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DON'T TRUST THE AUTHOR: SUSPECT TEXTS IN ÉDOUARD GLISSANT'S *TOUT-MONDE*

Édouard Glissant's *Tout-monde* is a text that challenges traditional conceptions of the novelistic genre. Glissant freely admitted to the book's transgressive qualities, remarking in an interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur* shortly after the work's publication in 1993 that "tout y est volontairement mêlé [. . .] peu importe de savoir exactement qui est qui ou qui fait quoi" ("Sur la trace"). In a subsequent interview included in *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (1995), he noted that "il s'agit bien d'un roman à mon avis, mais d'un roman éclaté [. . .] C'est aussi une œuvre qui risque un dépassement des genres littéraires établis" (129–30). Ostensibly, *Tout-monde* follows on from his five previous novels, and it therefore includes a "Rappel des péripéties qui ont précédé" (11) at the beginning to remind readers of prior plot events and of the relationships between characters. However, it also contains a plethora of new characters, notes for a travel journal, scenes that resemble passages from a historical novel, long stretches of first-person direct discourse, and excerpts from a text (*Traité du tout-monde*) that are attributed to the protagonist Mathieu Béluse, but which are later included in Glissant's own 1997 philosophical work of the same title. Moreover, unlike in Glissant's earlier novels, there are a great number of coded references to real-life individuals. Some of their identities are revealed at the end of the book, in the section "Sur les noms" (605)—for instance, "Roger" is the French poet Roger Giroux and "Gibier" is apparently Patrick Chamoiseau—yet since characters who are clearly invented are also mentioned here and many of the unveilings are ambiguous, the frontier between fiction and reality remains decidedly permeable. *Tout-monde* is additionally distinguished from Glissant's preceding works of fiction because it does not take place exclusively on his native island of Martinique. Its intertwining—though not always interconnected—plot strands are set over five continents and take place during different time periods, jumping back and forth from era to era and moving abruptly from one corner of the globe to another.

Glissant is himself a highly enigmatic presence in the work. Several unnamed characters are referred to in the third person as the poet, chronicler, narrator, novelist, or "le déparleur," and they share biographical details with the author: a wife called Sylvie (369), a home in Baton Rouge (548), a son

The Romanic Review Volume 105 Numbers 3–4 © The Trustees of Columbia University

named Mathieu (553). The poet character is also identified now and again as "Godby" or "Godbi"—Glissant's childhood nickname (*Traité* 78). However, the reader is warned not to make too much out of these associations, as the end of the book cautions that "le déparleur, le poète, le chroniqueur, le romancier, ne gagez pas que c'est l'auteur du livre, vous vous tromperiez à coup sûr" (606). To complicate matters further, there are various anonymous *first*-person narrators who frequently designate themselves with these epithets, and the character Mathieu Béluse—not to be confused with Glissant's actual son, Mathieu—adopts such scribal functions, too, as it is noted that "Mathieu, déparleur, chroniqueur, romancier, c'était quatre-en-un" (408). Glissant teases and tantalizes, and there are multiple instances when the text appears to justify an autobiographical reading or invite an interpretation of its words as expressions of his own views or experiences. Yet simultaneously, the fictional, polyphonic nature of *Tout-monde* frustrates such an approach, rendering it difficult to pin down the author and his thoughts.[1]

Both the form and content of the text are therefore opaque in many ways. Partly, this can be linked to Glissant's theory of opacity, a crucial aspect of his thinking since the beginning of his career that is especially evident in *L'Intention poétique*. There, in the chapter "Sur l'opacité," Glissant praises the fact that characters in the novels of William Faulkner "ne sont pas denses de psychologie, mais d'attache à leur glèbe" (168), suggesting that their anchorage in the landscape of the Deep South reveals more about them than any attempted gloss by the author, and that Faulkner's lack of insight into the motivations of his black characters is ultimately something positive, as they maintain an unfathomable alterity that underscores the tragedy of their social alienation (169–70). According to this essay, then, novels do not have to clarify or render their subjects intelligible in order to unveil them to the reader in a manner that resonates: the world can remain indecipherable, the author is not obliged to explain away its subtleties. Later philosophical texts by Glissant develop this notion of opacity and turn it into a key principle of his theory of Relation. In *Poétique de la relation*, he argues that in contrast to a process of comprehension that seeks to "surprendre le fond des natures" (204) and that reduces rich complexities into overly simplistic and fallacious transparencies, opacity allows for the distinctness of the world's diverse elements to be upheld as they interact with one another: "Le droit à l'opacité [. . .] fonderait réellement la Relation, en libertés" (204). For Glissant, respect for "l'Autre" implies relinquishing attempts to efface his or her difference, as

1. For further analysis of how Glissant constructs "a plurality of *sujets d'énonciation* for the text while simultaneously refusing to assign any definitive identities to them," see Britton, "Fictions" 54.

"il ne m'est pas nécessaire que je le 'comprenne' pour me sentir solidaire de lui, pour bâtir avec lui, pour aimer ce qu'il fait" (207). All peoples thus have the right to opacity, and it is the starting point for a rapport with others that is not based on conquest, domination, or hierarchies. Building on his earlier concern with how opacity functions in literature, Glissant also stresses that it is a crucial notion to bear in mind when reading or interpreting texts, because "la pratique d'un texte littéraire figure ainsi une opposition entre deux opacités, celle irréductible de ce texte [. . .] et celle toujours en mouvement de l'auteur ou d'un lecteur" (*Poétique* 129). The work will necessarily escape attempts by the critic to grasp it and pin it down to a particular message or meaning, as even its author will never be able to elucidate it fully.

This espousal of opacity certainly has implications for Glissant's style, as the majority of his texts resist easy synthesis. His novels in particular reject mimetic literary realism and its project of capturing the world in textual form in order to offer a coherent portrayal of its workings. These qualities of his fiction have been noted, explored, and often lauded by critics. Celia Britton, for instance, in *Édouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory*, links the opacity of Glissant's early novels to a practice of cultural resistance, whereby the author not only uses his fiction to protest situations of exploitation and domination in Martinique but also uses language and subversive narrative strategies to render his work resistant to a totalizing Western reading. Nick Nesbitt too finds that while a novel such as *Malemort* (1975) may be "Glissant's most pessimistic and opaque work [. . .] unrelenting in its refusal of stylistic compromise and its description of Antillean dereliction," its opacity is not simply a celebration of difference but also "a fragmentary, multi-faceted analysis of Antillean society in the throes of neocolonialist alienation" (*Voicing* 180, 181). While Britton and Nesbitt focus on the countercolonial dimension to Glissant's novels, Christina Kullberg perceptively notes the parallels between Glissant's rejection of "European realistic writing" and his suspicion of an ethnographic approach to reality, in which the cultivation of all-encompassing description "corresponds to a *construction* of the real, not an inventory. It *distorts* the real so that it can fit into the knowledge frame imposed upon it" (972, 973; my emphasis). Instead of forcing reality to fit into a text's preconceived structure or system, Glissant accepts that it will overflow from the work's borders and questions the merits of striving to paint it exactly: "L'imitation du réel, un des fondements de l'écriture dans les cultures occidentales, est à réinterroger" (*Traité* 110). Overall, at least for Glissant's first five novels, the opacity of his distinct style has been viewed positively: even Maryse Condé, who commented in the 1970s that "l'œuvre de Glissant est si obscure qu'il est souvent nécessaire de se référer à des commenteurs pour tenter de l'élucider" (*Le Roman* 12), has since asserted that "Glissant's most important contribution to West Indian literature is the introduction of a new dimension, the one of language [. . .] The

reproach of obscurity and abstruseness which is constantly hurled at him is but the consequence of his essential belief: language for the West Indian writer is the only way of shaping the future" ("Order" 127).

However, when it comes to how opacity functions in *Tout-monde*, the critical jury is still out. Several scholars have made comments to the effect that Glissant becomes too opaque for his own good here, criticizing the book's structure[2] and claiming that despite its multiplicity of characters and voices, it ultimately has only one message: that the *tout-monde* is a good thing.[3] Peter Hallward argues that the novel's polyphony is deceptive, as "what *is* clearly privileged is this very confusion of voices in the interests of a newly singular univocity [. . .] Glissant fragments, then, in order to become *more* rather than less total" (115, 118). In Hallward's view, the many voices seek to camouflage that Glissant is in fact producing fiction with a single purpose: that of promoting his philosophical ideas, which become increasingly marked by chaos theory and by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's figure of the rhizome,[4] to the point where the novel depicts "a new world order based on nothing other than constant internal metamorphosis, dislocation and exchange [. . .] a new, post-national or 'chaotic' alternative" (Hallward 68–69). For Hallward and certain other scholars, *Tout-monde* indicates a moment when Glissant's fiction—along with the rest of his oeuvre—takes a "post-political turn" (Bongie 329). They contend that by the 1990s, Glissant renounces oppositional politics and hope for an independent Martinican state, and instead promotes a "deterritorialised, 'rhizomatic' reality" (Hallward 69) and an aesthetics where

2. Richard Burton, for instance, asserts that it illustrates "l'essoufflement d'une pensée qui ne fait plus que tourner en rond" and "la dégradation [. . .] de l'art du romancier" (99, 101), while Peter Hallward proclaims that "there is no unity of place or plot [. . .] The basic principle of composition seems to be, quite simply: anything goes" (102).

3. The *tout-monde* implies an interaction of the world's cultures in which the specificity of each individual culture would be respected, but where societies would also be open to positive creolizing contact with other cultures: "Notre univers tel qu'il change et perdure en échangeant" (*Traité* 176).

4. *Tout-monde* is in fact dedicated to Guattari. However, it could be argued that Glissant finds the Deleuzian rhizome too abstract and that although he deploys the figure, he modifies it for his own purposes. In *Le Discours antillais*, for example, he expresses concern at how "la pensée rhizomatique de Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari relativise par système" (338), as "cette rapide incursion des deux auteurs dans la Relation [. . .] ignore beaucoup *les situations autres* [. . .] Aussi bien Deleuze et Guattari feront-ils le rapport entre rhizomatique et nomadologie. Mais le nomadisme 'dépasse' l'effort des peuples dont l'effort est de s'enraciner" (339). He concludes that "le rhizome n'est pas nomade, il s'enracine, même dans l'air [. . .] mais de n'être pas *une souche* le prédispose à 'accepter' l'inconcevable de l'autre" (340).

"poetics is sufficient unto itself" (Bongie 337).[5] According to this standpoint, *Tout-monde* moves away from the author's earlier, nationalist affiliations and succumbs to a free-floating postmodernism: a late work in the Glissantian corpus, it indulges in gratuitous textual play, and its opacity is no longer tied to any resistant attitude. Moreover, it vaunts the concept of the *tout-monde* as a simplistic panacea for the world's social and economic ills, thereby ignoring exploitative hierarchies between nations, establishing false parallels between very divergent societies, and obscuring the destructive, homogenizing consequences of capitalism.[6]

This article counters such negative interpretations of the 1993 text, as I argue that for Glissant, literature is not destined to be programmatic. The claim that he uses his fiction to promote the concept of the *tout-monde* as an easy way out of global inequality clashes with his long-held views on the extent to which literature should advocate directly for political action. As *Tout-monde* repeatedly challenges the authority of the written work and its creator, it undercuts a basic preconception of the *roman à thèse*: that fictional texts can function as the stable conduit for a distinct message. The novel's self-reflexive and intertextual aspects are also not merely the result of an increasingly abstract, careless, and depoliticized aesthetics. Instead, they radically call into question our expectations about the function and capacities of literature. Valérie Loichot has underlined how the novel's "fictional characters rebel against the centralizing, omnipotent authority of the author" (69), and she links this characteristic of the work to a postplantation critique of the patriarch/master, as embodied by the figure of the author. However, as the site of the plantation barely appears in *Tout-monde*, it is evident that other essential issues are at stake. My premise here is that the novel develops and intensifies the interrogation by Glissant of the writer's role in the world, which has been of vital concern to him from the beginning of his career. *Tout-monde* does not represent a break with a previous, more committed literary practice but is rather a continuation and exacerbation of Glissant's questioning of literature's rapport with the real, the ethics of representation, and practices of literary consumption and creation. As such, the work's thought-provoking complexities merit far more sustained critical attention, and I will here counter

5. See Bongie 322–70, Hallward 66–132, and Nesbitt, "Politiques" and "Early Glissant." Two articles that have rebutted this standpoint are Britton, "Globalization," and Forsdick. It also runs counter to J. Michael Dash's assertion that while there is evolution in Glissant's corpus, there is also a substantial amount of continuity, as his "oeuvre does not evolve in the normal sense—in terms of either theme or genre—his major preoccupations are apparent from his earliest writing and return obsessively throughout the various phases of his work" (*Édouard Glissant* 27).

6. See Hallward 100–118.

several of the readings that have led to *Tout-monde*'s dismissal or neglect by other scholars.

The humor that runs throughout the novel plays a key role in its progressive undermining of the writer's ability to supply order and authority. The characters who are variously referred to as the poet, narrator, novelist, or "déparleur" are often hapless: out of control of their own circumstances, and lacking any direction. For instance, there is a long story about how "le poète," who is a black Martinican, and his friend Roger find themselves penniless in Corsica for a summer, reduced to hitchhiking back to Paris and sleeping rough for weeks on end (287–302, 304–13). The reasons for this quandary are mundane and laughable, as they have frittered away their finances on expensive restaurants. Even when they eventually obtain one thousand francs to catch a train to Roger's parents' home in Lyon, they nearly blow it all on sandwiches, cigarettes, beer, and a newspaper (312)—a mistake that comes hot on the heels of them having already wasted a previous windfall on figs that turned out to be rotten (308) and having refused free plane tickets out of a misguided sense of gallantry. Meanwhile, their friends and fellow writers, charged with the task of saving money to send to them, are themselves unable to resist the lures of Parisian restaurants (299). In this tale of gluttony and mishap, financial acumen and common sense are tossed to the wind, as poets are not to be relied upon.

Elsewhere, an anonymous first-person narrator—nicknamed "ce romancier-là" by Mathieu Béluse (544), which could mean that he is supposed to represent the narrator of *La Lézarde*—bemoans his exclusion from a conversation between Mathieu and a mysterious old man called Rocamarron. The latter comes from continental America and his appearance has been foretold by the *quimboiseur*, Papa Longoué. One might be tempted to view him as Glissant's mouthpiece, especially given his name: rock and the figure of the maroon are both important motifs in his philosophy when it comes to the notion of resistance. Rocamarron lectures Mathieu about the importance of the Circle versus Unicity, and of "le jardin créole" as a space in which "tout est mis dans tout" (455), with positive results. Such statements certainly appear to invite an association with Glissant's own thought, but there are also subtle clues that warn the reader to tread carefully. After all, three years before, in 1990, Glissant wrote that "la poétique de la Relation est à jamais conjecturale et ne suppose aucune fixité d'idéologie" (*Poétique* 44), whereas Rocamarron is depicted as extremely single-minded in his purpose: "Roca prêchait à Mathieu Béluse, il semblait être venu pour ça, il ne tenait aucun compte de vous, comme si vous n'étiez pas présent" (552). Moreover, as Rocamarron's remarks become increasingly abstract, referring to "La Vision," "Le Grand Mystère," or "La Force du Cercle" (558, 558, 553), they are punctuated by dissatisfied grumbles from the narrator-novelist, who is unable to get a word in edgewise:

"J'écoutais, mais c'était comme si je n'étais pas là, ce dialogue dément [. . .] Moi aussi je peux parler de Vision et de Chiffres. Je suis romancier, non? Mais rien à faire" (556, 559). He also explains, rather pompously, that he *should* be included in the discussion precisely because he is a novelist, but this grandiosity is immediately undercut by his subsequent materialistic description of what his profession entails: "Je suis romancier quand même, nous avons appris par ici ce que c'est qu'un roman quand même. Qui raconte des histoires dans des livres qu'*on vend partout*" (554; my emphasis). These irreverent interruptions form a striking contrast with the old man's speech, and as they complain about its exclusionary and esoteric nature, there is perhaps some wry self-parody: readers are shown that they are not obliged to react to Rocamarron (or the thinking of Glissant himself) with the same respectful awe as Mathieu. However, the lighthearted statements of the romancier are also not intended to be treated as gospel, so readers are left with no obvious role model in this conversation in whom to place their faith. Although all three characters possess qualities that *could* at various points support an understanding of each one of them as Glissant's fictional avatar, they are ultimately distinct from him and from one another, as their interactions in this scene illustrate. While the author may project certain aspects of his personality onto his protagonists, he subsequently portrays them taking on almost a life of their own: they co-opt, exaggerate, debate, and mock his thought. The connection (and distance) between the writer and his imaginative creations is thus interrogated, and the relationship between philosophy and fiction implied to be somewhat fraught, as the overt presence of the former in the latter generates complaints and mockery.

Careful attention to other anecdotes supplied by "ce romancier-là" illustrates that these need to be treated with similar caution. In *Poétique de la relation*, Glissant mentions the evolving rapport between center and periphery, as the hierarchy inherent in this binary has been dismantled, and "les poètes maghrébins, antillais, africains, ne vont pas vers l'ailleurs d'un mouvement projetant, ni ne reviennent vers un Centre. Ils constituent leurs œuvres en métropoles" (43). In a later interview included in *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, he formulates this idea more strongly, asserting that "dans le rhizome de la totalité-monde, les centres et les périphéries sont des notions caduques. De vieux réflexes jouent encore mais ces vieux réflexes apparaissent de plus en plus ridicules et inopérants" (137). Such categorical statements have encountered criticism, although it should be noted that Glissant is not speaking here about the "totalité-monde" as something that *currently* exists but as something that could come into being if prejudiced "vieux réflexes" were to cease operating. *Tout-monde* has been accused of simply parroting such views, yet the novel actually offers a far shrewder commentary on the developments between center and periphery than scholars have given it credit

for. For instance, Hallward translates the statement "je vous dis, il n'y a plus ni Ici ni Là-bas, et même, ces îlets éparpillés autour des petites îles, on commence de les rassembler dans la maille sans aucune différence" (564) as a straightforward expression of Glissant's philosophy: "I [Glissant] say to you, there is no longer a Here or There" (Hallward 108; brackets in original). However, the first-person "je" in fact designates the same narrator-novelist who interrupted the conversation between Mathieu and Rocamarron and who continues his discourse with this anecdote: hardly, then, the most reliable of sources. Moreover, the indiscriminate, sweeping nature of his claim is swiftly undercut, as the words are supposedly not even his own and convey instead the opinion of an anonymous captain during the 1960s: "En tout cas, c'est ce que pensait Capitaine" (565). This captain decides to capture and send to live on Diamond Rock—which is located just off the southern coast of Martinique—a large number of "chats sauvages" (571) that have been plaguing the local community. Finally, the tale ends up completely contradicting the affirmation that led into it, as the captain stares gleefully at the cats marooned on the rock and thinks to himself, "Vous êtes, de désormais à dorénavant, dans le Là-bas [. . .] et ce que vous voyez là-bas c'est l'Ici, où vous n'allez plus" (572). The old binary is thus reestablished and confirmed, rather than proved obsolete, and the passage thereby hints that such unqualified, blanket statements can easily drift back into the kind of ideological systematizing that they might be trying to avoid, through their lack of subtlety and haste to hurry forward into the future.

Furthermore, the limitations of the knowledge that can be derived from texts and their authors are repeatedly emphasized, as the novel stages encounters between characters and the written word from which the protagonists emerge unenlightened or frustrated. Following on from Mathieu's criticism of the narrator of *La Lézarde* in *Mahagony* (in which he complains that the narrator of the first novel conferred on him "une exemplarité dont j'étais loin d'approcher la mécanique simplicité" [17]), a woman called Anastasie arrives to confront the author about his portrayal of Marie Celat in that same work. The chapter "Mycéa, c'est moi" begins with a long monologue from Anastasie addressed to the writer of *La Lézarde*, in which she tells him her life story, explains that when she read his book she realized that "Mycéa, c'est moi" (228), and announces that she comprehends the character better than he does, because "vous autres, vous ne connaissez pas ce qui bouge au fond de nous" (229): a man cannot empathize with the experiences of a woman's body. Britton and Loichot have both examined this scene. Britton suggests that Anastasie's paradoxical claim to understand Mycéa better than the author—when all she knows of the character is what *he* has written about her—means that she is perhaps "an extreme case of the fragile and tortuous

relays that constitute identity in Glissant's characters" (*Édouard Glissant* 171). Loichot argues that Anastasie's theory of an irreducible difference between men and women, "best addressed by a 'respectful opacity,' " breaks down, as "Mycéa, Glissant, and Anastasie stand not in a system of opposition but in a relationship of reciprocal and reversible acts of creation and revision [. . .] This constantly shifting authority implies that one single subject, one single author can never master a story" (71). Both readings are insightful; however, the writer's awkward, tongue-tied reaction to Anastasie's harangue also merits examination. His response is depicted in the third person and he is not named, thus imposing another layer between Glissant and the supposed author of his first novel and again muddying the waters between fiction and reality. After Anastasie finishes speaking, the writer is left paralyzed by her accusations, and although he tries to gloss her words, summing up what he thinks she meant by them, he is far from convincing as he casts about desperately for hidden significations and seeks to justify his inability to reply to her: "non, ce qu'elle avait dit, c'était bien et plutôt cela [. . .] c'est ça, c'était ça que sans aucun doute elle avait dit [. . .] et comment lui faire au moins comprendre qu'il avait compris [. . .] il ne pourrait pas écouter davantage [. . .] elle attendait sans doute un signe [. . .] comment se faisait-il qu'il ne trouvait rien à dire ni même à déparler" (249). The manipulator of words ironically has none to offer his interlocutor, and she leaves before he can stammer anything out, while the validity of his assertions about what she *really* meant by her speech is dubious at best. Yet Anastasie is flawed, too: her almost Spivakian reproach to the writer—for his attempt to speak for a feminine Other whose subjectivity is foreign to him—is undermined by her own insistence that she understands Mycéa perfectly, when her life story reveals that she has virtually nothing in common with the character, beyond their female gender. Neither she nor the romancier succeeds in speaking with compelling authority about *La Lézarde* or Marie Celat, and both illustrate that the interpretation of others' words may have very little to do with what was actually said or written. The author's capacity to write the world, together with the divide between reality and the imagination, is thus called into question, as Anastasie talks about Mycéa as if she truly existed and announces to him that he has written his own creation *wrongly*. Moreover, that the whole scene is the imaginative product of *Tout-monde*'s true author, Édouard Glissant, testifies to his sustained consideration of the means by which narrative can be both composed and appropriated. Clear-cut messages and meanings are thrown into doubt here as characters escape their authors and even rebuke them, and readers bring their own experiences to bear on works that are never finished products, even once printed and bound. Indeed, the unfinished nature of texts is something of which Glissant's oeuvre is acutely aware and continually highlights; he repeats phrases or narrative

events in order to open up new ideas or contexts[7] and sometimes changes the details of characters' lives that earlier books had appeared to fix definitively.[8]

In addition to the novel *La Lézarde*, *Tout-monde* depicts two more texts failing to satisfy when it comes to their revelatory potential. These are a letter from Anastasie, who subsequently disappears and apparently gets swallowed up by the mangrove, and Rocamarron's notebook, which is described as "une Chronique de famille et de nation en même temps" (517) and in which Anastasie's letter is found. Rocamarron offers this notebook to Mathieu "comme si toutes les explications lui seraient fournies là" (516), but its only decipherable content turns out to be dates and names, tracing a genealogy that reveals the identity of Rocamarron's ancestor but little else. Furthermore, just as readers think that they are about to find out what has happened to Anastasie when Mathieu discovers her letter, this expectation is frustrated, as "Mathieu n'acheva pas la lettre, il continua son survol" (519), and her ultimate fate is never disclosed. Moreover, Mathieu's reaction to the notebook and letter is not to reflect on their content but to think of other writings: of the "carnets de notes du romancier, dont il avait consulté plusieurs exemplaires" (520). Excerpts from these notes follow immediately on from his reading of Rocamarron's book and seem to be part of a travel journal, in which the writer refuses to offer any definitive conclusions about the places he visits. Texts, therefore, lead only to other texts: they stretch and open up the narrative further, as opposed to rounding it neatly off. One of the most noteworthy traits of Rocamarron's *Chronique* is, in fact, that which is the least comprehensible, as it depicts an encounter between cultures without seeking to explain them. Inscribed within the book's pages are multiple languages, all written in different styles, "du français à la gothique, de l'espagnol à la mode arabe, du brésilien à la romaine, et le tout en cursives, en capitales, parfois en gribouillis, et des notations comme secrètes, venues d'une langue inconnue" (520). Their

7. For instance, the line "Sur Gênes va s'ouvrir le pré des cloches d'aventures" (32, 36, 59, 609), which appears four separate times in *Tout-monde*, is first seen in Glissant's 1956 epic poem, *Les Indes (Poèmes complets* 111). The four deaths of Papa Longoué (*TM* 104–44) also offer an alternative and much more detailed take on the character's death from how it was depicted in *La Lézarde* (197–99) and *Le Quatrième siècle* (316–17).

8. One such example of this is the suggestion made in both *Traité du tout-monde* and *Sartorius* that Mathieu Béluse is in fact the father of Marie Celat's sons, Patrice and Odono (*Traité* 56; *Sartorius* 283). This contradicts the description of their progenitor in *La Case du commandeur* as an anonymous "jeune homme" about whom Marie remembers virtually nothing: "Elle ne se rappela aucune parole qu'ils eussent échangée. Il était employé de banque, rentrait en pleine nuit, n'était pas visible le dimanche où il allait au stade" (168).

content is not described, and after seeing these untranslated phrases, Mathieu closes the notebook, thereby granting the last word to creolized languages about which only the form, rather than the message, is known.

Glissant's own text becomes a site of encounter for the many "langages" of different authors, as most of the various sections and chapters of *Tout-monde* are preceded by epigraphs. These come from well-known works like Cyrano de Bergerac's *Histoire comique des états et empires de la lune* (17), from writings by friends of Glissant who are poets and painters (for instance, Maurice Roche and Roberto Matta), and also, unusually, from his own characters, such as Mathieu Béluse (31, 71, 145, 185, 227, 441–42) or Papa Longoué (287). In some cases, it is hard to distinguish between fictional protagonists and real-life individuals: the epigraph attributed to "Parole de Prisca" (362) is presumably a remark made by Glissant's childhood Martinican friend, Prisca Jean-Marie (Baudot 14), but the reader unfamiliar with this acquaintance might understandably think that Prisca is another imagined character. In any case, by using his own protagonists as sources, Glissant undermines the epigraph's conventional function: there is no way to check or substantiate the origins of these quotations, and for "Parole de Longoué" (287), "Parole de Panoplie" (331), and "Parole de Prisca" (362), verification is rendered even less feasible, as the citations are ostensibly not drawn from documents but from the spoken word. The epigraph does not, then, function for Glissant merely as an external authority or point of literary reference. Instead, it draws the reader deeper into the web of a world where attempts to determine the veracity and signification of others' statements are frustrated: they are ultimately the product of the author's imagination. Yet if the reader is willing to accept characters' discourse as part of the *text* of a novel, why not accept its presence in the paratext? The novel raises questions here about where (and why) readers, as well as authors, are prepared to draw the line between reality and fiction. Moreover, through subverting a practice whereby writers traditionally situate their work in relation to other texts that they might admire or with which they feel that their productions have an affinity, Glissant highlights the way that *Tout-monde* does not quite fit into a stable literary world regulated by established genres and canons.

The most notable epigraphs from an invented protagonist are "excerpts" from a text titled *Traité du tout-monde*, the author of which is identified as Mathieu Béluse. Four years later, Glissant published his own book with the same title. The name of the 1997 oeuvre cannot, consequently, be taken at face value as indicating that here is a treatise, by Glissant, about his concept of the *tout-monde*: authorial responsibility for that title and text have already been given to the character of Mathieu. The *mise en abyme* continues, as one of (Glissant's) *Traité du tout-monde*'s chapters is titled "Le Traité du tout-monde de Mathieu Béluse" (41) and another is "Objections

à ce dit *Traité* de Mathieu Béluse, et réponse" (207). These chapters contain the (slightly modified) "excerpts" that first appeared four years earlier, in the novel *Tout-monde*. Whose "traité" is this, then, if it even exists at all? The parts of *Traité du tout-monde* that are *not* attributed to Mathieu barely coincide with conventional understandings of the treatise as a genre. The work incorporates personal recollections by Glissant, assessments by him of other authors who have been key to his thinking since the 1950s (e.g., Michel Leiris, Yves Bonnefoy, Maurice Roche, and Stéphane Mallarmé), a generous critique of Léopold Sédhar Senghor's oeuvre (*Traité* 186–90), reflections on writing and reading, his thoughts on politicians such as Nelson Mandela (149–56), and poetry (243–44). When Glissant does make statements that seem more philosophical or theoretical in their leaning, he often explicitly highlights their repetitive nature: for instance, some of them are grouped under the section heading "Répétitions" (33). Repetition is not viewed negatively by Glissant, as it can enrich and build on previous thought, taking it in alternative directions, but his conscious use of it here also distances him, more than ever, from an understanding of the theorist as an authoritative producer of *original* thought. Meanwhile, Mathieu's "Traité" is not necessarily a treatise either, as the character uses some of "his" part of the work to expand on the narrative of *Tout-monde*, talking about the birth and death of the African princess Oriamé (*Traité* 53–55), whom the novel depicts as throwing herself to death from the deck of a slave ship (*TM* 114–15). Mathieu casts doubt on that fate, recounting two other possible ways that Oriamé might have died, and finishes his contribution to her story with the ambiguous sentence, "Mais je sais bien que tout cela est leurre et vertige" (*Traité* 55). Glissant's 1993 book is thereby rendered even more open, as the conclusion to one of its narratives is undercut and rewritten, stripped of any definitive ending. Additionally, the fact that objections are subsequently raised to Mathieu's "traité" and then refuted, in *Traité du tout-monde*, highlights that the debate around these ideas is perpetual, never quite finished. This idea of ongoing discussion is seen, too, as the text repeats and reflects on many of the quotations from real-life authors that were used as epigraphs in *Tout-monde*.[9] This repetition tugs readers in multiple directions: while the epigraphs' appearance in the earlier fiction might have directed readers *out*, away from the novel itself and toward the work of other thinkers, their redeployment in *Traité du tout-monde* means that readers

9. See, for example, Cyrano de Bergerac's "Y a-t-il une Italie aussi au monde de la lune?" (*TM* 15) and "Il y a une Italie aussi au monde de la lune" (*Traité* 76); Matta's "Toda historia es redonda, como la Tierra" (*TM* 487) and "Toute histoire est ronde comme la Terre. N'occidentons plus tout du long, orientons vraiment" (*Traité* 177); or the citation from Maurice Roche's novel *Compact* (*TM* 579) and the subsequent detailed discussion of that book in *Traité du tout-monde* (199–204).

of the later text are pulled back *in* toward Glissant's own corpus, back to these citations' first appearance in the earlier novel. Once again, Glissant's use of the epigraph is far from straightforward. The reader ends up oscillating between works, compelled to reflect on how the quotations function in these different contexts and on why the author might have chosen to circle determinedly back to them.

Tout-monde thus strikingly interrogates the capacity of texts to reveal and reflect the world. It deliberately undermines any impression of the writer's or narrator's authority, and challenges expectations with regard to *lisibilité*, refusing to allow the reader to feel a sense of mastery over its various narratives. In *Traité du tout-monde*, Glissant offers some insight into his potential motivation for producing such a literature: "Écrire c'est rallier la saveur du monde . . . L'éclat des littératures orales est ainsi venu, non pas certes remplacer l'écrit, mais en changer l'ordre. Écrire c'est vraiment dire: s'épandre au monde sans se disperser ni s'y diluer et sans craindre d'y exercer ces pouvoirs de l'oralité qui conviennent tant à la diversité de toutes choses" (120–21). Glissant forces literature to function differently here so that it both conveys and *partakes in* the world's evolution and dynamism, as contact between diverse cultures becomes more frequent and inevitable, and the principles behind a certain type of Western literature (and society) can no longer be seen as a valid model for all cultures. Imbuing written language with oral qualities such as "la répétition, le ressassement, la parole circulaire, le cri en spirale, les cassures de la voix" (*Traité* 121) compels literature to enter into a new mode, a mode in which textual details are not always recoverable as part of a narrative whole and in which narratives themselves cannot be pinned down or exactly summarized. Attempts to achieve such a goal will inevitably cause something to be lost in the process, and this is suggested in *Tout-monde*'s anecdote about a character called Stepan Stepanovitch. Britton considers this tale in terms of how it blurs the identity of the figures of the "poète" and "le déparleur" ("Fictions" 55–56); however, it is also notable for how it appears to propose an alternative manner of reacting to narratives, whereby they are valued for their poetry.[10]

10. This can be linked to the perpetual significance of poetry for Glissant, whether his own or the long-running inspiration that he derives from writers such as Faulkner or James Joyce, whom he describes as "des poètes ratés" ("Solitaire" 82). Mary Gallagher underlines that "despite his prioritizing of the 'roman du Nous,' [Glissant] is a writer for whom poetry seems to present an equal if not superior relational imperative to narrative" (63), whereas for other Antillean authors such as the *créolistes* and Raphaël Confiant in particular, "there does not seem to be any place for poetry as non-instrumentalizing, reflexive linguistic pressure on the limits and operation of subjectivity within language" (61).

The text reveals that the *déparleur* once stayed in a chalet in Switzerland, along with some other students and a young man called Stepan Stepanovitch, whose origins are somewhat unclear (398). The story of how Stepan was taken hostage by the Germans during World War II and managed to escape is one that intrigues all the students, but it is Stepan's manner of telling it—in rushed, exclamatory language described as "Langue de Stepan toute spéciale! Adopté langage en tenue camouflée!" (438)—that lends the tale its real richness. Indeed, before newcomers to the chalet listen to him recount his adventure, they are first given a summary of it by another student, in "une forme condensée à l'extrême, pour souligner la consécutivité des divers épisodes . . . après quoi on les présentait à Stepan Stepanovitch, pour guetter leur émerveillement à l'entendre la raconter. *Il fallait la repère pour apprécier la broderie*" (401; my emphasis). Content and narrative logic are thus implied to matter less than Stepan's dazzling ability to recount the tale orally, as there is no longer any suspense to it. Ironically, of course, the readers of *Tout-monde* have access to the story only in written form, and it is implied that this transcription compromises it somewhat: Stepan's listeners acknowledge that his voice can never be exactly captured and do not attempt "de la retenir, de la reproduire," as they know "déjà qu'ils perdraient la trace de celui-là" (438). This remark questions the validity of the way that the *déparleur* has apparently copied down Stepan's discourse, and Glissant thereby casts doubt once again on the written text's ability to represent the real without reducing or distorting it. However, the episode also presents an alternative way to relate to stories that might be helpful as an inspiration for the reader of *Tout-monde*: such a reaction treasures the "broderie" rather than the "fil," does not demand fixity or order, and does not require that these tales furnish verifiable "truths." (Although Stepan is meant to be telling his listeners about his life, the events that he describes often defy belief.) Even here, though, the reader is subtly encouraged to be wary of this discourse: while Stepan's tale may be impressive, it also emerges that he has raped several women (434, 440), and he is consequently morally suspect. The narrator passes no comment or judgment on this fact, but this does not imply that Glissant is treating the issue lightly. Instead, readers are forced to determine their own response to this obviously flawed protagonist, but they are given no guidelines and must evaluate the fiction for themselves.

Hierarchies are thus undone, as there is no voice of authorial wisdom on hand to offer clues about how to react to these diverse characters or proliferating narratives, or to group them together in the service of an overall idea. Hierarchical dissolution is also evident, as Glissant attempts to *write* the idea of the *tout-monde* into text, which as a concept is always partially utopian: it is "la totalité du monde telle qu'elle existe dans son réel et telle qu'elle existe *dans notre désir*" (*Introduction* 130; my emphasis). Rather than portray, promote, or explain the notion to his readers in a straightforward

manner, Glissant instead furnishes a kind of poetic equivalent of it,[11] using the novel and its multiplicity of characters and *récits* to convey a sense of the *tout-monde*'s diversity, movement, open-endedness, and ceaseless unpredictable interactions. Of course, this could be seen as lending fuel to the fire in terms of accusations that "late" Glissant both abandons the nationalist politics of his supposedly more committed early writing and produces *romans à thèse* that extol the *tout-monde*'s virtues. Yet even in his first full-length prose text, *Soleil de la Conscience,* Glissant underscores the need to avoid isolating or exclusionary perspectives. Referring to Paris as "une île, qui capte de partout et diffracte aussitôt" (82), he valorizes the city as a site that attracts cultures from around the world and mobilizes them in new directions once they meet there. He also expresses hope about future positive cultural interactions on a global scale, as "je devine peut-être qu'il n'y aura plus de culture sans toutes les cultures, plus de civilisation qui puisse être métropole des autres" (13–14). Ultimately, Glissant's literary project is continuously oriented toward the *opening up* of imaginaries and attitudes, as opposed to offering models for political change on a national scale.[12] *Tout-monde* lacks the "messianic male heroes [. . .] whose ambition is to change their societies and thus rehabilitate the exploited Black Man," who are found elsewhere in Caribbean literature and whom scholars such as Condé have critiqued ("Order" 125).[13] This is not a stance exclusive to Glissant's late aesthetics: visionary figures poised to take their struggling countries in hand are also absent from his early novels.

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11. The ability to produce a poetic equivalent of reality rather than a transcription of it was something that Glissant greatly admired in writers such as Leiris ("Le réel est totalité qui sans fin se trame. La passion de Michel Leiris sera de déchiffrer cette trame et d'en donner un équivalent poétique" [*Traité* 129]), Victor Segalen ("Il n'a pas voulu décrire ces stèles, mais en donner un équivalent poétique [. . .] On ne saurait reprocher à Segalen un symbolisme d'école ni une re-présentation réaliste" [*L'Intention* 93]), and Pierre Reverdy ("Il a bâti un monde, analogique (et non répétitif) du monde" [*L'Intention* 77]). See also his doubt about Jacques-Stephen Alexis's "transfert, souvent minutieux, parfois malhabile, de la réalité" in *Compère Général Soleil* ("Note" 395).
12. "I just don't believe there can be any political or military solution to these kinds of problems. It is inside people's heads that things have to change; it is in their imaginations that we have to challenge the idea that we exist only through a sole and unique identity" (Obrist 287). "Ces luttes de décolonisation [. . .] avaient été poursuivies par le principe même que l'Occident avait formulé, de l'identité comme racine unique. Je n'hésitais pas à adhérer à ces luttes, mais une inquiétude m'habitait [. . .] ils adoptait sans travail critique toutes les idées de puissance territoriale, de puissance militaire, la conception même de l'État, et le reste" (Glissant, *Entretiens* 58).
13. J. Michael Dash argues that, "traditionally, Caribbean writing is about the heroics of self-formulation," but that this demiurgic impulse is not present in Glissant's oeuvre, as he considers it "a disturbing tendency" and consequently "focuses on an inexhaustible diversity in reality" ("Writing" 609, 610, 610).

Writers are rarely leaders in his fiction. In *La Lézarde*, his narrator is the youngest of the group—the narrator of, not an actor in, the story—whose road to the production of narrative is ambiguous, as other characters offer him conflicting advice on how to represent their deeds (237). In *Le Quatrième Siècle*, meanwhile, Papa Longoué scoffs at Mathieu Béluse for his faith in the written word, which forces one to reason "en *que*, en *donc*, en *après* et *avant*, avec des nœuds de *pourquoi* dans sa tête, noyés dans une tempête de *parce que*" (53), with no room for doubt or dissent.

In fact, even when the Sartrean vision of committed literature was at its height in the 1950s, Glissant had serious qualms about such writing. He admits that he felt in this period that "l'écriture n'avait pas pour fonction de précipiter le politique [. . .] il me semblait que si l'on consacrait l'écriture au seul parachèvement d'une lutte populaire, de la lutte d'une communauté ou d'une nation [. . .] on n'accomplissait pas le travail de l'écrivain, mais celui, nécessaire tout autant, du pamphlétaire ou du journaliste engagé ou du militant pressé d'obtenir des résultats" (*Entretiens* 60). While this comment by no means illustrates disdain or scorn for the work of the latter figures, it certainly reveals a desire to draw a clear distinction between the domains of culture and activism: for Glissant, *politics alone* cannot suffice in the sphere of poetics. This viewpoint is expressed in contemporary essays, where he emphasizes the limitations of a too obviously committed literature. In 1957, for instance, he argues in "Le Romancier noir et son peuple" that when the novel is merely "un acte d'accusation" (29), it loses its poetic resonance and capacity to depict reality's richness, and thereby becomes inferior to poetry (30). The previous year, in his 1956 contribution to the debate among black writers on "la poésie nationale," he also underlined the need for poetry to express "des aspirations plus qu'une situation arrêtée" ("Note" 393), as creating literature revolving only around themes of protest would not produce "cette sorte de 'Renaissance' bouillonnante d'où jaillissent les principes majeurs d'une culture" ("Note" 395). However, his assertion that "la réalité des peuples noirs de langue française, c'est la misère et la souffrance, c'est la lutte, c'est aussi la conviction de posséder un style à définir" ("Note" 395) illustrates that his preoccupations were not purely literary either. He seems to have felt that as the world entered an era of rapid change, and as previously ignored peoples began to make their voices heard on the global stage, poetics needed to evolve in tandem with these transformations: writers had to shift the parameters of literary tradition in order to represent their own communities and landscapes without forcing them into molds that had been established by and for the West.[14] Additionally, if an author's work could enable his or her

14. See the "Résolution concernant la littérature" drafted by Glissant for the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists (Baudot 46). It argues for "la nécessité de

people to regain faith in their ability to produce culture and in the worthiness of that culture to be represented in literature, this might restore to them a dignity of which colonialism had deprived them. As Glissant remarked in a 1958 interview about *La Lézarde*, "Créer un style propre dans l'expression littéraire d'un peuple est la seule manière de donner une sorte de dignité à des choses qui n'en avaient pas . . . c'est dans ce sens que mon roman peut servir aux gens de mon pays" (quoted in Baudot 34). Aesthetics were thereby of primary importance to him and came with their own politics as he sought to rework literature's modes of representation: even in this decade, he was "à la recherche d'*une poétique nouvelle*, c'est-à-dire d'un sens nouveau de la présence au monde" (*Entretiens* 54; my emphasis). For literature to become truly open to formerly colonized peoples, literacy was not the only issue: the form, ambitions, and value systems of writers and their texts needed to change. The very experimental aspects of *Tout-monde* suggest that, four decades later, this project remains paramount to Glissant as the world continues to evolve and literature must respond to its transformations. Indeed, he stresses the necessity of literary evolution repeatedly in *Traité du tout-monde*:

> Nous ne croyons plus que le récit est la forme naturelle de l'écriture [. . .] L'éclatement de la totalité-monde et la précipitation des techniques audiovisuelles ou informatiques ont ouvert le champ à une infinie variété de genres possibles, dont nous n'avons pas idée [. . .] La démesure du monde est explorable par la démesure du texte [. . .] Écrire aujourd'hui, ce n'est pas seulement conter des histoires pour amuser ou émouvoir, ou pour épater, c'est peut-être avant tout rechercher le lien fiable entre la folle diversité du monde et ce que nous désirons en nous d'équilibre et de savoir. (121, 122, 161, 173)

However, even as Glissant's work opens increasingly *out* onto the world with *Tout-monde*, he refuses to forget his Martinican origins, and an early comment made in *Soleil de la conscience*—"le voyage n'a de sens qu'autant que le voyageur sait ce qu'il quitte et ce qu'il retrouve" (64)—clearly remains a valid structuring principle of his thought in this respect. The novel begins and ends with evocations of the island, and characters explore, in particular, the site of the mangrove. Glissant's discussion of this space ties into contemporary debates surrounding it: in 1989 the Caribbean magazine *Antilla* ran investigative articles about the mangrove next to Glissant's

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dépasser les structures littéraires fixes, telles qu'elles résultent de l'histoire littéraire de l'Occident. L'écrivain noir devrait par une tendance toute naturelle inventer de nouvelles structures, correspondant à l'histoire de son peuple" (388).

hometown, Le Lamentin. It had become a site for drug dealing and squatting, and its inhabitants had just been threatened with eviction, which provoked outcry, as they had nowhere else to live and had, against all the odds, built a community there (23–28). *Tout-monde* makes reference to how the mangrove has become polluted, inhabited by drug dealers, and peopled by tourists on speedboats and bus tours (255–71), but in a move typical of Glissant's fiction, there is no detailed, realist description of its problems. Instead, he reimbues the mangrove with some of the magic of which modernity has stripped it. The poet, Apocal, and Prisca get lost there and suddenly find themselves fearing the old superstitions that once surrounded the place (265–66). It also constitutes the potential location of Anastasie's lost, undiscoverable corpse, of which it begins to smell strongly (267, 270). This rebarbative odor—that makes the tourists descending from their buses retch—suggests that the land itself is fiercely hostile to the transformations being wrought on it. Glissant implies too that some hope exists in the diverse species of vegetation that proliferate and intertwine there, evolving and branching out in new directions as a result of their contact with one another, much like the cultures of the imagined *tout-monde*. Indeed, the novel in a sense resembles the mangrove: bewildering, unexplainable, bursting with tangled language and narratives, but pulsing with subterranean energy. However, while the mangrove stubbornly resists the homogenizing forces of the French tourist economy, it holds no ready answers to the island's quandary. Yet as Glissant remarks in *Le Discours antillais*, "L'important n'est pas dans la réponse, mais dans le questionnement" (258), and that is where he, as an author, undoubtedly assumes his role and steps to the fore in this novel: interrogating instead of prescribing, disorienting instead of explaining. The reader is compelled not to follow him trustingly but rather to accompany him in his questioning, even when such a questioning extends to a reevaluation and overhaul of the literary project itself.

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