène's empathy for Juletane provides an alternative to the western tropes of self-discovery that fail the latter, the former's presence is just as riddled with Guadeloupe's past as Juletane's, so that this double to the protagonist exists not as an uncomplicated panacea to Juletane's illness but as a true heir to their collective potential to enable rebirth and recovery. After all, it is her education and the opportunities it has brought her that could enable her transcendence over the legacies of the past, since she enjoys the economic means and the freedom to return to Guadeloupe, should she wish, or to remain single.[28] Beyond this fundamental complexity, one which forebodingly parallels Juletane's insistence on western forms of self-discovery, various elements of fiction work to challenge the reader's perspective on Hélène's future and on her relationship with the past, as personified in Juletane. On the one hand, Hélène's ability to translate the hieroglyph Juletane has left, the interruptions her voice provides and her apparent decision not to marry would indicate that her character does provide hope that Juletane's alienation will nurture a future of self-discovery. But on the other hand, Hélène's voice, by page-count, is weaker than Juletane's, it is mediated by the past tense and the third person, and as Rogers has noted, it is "the weakest and most mediated voice" (*J*, 61) in the text, forming a relationship with the reader which seems to invoke a Derridean violence or denial of agency.[29] As mentioned above, the novel's ending offers a possibility, not a promise, of change – a narrative tactic that could signify either potential failure or a refusal to comply with western expectations. Yet, despite the ambiguity of her position, Hélène's internal journey of discovery clearly serves as an alternative to Juletane's physical journey.[30]

As an affirming counter-balance to Juletane, Hélène transforms what would otherwise be a relic from an unknowable woman into a meaningful message from the recent past. Simply, she affords verisimilitude to Juletane's account, which is often confused by her madness. Hélène, for instance, identifies the journal's author as a patient in a psychiatric hospital, a patient without an immediate family (*J,* 43). More importantly, for Juletane's accounts of her own violence are unreliable, Hélène verifies the deaths of Awa's three children, recalling that she read about them in the local newspaper. Without her mediation, Juletane's story might never have been unearthed and, had it been, its historical context would have remained obscure and its verisimilitude in doubt. Hélène, in short, gives Juletane a voice. And in doing so, she not only provides a model to other women of the developing world; she becomes an agent of change, a maker of meaning, the author of her own sense of self.

[28] Following a national plebiscite, in 1946 Guadeloupeans gained full citizenship as a French *département*, but departmentalization, continued to threaten local history and cultural identity by bringing European economy and politics and French schooling, turning the Guadeloupean imagination toward France, and, conversely, toward Africa as "the mythic signifier", Brodzki, "Reading/Writing Women", 64.

[29] Ibid., 61.

[30] Lulamea Fragd, "Reading Your Self Home: Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*", *CLA Journal*, 45 (2002), 490.

Because her interruptions ultimately clarify and reconstruct Juletane's story and because they transform what would otherwise be a typically western journey described in a diary – not unlike Columbus's log – into a typically non-western dialogue, Hélène's presence suggests alternative possibilities to Juletane's adoption of the western tropes which fail her. In Hall's narrative terms, the axes of Afro-Caribbean identity – continuity and fragmentation – are potentially bridged or transcended as the double's voice punctuates the diary with her interrogations of her own life. She enters into a dialogue with a woman whose powerlessness motivates her to reflect on her own "marginal existence", but Hélène recognizes "that her life was very empty" as she prepares to marry a man she does not love so that she can have a child, a child who, like Juletane's, would have given her life immediate "purpose" in Africa (*J,* 56-7). If Juletane fears she is becoming a "being without a soul", withdrawing from life and mortifying her flesh, then her counterpart sees in Juletane her own refection as she punishes herself with too much scotch, smokes until her throat is dry, and passively allows herself to be "swallowed up" and "carried away" by the diary she reads overnight (*J,* 57-8). But, unlike Juletane, who embraces self-mortification and passivity to the point of death, Hélène is prepared to change, to act, to refuse to marry Ousmane, a man who, like Mamadou, represents both the African utopia and a complete divorce from her Caribbean past. Hélène, a woman who has vaccinated herself against love and armed herself against pity, now weeps, "for the first time in almost twenty years" (*J,* 79). The dialogue, with its ability to hold unity and multiplicity at once, has brought her out of the numbness she formerly embraced, the numbness that Juletane welcomes. Through mourning, and perhaps more importantly through her identification with another woman of Guadeloupean descent, Hélène enjoys the potential to reconstruct her homeland's shattered past and the dystopic visions it has bequeathed to Juletane, and in the process, her own future.

Indeed, Hélène provides what Juletane cannot: a re-membrance of colonial and personal history and a reconstruction of their interrelation. Catholic school and the sugar cane are not the only reminders of the island's past, for Hélène later recalls her first fiancé's betrayal – his leaving her and marrying instead a white woman. If this relationship was once "a real vaccination, which protected her perfectly against falling in love" (*J,* 27), Juletane's diary, as Willey explains, has re-infected her with emotion and empathy (*J,* 463). "The more Hélène read the more she felt drawn towards this woman," who, at first, seems so unlike her (*J,* 27). But by the end of the diary, Hélène is unsure: "Was she right to be getting married? Ousmane, of course, was nothing like Mamadou and she was the exact opposite of Juletane, but still…" (*J,* 79). "But still" – the doubt is clear as Hélène wonders whether she, like Juletane, will recapitulate the history of

their homeland, whether she will remain an orphan, whether she will define herself solely through the African emphasis on motherhood, or whether she instead will embrace the past and refashion a colonial history and an African heritage into something uniquely Caribbean, something other than a linear journey and a life frozen in a diary, something other than the "radical subjectivity" of western prose, the voice that Mohanty and Minh-ha seek to describe.[31]

But still – at least for now – Hélène's relationship with her homeland, though fuller than Juletane's, remains scattered and painful. If Hélène is to find the voice of the Afro-Caribbean woman, she must reject words and values which tyrannize, fossilize and objectify and embrace a means of communication and a way of life which include, liberate and empower. For the moment, she admits that she "never took the time to dream or even to just think about the past" (*J,* 18). She lives in exile, and because she does, her relation with Guadeloupe remains problematic, not only because she seldom returns, but because the painful memories are complicated by the benefits she has reaped from the francophone education she received there. In fact, without a more concrete presence and a definitive meaning, her homeland continues to be the *terra nullius* Columbus encountered five-hundred years ago, and as long as it appears to be a geographical and historical *tabula rasa*, lacking *self*-determination, it will be ripe for possession, objectification or erasure. As testimony, the island's relics, Juletane's diary and even Hélène's records, have been transported to Africa, where they depend, precariously, on interpreters to recover them. The novel's concentric rings of truth-seeking – Juletane's, Hélène's and the reader's – contain both a warning to those who think they can use the master's tools to unearth the past and a forecast of the tools Hélène uses to liberate it.

[31] Sara Suleri, "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition", in Padmini Mongia, ed., *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996), 339.