

Exploiting the Undead: The Usefulness of the Zombie in Haitian Literature

In the Francophone Caribbean, where there has long existed a marked distance between intellectual and popular culture, the writer has had to take particular care in negotiating the necessarily elitist world of letters within the region's primarily oral cultural context. Whether through Creole terminology and proverbs woven into written texts, or extended imaginings on the lives of unsung Caribbean heroes, several of the region's most prominent writers make use of folk elements as springboards for their literary endeavors. Such borrowings from popular culture, looked to for more than a source of colorful content, often provide the very foundations of these works, shaping them both formally and thematically. In the particular case of Haiti, one of the most useful (and entertaining) figures to emerge from the folkloric tradition is that of the zombie. Functioning literally and allegorically in several Haitian novels of the mid- to late twentieth century, the zombie offers a valuable critical tool with which to access Haiti's literature from an original, decidedly non-European perspective.

The presence of the zombie figure in the Haitian literary context is tied inextricably to the particulars of Haiti's history and culture as they evolved over the course of the twentieth century. As has been well commented on by theorists of Francophone literature, the United States' occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and the corresponding rise of *indigénisme* inspired a renewed interest in and appreciation for Haiti's traditional culture. Placing particular emphasis on the African roots of the peasantry's folk beliefs and practices as a valid source of creative inspiration, *indigénisme* encouraged a literary investment in the popular imagination—an imagination profoundly connected to the Vodou faith. Indigénisme further called for a renunciation of the assimilative tendencies exhibited by Haiti's bourgeois intellectual and socio-economic elite. The works of fiction and theory produced during this period thus share both a specific political agenda and a clear aesthetic perspective. As theorist Rafaël Lucas points out, “[t]he combination of indigenism, Marxism, and marvelous realism...constitute[s] a textual space that is conceived according to the following axes of intentionality: exemplary literature, predominance of Promethean heroes, militant project oriented toward the transformation of society, expectant tellurism, a writing of wonder, love of Haiti's land, and the mystique of a better future” (61). It was, of course, in this climate of racial and cultural pride that Indigenist intellectual and ethnologist François “Papa Doc” Duvalier rose to power, perverting Haiti's popular culture to his own ends, and ultimately establishing himself as the Vodou-empowered embodiment of the State. Indeed, over the course of François and his son Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier's consecutive dictatorships (1957-1971 and 1971-1986, respectively), Haiti's citizens suffered brutal political, social, and

psychological oppression at the hands of their own leaders—both political and spiritual. The “‘Duvalierization’ of vodou” (Murphy 14) proved a singularly effective foundation for totalitarian authority. Witnesses to, and all too often targets of, the violence threatening to overwhelm the nation, Haiti’s writers were thus motivated to significantly alter literary representations of their increasingly embattled island.

Enter the zombie.

Francophone scholar Régis Antoine qualifies the zombie as “le sujet à l’envers du merveilleux” (67) the antithesis of characters marked by “l’idée de bonheur et par la volonté de vivre pleinement” (67-8) in accordance with ideas of collective liberation. He understands the zombie as polar opposite of the romanticized hero portrayed in the Indigenist novel and of the noble peasant extolled in Indigenist theoretical writings. While Antoine is right to point out this general movement away from inspirationally heroic characters, such an assessment needs to be nuanced, failing as it does to look beyond the ethnographic—as opposed to the literarily configured—portrayal of the zombie. That is, the literary zombie must be appreciated perhaps less as what Lucas, like Antoine, perceives as “the archetypal figure of failure” (Lucas 65) and converse of the traditional Indigenist protagonist, and more accurately as Manuel, or El Gaucho, or even Hilarius Hilarion’s problematized avatar. For while it is certainly true that the zombie refuses the notion of the ready-made hero as some sort of whole and transcendent figure destined to lead the masses to revolution, it must also be acknowledged that the hero always remains dormant in the zombie, hence the creature’s inherent ambivalence and, ultimately, its usefulness to the Haitian novel.

A close look at the verb “to exploit” in the context of the zombie, both as “real” element of the Haitian folkloric tradition and as literary metaphor, helps define the role and value of this figure to certain Haitian texts. “To exploit” has two connotations to its definition: the one a neutral, if not positive, implication—that is, “to employ to the greatest

possible advantage”; and a second, clearly pejorative—“to make use of selfishly or unethically” (*American Heritage Dictionary* 478). Of course, while this semantic breakdown by no means sheds new light on the meaning of the word “exploit,” it nonetheless provides quite an appropriate frame for a discussion of the zombie. The connotative duality of the term very satisfyingly applies to an inherent quality of the zombie as an exploited being (selfishly and unethically used), as well as to the literary value of the zombie figure, exploited—that is, employed to the greatest possible advantage—first by the Haitian writer and then by the reader-theorist of Haitian literature.

In effect, the rehabilitation of Vodou initiated by the Indigenist movement, and then affirmed under the Duvalier régime, created an atmosphere in which the zombie became exceedingly useful to Haitian writers. A direct product of Haiti's most essential belief system, the zombie offered a fitting vehicle for intellectuals interested in affirming their commitment to Haiti's popular culture; an ideal metaphor through which to condemn Haiti's social and political ills. The zombie thus proved highly exploitable as a literary device and, perhaps more significantly, proposed a distinctly Haitian contribution to the literature of the French-speaking Caribbean.

Before addressing the nature of the zombie's exploitation, however, it is crucial to understand what a zombie "really is," from a specifically Haitian perspective. It must be noted that the Haitian zombie is not at all the crazed, bloodthirsty monster raised from the grave by some compulsion to hunt down humans and feast on their brains. Such a conception of the zombie—drooling, stiff-legged, arms outstretched—is strictly a Hollywood invention. First brought to theaters by Bela Lugosi in the 1932 film *White Zombie*, the silver-screen version of this figure has also appeared in such classics as *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Return of the Living Dead* (1985), *Return of the Living Dead II* (1988), and the (thankfully) less familiar *Zombies on Broadway* (1945), *Zombies of the Stratosphere* (1958) and, finally, *Zombie High*, known also by its British title, *The School that Ate My Brain* (1987).

Unlike the zombie presented in all of these B movies and straight-to-video productions, the zombie in Haiti is a victim, and not a predator; deserving of pity more than fear. Figure of exploitation *par excellence* and staple of the Vodou universe, the Haitian zombie is a being without essence—lobotomized, depersonalized, and reduced through malevolent magic to a state of impotence. Without any recollection of its past or hope for the future, the zombie exists only in the present of its exploitation. It represents the lowest being on the social scale: a non-person that has not only lost its humanity, but that has accepted, without protest, the status of victim. The creature is a partially resuscitated corpse that has been extracted from the tomb by an evil sorcerer (a *bokor* or *houngan*) and then maintained indefinitely, as anthropologist Alfred Métraux explains, "in that misty zone which divides life from death. He moves, eats, hears what is said to him, even speaks, but he has no memory and no knowledge of his condition. The zombie is a beast of burden that his master exploits without mercy, making him work in the fields, weighing him down with labour, whipping him freely and feeding him on meager, tasteless food" (282).

This latter element is particularly important since, in the mythology of the zombie, the creature remains completely obedient only as long as it is denied salted food. In effect, if the zombie ingests even a single grain of salt, it is brought out of its state of lethargy and is immediately transformed into a *bois-nouveau* (new wood), suddenly awake and aware of its

condition. It must be noted, then, that the zombie exists, in principle, in a state that as closely resembles the movement of life as it does the immobility of death. As such, while the zombie's subjugation is profound it is not necessarily definitive. In other words, the zombie is a creature within whom coexist an utter powerlessness and an enduring potential for rebirth. Both alive and dead, neither alive nor dead, the zombified individual always retains the possibility, albeit slim, of reclaiming his or her essence. It is in negotiating this double-sided nature of the zombie that several Haitian novelists have incorporated the figure into their works. For the most part, then, theirs are tales of zombies reborn.

Jacques-Stephen Alexis' "Chronique d'un faux amour" was published in 1960 as part of a collection of short stories titled *Romancero aux étoiles*. One of nine stories presented by "the Old Caribbean Wind," in the manner of a Creole folktale, it is the first-person singular account of a mulatto girl from Haiti's bourgeois elite class—an all but unredeemable social group in the eyes of Indigenist champion Alexis. This unnamed young girl, a representative social type if ever there was one, tells her story from a nunnery, though she is not a nun. Rather, as the reader learns at the conclusion of the story, the girl has been placed in the convent by her family after having been found in the home of the sorcerer who turned her into a zombie on her wedding day. The "chronicle" is this heroine-narrator's confused and fractured account (in flashback) of her barely remembered past and of the events leading up to the fateful day of her false death.

Ten years prior to this telling of her story, the pampered adolescent girl's father, faced with financial troubles, arranged for her to wed a mysterious young stranger "d'extraction douteuse" (133). Her fiancé's only known relation was his adoptive father, an old peasant who our narrator describes as "un ours brun mal léché...qui ne sait même pas s'exprimer en français" (136). She makes no secret of the fact that this figure of the peasantry—this "gorille grimaud" (138), as she calls him on several occasions—inspires fear and disgust in her. Ultimately, of course, it is this old man who poisons her on the day of her wedding and makes of her his zombie slave by giving her an enchanted bridal bouquet to carry. In the present of the story, the girl has since been rescued from the old sorcerer but, as a *bois nouveaux*, can never entirely recover her old self. She lives, then, in a state of horrifying limbo, not quite dead, but not able to fully join the rhythms of life either.

Though the girl is unquestionably a victim, Alexis makes it equally clear that this character is not meant to evoke the reader's sympathy. For as she tells her story, the reader quickly realizes that her pre-zombie existence was one of frivolity and great privilege sustained by her father's wealth and social status. Her memories reveal her great disdain for the poor, her bigotry toward the darker-skinned, and her ignorance and fear of the peasant class and its traditions. In effect, she is—or rather, was—the epitome of the assimilative, arrogant

bourgeoise; absolute in her prejudice and blind to the narrowness of her perspective. Alexis suggests that it was ultimately this prejudice and this blindness, coupled with the general hypocrisy of her social class, that resulted in her transformation into a zombie.

By the conclusion of the story, the reader has become aware of the very subtle commentary at work in the “chronique.” It becomes apparent that Alexis’ narrator was in fact both transformed into an actual zombie on her wedding day and revealed as a metaphorical zombie by her first obligatory contact with a member of the peasantry. That is, her careless acceptance of the unjust hierarchical class structure of Haitian society, and her inability to recognize the shamefulness of her social milieu, were already evidence of a zombified state—a condition that actually preceded her literal zombification at the hands of the sorcerer. Symbolic figure of the indecent Haitian elite, the spoiled young girl had long been a being without essence. The pettiness and egoism of the life her father encouraged her to live—before making the deal that further damned her—was not unlike the passive, soulless condition of the zombie. And it is only after going through zombification and coming out on the other side that the girl begins to question, ever so slightly, this past existence. The “Chronique d’un faux amour” thus amounts to a cautionary tale that uses both a literal and a figurative iteration of the zombie to denounce what Alexis considered one of the primary social ills afflicting the Haitian people: the selfishness and indifference of its elite.

The metaphorical potential of the zombie becomes full-blown allegory in Frankétienne’s *Les Affres d’un défi*, and permeates every aspect of the novel. The premises of the story and basic narrative thread are fairly straightforward: the citizens of Bois-Neuf live in total submission to the evil Vodou sorcerer Saintil and his henchman Zofer. Clodonis, a young student whose political ideas threaten Saintil’s power, has been turned into a zombie by the sorcerer and made to work alongside other zombies in rice fields stolen from the people of the village. In “zombifying” Clodonis, Saintil has effectively issued a warning to all who would potentially oppose him, thus solidifying his control over Bois Neuf. Saintil’s daughter, Sultana, falls in love with Clodonis, however, and wakes him from his zombified state by giving him salt. Clodonis in turn distributes salt to the other zombies, who then awaken and cry out for vengeance. Inspired by Clodonis’ call for collective action, the villagers, too, are “awakened” and ally themselves with the bois nouveaux (both the expression used to designate reanimated zombies and, of course, the appropriate term for the citizens of Bois Neuf). Unified and powerful, this newly-revitalized community—led by former zombies _ destroys Saintil and begins for the first time to look toward the future with hope.

The fairly simple allegory described above actually represents only one layer of the narration in *Les Affres d’un défi*. Though this plotline provides the most perceptible markers of a beginning, middle, and end to the story, there are numerous other significant intrigues

presented throughout the novel. In fact, *Les Affres d'un défi* uses the metaphor of zombification as its organizing theme. In addition to Clodonis and the others whom Saintil has literally turned into the living dead, Frankétienne's novel features a host of figuratively zombified individuals who share a common experience of exploitation. Indeed, while Clodonis is perhaps the most visible protagonist, his character is by no means the "hero" or even necessarily the central character of the story. On the contrary, the novel is peppered with numerous zombie-like characters that exist in varying degrees of subjugation in a textual universe devoid of chronological or any other order.

There is, for example, Rita, a poor servant girl who lives as a veritable slave in the home of her elderly godfather, Gédéon. Her life consists of executing an unending list of menial chores, while responding to Gédéon's most humiliating insults and demands with a docile, "Oui, Tonton." Frankétienne summarizes her existence as follows:

Arrivée au marché, elle s'empresse d'exécuter les achats, pour regagner aussitôt la vieille maison de Gédéon. Reprendre l'interminable calvaire. Gravier et descendre l'escalier, plusieurs fois par jour. Cuisiner. Servir la nourriture et l'eau. Balayer la cour. Nettoyer les chambres. Lessiver. Repasser les linges. Époussetter les meubles. Cirer le parquet. Torréfier le café. Avaler des flots d'injures. S'étioler dans un coin. L'existence de la petite Rita se ramène au fond à grimper une échelle à laquelle manqueraient plusieurs barreaux. Sa vie, un épouvantable mâât suiffé (38).

Several pages later, the quasi immobilizing monotony of Rita's existence is reiterated:

Entretemps, escaladant et dégringolant sans répit l'escalier branlant pour servir des médicaments au vieillard malade et grincheux, la petite domestique Rita rappelle étrangement une poupée mécanique, une marionnette de théâtre (111).

Frankétienne later uses almost identical terms to describe the situation of another metaphorically zombified character, the traumatized young student, Jérôme. Each day before dawn, Jérôme cloisters himself in a small, elevated coop from which he does not emerge until after dark. He spends his days shut up in a prison of his own making, too terrified of Saintil and Zofer to participate in the world outside his rat-infested quarters. Like Rita, he is tormented by, yet reconciled to, the limitations that define his quotidian.

L'existence de Jérôme se ramène à un curieux calvaire. Devoir se réveiller avant l'aube. Grimper l'échelle avant le lever du soleil. Passer la journée, recroquevillé dans un coin du grenier. Le soir, descendre l'échelle après la tombée de la nuit. L'épreuve de l'échelle se révèle pire qu'un châtement. Les tourments de l'enfer. L'épuisement. Parfois, aux bords des larmes, Jérôme ne peut se souvenir fidèlement des événements de sa propre vie; il ne comprend même pas comment ni pourquoi il a commencé à s'entortiller les jambes autour des barreaux de l'échelle. Toujours le même supplice se déroulant sur le rythme binaire de l'escalade et de la dégringolade (43-4).

Both Rita and Jérôme are defined, then, by a paralyzing repetitiveness that neither is capable of challenging much less of rejecting. Though physically alive, both characters are spiritually near-dead, and—like zombies—have abandoned any hope of modifying their existence or of escaping their wretched condition.

These two examples of spiritual zombification are set against a chaotic backdrop of unceasing acts of violence perpetrated against and narrated by an unidentified “Nous,” itself constantly at risk of being “zombified.” In long passages filled with images of extreme, almost delirious carnage, this first-person plural narrator describes the repression suffered at the hands of various zombifying social forces. Randomly juxtaposed with the events of the more coherent narrative, these descriptions are strewn with both literal and figurative zombies, as in the following passage:

Notre sommeil est entrecoupé de visions macabres. Nous hurlons en proie des cauchemars. A notre réveil, nous prenons des purges amères. Faux espoirs. Poignards rouillés. Chair gangrenée. Défilé de séquences carnavalesques. Nous avalons l’huile âcre de l’échec. Poison foudroyant tétanisant nos muscles. Perforation des intestins. Les zombis se dirigent lentement du côté des ombres ; ils s’en vont lourdement, bercés par la sourde et molle musique de leur âme à demi éteinte (173).

In addition to detailing physical acts of violent subjugation, these passages describe countless metaphorical acts of zombification, such as censorship, starvation, and dispossession. Physically constrained and psychologically demoralized, the anonymous “Nous” amounts to an undifferentiated community of zombies, as the following passage so vividly illustrates:

Les yeux sombres noyés dans leur orbite, le visage blême, les lèvres fanées, le cou décharné, les clavicules saillantes, nous offrons le spectacle désolant d’un troupeau de malades incurables (128).

With such descriptions Frankétienne plunges his reader—implicitly made a part of this suffering “Nous”—into an immediate experience of the “horror of indeterminacy” (Collins and Mayblin 21) that defines the zombie’s situation and profoundly marks individual reality under a dictatorship. Frankétienne thus exploits the zombie metaphor as an allegorical representation of the many tensions that make existence so great a struggle for those who, like himself, remained in Duvalier’s Haiti. The brutalized collective of Frankétienne’s narrative, well aware of the magnitude and power of the forces of evil but unable to concretize an effective solidarity, rarely dares challenge the order of things. We thus find numerous passages in which the group seems inclined to take action, but desists for lack of confidence in its own strength. Let us take, for example, the following extract:

La lumière a aveuglé l’assassin embusqué au fond des bois. Sans dire un mot, les yeux grands ouverts, nous en avons profité pour nous retirer à pas feutrés et nous mettre à l’abri. Il n’est jamais recommandé d’interrompre le sommeil des carnassiers affamés, des mangeurs insatiables et des ennemis de guerre, tant que nous ne nous sentons pas encore prêts pour terrasser le mal. Ni de parler à haute et intelligible voix, si nos bras tardent à suivre l’envol de nos pensées (56).

Rather than seize the opportunity to confront, as a group, the momentarily blinded assassin, the terrified “Nous” hides instead. The community’s utter lack of confidence in its capacity to successfully unite effectively condemns it to paralysis.

Like the fighting cocks evoked throughout the novel as a metaphorical offshoot of the zombie allegory, the anonymous “Nous” is framed—trapped—within an intrinsically violent arena in which solidarity is a risk no one can afford to take. The zombie figure thus enables Frankétienne to construct a community of individuals whose condition of victimization and resignation is consistently nuanced by tentative or, at the very least, potential acts of transformation and revolution.

The hesitancy and indecision that paralyze the “Nous” are best expressed by one of the most persistent refrains of the novel: “sur quel pied rentrer dans la danse.” This phrase reflects at once the immobility plaguing the collective and this collective’s desire to take action, thus echoing the tension implicit in the character of the zombie. The “dance” suggests potential resistance, and not knowing which foot to raise first is what prevents the struggle from being initiated. Variations on the phrase appear throughout the novel, at times in the form of a question and at others in the form of a statement. The narrator asks, for example: “Mais, s’il est question pour nous d’y participer pleinement, sur quel pied devrions-nous danser?” (7) then later explains, “Pour le moment, nous nous évertuons à chercher sur quel pied entrer dans la danse?” (72) and again, “Si nous restons encore indécis, c’est que nous cherchons vraiment sur quel pied entrer dans la danse.” (100) There are at least a dozen such instances in the novel where the unidentified first-person narrator mentions a frustrated desire to enter into the dance, each time referring to the community’s reluctance to assume responsibility for its future.

The “Nous”-narrated passages also suggest, however, that the possibility of “entering the dance” might exist, ironically, thanks to the very misery and degradation in which the “Nous” has been forced to wallow. This collective narrator essentially argues that the very baseness of the Haitian condition might ultimately be the greatest source of its freedom:

Une miette de maïs sous les ongles, un grain de sel sous la langue, nous n’avons peur de rien, ni d’ève, ni d’adam, ni du serpent. Vingt siècles de luttes ne nous effraient nullement. La patience, l’endurance, la résistance, enracinées dans nos tripes, imprègnent toute notre vie de peuple bafoué. Nés dans la crasse et la pouillerie, pétris par la misère, colletés à l’expérience quotidienne de la douleur, que pourrions-nous craindre de plus? (160-1)

Centuries of degradation and despair have left the collective in a position that simply cannot become any worse. It is, therefore, only by crying out all the misery that marks its quotidian, in acknowledging the rape, murder, filth, and poverty that color its existence, and in recognizing the ugliness and decay that define the entirety of the community, that the “Nous” can begin to challenge its immobility. In effect, while descriptions of horror may appear to overwhelm *Les Affres d’un défi*, the narrator nonetheless seems able to envision an awakening: “*Dessillons-nous les yeux / Arrachons les plumes racornies alourdissant nos ailes / Enlevons les croûtes pourries de nos orteils / extirpons les chiques et les crabes entravant notre marche parmi les pierres.*”

Nous finirons par savoir sur quel pied danser.” (61)

But in the end, ambiguity remains: Frankétienne refuses his reader the solace of any definitive conclusion about the many characters he presents. The relatively one-dimensional individuals and the ill-defined “Nous” conflate and overlap throughout the novel, leaving the reader with the image of a single figure formed by the combination of this multitude of fragmented individuals. Indeed, the most vividly and completely depicted character of *Les Affres d'un défi* is ultimately a symbolic one: the zombie. Frankétienne extracts this distinctly non-European figure from the specificity of the Haitian Vodou tradition and successfully employs it as the cornerstone of his lamentation on the universal struggle between alienation and self-realization.

René Depestre similarly exploits the zombie figure in his first novel, *Le mât de Cocagne*. The novel's plot amounts to an even more thinly-veiled allegory of the political situation in Haiti under Duvalier. As Depestre himself has stated, *Le mât de Cocagne* can be read as “the fable of Haitian tragedy, an allegory of the moral conscience confronted with the violence of ‘Papadocracy’” (Depestre, Festival xl). The novel tells the story of Henri Postel, victim of gradual zombification by the dictator Zacharie Zoocrate, the “Grand Eléctricateur des âmes.” A former Senator targeted by the government for supposedly seditious activities, Postel has witnessed the torture and murder of his entire family, including his pregnant wife, and the massacre of all his partisans. The most horrific punishment has been reserved for Postel himself. Rather than killing him outright or even physically torturing him, Zoocrate and his ministers set out to turn Postel into a zombie, metaphorically speaking, and have condemned him to “une mort qui lui grignote lentement l'esprit avant de s'attaquer à son corps” (14). They have completely degraded Postel, stripping him of his political power and sticking him behind the counter of a run-down, vermin-infested rural boutique.

The above events have all occurred in the past of the novel. At the point when the reader encounters Postel, the latter has had enough and is in the midst of planning his escape into permanent exile. Yet just as he has resigned himself to embarking, zombie-like, on this path of least resistance, Postel discovers an alternative. He decides to participate in the government-sponsored greasy pole competition. Fixed clearly within the framework of a traditional aspect of Haitian popular culture, this contest pits competitors against one another in a race to be first to reach a prize placed at the top of a several meter high pole slathered with tar, oil, and fecal matter, and rigged with various booby traps (such as the *mât suiffé* of Rita's torment). Though middle-aged, out of shape, and psychologically traumatized, Postel decides to enter the competition and thus refashion his destiny—not just for his own sake, but for the sake of all Haitians. As he declares to one of Zoocrate's political allies, “[v]ous allez voir ce qu'un zombie peut tenter pour recouvrer l'estime de sa patrie” (35)

Postel's decision to take action transforms him from a zombie into a Marxist revolutionary.

Thus with the character of Henri Postel, Depestre effectively proposes the political ideology that numerous other Haitian writer-intellectuals have turned to, hoping to find in Socialism a viable solution to the political terror imposed by Haiti's own leaders. As a true Marxist hero, Postel's actions are meant to inspire revolution or, at the very least, resistance among members of the less educated peasant and popular classes - to "offrir à son peuple un exemple apte à le réveiller de sa condition animale de zombie." (98) And, indeed, the ex-Senator succeeds in doing just that. After putting himself through a mentally, physically, and spiritually grueling training process, Postel manages to triumph over all the other younger, Zoocrate-planted competitors, thus providing an example for his community of how one individual can combat the forces of violence and terror that define existence under a dictatorship. As the narrator informs us, "l'exploit d'Henri Postel et le bain de sang qui le suivit eurent des échos dans le monde entier. Pendant trois jours le Grand Pays Zacharien cessa d'être la moitié d'île la plus à l'écart des combats qui se livrent sur la terre" (133)

This last passage explicitly announces what is perhaps the most fundamental intention underlying all of Depestre's prose fiction: the incorporation of Haitian reality into a greater world picture. And *Le mât de Cocagne* is not the only instance in which Depestre exploits the zombie in service of this objective. Indeed, Depestre's second novel, *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves*, similarly extends the metaphor of the living dead into an extra-insular space. Hadriana tells the tale of a small Haitian community's attempt to cope with the transformation of one of its most beloved members into a zombie. A young, wealthy French girl, the eponymous Hadriana, enjoys a seemingly perfect existence in Jacmel. As the town's "fille-étoile" (25), she is cherished and adored by all, and her upcoming wedding to a local boy from a prominent Haitian family is considered a blessing on the village. On the morning of her marriage, however, Hadriana imbibes a mysterious potion and collapses at the altar just as she pronounces her vows. Transformed into a zombie, her wedding day becomes her funeral. She is buried by the town, revived by an evil sorcerer, escapes, and disappears into popular legend, never to be seen in Jacmel again.

Clearly, *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves* repeats certain of the basic premises of "Chronique d'un faux amour." Depestre's tale ultimately diverges rather significantly from Alexis' story, however, in its presentation of the perspective of and choices made by its zombified heroine—in the fact and the implications of her escape from zombification. For what we have in this novel is a two-part narrative structure: that is, a telling and retelling of the events surrounding Hadriana's zombification. More importantly, while the first version is told in the third person by a male narrator, Patrick, Hadriana's godbrother and greatest admirer, the second, corrected version is told in the first person, by Hadriana herself.

Patrick's narration reveals a vision of Hadriana shared by the entirety of the Jacmelian community. Peppered with doctors, lawyers, and low-level bureaucrats, Jacmel strives to maintain an air of Gallic respectability in the face of the pervasive influence of various popular beliefs and practices. A virginal embodiment of white womanhood, Hadriana is heralded as "l'idéal de la beauté française" (44) and "le don princier que la France de Debussy et de Renoir a fait" (38). She is the veritable patron saint of Jacmel, object of the town's profoundly alienated admiration for all things French, and symbol of its "filiation naturelle entre le réel et le merveilleux" (132). Hadriana's marriage to a Haitian—which, tellingly, marks the beginning of carnival, and to which all members of the community have been invited—fully implicates the collective. The ceremony is described as a "une bacchanale publique" (6), and is meant to provide Jacmel with "l'occasion de rythmer de nouveau sa vie dans la danse et la fantaisie" (37). In essence, Hadriana's wedding is viewed as an offering of herself (her self) to the entire village. It is, therefore, quite fitting that Hadriana should die at the highpoint of the marriage ceremony. By expiring in the same breath with which she affirms her commitment to Jacmel, Hadriana enters irreversibly into popular memory as the virgin bride, fixed in an eternal purity.

Indeed, the last moments of Hadriana's life, as recounted by Patrick, very clearly support the interpretation of her death as a virtual martyrization. Dressed in white and followed by her wedding party, the young bride passes through a crowd of admirers in a slow procession to the church. With the magic potion already flowing through her veins, Hadriana walks to embrace her death in a scene that perfectly resembles the performance of a ritual sacrifice. When the priest calls upon her to pronounce her vows, she crumbles to the ground at the foot of the altar, but not before consenting to her own sacrifice with what Patrick describes as a "oui hallucinant de détresse" (46). Devastated by Hadriana's tragic death, the community bears the further insult of her zombification—which is revealed on the day following her funeral, when it is discovered that her grave has been disturbed and her coffin emptied. The social and economic decline that befall Jacmel over the next several years are then, Patrick suggests, attributable as much to the community's despair at losing Hadriana as to the fact of her botched sacrifice and presumed zombification.

In the second half of the novel, which is set nearly forty years later in Hadriana's new home in Kingston, Jamaica, the would-be bride tracks Patrick down and then revisits and reconstructs nearly all of the events and experiences that he has previously described. Having ostensibly been granted narrative authority here, Hadriana sets out to demystify Patrick's narration and to (pro)claim a sexuality that had been consistently denied her by the people of Jacmel. Hadriana explains in her narration that she herself had never accepted the role of virgin-saint, and even confesses to having indulged in numerous (and varied) salacious

encounters prior to her wedding day—including one that implicates Patrick himself. She reveals, for example, that while laying silent and paralyzed at her own wake, alive but trapped within her immobilized body, she was both shocked and amused to hear the many evocations of her saintliness:

Moi, une sainte? J'ai été capable...par deux fois avant le "au-mariage-seulement," d'ouvrir ma chair à autrui les yeux fermés: il s'en était fallu d'un cheveu de blonde que Patrick se décidât à passer outre à l'éblouissement de sa grande main d'adolescent sur mon amande pour piquer un plongeon de mâle dans une eau femelle rageusement consentante....Parlez d'une sainte...pardonnez-moi, j'ai péché! Une autre fois...j'étais nue dans la chambre en compagnie de Lolita Philisbourg. Le charbon noir et mauve de mon sexe de dix-sept ans criait dans la cendre brûlante de ses caresses. J'étais ravie d'avoir dans sa bouche mon amande mieux aotée que n'importe quel fruit de la saison...afin qu'elle l'élève follement au septième ciel, à travers trois, cinq, et même en ce jour béni des dieux, jusqu'à sept orgasmes successifs (171-2).

In a language taken straight from the pages of a Harlequin Romance and charged with the sensuality of a creolized French, Hadriana expresses her own extremely eroticized conception of herself, refusing Jacmel's phallographic and repressive collective construction of her individual identity. As such, the reader must understand her emphatic "yes" at the altar as, perhaps more than anything else, an embracing of the long-awaited opportunity to finally have sex.

Over the course of her narration, Hadriana makes clear that the Jacmelian community's perception of and love for her, as well as the life of ease and privilege this communal adoration afforded her, came at a great price and were actually experienced as an increasingly stifling objectification. She further admits that she herself only became fully conscious of the extent to which she had been exploited and constrained by her community after being turned into a zombie. Recalling her terrifying ideal, Hadriana tells Patrick of how she initially managed to flee the sorcerer and his henchmen at the cemetery, and returned to the village hoping to find refuge from her pursuers. With the Vodou priest on her heels, she recounts, she ran back into town and knocked desperately on door after door. But neither family, nor friend, nor any of her many "devotees" would open their home to her. As she was no longer of any use to Jacmel, they simply ignored her cries. It was then, Hadriana explains, that she understood the limits of the woman she had once been, and the value of her escape and rebirth:

D'avoir eu un horizon terriblement enchevêtré dans la mort et la vie à la fois rendrait mon existence plus vivante et plus sensible à la délicate complexité de tas de choses touchant aux faits et aux gestes familiers de mes semblables....Je saurais mieux écouter toutes mes voix de femme, avec toutefois le sentiment, dès ce matin-là, que si la femme naturelle renaissait de ces épreuves mieux armée pour donner une valeur pleine à chaque instant de la vie, la femme sociale ne se remettrait jamais tout à fait de ses mains blessées aux portes où elle a frappé (204).

From this moment on, Hadriana refuses the social zombification that implicitly dictated her existence prior to her physical zombification. She begins the process of reinventing herself according to her own desires. In a sense liberated by her false death, she rejects the fundamental impotence of her pre-zombie life. Hadriana renounces all ties to Jacmel and leaves for Jamaica, never to return to Haiti again.

And so Depestre uses his rebellious zombie to illustrate an important dialectic according to which individual freedom is the primary condition for true participation in a community. For in the end, he suggests, there are circumstances in which the community as a whole threatens the dignity and liberty of certain of its members. This is clearly Hadriana's plight. As Patrick himself admits,

L'efficacité de la magie (je l'ai appris de Lévi-Strauss) est un phénomène de consensus social. Celui-ci a joué aux dépens d'Hadriana Siloé. Quand tout un village, conformément à ses traditions, est convaincu qu'un être humain peut devenir un mort-vivant sous le double effet d'une substance toxique et d'un acte de haute sorcellerie, il ne faut pas s'attendre, en pareil cas, que l'entourage de la victime se porte à son secours. Cette nuit-là, au fond de chaque conscience, à Jacmel, le souci de tous était d'éloigner la jeune mariée changée en zombie, de la rabattre sur son inéluctable destin, comme un danger pour l'ensemble du corps social jacmélien. C'est ce qui s'est passé (133).

Hadriana's adventure thus serves to effectively comment on and challenge the hypocrisy of the conventions regarding race, class, gender, sexuality, and folk belief that pervade the Haitian bourgeoisie. Her story further insists on the notion of the individual's right to refuse determination by the needs or desires of someone or something outside of him or herself, a concept that might even be regarded as Depestre's response to the phenomenon of "doctor politics" that has proven so damaging to his native Haiti and to many other postcolonial nations. The crafty young virgin who actually crawls out of the volcano, Hadriana's refusal to be sacrificed clearly distinguishes her from Henri Postel. Indeed, the concepts presented in *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves* reveal a very different Depestre from the novelist of *Le mât de Cocagne*—a Depestre disillusioned with Socialism, Marxism, and any other "ism" that implies the sacrifice of individual liberty. His narrative echoes, in fact, certain of Edouard Glissant's comments on the fundamental unsophisticatedness of any sort of collective dependency on the performance of a sacrifice for its political salvation. In his seminal collection of essays *Le discours antillais*, Glissant comments specifically, if briefly, on the function of sacrifice in the modern world. He writes,

Oui, l'homme d'aujourd'hui a appris à ne pas mésuser de l'espoir commun (et des tensions qu'elle autorise) au point de lui sacrifier des héros rituels. Le rite tragique du sacrifice comporte l'assurance d'une opposition dialectique (individu-communauté) dont la résolution est estimée bénéfique. La modernité suppose l'éclatement de cette dialectique: ou bien l'individu s'exaspère, et c'est le retournement de l'Histoire en pure négation; ou bien les communautés s'élargissent, et c'est le dessin nouveau des histoires qui relaient (dans la conscience) l'Histoire. Dans un cas comme dans l'autre, la médiation du sacrifice héroïque devient inutile (715-16).

Depestre's novel certainly supports these ideas, suggesting that Hadriana's sacrifice exposed the most unenlightened, rigid, and even cowardly aspects of her community. Having created, then abandoned the zombie in its midst, Jacmel's gradual degradation and ultimate passage into a permanent state of neglect present an appropriate conclusion to this cautionary tale. For in the end, Depestre calls this postcolonial community to task for its willingness to sacrifice—over and over again—one of its own members for the ignoble purposes of maintaining a status quo steeped in and defined by an unchallenged alienation. It is clear, then, that Depestre expects Hadriana's tale to bear a significance that extends beyond this one novel. The very insertion of blonde, French, white Hadriana Siloé into this Haitian folkloric drama is in and of itself a calculated move outside the space of the island. In effect, Depestre uses Hadriana (the woman and the text) to explore the vast metaphorical potential of the zombie, exploiting this figure as an opportunity to place Haiti—that not-even-half of an island from which he himself has long been exiled—in contact with the rest of the world.

As in *Les Affres d'un défi*, the less frequently acknowledged side of the zombie's dialectical nature—its transformative, even revolutionary capacity—is explored in both *Le mât de Cocagne* and *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves*. Indeed, both Frankétienne and René Depestre suggest that the zombie's fundamental ambivalence imbues it with a potential for resistance—be it as an actual leader (Postel, Clodonis) or as a mere example of possibility (Hadriana)—that nuances the binary opposition described by Antoine or Lucas. In other words, the zombie is neither the protagonist of the puddle nor one of so many “motifs-signes de la négativité absolue” (Antoine 69). On the contrary, there is nothing absolute about the zombie's condition or function in any of the works examined here. This figure can be said to exist outside of the “oppositional paradigm” that places the marvelous real either in or out of the puddle.

Focusing on the zombie, this too little explored narrative element taken directly from the mytho-reality of Haiti's folk tradition, thus proposes a unique and ultimately quite productive point of entry into a number of Haitian literary works. Exploited as effectively for Alexis' Indigenist purposes as for Depestre's social (sur-)realism and Frankétienne's Spiralist aesthetic, the zombie functions as a catalyzing metaphor for considering questions of community-building and alienation in an economically, politically, and even psychically fractured society. The zombie figure indeed proves imminently exploitable as a conduit to many of the broader socio-aesthetic concerns prevalent in modern Haitian literature.

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