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Sous le Macadam Deviancy, Abuse, and Underlying Hope in the Works of Gisèle Pineau

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Sous le Macadam
Deviancy, Abuse, and Underlying Hope in the Works of Gisèle Pineau

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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Introduction

*When I am with my characters in Guadeloupe, I cannot write in standard French. That just doesn't capture the characters' reality, what I perceive of them, what they give me. When I am in Paris, the writing changes. I am not locked in Creolité...I am a wanderer...And even though I am Antillean, nobody locks me up. I want to be free to write.- An Interview with Gisèle Pineau, Spring 2004*¹

Though she is recognized daily as a prominent contributor to Creolité, a literary movement spearheaded by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant², writer Gisèle Pineau denies direct allegiance to the group. True, the Francophone author does attempt to define 'Creoleness' through her art and explore the Antillean experience, all through parsing out the unique and defining aspects of the culture. However, while these attempts are admittedly typical of many Franco-Caribbean writers and are certainly in line with *le but de Creolité*, Pineau harbors a distinctive combination of experience and literary craft that set her apart from the movement. This marriage of personal history and talent allow for a distinct depiction and examination of the Creole experience.

A self-described wanderer (Veldwachter), Pineau's past can be characterized by movement and displacement. The majority of her childhood was spent between countries and cultures, bouncing from France to Martinique to Guadeloupe, and landing in the latter for the duration of her adolescence³. Unwelcome in Paris due to her Antillean heritage and unwelcome in Guadeloupe due to her rearing in Europe, Pineau became intimately familiar with discrimination and alienation at a young age. This internal understanding led her to a sense of

¹ An Interview with Gisèle Pineau. Nadège Veldwachter and Gisèle Pineau. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring, 2004), pp. 180-186

² Creolité is a modern literary movement that began in the 80's with the publication of *Éloge de la Créolité* (In Praise of Creoleness).

³ Adamson, April, Michael Koerpel, and Maggie Majewski. "Gisèle Pineau." *Voices from the Gaps* 07 May 2005. n.pag. Web. 18 Mar 2012.

otherness. “I was born in Paris. I am Parisian. But I was in exile,” (Veldwachter) Pineau explained during an interview. She was not home in either setting.

Unlike many Franco-Caribbean writers who view Creole as their classification or ethnicity⁴ Pineau lacks so clear an identity. Due to her constant shifting between cultures, she is not wholly one class or ethnicity. She cannot deny either the influence of Europe or the influence of her innate Creolité, and yet the two influences seem constantly at odds with each other. She says, “...when I was in France, people rejected me because of my black skin; when I arrived in the Antilles, I was also rejected because I was a “Negropolitan”: This Guadeloupean woman is black, but she speaks very bad Creole, rolling her “r”s. So, I was never at the right time, never at the right place, always a misfit” (Loichot). It is this personal and internal disjunction that creates the strength in her writing. Each of Pineau’s characters embodies her personal experiences. They are each fragmented and in search of distinct identities. They suffer, at times they succeed, and they are forever searching. But their *souffrance* is Pineau’s *souffrance*. In this way, she is uniquely embedded in her writing. She *is* her words.

What’s more, Pineau does not only inject her childhood and adolescent experiences into her writing, but also embraces another unique segment of her past and present—her profession as a psychiatric nurse in Paris and Guadeloupe. The writer has commented, “In my novels, there are often people who are marginalized, pushed aside, different. I am interested in difference and in how we look at others—it brings me terribly close to my profession as a psychiatric nurse” (Veldwachter). At the UMD (Unité pour malades difficiles) Henri-Colin de l’hôpital Paul Guiraud de Villejuif, Pineau encountered a variety of patients “locked up in their disease,”⁵

⁴ “Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles.” Jean Barnabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant. 1993. *Éloge de la Créolité (In Praise of Creoleness)*. Translated by M. B. Taleb-Khyar. Gallimard, p. 75.

⁵ “Devoured by Writing”: An Interview with Gisèle Pineau by Valérie Loichot

plagued by various *maladies mentaux*⁶. These men and women had an impact on her writing style and madness, or *la folie*, is omnipresent in the majority of her works. Whether it is madness as a reaction to abuse and ostracism, or as a means of catharsis, or even as a representation of magic in the Caribbean culture⁷, *la folie* is one of Pineau's most frequent characters. Additionally, Pineau's time in psychiatric nursing forever connected her to young people—specifically *les enfants difficiles*. Her fascination with the “problem child” surfaces in several of her works of fiction.

Children, in general, play an important role in Pineau's unique career trajectory. Pineau began her career as a children's book writer and as a crafter of *bandes dessinées* (cartoons)⁸. Moreover, the writer places children and adolescents—specifically those experiencing psychological or emotional trauma—at the forefront of the majority of her plots. In *Fleur de Barbarie*, readers follow the experiences of Josette, a nine-year-old girl; in *Chair piment*, they meet Suzon, a sixteen year old; in each of her children's books (*Un Papillon dans la cité*, et al), readers encounter the unique perspective of the francophone child. Even if a given novel lacks a central child protagonist, it is certain to contain the perspective of children at some point along the way (see *La grande drive des esprits* and most evidently, *L'espérance-macadam*).

Finally, Pineau can be separated from her peers in the Creolité movement due to her political ideology. Many writers in the literary movement can be described as *les indépendantistes*, members of the political party for the independence of the Antilles. Edouard

⁶ Adamson, April, Michael Koerpel, and Maggie Majewski. "Gisèle Pineau." *Voices from the Gaps* 07 May 2005. n.pag. Web. 18 Mar 2012.

⁷ “But are these people really mad? [It could be] magic. Because in the Caribbean, many people hear voices, are inhabited by the devil. They visit the sorcerer, the *quimboiseur* in Martinique, the *gadezafe* in Guadeloupe. In the Caribbean, we also live in a parallel world where the devil is never far.” Devoured by Writing”: An Interview with Gisèle Pineau by Valérie Loichot

⁸ Ngandu, Pius. Personal Interview. 3/2/2012.

Glissant⁹, as well as the writers of *Eloge*, purports the opinion that Guadeloupe and Martinique should attempt to obtain complete independence from France. In an article for the French magazine *l'Express* in 2009, Patrick Chamoiseau said, “c’est le moment pour la France de se débarrasser de « l’esprit colonial » qui préside à ses relations avec ces pays que l’on appelle « Dom-Tom ». Ces pays peuvent adhérer en toute autonomie ou en toute indépendance au pacte républicain français” (*L’Express*)¹⁰. In other words, now is the time for France to allow the Antilles to fully self-govern. In contrast, Pineau is against the independence of her native country, Guadeloupe. Seeing the impact of independence on Haiti, the devastation, and tumult, violence, and destitution, Pineau positions herself against *l’indépendantisme* and in favor of remaining a French department. This distinct difference in political ideology combined with her unique personal background clearly makes Pineau an outlier in the world of Creolité.

In terms of her writing style, the influence of madness and Pineau’s focus on internal and external displacement, allows for writing that is rich in autobiography and, yet, wholly fictional. In fact, Pineau seemingly and characteristically structures entire novels around a single veiled metaphor that seamlessly ties together her personal life and the characters’ experiences. But, she does not necessarily view her writing as so clearly planned. She says, “I am rather the kind of writer who lets herself be carried away; I enter, in a way, into an unknown, unsuspected world, and I keep moving forward. It’s like wandering” (Veldwachter). Despite this recurring personal sentiment of wandering, it is clear that Pineau masterfully uses her characters daily actions to comment on larger Antillean themes—her most common being fractured identity, displacement,

⁹ Lemieux, Emmanuel. "Edouard Glissant: Monsieur Tout-Monde." *Les Influences*. 19 Nov 2010: n. page. Web. 18 Mar. 2012. < <http://www.lesinfluences.fr/Monsieur-Tout-Monde.html>>.

¹⁰ It is time for France to get rid of the “colonial spirit” that governs its relations with these countries they call “overseas territories.” These countries can join on their own or independently in a French Republican pact. (*L’Express*)

and the concept of home—while continually and covertly adding herself, her experiences and emotions, into the narrative.

Pineau's first full-length work, *Un Papillon dans la cité*, was written for young adult readers. In *Papillon*, she delves into what will become a career-long exploration of abandonment and transition through the experiences of Félicie. After spending the first decade of her life in Guadeloupe with her grandmother, Man-Ya, Félicie receives a letter summoning her to live with her mother in France. Though the news devastates the soon-to-be abandoned Man-Ya, the formerly abandoned Féfé longs for closeness to her mother—even if it means extricating herself from home. She writes, "Man-Ya pulled me to her, clutched me against her enormous breasts and hugged me for a very long time. That was the first time I ever saw her cry, so tears began to roll down my cheeks as well. A little later, having regained control, she asked if I wanted to live so far from her. I told her that I would like to know my mother" (Rudolph)¹¹. This short novella provides a keen example for all of Pineau's work—fictionalized autobiography with an emphasis on internal longing, and both internal and external disjunction.

In her more adult-centered works, one of the writer's most preferred methods of metaphor is to utilize seemingly "bad behavior" as a symbol for the impact of displacement and marginalization. Through the abundance of sexual deviancy, madness, abuse, and refolement, in her novels *La grande drive des esprits* and *L'espérance-macadam*, Pineau successfully provides a personal critique on transition and marginalization. In *La grande drive*, she explores the psychological unraveling of the novel's primary character, Léonce, in order to explore the price of continuous ostracism. Additionally, she uses the sexual deviancy of Paul and Céluta as a metaphor for the Antillean search for identity. In *L'espérance*, Pineau examines the violent abuse

¹¹ Rudolph, Katherine. "Translating the Butterfly: Gisèle Pineau's *Un papillon dans la cite*." . N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Mar 2012.

of Glawdys' child, Hortense, Angela, and Eliette. Additionally, the writer explores the systematic refoulement of both Angela and Eliette in order to explore the emotional and internal impacts of sexual violence and relegation.

In this Honors Thesis, I will aim to dissect Pineau's metaphors as they are presented through her characters. I will provide a brief synopsis of *La grande drive des esprits* in order to give a bit of literary background. This overview will be followed by an exploration of Léonce and his descent into madness, and, finally, an explication of Paul and Céluta and their experiences with social deviancy. Then I will transition into my investigation of *L'espérance-macadam*, beginning with a brief outline of the plot. This synopsis will be followed by a detailed examination of Pineau's female characters, Glawdys, Hortense, Angela, and Eliette and their personal encounters with and perpetrations of violent abuse. My analysis of all of these characters will culminate in my exploration of Pineau's most predominant character—hope.

In each of her works Pineau creates stories and characters with their roots in the past—both her own past, and her country's past. As a celebration for how far the Antillean community has come and a reminder of how much work there is still left to be done, Pineau explores her characters through a historical lens.

We have inherited many of [our ancestors'] sorrows and sufferings that do not disappear. Today still, we are haunted by that violence because our ancestors were denied their humanity, subjects and objects of commerce, exiled, deported, raped, assassinated, and that was only 150 years ago. It [is] important for me to commemorate, to say how proud I [am] of them. (Veldwachter)¹²

¹² An Interview with Gisèle Pineau. Nadège Veldwachter and Gisèle Pineau. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring, 2004), pp. 180-186

Chapter 1

La grande drive des esprits

A Synopsis

Pineau's first novel, *La grande drive des esprits*, penned in 1993, is set in Basse-Terre, Guadeloupe. The story follows the bloodline of the characters Sosthene and Ninette, commencing with their son, Léonce.

Léonce is born with a caul and a clubfoot—two unique attributes that signify the gift of accessing and communicating with the spiritual world. Yet, his mother, Ninette, views this connection to the spirits as a curse and destroys Léonce's caul and, in conjunction, his gift. After this loss, the boy experiences a difficult childhood—one plagued by continuous ostracism and degradation due to his physical deformity. However, demonstrating his determination and fortitude, Léonce overcomes. He wins the heart of Myrtha, is married, and soon his spirit grandmother, Man Octavie, returns to him his spiritual gift.

While initially all seems to be going well for Léonce, it is quickly revealed that the spirits do not give this gift freely—the actions of their mortal recipients determine the gift's course. For Léonce, this caveat proves to provoke both his and his family's eventual ruin.

Léonce

Dix ans que la guerre était finie. Léonce n'avait pas vu grandir ses enfants. Depuis la tragique nuit passée à soupirer après la gloire, il ne les avait plus regardés. Il ne leur avait plus parlé. Il ne les avait plus écoutés/Ten years since the war ended. Leonce hadn't seen his children grow. Since the tragic night passed to sigh after the glory, he had no longer seen them. He had no longer spoken to them. He had no longer listened to them.
(141)

Pineau's Léonce provides a vehicle for one of the writer's most revisited themes—madness and detachment. Where other characters in the novel act out violently in order to compensate for their

internal and external disjunction, Léonce looks inward, and eventually becomes trapped on the inside—amidst his thoughts, emotions, and recollections; unable to rejoin the outer world.

In *La grande drive*, Léonce encounters his first experiences with madness early on. Plagued by *un pied bot*, or club foot, Léonce grows up tormented by his peers for being different. Through these early experiences, Léonce attempts to internalize his true feelings and the jeers of society. However, his attempts to repress his negative experiences to his unconscious quickly prove to be a futile task. An inner voice, or “*la voix de l’ombre*” (18), follows Léonce throughout his lifetime, consistently reminding him of how he does not belong and how he will never be at peace.

Léonce avait sept ans lorsqu’il prit pour la première fois le chemin de l’école communale...C’est ainsi qu’avec ce premier pas dans la société, le rire amer prit possession de ses entrailles... ‘Kochi ! Voilà ton nom ! Susurrant la voix de fiel. Tate cet injure ! Ose regarder!’ (16)¹³

The negative words of his peers are almost immediately internalized and forever haunt Léonce’s conscious world. In addition to this curse of *la voix de l’ombre*, Léonce is also afflicted with a spirit that is indelibly linked to the afterlife—another aspect of his being that separates him from normal society and makes him prone to abnormal mental processing. Most significantly, Léonce experiences visions of his dead grandmother, Manman Octavie, throughout the course of the novel.

Ce fut à ce moment, qu’apparut Octavie. Elle portait la robe blanche qui couvrait sa nudité au jour de sa mort. Mais surtout, elle arborait le visage rajeuni... Le rire de la grand-maman couvrait sa moindre incantation, approchait, approchait...il ferma les yeux, et attendit (86)¹⁴

¹³“ Léonce was seven years old when took the way to the communal school...So, with that first step into society, the bitter laughter took possession of his heart... ‘Kochi! Here is your name! whispered the voice of his entrailles. Feel this insult! Dare to look!’” (16)

¹⁴ “It was at this moment that Octavie appeared. She wore the white robe that covered her nudity on the day of her death. But above all, she sported a rejuvenated face... The laughter of his grandmother covered her lower incantation, approaching, approaching...he closed his eyes and waited.” (86)

The ghost of Man Octavie counsels Léonce. She urges him to trust in her and heed her advice. Though he is initially disturbed by her presence, he quickly decides to listen to her. He avoids drinking, as he is advised, he bears children, as he is advised, he goes to war; and, yet, through the listening Léonce becomes more and more psychologically unglued. Soon his outer world and inner worlds and the natural and supernatural begin to mix. During the war, he gives into his urge to drink, thus, disobeying Man Octavie's orders, and opening the door for his ghosts to consume his conscious mind.

Plus Léonce buvait, plus il avait le sentiment que le rhum bâillonnait la voix méchante. Alors, roquille sur roquille, il but. Toute la nuit. Jusqu'à oublier son nom de baptême...la voix déboula, enragée, rauque, hargneuse : 'Kochi ! Kochi ! Kochi ! voici ton nom ! (136)¹⁵

His external reality is filled with his internal reality. He abandons all external happenings and his spirit drifts. In a final and desperate attempt to shake his phantoms, Léonce reaches for glory in the war against France—leading to a physical injury that forms the final catalyst for his descent into utter madness.

1955. Cela faisait maintenant dix ans que la guerre avait pris fin...[Léonce] arborait seulement ses quarante-trois ans, et pourtant il passait déjà pour un vieillard. Ses cheveux étaient plus blancs que noirs...Cela faisait exactement douze années que Myrtha élevait [ses enfants] seule. (141)¹⁶

He is finished. He detaches, leaving his wife to care for his children, and enters a seemingly catatonic state.

Pineau utilizes this slow descent into madness along with Léonce's final detachment from society as a means to comment on the impacts of marginalization. Though Léonce is admittedly

¹⁵"The more Leonce drank, the more he felt that the rum gagged the wicked voice. So glass upon glass, he drank. All night. Up to the point of forgetting his name...the voice rushed down, enraged, raucous, snarling: "Koch! Kochi! Kochi! This is your name!" (136)

¹⁶"1955. It was ten years since the war ended...[Leonce] was only forty three years old, and yet he was already an old man. His hair was more white than black...It had been exactly twelve years that Myrtha began raising her children alone." (141)

initially separate from society due to his deformity and his connection to *le monde des esprits*, his separation is not complete without the internalization of his outer persecution. His lack of stability in self-perception combined with his lack of connection to his peers and to reality lead him to a world of isolation and insanity. While the Antillean community at large does not necessarily experience visions of ghosts or physical malformations, the community is plagued by the *mélange* of cultural identities and perceptions. Like Pineau herself, struggles with connection to the country and concurrent connection to the colonizers (the French) is nearly an impossible feat. The impossibility of this connection, the struggle in attempting to attain a sense of home and contentedness, leads to, at times, an all-consuming preoccupation. Léonce's descent into madness, his loss of psychological control and eventual abandonment of his wife and children, reflects this real life preoccupation. He cannot connect, he cannot find his place, and thus, he becomes ensconced in his own mind. The type of damage Léonce undergoes mirrors the damage caused by colonization.

With Léonce's character, Pineau comments on the inherent shifting and internal negotiations that occur due to colonization. She explores the cultural divide between Guadeloupe and France and the sentiments of baselessness and lack of control that seem to abound.

The constant experiential and geographic juxtapositions [that come as a result of colonization]...lead to a particular complexity that shapes French Caribbean citizens. It is within and against discourses of authenticity and problematic essentialisms that definitions of an "other/Caribbean/exotic" are constructed (Suarez).

This real-world complexity is Pineau's base for Léonce. Though the character's madness is certainly an embellishment, and his descent is both emotionalized and fictionalized—perhaps via real-world imagery garnered during Pineau's tenure in psychiatric nursing—his madness is a metaphor for the detachment, otherness, and longing for connection tied to Antillean history.

Paul et Céluta

[Célestina] haïssait surtout les jumeaux, Paul et Céluta, les maudits... Leur malveillance n'avait pas de frein. Déjà, dans leurs rires de nourrissons, on entendait les grincements d'une âme diabolique/[Célestina] above all hated the twins, Paul and Celuta, the damned... Their malevolence did not break. Already, in their infant laughs, one could hear the squeaks of a diabolical soul. (151)

One of the author's most striking uses of bad behavior as metaphor also comes in this first novel. Though each of Pineau's characters in the work beg for further analysis and exude immense complexity, the twins, Paul and Céluta are unique. Paul and Céluta are both periphery characters—the children of Léonce and Myrtha—and, yet, these children serve as unmistakable representations of Pineau's thematic concerns in the novel.

To begin, it is important to consider the writer's strategic use of children as the vehicle for her metaphor. The use of "child" is quite prevalent among Francophone writers for a myriad of reasons. In fact, in all genres of literature, the child can represent innocence, impressionability, the future, and, quite certainly, naiveté. However, in Francophone texts, the use of a child character can derive from a specific objective: to reflect the impacts of French colonization on the impressionable psyche. In works like Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir*, readers can see how the child is utilized in this fashion. Laye's text follows the journey of a child from his *pays natal*, to his time at the local colonial school, and, finally, to his years as a student in Paris. In addition to this physical journey, Laye explicates the child's battle against colonial forces, at times physical and at others figurative, and, also, his desire to find his "true" identity. In this way, Laye's uses the child as a mirror for the realities of French colonization. The voyage of his *enfant noir* reflects the voyage of innumerable real children, women, and men of both

colonial Africa and the Antilles. This child is employed as such so that the readers can better understand the reality of the colonized, so that the physical and spiritual journey can be implicit.

For this same reason, Pineau includes her children, Paul and Céluta—to both clarify and emphasize the true Francophone experience and Pineau’s own life experience. While the desperate and grotesque actions of the twins do not literally mirror reality, Pineau uses these actions to comment on her past. In the work, these children share the same sense of fractured identity and they both simultaneously struggle for self-definition. As Pineau has openly discussed her own internal displacement, it is not hard to see the connection. Despite their extreme malevolence in the text, Pineau’s reality and the Creole reality live within Paul and Céluta.

In the text, the twins are known as “problem children.” They are difficult, distant, and misunderstood. The language that surrounds them is brimming with disapproval. They are hated; they are damned.

[Leur sœur] haïssait les jumeaux, Paul et Céluta, les maudits, comme les appelait [leur grand-mère]...Déjà dans leurs rires de nourrissons, on entendait les grincements d’une âme diabolique (151)¹⁷

Throughout their lives, the twins commit acts viewed as repulsive, and, at times, demonic. From early acts of violence to their relationship later in life, the twins consistently commit *crimes contre la moralité*.

Vers l’âge de sept ans...ceux-là prenaient le chemin des bois, pour torturer petits oiseaux, avant de les manger sans cuisson ni accommodement¹⁸...

A l’âge de huit ans, Paul assassina sa maitresse de cours préparatoire¹⁹ (151).

¹⁷ “[Their sister] hated the twins, Paul and Céluta, the damned, as their grandmother called them...Already in their early infant laughs, one could hear the squeaks of a diabolical soul” (151).

¹⁸ “Around the age of seven...they took the wooded path, to torture small birds, before eating them raw” (151).

¹⁹ “At the age of eight, Paul murdered his preparatory school teacher” (151).

On jurait qu'avec Paul (son propre frère !), ils vivaient comme mari et femme²⁰ (194).

Upon first reflection, Pineau's inclusion of the twins seems to lack direction or purpose. Their depravity is palpable, yet, said depravity has little impact on the path of the narrative. Each shocking act of the twins is met with little explanation or consideration. In fact, though we get the viewpoint of their father, mother, and older sister, we never receive their firsthand perspective. On top of being problematic to the other characters, they feel problematic, disjointed and underdeveloped to the reader. However, the continuation of plotline is not the goal of their inclusion. The twins serve as an ingenuous representation of an aspect of Antillean culture and Pineau's personal experience—the struggle for self-definition. The twin's apparent wickedness does not come from Pineau's desire to explicate true perversion or to develop strong characters. Conversely, the writer utilizes these children's immorality to comment on the constant battle for self-image and the inherent identity crisis of those born to colonized nations.

As children of Guadeloupe, a colonized country, a culturally fractured country, Paul and Céluta are born without a clearly defined identity. They are half French, half Guadeloupian. They learn French at school, and, yet, they speak Creole at home. They do not have a clear self-perception. And it is because of this that they rebel. The twins search for their own place in the world and attempt to compensate for their culturally divided life. They commit acts of violence, they engage in incest, all out of feelings of confusion and, most significantly, the underlying rift inherent to their psyches. This idea is expressed clearly in the University of Minnesota's online database, *Voices from the Gap*. Writers April Adamson, Michael Koerpel, and Maggie Majewski state:

The implications of [the twins'] act of incest along with their violent behavior, however abnormal or self-destructive, give them a problematic sense of security. This problematic

²⁰ "One would swear that with Paul (her own brother!) They lived like husband and wife" (194).

sense of agency is an effort at self-affirmation within a space where the post-colonial wreckage of racism, sexism, and socio-economic and political instability challenge the definition of home and identity. Incest, along with violence, hustling and prostitution, becomes a coping mechanism to deal with the fragmentation and displacement of home.²¹

This is the idea that forms the base of Pineau's work and metaphor. Through Paul and Céluta, the author demonstrates her understanding of Guadeloupian reality: a country that is both physically and emotionally fractured by colonization must produce inhabitants who reflect these schisms. Just like Pineau herself, the twins cannot be totally Guadeloupian or wholly French; and because of this they cannot be completely content in their personal identities. They are damned to be forever grasping, searching, and attempting to attain completeness. Their acting out does not come from a place of actual malice, but a place of uncertainty, confusion, and transition. They move from place to place, experiment with various uncouth acts, and are in a constant state of flux—a state similar to that of Pineau as she traveled from country to country, and a state that reflects the internal journey of thousands of colonized peoples.

The image of children with a strong sense of self-disgust; the image of disobedient and disagreeable children; the image of broken and seemingly lost children—Pineau uses these images in her depiction of Paul and Céluta to clearly show the significant effect of colonization on the personal identities of the Guadeloupian populace and herself.

²¹ Voices from the Gap

Chapter 2

L'espérance macadam

A Synopsis

Pineau's second full-length novel, *L'espérance Macadam* of 1995, is set in Savane, Guadeloupe. The novel is placed in the context of two natural disasters—the cyclone of 1928 and Hurricane Hugo—and explores sexual abuse. While several different perspectives are present throughout the work, Pineau focuses most intently upon the experiences of Eliette and Angela.

The novel follows the memories and experiences of Eliette, an older resident of Savane, however, the perspective changes throughout the work. In fact, the story is told through three sets of eyes, those of Eliette, those of Angela, and, finally, those of Rosette, Angela's mother. Through these characters, readers encounter the destitution and violence that pervades Savane. Most particularly, the novel follows and details the sexual abuse of Eliette at the hands of her stepfather at the age of eight, and the continuous sexual abuse of Angela by her father. With Hurricane Hugo and the cyclone in the background, and the vividly shocking abuse in the foreground, Pineau draws parallels between the destruction of both nature and man that is ever threatening and ever present in Guadeloupe.

Glawdys and Hortense

Glawdys, elle avait pas tremblé en lâchant son enfant vivant. Elle avait toute sa tête...Elle avait dû bien réfléchir avant, peser, jauger, mesurer l'inutilité de le garder vivant/Glawdys, she hadn't flinched in dropping her child alive. She had her whole mind....She had to think carefully before, weight, measure, measure the futility of keeping it alive. (73)

Fendre ! hacher ! couper !...Fendre ! hacher ! couper !...[Hortense] dormait, le corps replié comme un grand Z qui semblait marquer le final d'une histoire...Il avait pris Hortense de A a Z/Crack! chop! cut!...Crack! chop! cut!...[Hortense] was sleeping, her body bent like a large Z which seemed to mark the end of a story...He took Hortense, from A to Z.(101)

Pineau continues her exploration of unsettling behavior in this second novel, *L'Espérance Macadam*. The novel is teeming with extraordinary examples; a veritable chronicle of shocking violence and sexual deviancy. Two of the less prominent examples of said misbehavior come with the untimely death of Glawdys' child and the murder of Hortense. Both instances are shockingly violent as well as graphic, and both point to another of Pineau's oft-utilized motifs: unrestrained, violent, and forced silencing as a metaphor for the mass silencing that takes place in a colonized country.

As Eliette, the novel's most consistent narrator encounters Rosan in the backseat of a police car, memories of Savane's violent history flood back to her. It is through these recollections that readers learn of Glawdys and her child's tragic end. As a child, Glawdys is brought to Savane and abandoned by her mother.

La petite d'Hermancia fut baptisée Glawdys. D'une beauté étrange et merveilleuse...Négresse-noire à yeux verts, nez droit, épaisses lèvres pourpres et grands cheveux jaune paille bouclés, Glawdys déroutait tous ceux qui cherchaient à définir sa race. (61)²²

Though Eliette has the opportunity to adopt the young girl, she falls into the hands of Eloise—only to be systematically abandoned and neglected all over again. As soon as she is officially adopted, the young girl is tied to a rope and made to live in the yard like an animal.

Par manque de soleil, sa chevelure brillait maintenant d'une manière chrysocale. A force de rester serrée dans l'ombre de la case, le vert de ses yeux prit la couleur des mares glauques de Grande-Terre. Du pourpre, ses lèvres virèrent au bleu inquiétant des hauts-fonds. Même le noir d'ébène de sa peau s'altéra, devint terne et cendreuse, perdit son beau moiré. (63)²³

²² "The daughter of Hermancia was baptized Glawdys. Of a strange and wonderful...A black Negress with green eyes, straight nose, thick purple lips, and big, yellow, straw-like curls. Glawdys baffled all those who sought to define her race." (61)

²³ "Through a lack of sunlight, her hair now shone like imitation gold. The strength of remaining closed in the shadow of her box, the green of her eyes took the color of the murky ponds of Grande-Terre. Of purple, her lips veered to the disturbing blue of shallow water. Even the ebony black of her skin was altered, it becoming dull and ashen, it lost its beautiful shimmering." (63)

Glawdys is destroyed, internally as well as externally, all due to her unfortunate circumstance of birth. As a seeming result, when she has her own child, she immediately and literally destroys its life: throwing the child over a bridge, sending it to crash and splay across the surrounding rocks. Through this action, Glawdys simultaneously ends what she views as her child's future suffering and punishes the community of Savane for allowing the multitude of suffering she experienced throughout her own life.

[Glawdys] n'y avait jamais cru, au bonheur. Elle avait fait comme ces Nègresses des premiers voyages qui tuaient leurs nouveau-nés pour pas qu'ils naissent dans l'esclavage, tombent pas dans les pattes des négriers. (243)²⁴

Also through Eliette's remembrances, readers learn of Hortense and her tragic and untimely end. The murder of Hortense, marks the first crime of "Ti-Ghetto," and is horrifically detailed by Pineau via Eliette.

En 1969...le Nègre Régis a débité son Hortense, la femme qu'il avait mariée ni devant Dieu ni devant les hommes... (88)²⁵

This scene is further explained in the pages that follow. As his concubine, Hortense is expected to bend to the whims of Régis. However, when Régis suspects that his "property" has taken a true lover in the form of Zebio, a charming young man of Savane, this arrangement buckles beneath his blinding jealousy and rage. Taking hold of his *sabre*, Régis attacks Hortense and cuts her body into pieces, taking sadistically calculated care to arrange her dismembered parts.

Sûrement qu'elle pensait pas qu'il aurait fini par la débiter et rassembler ses morceaux sur la terre battue de la cuisine et déposer ses deux tétés tremblants comme blanc-manger sur une feuille de bananier, entre la tête aux yeux ouverts dans la stupéfaction, et la coucoune béante ensanglantée. (88)

²⁴ "[Glawdys] had never believed in happiness. She had acted like the Negresses of the first trips who killed their newborns so that they would not be born into slavery, so they would not fall into the clutches of the slavers." (243)

²⁵ "In 1969 the Negro...Régis cut up his Hortense, the woman he had married neither before God nor before men..."(88)

The immediate impact of this described placement is shock and terror. The disturbing focus on Hortense's sex highlights Regis' core perception of the woman as a sexual object. Furthermore, the location of his mutilated trophy, on his dirt-floored kitchen upon a banana leaf, reinforces the man's perception of Hortense as tied to the home, to the domestic sphere, and to a constant position of relegation, in life and death. Finally, her head, without the mouth, provides a both shocking and haunting image of Regis' literal and figurative silencing of his mistress.

In both of the aforementioned crimes, the death of Glawdys' child and the murder of Hortense, Pineau masterfully presents violence and forced silence hand in hand. Glawdys, abandoned at childhood by her birth mother and further abandoned by her adoptive mother, is effectively silenced throughout her lifetime. As a result, when she reaches adulthood, she forcefully and eternally silences her offspring—preventing its voice from ever producing a single sound. Hortense, a woman condemned to a life of marginalization as a result of her lifestyle as a concubine, is successfully and daily silenced. With her premature death, she is violently and permanently separated from any voice she might have once had.

Pineau implements these appallingly violent scenes of silencing as a means to discuss the silencing that can take place via real life discrimination, and, on a larger scale, colonization. In order to successfully diminish a person's impact and to create an inward feeling of "otherness", one must overtake said person physically, mentally, and vocally. One can conquer a person in a physical sense, but if this person maintains his voice, his opinions, he still has power. He can still have an impact. Similarly, in the colonization of a nation, a colonizer must, most significantly, colonize the voice of the people. If this collective voice does not fall in line with that of the colonizer, it must be quelled; it must be silenced. The conquering of the voice is the final and

most effective manner of marginalization. Through Pineau's words, readers can clearly comprehend this important step in small and large scale domination.

Angela and Eliette

Toujours la voix de ma manman s'élevait pour couvrir d'autres sons qui perçaient fond en moi. Elle racontait comment, pour mes huit ans, le Cyclone de 1928 avait démembré la Guadeloupe, m'avait jeté cette poutre au beau mitan du ventre/The voice of my mother always rose to cover the background sounds that pierced me. She told me how, for my eight years, the Cyclone of 1928 had dismembered Guadeloupe, had thrown me this beam at the middle of my belly. (12)

Pour lui trouver une autre excuse, Angela se figurait parfois que son papa était possédé par un esprit et qu'il ne connaissait rien des agissements de ce démon qui usurpait son enveloppe pour l'abuser, elle. Il avait une figure ressemblante, mais c'était dans la noirceur. La même voix, mais il parlait si bas...Comment savoir si c'était vraiment lui ? Son bon papa Rosan/To find another excuse for him, Angela imagined sometimes that her papa was possessed by a spirit and that he didn't know anything about the acts of this demon who usurped his skin to abuse her. He had similar figure, but it was dark. The same voice, but he spoke so low...How could she know if it was truly him? Her good papa Rosan? (212)

In addition to these small, yet powerful, scenes of violence, Pineau focuses most of her energy in the novel upon sexual abuse—the sexual abuse of Angela by her father, Rosan, as well as the earlier sexual abuse of Eliette. In both instances, the young victims of the repeated abuse repress these negative experiences. This systematic *refoulement* provides a means for both women to continue through their daily lives; however the internal action forever impacts their respective psyches. In her depiction of this physical abuse and the consequential repression, the writer alludes to the nonfictional *refoulement* that transpires in atmospheres of abuse.

The term *refoulement* literally is defined to mean “repression,” yet, the word encompasses a great deal more than this simple definition implies. The idea behind *refoulement* is that repressed psychological elements are constantly active in a person's unconscious. Due to this constant activity, these elements are destined to reappear in a person's conscious reality in various forms that can be seemingly unassociated with the initial repression. In other words,

psychological repression aims to ensure that the elements or experiences that are unacceptable to the conscious mind are prevented from entering it, but the mechanism is not foolproof.

While *refoulement* is certainly common, abnormal repression or *refoulement anormal*, occurs when the repressed and internalized feelings and their conscious reincarnations lead to irrational, self-destructive, or unsociable behavior. It is this type of *refoulement* that fascinates Pineau. In several of the writer's works, the principal characters oscillate between the conscious and the unconscious, and are quite often teetering on the edge of total sanity—see Léonce in *La grande drive* and Seraphine in *L'espérance*. These characters suffer from *refoulement anormal* and are likely to be eventually paralyzed by their mind's repression method. In this specific instance, however, Angela and Eliette both *attempt* to repress their experiences with sexual abuse without full success, yet the lack of repression does not lead to the detriment of the women, rather it leads to their liberation.

For Angela, the fear that she will be seen as a traitor by her mother keeps her silent about her sexual abuse. It is this fear that also leads to her personal *refoulement* and internalization of the violence done to her.

‘Chut! Ne dis rien à ta manman. Jamais...ne trahis pas notre secret!’ C’était tout ce que [Rosan] avait dit avant de se coucher sur elle...Elle se mit à pleurer tandis qu’il la serrait plus fort, enflait en elle...Des pleurs sans paroles, pour pas faire de la peine à son papa, la sa manman Rosette. (214-215)²⁶

Readers can see Angela repeatedly compensate for her father's seemingly diabolic actions by blaming them on a separate creation. She cannot fathom that her loving papa *Rosan* could commit these atrocities, so she begins to reason that a demon has taken hold of his being.

Non, c’était pas son papa Rosan, un démon, mon Dieu Seigneur, un démon...De toute la force de sa jeune foi, elle récita un Je crois en Dieu mais la bête ne disparaissait pas en

²⁶ “‘Hush! Do not tell your mama. Never...do not betray our secret!’ This was all [Rosan] had said before raping her...She began to cry as he pressed harder, swelling inside her...Wordless tears, for not to hurt her father, her mother Rosette.” (214-215)

vapeur, ne voltigeait pas en poussière, ne quittait pas l'enveloppe de son papa Rosan pour retourner dans le monde des ténèbres de Belzebuth...Non, c'était pas son papa. (214)²⁷

It is simpler for Angela to attempt to ignore the evil her father is doing to her. It is even simpler to be able to blame it on a demonic possession. However, soon—relatively speaking, of course—Angela speaks out. Upon realization that her younger sister could also be in danger, Angela's refolement is broken, and she breaks her silence—an action which sends her father to jail and her mother towards the brink of *la folie*. Despite the negative ramifications of her *défoulement*, Angela's actions lead her towards freedom from the power of her abuser.

Eliette, on the other hand, is haunted and impacted by the ramifications of her violent abuse and her subsequent repression for many, many years—psychologically and physically. At the age of eight, Eliette experienced two large-scale acts of violence—the natural, in the form of *le Cyclone 28*, and the unnatural, in her stepfather's sexual abuse. For years following this *année de violence*, her mother reminds her of the tornado and its damage without ever acknowledging the reality of the sexual abuse. In this way, her mother successfully confuses the two occurrences for Eliette, and makes them into one.

Je voyais plus ma manman folle assise sur son ti-banc revivant Cyclone 28 qu'elle criait La Bête. Quand elle disait: 'Eliette, ma fi, je vais te raconter Le Passage de La Bête...', son visage se froissait comme du papier gris, sa voix sortait soudain hachée d'entre les lames d'un vent levé furieux a la seule évocation de la nuit terrifié. (22)²⁸

Just as her mother refers to the tornado as *La Bête*, Eliette refers to her abuser with the same euphemism. They are the same force, the same violence. Furthermore, the physical injuries she experienced at the hands of the tornado mirror those experienced at the hands of her step-father,

²⁷“No, it was not her father Rosan, a demon, Lord my God, a demon...With all the strength of her young faith, she recited one I Believe in God but the beast did not disappear into vapor, did not burn to dust, did not leave the evelope of her father Rosan to return to the dark world of Beelzebub...not it was not her father.” (214)

²⁸ “I no longer saw my crazy mother sitting on her small bench reliving the Cyclone of '28 that she called The Beast. When she said: 'Eliette, my girl, I am going to tell you about the Passage of The Beast...' her face crumpled like gray paper...” (22)

and, thusly, Eliette begins to consciously blame her adulthood infertility on the *Cyclone*, instead of on her abuser.

J'aurais pu mourir depuis ce temps-là. Une poutre m'était tombée dessus, m'avait presque traversée. J'ai eu le ventre ouvert à ce que disait ma manman... Je sais pas si [je ne pourrais jamais faire d'enfants] à cause de la poutre qui m'avait traversée le jour du Cyclone... ou bien parce que j'avais pas connu d'homme avant mes trente-cinq ans. (216-217)²⁹

The two incidents, due to her psychological repression and her mother's intent encouragement, seem to combine to be one event in Eliette's subconscious. However, as she is confronted with Angela's abuse years later, the two events of her past become more disparate. The abuse that has resided in her subconscious enters into conscious mind.

Personne n'oubliait jamais. Même s'il n'y avait pas trace de cicatrices sur son ventre. Même si une autre mémoire lui avait rapporté tous les souvenirs qu'elle amassait pour s'étourdir les jours de solitude et louer Dieu de l'avoir laissée réchapper vive de ce cyclone tant raide. Elle en eut soudain conscience, si violemment qu'elle dut chercher un siège, s'asseoir... Alors Eliette vit la poutre qui venait droit sur elle pour la pilonner. Une poutre vivante qui avait un visage, des yeux, des dents longues, des narines toutes frémissantes de rage. Elle avait huit ans... (219)³⁰

Just as Angela can no longer deny the true abuse her father subjects her to after being confronted with the potential abuse of her sister, Eliette is no longer able to *cacher* her past experiences when faced with the reality of Angela's. Her attempted refoulement is unsuccessful, and the pain of the abuse is made new. However, due to the fact that these fragmented memories finally surface and become a reality for Eliette, the character is able to finally understand her past and current self. As she and Angela live together and discuss their respective experiences, the two women are able to end their personal cycles of repression, and hope remains.

²⁹ "I could have died at that time. A beam had fallen over me, I was almost split in half. I had an open stomach, my mother said... I do not know if [I could never have children] because of the log that separated me the day of the Cyclone... or because I had not known a man before my thirty-five years." (216-217)

³⁰ "No one ever forgot. Even if there were no traces of scars on her stomach. Even if another memory had been worth all the memories she amassed to dull the lonely days... She was suddenly aware, so violently that she had to find a seat, to sit down... So, Eliette saw the beam coming straight to pound her. A beam which had a living face, eyes, long teeth, nostrils quivering with rage. She was eight years old..." (219)

Through this pattern of repeated sexual abuse, failed repression, and eventual hope Pineau explores the congruent patterns present in the lives of real-life victims.

L'Espérance Macadam relates the violence that is done to women and girls. I have met many people who were victims of incest and it is an injury about which, as a woman, I couldn't keep silent. I wrote *L'Espérance* to show the human being in this violence, bounced around like a canoe at sea, wounded by the hurricanes, like an island, like Guadeloupe. (Veldwachter)³¹

Unlike Paul and Céluta, Léonce, Glawdys, and Hortense, Pineau's characters that are utilized as representations of disparate kinds of violence and marginalization than those represented in their respective novels, Pineau uses Angela and Eliette as literal examples of a real-world ail. Knowing the pain of lacking a voice in her own life, experiencing alienation from an early age, the writer uses her novel to give women of her nation, Guadeloupe, who have experienced sexual abuse a true voice.

In this way, however, the writer exposes the underlying culture of abuse living in Guadeloupe. In this novel, she publicly outs the island for its continual atrocities, and for its propagation of sexual abuse on its female inhabitants. While her goal is a positive one, Pineau is disliked by many Guadeloupians for her very public portrayal of this abuse. In actuality, Pineau is not a popular writer in her own country. She shares too much with the outside world; shows too much of Guadeloupe's bad characteristics; betrays the island's code of silence regarding familial sexual abuse. For all of this, she is not regarded as a great writer of the island.³²

³¹ An Interview with Gisèle Pineau. Nadège Veldwachter and Gisèle Pineau. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring, 2004), pp. 180-186

³² Ngandu, Pius. Personal Interview. 3/2/2012.

Chapter 3

Hope: Sous le Macadam

I didn't want it to be only ruin, rape, desolation. I wanted there to be hope with this young woman, Angela, able to rebuild herself, because that's what matters, showing that we can rebuild ourselves. Never forget, but rebuild. (Veldwachter)

Each of the aforementioned characters, from Léonce to Eliette, Céluta to Glawdys, share a strong connection. They are each plagued. They are each alone. Whether it is by fractured personalities, psychological turmoil, overwhelming violence, or sexual abuse, each character is haunted by some occurrence or event and is left nearly alone to deal with the repercussions. This similarity creates a feeling that this type of suffering is ubiquitous in Guadeloupe, which I contend is the desire of the writer. By creating characters that are so similar in suffering, yet so different in circumstance, Pineau creates a clear picture of her interpretation of Guadeloupian society. In this way, Pineau comments on the various types of relegation and violence that lurk in hers and others daily life in the Franco-Caribbean; abuse that exists *sous le macadam* (beneath the tarmac), and pervades the landscape.

However, these seven characters as well as these two novels, all share something more. Another aspect of their culture and experiences is buried even deeper *sous le macadam*. They all share an inherent sense of unending hope. They all continue, and most find a way to “rebuild,” as Pineau describes in an interview. Even though many are destroyed by the violence of the earth, there are some—Angela, Eliette, Paul, and Céluta—that continue on in their search for identity and self contentedness, not to be deterred by their personal misfortune. It is through these stories of resilience in the face of adversity that Pineau shares with her readers the true fortitude of the Antillean people and culture. There is strength, perseverance, and, above all else, there is hope for a better life.

Personal Conclusion

This process of creating an Honors Thesis has been a long and tumultuous journey. I began last semester with an entirely different topic, and I had a great deal of research and reading to make up for this spring.

I was attracted to the works of Gisèle Pineau through a course on Francophone Literature during the fall, and I spent my Christmas break reading and re-reading *L'espérance macadam* and *La grande drive des esprits*. Then, this spring, under the faithful direction of my committee chairman, Dr. Ngandu, I began to write. I collected information from various sources printed on the works of Gisèle Pineau—most specifically her personal interviews—and reread various selections from my main sources, her novels.

While I am satisfied with the end product, I do feel that this is an incomplete depiction of the works of Pineau. I would have liked to include an analysis of a few more of her pieces—specifically an example of her children's literature as well as an example of her nonfiction. I feel that a broader exploration of her texts would have provided a more accurate analysis and a more full-bodied depiction of her thematic and personal concerns. I regret that I was only able to include two novels in my final paper.

However, I do feel that this smaller breadth of works studied allowed for a more in-depth analysis. I truly immersed myself in these novels this year. The most difficult aspect of this immersion was the written analysis portion. I so enjoyed simply reading the texts, and, surprising myself, I did not struggle with the language of the novels. In fact, I struggled most with taking the text and presenting it in a clear and deserved fashion in my native language. I wanted to maintain the beauty of Pineau's prose in French while clearly expressing myself in English. This

was the most challenging aspect—and, actually, a nice real-world representation of the cultural clash described in these works.

All in all, though I know it is far from perfect, and that it is perhaps not up to graduate school standards, I am proud of this undergraduate thesis. I am proud to have completed it, and I am proud to have been, in this small way, a part of Pineau's novels and their beauty.

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