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# Simmering in the tombs: the role of the zombie in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Chronique des Sept Misères* and Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Ti Jean L'horizon*

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**SIMMERING IN THE TOMBS:  
THE ROLE OF THE ZOMBIE IN PATRICK CHAMOISEAU'S *CHRONIQUE  
DES SEPT MISERES* AND SIMONE SCHWARZ-BART'S *TI JEAN L'HORIZON***

A Thesis

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1. “Aside From The Chains”: The Zombie as History.....	4
1.1 The Historical Symbolism of the Zombie Afoukal.....	7
1.2 The Ever-Present Zombie Horde of Schwarz-Bart.....	14
1.3 The Inherent Historical Nature of the Zombie Figure.....	21
Chapter 2. Inner Horizon: The Living-Dead Protagonist.....	24
2.1 The Zombification of Pierre Philomène Soleil.....	25
2.2 Ti Jean and His Horizons.....	29
2.3 The Zombie: The True Antillean Hero.....	35
Chapter 3. “A Basket Without Handles”: The Zombification of Writing.....	36
3.1 Chamoiseau’s Morbidity of “Word-Scratching”.....	40
3.2 Schwarz-Bart’s Narrative Zombification.....	42
3.3 The Undead Pen.....	43
Conclusion.....	46
Works Cited.....	50
Appendix A: Glossary of Terms.....	52
Appendix B: Synopses of Novels.....	53
Vita.....	54

## Abstract

The figure of the zombie is a recurring trope for writers in the French Antilles. Two of the most influential and popular authors in modern French-Antillean literature are Patrick Chamoiseau from Martinique and Simone Schwarz-Bart from Guadeloupe. Both of these authors use the figure of the zombie as representations of colonization and the lingering trauma of slavery in Antillean society. In this thesis, I examine two of the most well-known works by these authors, Chamoiseau's *Chronique des Sept Misères* (1986) and Schwarz-Bart's *Ti Jean L'horizon* (1979), and how these texts use the nature of the zombie in an effort to define Antillean identity. I argue that it is through the use of the zombie in these texts that Schwarz-Bart and Chamoiseau are able to create a portrait of Antillean culture which, as well as illustrating the importance of history, also proposes a plan to strengthen Antillean identity and literature for the future.

## Introduction

Zombies are often portrayed in contemporary American culture as an apocalyptic mass of cannibals. They are party to the realm of science fiction, and the immense amount of books, comics, films, and television shows one sees that treat the subject is mind-boggling. With the popularity of the zombie-phenomenon in American culture, ignorance or neglect of the Afro-Caribbean origins of the zombie has become more widespread. The basic idea of a zombie as we understand it today, a person who was dead and then brought back to life, originates from Haitian tradition and folklore. In her book *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Jamaica and Haiti*, Zora Neale Hurston explains the differences between the American understanding of death and that which exists in Haiti: “Here in the shadow of the Empire State Building, death and the graveyard are final, in such a positive end that we use it as a measure of nothingness and eternity. We have the quick and the dead. But in Haiti there is the quick, the dead, and then there are Zombies” (179). In Haitian culture, the zombie is an important folkloric and religious tradition, symbolizing an alternative to the idea of death as permanence.

The influence of Haitian culture on the rest of the Caribbean cannot be understated. Famed French-Caribbean author Maryse Condé writes:

Haïti est la première île de l’archipel des Antilles à avoir conquis son indépendance au terme d’une lutte autour de laquelle s’est édifié un véritable mythe. Pour la première fois, la Noir avait dit non au Blanc et l’avait mis en échec. L’esclave avait renversé son maître. Des chefs aux noms prestigieux, Toussaint Louverture, Dessalines, composaient une galerie de héros éponymes... les souvenirs du passé semblent avoir emporté sur la réalité du présent. (14)

According to Condé, Haiti, due to its language, history of slavery, iconic liberation, and colonial rule, has had an undeniable influence on the other islands of the French-

Caribbean. With this influence comes the exportation of Haitian folklore which has become a prevalent force on the Caribbean psyche and has permeated French-Caribbean literature, particularly in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

In regards to the zombie legend in particular, the influence of Haiti is essential as well. Regarding the historical progression of the zombie myth from the biblical story of Lazarus up to the films of George A. Romero, the undisputed foundation of modern American zombie lore,<sup>1</sup> in his article “A Leurs Corps Défendant” in a collection of essays called *Politique des Zombies: L’Amérique selon George A. Romero*, François Angelier writes: « Si tout commence à Béthanie de Judée, tout recommence à Port-au-Prince dans l’Haïti des planteurs, des esclaves, des rebellions matées et rematées et de l’occupation américaine » (17). The zombie legend, introduced to the French Antilles via Haiti, has greatly impacted the Martinican and Guadeloupian literary canon.

Françoise Lionnet describes how colonial ideas of Caribbean geography do not accurately portray trans-Caribbean influence:

I grant that colonial geography is confusing, as are the modalities of mapping...or naming that settlers and chroniclers used to establish their mastery over the “virgin” territories that they encountered and surveyed for their monarchs, building on ancient utopian dreams of islands as *terrae nullius*, empty or unoccupied places of the imagination that seem insulated, isolated by large bodies of water, rather than treating the islands as landmasses linked to each other by active oceanic routes. (731)

Given this new perception of Caribbean geography, one can imagine the relative ease of cultural influence between Haiti and the French Antilles. This concept will also help inform my argument about the use of the zombie figure to suggest a new reading of an Antillean identity.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on George Romero, see Appendix A.

Many authors have looked at zombies in the Caribbean through a plethora of lenses. Wade Davis, an ethnobotanist from Harvard and author of the well-known book *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, has researched the scientific causes of zombification. In another case, in their article “The Ways and Nature of the Zombi,” Hans W. Ackerman and Jeanine Gauthier examine the origins of the zombie etymologically, sociologically and anthropologically. However, the concept of removing any desire to explain the anthropological or scientific origins of the zombie and examining the *idea* of the zombie and its use in a modern context is rare and indeed nearly non-existent in terms of the zombie in contemporary French-Antillean literature. Because of its versatility, as well as the all but ubiquitous knowledge of the zombie figure in Martinique and Guadeloupe due to Haiti’s influence, many authors from the French Antilles use the zombie as a literary device.

Two texts which prominently figure zombies as social, political and historical metaphors as well as serve as representations of writing itself are Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Chronique des Sept Misères* and Simone Schwarz-Bart’s *Ti Jean L’horizon*. In Chapter 1 I will examine how both of these texts use the zombie to represent the history of slavery and colonialism in Guadeloupe and Martinique. In Chapter 2, I will discuss in what way the protagonists of the above two novels are given zombie-like aspects themselves. Finally, I will argue that for Chamoiseau and Schwarz-Bart, the act of writing itself is a form of zombification when dealing with identity in an overwhelmingly oral culture such as the Antilles.

## Chapter 1 “Aside From The Chains...”: The Zombie as History

*« Autrefois autrefois/ Ah! mémoire rocailleuse insurge-toi en taillis./  
Chaque buisson de mémoire cache un tireur. »  
– Edouard Glissant, « Le Sang Rivé », 13*

In her sociological study *Tell My Horse*, Zora Neale Hurston describes the reasons for which zombies are created by Voodoo priests and priestesses in traditional Haitian society:

Now, why have these dead folk not been allowed to remain in their graves? There are several answers to this question... the zombie A. Was awakened because somebody required his body as a beast of burden. In his natural state he could never have been hired to work with his hands, so he was made into a zombie because they wanted his services as a laborer. B. Was summoned to labor also but he is reduced to the level of a beast as an act of revenge. C. Was the culmination of “ba’Moun” ceremony and pledge. That is, he was given as a sacrifice to pay off a debt to a spirit for benefits received. (182)

According to Hurston, one of the major reasons a zombie is created is for the purpose of forced labor. As well as offering a definition of a zombie and illustrating their reason for being created, Hurston also describes the pitiful and hopeless situation of an individual after he/she is transformed into a zombie:

Think of the fiendishness of the thing. It is not good for a person who has lived all his life surrounded by a degree of fastidious culture, loved to his last breath by family and friends, to contemplate the probability of his resurrected body being dragged from the vault...and set to toiling ceaselessly in the banana fields, working like a beast, unclothed like a beast, and like a brute crouching in some foul den in the few hours allowed for rest and food. From an educated, intelligent being to an unthinking, unknowing beast...It is not to be wondered at that now and then when the rumour spreads that a Zombie has been found and recognized, that angry crowds gather and threaten violence to the persons alleged to be responsible for the crime. (181)

From the above passage, one can see symmetry between the life of a zombie as described by Hurston and that of an African slave brought to the Antilles who is also “toiling ceaselessly in the banana fields” and “working like a beast.” If a zombie is one who was dead and then brought back to life, then the slave is indeed a type of zombie. Even if one survived the Middle Passage, the voyage itself was nonetheless a death of its own sort: to be taken from one’s homeland where one is, much like the pre-zombified person described in Hurston’s passage, “surrounded by...fastidious culture” and “loved to his last breath by family and friends” and deposited in an unfamiliar land to work unceasingly is undeniably a form of death. In this situation, one is no longer an individual but a mere, disposable workhorse. Upon arrival to the Caribbean, the slave is brought back from death to answer to the will of another human being. Indeed, slavery is itself the zombification of an individual.

Hurston’s studies center around the zombie in Haiti. Wade Davis, author of the famous scientific study *The Serpent and the Rainbow* states in an interview with Michelle Press: “In Haiti, a zombie is a complete pariah; no sooner would someone stand up in Haiti and claim to have been a zombie than would a leper stand up in Hyde park corner and boast of his disease” (412). The zombie in Haiti is a feared force. Indeed, the figure of the zombie in Haiti has political implications to the point where it was rumored that the infamous Tonton Macoute were zombies brought back from the dead to serve the Duvalier dictatorship. Indeed, it is often thought that merely mentioning zombies, let alone writing about them, leaves one vulnerable to being zombified. In Haitian author Dany Lafférière’s novel *Pays Sans Chapeau*, in a scene in which the narrator is having

dinner at his mother's house, the mother begins reciting the names of people they both knew who have died and most likely been zombified. Laferrière writes:

Et à chaque nom prononcé, je sens vibrer la table. Ils sont là tout autour de moi, les morts. Mes morts. Tous ceux qui m'ont accompagné durant ce long voyage. Ils sont là, maintenant, à côté de moi, tout près de cette table bancale qui me sert du bureau... Ils sont là, je le sais, ils sont tous là à me regarder travailler à ce livre. Je sais qu'ils m'observent. Je le sens. Leurs visages me frôlent la nuque. Ils se penchent avec curiosité par-dessus mon épaule. Ils se demandent, légèrement inquiets, comment je vais les présenter au monde... (37)

The zombie in Martinique and Guadeloupe is a creature which is removed from the serious implications it has in Haiti. In their article tracing the origins of the zombie anthropologically, Hans W. Ackerman and Jeanine Gauthier write: "The story of a physical zombie was also reported from Martinique. However, the report is very vague and seems to be a literary fiction based on local folklore and zombie tales from Haiti" (479). Ackerman and Gauthier also describe "...zombis in the French Antilles as rather indistinct entities that make nocturnal appearances and haunt houses or become fireballs called *soucliens*" (485). As evidenced by the above passages, zombies in the French Antilles are considered to be less sinister than in Haiti where they may carry a curse for anyone who dares even mention them. It is partly because of this removal from the zombie "curse" present in Haiti that authors in the French-Antilles are allowed to write about the zombie freely and therefore use it as a symbol without the psychological or societal repercussions the figure of the zombie has in Haiti. In this chapter I examine how the zombie is used by Chamoiseau and Schwarz-Bart as a symbol for the history of colonization and slavery in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

## 1.1 The Historical Symbolism of the Zombie Afoukal

Caribbean literature scholar Nicole Simek writes: “In Caribbean literature, history occupies a privileged position as an object of inquiry, a primary force in the formation of Caribbean identity, and a paradigm elucidating present socio-political realities” (23). Because of the parallels between being a slave and being a zombie, both *Chronique des Sept Misères* by Patrick Chamoiseau and *Ti Jean L’horizon* by Simone Schwarz-Bart find the zombie a useful trope in discussing the all-important subject of history, slavery and colonialism described by Simek in the respective islands where each text takes place.

Perhaps the most vivid depiction of the zombie as history in these two works is in Chamoiseau’s use of the character Afoukal in *Chronique des Sept Misères*. The basic plot of the novel follows the adventures of a Martinican man named Pipi who is known as king of the “djobeurs:”<sup>2</sup> manual laborers with no fixed source of income who are hired to transport cargo through Fort-de-France. Along his journey, Pipi hears the tale of a zombie who guards buried treasure:

(Ce que dit la rumeur sur Afoukal, l’esclave-zombi.) Un maître béké de l’ancienne époque, à l’annonce forcée de l’abolition de l’esclavage, vida ses bas de laine, ses coffres, ses goussets, ses pochettes, les écrins et les boîtes à bijoux de sa femme, arracha les boutons d’argent de ses vieux costumes militaires, gratta le placage d’or de sa montre, dévissa les poignées d’ivoire sculpté des portes, le pommeau serti de sa canne, décolla les arabesques d’argent de ses selles, et fourra le tout dans la jarre de Provence où l’on serrait d’habitude l’huile de l’habitation. (143)

The béké<sup>3</sup> then tells his most loyal slave, Afoukal, to bury all the riches in a hole in the woods. After Afoukal accomplishes this task, the master hits him in the head with a shovel, killing him. The béké then buries both the treasure and the body of Afoukal. In

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> For definition, see Appendix A.

the novel we read: « Nostalgique, il [Afoukal] remontait à chaque minuit en compagnie de l'objet de sa garde, stagnant presque en surface à l'écoute de la nuit, accessible à une pelle bonne, à un courage beaucoup » (145-146). In addition, the legend states that « si tu sais l'attendre, et si tu as de la chance, il viendra une nuit dans ton sommeil » (149). Pipi, upon hearing this tale, becomes obsessed with finding the treasure and the zombie Afoukal.<sup>4</sup>

There are several parallels between Afoukal's situation and the history of the institution of slavery on the island of Martinique. To begin with, even the name "Afoukal" sounds conspicuously like "Africa" ("Afrique" in French, "Afrik" in Creole), immediately establishing a link with the heritage of a vast majority of people on the island of Martinique and the influence of slavery on their history. Indeed, if one dissects the name, "Afoukal" is very much like "Afrique colle" or "Africa glues." This interpretation of the zombie's name would mean that the history of slavery is, as Chamoiseau writes in his well-known theoretical text *Eloge de la Creolité*,<sup>5</sup> the institution that unites the Caribbean people "on the same soil by the yoke of history" (87).

Furthermore, the fact that Afoukal is "stagnating just beneath the surface"<sup>6</sup> is quite reminiscent of slavery itself, lying beneath the surface of Martinican culture, for no matter how much time has passed since the abolition of slavery in Martinique in 1794, its memory will always lie "just beneath the surface." Indeed, this resentment is even more poignant given the fact that the incident with Afoukal and his master happens at the exact moment when slavery is abolished. Although the master kills Afoukal, just as the French

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<sup>4</sup> For plot synopsis of *Chronique Des Sept Misères*, see Appendix B.

<sup>5</sup> For more on Theory of Creolité, see Appendix A.

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations from *Chronique Des Sept Misères* are by Linda Coverdale – bibliographic information in my Works Cited section.

government “killed” slavery, the zombie rises at midnight – a metaphor for the lingering sting of colonialism which is still quite an active force on the Martinican psyche.

However, while Afoukal’s name and existence are a metaphor for slavery, his role in the story itself draws further comparisons between the figure of the zombie in general and the institution of slavery. When Pipi finally meets Afoukal in his dreams, Afoukal gives Pipi the “18 Dream Words of Afoukal”: a list of questions and parables which tells the history of slavery in Martinique. With the following words, Afoukal explains the deaths and resurrections which come with slavery:

Il y avait trois noms. Celui du Grand-Pays (défait dans l’inutile ou l’attentat), celui du bateau (donné par les marins à l’heure des douches d’eau de mer et de la gymnastique qui décollait nos muscles), et celui des champs. Celui-là disait ta mort définitive: tu mourais avec et le laissais à tes enfants déjà oubliés de toi. Alors pour nous les noms n’avaient plus d’importance. (151-152)

In this passage, Afoukal explains the death and subsequent rebirth of a slave’s identity during the various stages of the voyage through the Middle Passage. Indeed, the changing of names from Africa to the Caribbean resembles a sort of abject baptism: being re-christened in the name of efficiency and homogeneity by the slave-master. Just as a zombie is one who is dead and then brought back to life, so too is a slave’s identity destroyed and reshaped according to the desires of the slave-owner.

Furthermore, according to Afoukal, this rebirth is more than a metaphorical change in identity, but an inevitable and literal transition from one life to another:

Imagine cela: tu descends du bateau, non dans un monde nouveau mais dans UNE AUTRE VIE. Ce que tu croyais essentiel se disperse, balance inutile. Une longue ravine creuse sa trace en toi. Tu n’es plus qu’abîme. Il fallait vraiment *renaître* pour survivre. Quelle impure gestation, quel enfer utérin, roye roye roye! (153, emphases Chamoiseau’s)

Chamoiseau's emphases in the above passages underscore the author's desire to communicate the necessity of death and resurrection inherent in the institution of slavery. Despite the fact that Afoukal is literally a zombie, he argues in the above passage that *every* slave was killed and forced to be reborn: slaves had to become the very definition of the living-dead in order to stay in existence, for their former lives were taken from them and their identities were reshaped into those of unthinking drones who exist solely for the purpose of manual labor.

As well as the parallels between the slave and the zombie, Afoukal's storytelling also casts light on the institution of slavery in general. While Afoukal's intention in telling Pipi the "dream-words" may have been in the interest of self-preservation, Afoukal has unintentionally preserved the legacy of the *béké* also, and has, in a way, turned the *slave-owner* into a zombie. In the telling of these stories of slavery, the *béké* is spoken of as one who can come back from the dead. While speaking of slave-masters who died in revolts, Afoukal describes each replacement *béké* as if they are all the same person simply brought back from the grave:

Tu te rends compte? Ils [the slave-owners] pouvaient donc mourir comme nous!? Mais nous n'eûmes même pas le temps de danser à plein ventre. Deux mois plus tard une lettre de désignation du grand patron de France ressuscita *le* [singular, emphasis added] maître. C'est là que nous apprîmes qu'ils étaient éternels. (162)

In keeping with the idea of the slave-owner as a zombie, Afoukal also explains: « Chaque fois qu'il [the slave-owner] mourrait (empoisonné par les papas-feuilles), la détresse m'envahissait comme s'il se fût agi de mon meilleur cheval. Je m'enfonçais alors comme un crabe dans le torpeur jusqu'à ce qu'une lettre de France le ressuscite. Tout

recommençait » (167). This idea of “resuscitation” is no less a bringing back from the dead of the master than the voyage through the Middle Passage is for the slave.

Indeed, almost as if Chamoiseau’s intention is to reiterate the zombie-ness of the institution of slavery, many of the passages taken from the novel involving the episode with Afoukal contain numerous words with the prefix “re” which, in French, signifies something which has happened before and is happening again. “Re-naître” and “re-suscita” in the above passages, on a stylistic level, serve to remind the reader of the fluid nature of life and death as well as of the shifting nature of Antillean history. These literary similarities between the way the slave is described and the way the master is portrayed, as well as the opaque separation between life and death on both sides, are reminders that while the slave may lead a life more closely related to that of a zombie in that he/she is deprived of individuality and forced to do manual labor, the slave-owner is nonetheless given zombie-like characteristics in that death does not equal permanence for the *béké*. The fact that both slave and slave-owner alike are spoken of as if they are zombies symbolizes the fact that the very institution of slavery is a zombie-like mechanism because human beings are constantly being killed and then reborn in a seemingly unending cycle. Much as a zombie is a creature stripped of all individuality, so too is every slave as well as slave owner easily replaceable.

On a deeper level as well however, the zombification of both slave and slave owner serves to illustrate the historical legacy of Euro-Caribbeans *as well as* Afro-Caribbeans in Martinique. While the historical trauma of slavery can clearly be seen on the part of the African-Caribbean people of Martinique, by zombifying the Euro-Caribbean as well, Chamoiseau reminds the reader of the historical legacy experienced

by the descendants of the slave-owners as well as of the slaves, for the béké's zombie of slavery manifests itself as historical guilt in Martinican society.

In this same vein, it is necessary to remember that Pipi, a modern Antillean, encounters Afoukal in modern Martinique. While we have seen that Afoukal is representative of the past, perhaps more importantly, Chamoiseau also uses him as a symbol for the present. The fact that Chamoiseau chose to make the teller of history a zombie indicates that while slavery may be over, its legacy endures even today. While history may be in the past, it still roams the earth, affecting the present. One can see this fact particularly in Pipi's response to the "dream words." After he meets Afoukal, Pipi goes through a spell of insanity:

Vers cette époque, Pipi avait les petits yeux des insomniaques, mais le regard en bonne saison de ceux qui pour la première fois, possèdent une mémoire...Il rôdait souvent du côté du boulevard Alfassa, sous les façades des entreprises d'import-export où s'étaient reconvertis les békés, relevant le nom des propriétaires peints au-dessus des entrées. Quand il crut reconnaître celui du maître d'Afoukal, il fut pris de nausée. Dans un état second, il doubla le punch de midi, tripla celui de midi et quart, multiplia celui de treize heures, avant de se dresser sur sa table, soûl comme un Mexicain, pour clamer d'une gravité comique: Messieurs, ils sont encore là!... (169)

The history of Martinique, symbolized by Afoukal, is so powerful that it brings an actual living being to the brink of insanity. In her afterward to the English translation of *Chronique des Sept Misères*, Linda Coverdale explains the above passage in the following way:

Pipi may hang with a zombi but he's no fool: 'Gentlemen, they're still here!' The real zombies are those who move through their world with minds that are culturally dispossessed, who spurn the market's island bounty for mealy supermarket apples from France. Afoukal, that master storyteller, must literally raise a concealed world to the level of consciousness, for who else will break the silence and tell the people of Martinique *who they are?* (214)

While Afoukal may be the only character specifically referred to as a zombie in the novel, as Coverdale argues, modern Martinicans are no less zombified than Afoukal due to their neglect of the past. Given Pipi's reaction to Afoukal, the fact that Afoukal is dead does little to hinder his influence on the present.

In fact, Afoukal takes pleasure in his role in the zombification of the present:

Plaqué au sol, il (Pipi) raconta au zombi notre vie de l'époque...Il lui parla de tout et de tout, et lui apprit même, dit-on, le maniement de la brouette et l'angoisse de la construire. Cela intéressait le zombi d'Afoukal, et les cliquetis d'os qui signalaient son rire ou son contentement grimpaient comme des ouistitis libérés, par les racines. Une curieuse complicité s'établissait ainsi entre le vivant et le mort. (175)

Afoukal's companionship with Pipi establishes a link between living and dead as well as between past and present. Because of this all-important rapprochement, the figure of the zombie represents the past in Chamoiseau's novel. However, it is in its role as a symbol of the present that the zombie is rendered a perfect metaphor for slavery in Martinique as a whole. As Chamoiseau writes: « (chaînes mises à part, rien n'avait véritablement changé) » (*Chronique* 145).

Afoukal plays a pivotal role in *Chronique des Sept Misères*. In being a representation of the past and its influence on the present, the zombie works as a perfect symbol for the history of slavery in Martinique in Chamoiseau's novel. The institution of slavery, while dead, has shaped Martinique, both politically and culturally. Furthermore, although this establishment has long been abolished, it will continue to influence the future. The institution of slavery shares many parallels with the zombie, for it is a non-living entity surrounded by a grandiose mythification which symbolically continues to roam the earth, dwelling in the Antillean psyche.

## 1.2. The Ever-Present Zombie Horde of Schwarz-Bart

While Afoukal represents history in Chamoiseau's novel, the figure of the zombie as a symbol of Antillean heritage is equally important in Schwarz-Bart's work. *Ti Jean L'horizon* follows the adventures of a boy named Ti Jean from Guadeloupe who is destined to save the world after a fantastical beast swallows the sun.<sup>7</sup> While there is not a specific zombie character that has the same prominence as Afoukal in *Chronique des Sept Misères*, zombies can be found throughout *Ti Jean L'horizon*. Zombies are no less real in the novel than Ti Jean himself and they make several appearances, not the least of which can be found in the following passage:

Et lui-même [Ti Jean] supportait à grand mal les apparitions nocturnes, zombis, chevaux à diables, boules de feu qui venaient rouler à ses pieds. Des animaux à traits humains venaient rôder autour de son campement, et puis un jour, s'enfilant au cœur d'un hallier, il reçoit un coup de bois dans le dos et se retourne, manqué de s'évanouir devant le visage phosphorescent du nègre Filbert, mort et enterré depuis belle lurette. (69)

Zombies are common in the world of *Ti Jean L'horizon* to such a point that the protagonist has frequent run-ins with them.

In fact, even the first descriptions of Ti Jean's village, which is itself called "Fond-Zombi" – a title which can be translated as "Founded on Zombies"<sup>8</sup> – are presented in the following manner:

Puis il y avait le petit pont de l'Autre-bord, suspendu au-dessus d'une ravine sèche, une rivière morte, quoi, hantée par un lot de mauvais esprits qui se tordaient et gesticulaient, dans l'attente qu'un humain manque une planche et dérape, vienne les rejoindre. Et c'était alors Fond-Zombi dans une éclaircie

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<sup>7</sup> For synopsis of *Ti Jean L'horizon*, see Appendix B.

<sup>8</sup> Translation mine.

fantastique de lumière, mornes après mornes, en chapelet, avec ses cases juchées en dépit de raison et comme accrochées au ciel par des cordes invisibles: juste quelques maisons d'hommes, maisons de zombis livrées à elles-mêmes au milieu des grands bois, appuyées contre la montagne Balata qui semblait prête à basculer dans le vide... (12-13)

In addition to the fact that zombies are so prominent in the narrative that they can be found in the name of the village itself, the hills just outside the center of Fond-Zombi are described in quite the casual manner as “juste quelques maisons d'hommes, maisons de zombis livrées,” a phrase which can be translated either as “a mere handful of human habitations, the dwellings of zombies”<sup>9</sup> or “*just* some houses of men, abandoned houses of zombies,”<sup>10</sup> the latter translation expressing the commonplace occurrence of this usually fantastical creature.

It is also important to note that along with the existence of the zombies themselves, the town of Fond-Zombi has a zombie-like atmosphere as well. The mention of “le vide” or “the void,” a word classically associated with death, immediately conjures images of opaqueness between the material and the afterlife in Fond-Zombi. The fluid nature of life and death, a concept which the very existence of the zombie typifies, is further exemplified in the above passage by the fact that the evil spirits which dwell in the hills “wait for some human to lose his footing and join them below.” This phrase creates an environment where death's inevitability is whole-heartedly accepted, for the spirits are not “hoping,” but “waiting.” However, perhaps more interestingly, in the original French text, Schwarz-Bart uses the word “rejoindre” which can be translated as

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<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations from *Ti Jean L'horizon* are by Barbara Bray – bibliographic information in my Works Cited section.

<sup>10</sup> Translation mine.

“re-join.”<sup>11</sup> This conspicuous word would suggest that any human who happens to fall into “the void” is not *becoming* party to the realm of the dead but is rather *returning* to some place they have already been. This situation renders life and death more cyclical, for it suggests that the living have been dead in the past and when they die are simply *returning* to the afterlife. This unclear division between life and death is a characteristic inherent to the zombie figure, for while it walks among the living, it is nevertheless a dead entity.

Given the ubiquitousness of the zombie figure, even from the first pages of Schwarz-Bart’s novel, zombies immediately carry different implications regarding history than in Chamoiseau’s work. While Afoukal must be vehemently sought after, the zombie is a common occurrence in the village of Fond-Zombi, making zombies more a part of everyday life than the mystical legend with which Afoukal is associated in *Chronique Des Sept Misères*.

Indeed, in Schwarz-Bart’s novel, it is not merely the village in which Ti Jean resides that is zombie-ridden. The whole of Guadeloupe itself is compared to the living-dead. In the novel, Ti Jean’s mother, Man Eloise, dies and the description of her burial has many zombie-like characteristics:

et comme il [Ti Jean] pensait que c’était [Man Eloise] la Guadeloupe tout entière, celle d’avant, avec son coin de ciel bleu, son petit soleil jaune et ses herbes toutes vertes, qu’elle avait tant butinées de ses doigts, un tel chagrin le prit qu’il entra en saisissement au-dessus de la fosse, penché sur le trou avec l’idée de s’y allonger raide pour tenir compagnie à la défunte...A ce moment, la flamme de la torche se recourba et une odeur familière de cannelle vint danser autour du garçon, cependant que la voix de man Eloise lui disait en esprit: –Les morts, vois-tu, il faut les enterrer, Ti Jean, voilà ce qu’il faut faire... (110)

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<sup>11</sup> Translation mine.

Ti Jean's mother is described in the above passage as a microcosm of Guadeloupe itself. Furthermore, she is associated with "the Guadeloupe of the past." The fact that Ti Jean's reaction to her death is to climb into her grave symbolizes his intention to zombify himself in order to commune with the dead and thus with history. It is in this fashion that Schwarz-Bart uses the zombie as a representation of Antillean history.

The zombie-like description of Man Eloise's burial is made more vivid by the fact that even though Ti Jean's mother is dead, she still lives and even has the capacity to whisper to him. Man Eloise has just been buried while at the same time being described as "the whole of Guadeloupe in herself...the Guadeloupe of the past." The fact that she whispers to the hero of the novel, who is at one point even called "Little Guadeloupe" and whose destiny it is to save the world, represents the idea, much like in Chamoiseau's novel, that although the past may be dead, it can still affect the present.

The fact that the "dead" past can affect the present in Schwarz-Bart's work is further illuminated by the fact that after Ti Jean expresses his desire to climb into his mother's grave, several ancestral spirits speak to him and one of them says: « Tu as deviné juste, Ti Jean, tu es bien des nôtres...Tu as entendu la voix, tu es venu et tu as ouvert la tombe: c'est pourquoi tu es l'un des nôtres... » (114). It is because Ti Jean symbolically zombifies himself by wanting to crawl into the grave of "history" that the spirits of his dead ancestors tell him that he is "now one of them." The burial of the history of Guadeloupe coupled with the protagonist's new ability to communicate with the dead further represents the fact that although history is an entity of the past, it has immeasurable influence on the present. Therefore, just as in Chamoiseau's novel, Schwarz-Bart utilizes the figure of the zombie to symbolize Antillean history.

However, while the zombie has a ubiquitous nature in Schwarz-Bart's novel as described above, this fact does not undermine the importance of the zombie figure nor of history, but indeed, serves to underscore the fluid nature of life and death as well as of past and present. Unlike Afoukal in Chamoiseau's work, the zombie is not necessarily a figure to be embraced but is more of an entity which refuses to be at peace and as such wishes to enact its revenge on the living. According to Ti Jean's mother, the past must be "buried" as opposed to Chamoiseau's contention that the figure of the zombie provides a living memory which helps to strengthen Antillean identity. This is not to say that Schwarz-Bart argues that figures of folklore such as the zombie need to be repressed. In her novel, the well-known image of the zombie is simply more commonly used to represent the malevolent forces with which it is traditionally associated. While Afoukal is the keeper of the buried treasure of Martinican identity in his role as the living past, Schwarz-Bart chooses to showcase the more sinister aspects of the zombie figure: loss of individuality, malevolence, and darkness. This is in stark contrast to Afoukal who has an elevated role as the voice of history and is a positive character.

For example, when the sun is swallowed, the reaction of the people of Guadeloupe is described as follows: « Au lieu de les rassembler sous une même arche, la nuit semblait s'être insinuée entre les corps vivants qui devenaient de vagues silhouettes les uns pour les autres, perdaient leur poids de chair et de sang, de complicités anciennes... » (94). The conspicuousness of the phrase "living bodies" coupled with the "darkness" snaking between them is an undeniably zombie-like image for it is almost as if death has overtaken the live bodies of Guadeloupe. Likewise, the fact that they appear merely as dim shapes to one another represents a loss of individuality: a characteristic

inherent to the zombie figure. So, in effect, death has overcome the people of Guadeloupe, stealing their unique characteristics and transforming them into amorphous wandering shades.

Perhaps even more intriguing than these zombie-like reactions of Guadeloupians to the swallowed-sun phenomenon as a whole, is the description of the reaction of the elderly people of Guadeloupe in particular. « Quelques augures murmurèrent que l'abomination était en train de renaître, ils en reniflaient la vilaine odeur dans l'air... » (95). The “abomination” mentioned in this passage is a reference to slavery in that it is the old people of Guadeloupe who, at the time the novel takes place, still remember the institution of slavery. This scene draws an association between zombies and slavery just as in Chamoiseau’s book; however, it is portrayed as a primal dread. In the above passage, history, as in Chamoiseau’s novel, is given zombie-like characteristics. The institution of slavery has long been abolished at the time the novel takes place, but it seems to rise again and brings with it a “horrible scent” like that of a dead body. Furthermore, Schwarz-Bart uses the word “renaître” or “reborn” – the same word Afoukal uses to describe his life upon arrival in the Antilles.

This connection with zombies is strengthened yet further by the fact that it is previously mentioned in the novel that the meeting place for the people of Fond-Zombi at this time of crisis is « Derrière l'église, sous les flamboyants du cimetière » (92). The fact that the hub of information for the people of Fond-Zombi is in a graveyard behind a church- a place associated with death, further defines the people of Guadeloupe during the crisis in *Ti Jean L'horizon* as a mass of living dead. Just as in Chamoiseau’s book, slavery, just like a zombie, has the ability to be resurrected in *Ti Jean L'horizon*. This fact

implies that the memory of the institution of slavery, while dead, still lingers in the minds of the Antillean people.

However, it is in Schwarz-Bart's use of the zombification of the masses that her depiction of the zombie differs the most from Chamoiseau's. According to Chamoiseau, a zombie is a unique phenomenon and as such cannot be used as a political representation to the extent that Schwarz-Bart's zombification of society allows. While Afoukal is a vivid symbol of history, he is nonetheless a single character. A *zombification en masse*, such as that which takes place in Schwarz-Bart's novel, invites social criticism in a way a lone character simply cannot. It is because of this that Schwarz-Bart's zombie in *Ti Jean L'horizon* is more *political* than Chamoiseau's. For example, perhaps the most poignant use of zombies in Schwarz-Bart's novel is in a scene in which two characters, Gros Edouard and Père Filao in the village of Fond-Zombi, discuss the current situation of the "Black Man" in Guadeloupe in a bar using undeniably zombie-like terms:

Mais c'est parce qu'on nous a frappés, frappés, ça ne te sonne donc jamais aux oreilles?...Oui, nous avons été des hommes autrefois, des hommes au complet, comme tous ceux qui vont sous les nuages: et nous avons construit leurs usines à sucre, nous avons cultivé leurs terres et bâti leurs maisons et ils nous ont frappés, assommés...jusqu'à ce que nous ne sachions plus si nous appartenons au monde des hommes ou à celui des vents, du vide et du néant. (51)

Gros Edouard's contention that the "Black Man" was once a man but has been beaten so much that he no longer knows whether he is living or dead is a perfect example of the usefulness of the zombie as a representation of history and, more importantly in this case, its effect on the present. According to Gros Edouard, the people of Guadeloupe were living beings at one point but were beaten down into agents no longer of the world of the

living but not of that of the dead either. Indeed, Gros Edouard contends that they are part of “the void.” This existence of semi-life is the exact situation which defines a zombie.

The rhetoric of the above passage of Schwarz-Bart’s text is more politically reactionary than anything in Chamoiseau’s novel. While the goal of using the zombie as history in Chamoiseau’s book is to restore Antillean identity, the metaphor of the zombie is far darker and politically charged in Schwarz-Bart’s work, and speaks to the fact that it is very difficult to find anything redeemable about the legacy of slavery. Indeed, to give the above scene even more gravitas, immediately after this conversation takes place, the atmosphere seems surrounded by death: « La buvette de man Vitaline se tut. A l’intérieur, les hommes tambourinaient les petites tables de bois tandis qu’au-dehors, sur le bord sombre de la route, un ensorcelé à l’âme zigzagante se mit à bouleverser l’air en dressant ses deux bras vers le ciel » (52). The “ensorcelé” or “bewitched man” flailing his arms about is, for all intents and purposes, a zombie as described by Hurston. It is almost as if the very mention of the past and its creation of the contemporary situation of Afro-Caribbeans in Guadeloupe has caused an actual zombie to wander the streets of the village in a daze. The proximity of this description in the text to the conversation which has just taken place in the bar is a representation of the ever-present nature of the zombie and thus of history and its importance to the living.

### **1.3 The Inherent Historical Nature of The Zombie Figure**

Antillean Literature scholar Cilas Kemedjio writes:

The slave trade produced slave bodies...through isolated or collected actions, the slaves and their descendants undertook the subversion of the “yoke of slavery.” In defining slavery as the total alienation of the will at the individual and collective

level, one can say...that the slave system presents a situation in which the colonized are dispossessed of historical initiative to the advantage of the colonial power. (52)

In an effort to re-appropriate this “dispossessed historical initiative,” both Schwarz-Bart and Chamoiseau use the zombie to represent the history of slavery and colonialism (institutions which have long been eradicated in the early to mid-twentieth century when the novels take place) and their effects on the present (which currently thrives). Nicole Simek argues: “In French-Antillean literature, the trauma of slavery and the violence – the different more purely psychic violence – of colonization and assimilation are nearly ubiquitous themes... Yet the urgency of such an impulse to uncover history also stems from its obscurity” (121). Both Chamoiseau and Schwarz-Bart find the zombie a useful tool in helping to eliminate this obscurity and thus help to perhaps “resurrect” Antillean identity.

While Chamoiseau’s depiction of the zombie (and therefore his interpretation of history) is given an elevated grandeur in *Chronique des Sept Misères*, zombies have woven themselves into everyday-life in Schwarz-Bart’s novel from the bars to the houses to the very name of Fond-Zombi itself. Neither approach limits the impact of history on modern-day Antillean society but rather, while Chamoiseau’s method is to give history a clear and unique importance, the ever-present existence of the zombie (and therefore history) described by Schwarz-Bart serves to reflect the fact that history is so important that it is no longer worth mythifying because it has shaped the very fabric of day-to-day life in the Antilles.

Perhaps more importantly however, the zombification of history in many respects implies a zombification of the future. Dany Laferrière writes: « Le mort change

immédiatement de mode de temps. Il quitte le présent pour rejoindre à la fois le passé et le futur » (36). If history is capable of being dug up from the past then the future can be unearthed as well. It is partly for this reason that Chamoiseau and Schwarz-Bart imbue their protagonists with a zombie-like essence, a characteristic I will examine in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2. Inner Horizon: The Living-Dead Protagonist

« *Notre Chronique est dessous les dates, dessous les faits répertoriés: nous sommes Paroles sous l'écriture. Seule la connaissance poétique, la connaissance romanesque, la connaissance littéraire, bref, la connaissance artistique, pourra nous déceler, nous percevoir, nous ramener évanescents aux réanimations de la conscience.* »

– Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant,  
*Eloge de la Créolité*, 37-38.

While we have seen the use of the zombie as a representation of history, another useful trope provided by the zombie figure in *Chronique des Sept Misères* and *Ti Jean L'horizon*, is as its representation of the protagonist in both novels. The heroes in both Chamoiseau's and Schwarz-Bart's novels, as a necessity, have a connection with the dead in order to fulfill their destinies as modern-day saviors. In the case of the protagonist in both Schwarz-Bart's and Chamoiseau's novels, zombie-like characteristics are given to the protagonists after they have experienced either a literal or figurative death and are resurrected. It is only due to this zombification that they acquire the abilities which are required to save their people.

There is little doubt that both Pipi in *Chronique des Sept Misères* and Ti Jean in *Ti Jean L'horizon* are heroic in the classical sense of the word: they both undertake quests of self-discovery, undergo a great deal of suffering and in doing so are able to save their people from great harm. While Ti Jean literally saves the world from a great beast, Pipi saves the Martinican people from being swallowed by the void of historical forgetfulness. The zombie figure fits in nicely with both of these examples of heroism. There is a great deal of suffering involved in death as well as resurrection and zombification is a form of

ultimate sacrifice, for it is the complete appropriation of one's physical body as well as one's soul. The zombie-like characteristics of both protagonists recur throughout both novels.

## 2.1 The Zombification of Pierre Philomène Soleil

In *Chronique des Sept Misères*, even from the first mention of the protagonist's full name, elements which define a zombie are present: « ...et bien sûr, celui qui était appelé à nous étonner tous, Pierre Philomène Soleil, fils de dorlis, Pipi pour le marché » (76). Pipi (meaning “urine” in French) has a full name that is quite earthy and lively, involving both “pierre,” “rock,” and “soleil,” “sun.” However, perhaps more interestingly, the name he goes by is Pipi –a sort of zombification in and of itself. The name “Pipi” takes a full name consisting of elements associated with growth and stability and reduces it to a basic human function just as a zombie was once a full human being with a mind and soul who is reduced only to its physical movements. Indeed, it seems Chamoiseau welcomes analysis of the protagonist's name for the “philo” in “Philomène” brings to mind both “philo-sophie” and “philo-logie,” both being academic terms inviting an examination of language.

However, in addition to the zombification of his name, Pipi's connection with the afterlife begins long before he is even born. His father, Anatole-Anatole, falls in love at first sight with Pipi's mother Héloïse at a funeral:

Quand le cortège arriva, la fosse était prête, près du mur, la dalle de ciment expédiée par Héloïse le matin même plantée au bout... Anatole-Anatole chargeait une extrémité de cercueil sur son épaule quand il aperçut Héloïse. Il l'avait déjà vue et elle ne l'avait pas attiré. Mais ce jour-là, baignée de larmes, privée net du

suc d'éclat d'une personne bien en sang, elle semblait avoir rejoint le monde des morts-vivants. A force de côtoyer l'autre monde sur des frontières où l'âme chancelait, Anatole-Anatole appréciait tout ce qui réunissait la mort et la vie. Héloïse était des deux mondes: elle l'éblouit. (33)

Héloïse is described as being of two worlds: the living and the dead. If this is the case both Pipi's mother and father are zombified in how they are seen by outside observers. Given that his father's attraction to his mother is based on her affiliation with death, it becomes Pipi's very destiny even from his conception to somehow bridge the gap between the living and the dead. Pipi is essentially predestined to be a zombie before he is even in the womb.

But Pipi's genetic link with the dead is deeper than both his name and conception suggest. His father, having a hideous deformity, is raised by a grave keeper, Phosphore, whose only companionship comes from the dwellers of a graveyard. After an altercation with the local priest, Phosphore is described in the following manner: « Ô triste vie du nègre Phosphore! Ce geste fatal lui ôta son rire, la flamme de ses yeux, et l'obligea à tournoyer entre les tombes. Plongé dans l'état du colibri soûl, il ne quitta plus le cimetière, enraciné à l'endroit où le destin l'avait frappé » (30). Being raised by a gravekeeper, Anatole-Anatole unsurprisingly imitates his mentor:

Il [Anatole-Anatole] imitait sa façon de marcher, les droite-gauche de sa tête. Parfois, Ninon l'autorisait à passer la nuit avec son père dans la petite case, récif de vie dans l'océan des morts, et l'enfant participait à l'écoute attentive des bruits de vie grouillante provenant des caveaux. (31)

Anatole-Anatole, because of his monstrous appearance, is essentially raised by someone who is almost the very definition of a zombie, complete with its associated images of “stragglng among the graves.” As a result Anatole-Anatole is more preoccupied with

death than life. Indeed, even his way of walking with a “right-left sway of his head” is an incredibly zombie-like image.

In regards to the novel’s protagonist, however, the phrase “simmering from the tombs” in the above passage can be interpreted as a reference to Anatole-Anatole’s unborn son. “Simmering,” a term associated with cooking, is a verb that implies an unfinished product. Due to the fact that *Chronique des Sept Misères* is a story centered around the life of Pipi, this phrase can be considered a reference to Pipi’s upcoming conception and most importantly, Anatole-Anatole’s progeny’s connection with the world of the dead. Indeed, the fact that Anatole-Anatole is listening for “sounds of life” coming from the graves further strengthens his legacy’s connection with zombies.

While Pipi’s genetic connection with the realm of the dead indicates his zombie heritage, Pipi himself experiences death and rebirth, thus making the man himself an actual zombie in several respects. After he finds the dwelling of the zombie Afoukal, Pipi is repeatedly drawn to him to the point where he becomes one of the living-dead. Pipi’s state of being at this point in the novel is described thus: « Sans l’[Pipi] avoir cherché, nous le savions ancré au royaume du zombie à la jarre d’or » (176). Chamoiseau also writes: « ...Pipi continuait à mâcher ses herbes grasses, affaire dans l’osmose entre son corps lumineux et la terre battue qui reproduisait fidèlement la topographie de ses reptations » (179). This last excerpt in particular underscores Pipi’s transformation from a living being to a specter and back again for “osmosis” between body and earth is essentially a way to describe a dead body’s decomposition. Furthermore, it is said that:

Il y eut des périodes, dit la rumeur, où il se transforma en herbe car on ne le voyait plus. Il y en eut d’autres où il trouva certainement manière de naviguer sous terre en compagnie de la jarre. Il dut mourir plusieurs fois et pourrir jusqu’à

poussière car la clairière fut souvent envahie de brumes jaunâtres et d'odeurs pestilentielles, insoutenables puis lentement décroissantes. (213)

While Pipi's connection with the dead is present in his very bloodline, in associating with a zombie, Pipi zombifies himself, even going so far as to meld with the earth and those who dwell beneath it. This becoming an agent of both death and rebirth represents a transformation for Pipi and it is only because he obtains this hybridity that he is able to understand Martinican identity and become the hero of *Chronique des Sept Misères*.

While it is clear that Pipi has zombie-like qualities, the reason he is the hero of the novel is that he is able to prove to the people of Martinique that he is "King of the Djobbeurs." Pipi achieves this feat by attaining the job of transporting a magical giant yam from one point in Fort-de-France to another by getting to the vendor with his wheelbarrow in the quickest time:

Vint alors l'événement qui nous révéla Pipi, le sacrant sans plus de fioritures grand maître de la brouette, roi de nous autres djobbeurs... Vaincre là relevait du génie car il était indispensable de calculer au plus exact la vitesse, la longueur du pas, de manier la lourde brouette comme une plume pour ne blesser personne, ne rater aucune ouverture. Cela exigeait une connaissance parfaite de la géographie du quartier, des dimensions de chaque rue, et surtout une aptitude à réagir à l'imprévu. Or, chacun [des « djobbeurs »] étant docteur en brouette, personne n'eût été surpris de nous voir arriver ensemble devant la marchande de Ducos. Pourtant, Pipi nous devança d'une minute et caetera. (88-89)

Pipi has an advantage over the other "djobbeurs" because his association with death has given him a supreme understanding of Martinique. As Chamoiseau writes, in order to attain this mythic "djob," "absolute familiarity with the local geography" as well as "the ability to adjust to the unexpected" are essential. Pipi, because of his knowledge of Martinique given to him by his association with the dead, has attained both of these abilities and thus become the hero of the novel.

It is important to note as well that his burden in this episode is a yam. The yam is an essential staple in Martinique. In the famous theoretical work *Eloge de la Creolité*, written in 1995 (well after *Chronique des Sept Misères*), Chamoiseau, with Jean Bernabé and Raphaël Confiant compare the definition of Creole, and therefore Antillean, identity to this very vegetable: “We decided not to resist its [Creoleness’] multiplicity just as the Creole garden does not resist the different forms of yam which inhabit it” (89). The yam is a vegetable that needs to be uprooted from the ground (the realm of the dead).

Likewise, the yam, while common, is an oddly shaped vegetable. The yam is rarely symmetrical; it is the color of dirt and has a hodge-podge of protrusions sticking out from it, making it in many ways a monstrous tuber. Given these characteristics, the thing that Pipi transports which makes him the hero of the novel is, in a way, a symbol of zombification, for it comes from a place associated with death (the ground) and yet provides life and is also an object devoid of elements traditionally associated with beauty. Pipi is linked genetically and personally with the dead, and while traditionally this quality would most likely be considered a hindrance (as it was for his father), for Pipi, his zombie-ness is what gives him his unique abilities and allows him to become the hero of Martinique in *Chronique des Sept Misères*.

## **2.2 Ti Jean and His Horizons**

The protagonist in *Ti Jean L’horizon* also has a connection with the dead that is no less bold than that of Pipi and indeed, Ti Jean’s association with the dead is a major plot point and the main reason he is able to fulfill his destiny of saving the world from a

mythical beast. When Ti Jean is first mentioned in the novel, his christening is described as follows:

On l'avait baptisé du nom du père, mais ceux de la vallée évitaient de l'appeler ainsi, Jean, Jean L'horizon, de crainte que le défunt n'en profite insidieusement pour répondre à l'appel. Eloise n'aimait guère cela, elle non plus, entretenir la confusion entre les vivants et les morts...et pour éviter ce mic-mac son garçon répondit longtemps aux seuls noms de Hep, Holà et Psitt; puis quelqu'un eut l'idée de l'appeler Ti Jean, et c'est sous ce modeste emblème que le héros fit son entrée dans le monde, lui qui devait un jour bouleverser soleil et planètes... (29)

The proximity of the phrase “she did not like mixing up the living and the dead” with the description of the very basis of the plot, Ti Jean’s destiny to destroy the beast, signifies that Ti Jean’s character is inherently a figure of the transparency between life and death and that this characteristic is essential to his destiny. Likewise, the fact that he is given his father’s name and that the villagers mention their fear of his dead father’s response, indicates that Ti Jean himself is a rebirth of his father. Ti Jean is essentially the zombie of Jean, linking him to death at the mention of his name.

However, despite Ti Jean’s having a literal genetic connection with the dead much like Pipi, the Creole folktale of “Ti-Jean” is a well-known myth in the French Antilles. It can be stated with a great deal of certainty that anyone from the French Caribbean reading Schwarz-Bart’s novel will immediately associate this character with the character of the same name in the time-honored tale. Given this fact, it is essential to note that the story of the original Ti-Jean legend speaks to the hero’s zombie-like nature. An important aspect of the tale is how he receives “L’horizon” as a surname. Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Creole Folktales* emphasizes the following episode of the Ti-Jean legend:

After long and anxious thought, he [Ti-Jean] had come up with a scheme: a bullock’s bladder stuffed with chicken guts and other disgusting sundries, which

he asked his mother to wear under her apron. He also told her to play dead when he cut open the bladder with a single knife thrust, and not to move until she heard him play his flute and bid her rise. (96)

After Ti-Jean does this, he is given the name “L’horizon” when the master says: ““What a little devil!...He’s a snake! A sorcerer! We should stuff him in a bag and throw it into the sea, way off by the horizon...” (98). After the master and some of his slaves complete this task, Ti-Jean, who was never in the sack to begin with, reappears to the master: ““Hello there, Godfather, an soti lorizon,’ said Ti-Jean. ‘I’ve just returned from the horizon”” (99-100). Both the fact that Ti-Jean fakes the death of his mother and then appears to zombify her with a magic flute as well as the fact that he appears to resurrect *himself* in front of the master indicates that there are facets of zombies implanted within the Ti-Jean legend itself.<sup>12</sup> Schwarz-Bart’s use of this well-known story, prevalent in the Antillean folkloric canon, shows the reader that even from the title, *Ti Jean L’horizon*, has an inherent connection with death even before the first page of *Ti Jean L’horizon*.

Interestingly, Schwarz-Bart drops the hyphen in the name of her adaptation of the famous character. This conspicuous absence of punctuation invites the reader to examine the name of the novel’s protagonist in more detail. “Ti” is a Creole adaptation of the French word “petit” or “little.” This prefix has several implications. First of all, just as Pipi’s name is the abbreviation of a full name to that of a bodily function, so too is “Ti” the reduction of the full word “petit” into a mere two-letter word indicating that “Ti Jean” is merely the spawn of “Jean,” a copy with no identity of its own. Secondly, “Ti” can be the indication of a reduced version of a previous entity. Therefore the name “Ti Jean” itself essentially means that “Jean” no longer exists but has been reborn in a more

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<sup>12</sup> For more on the Ti-Jean legend, see Appendix A.

compact version, just as a zombie was a human being who has ceased to be but has been resurrected with merely its basic functions. The absence of the hyphen then, underscores Ti Jean's unique existence. The fact that Ti Jean is both "Ti," a prefix of rebirth, as well as "Jean," a name indicating a dead entity, along with the fact that it is not joined together with hyphenation, truly indicates that the hero of *Ti Jean L'horizon* is one of the living *and* one of the dead.

However, while Ti Jean may have a genetic and etymological connection with the dead, he has not as of yet been turned into a zombie in Hurston's sense of the term. There is an entire section of the book entitled « Livre Sixième: Comment Ti Jean entra au Royaume des Morts, et comment en sortit; chose toujours plus malaise comme le savez, marmaille » (193), the very title of which indicates Ti Jean's zombification. In addition, in a particularly poignant scene after his mother dies, Ti Jean is described in the following manner:

A la montée de la lune, Ti Jean se leva sans bruit dans une case entièrement close, bouclée à double tour non pas contre les esprits des ténèbres, comme autrefois, mais pour barrer la cruauté et la scélératesse des vivants... Tous ses gestes étaient d'une extrême lenteur et semblaient d'un automate plus que d'un humain. Depuis le jour fatal, un vide s'était creusé dans sa tête et il s'astreignait à le maintenir, se faisait tout entier vide et silence. (97)

Ti Jean's robotic gestures as well as his fear of interacting with the living at this stage of the novel, truly represents a zombification of the protagonist. His name, his lineage, and the knowledge of the Creole folktale all make Ti Jean a zombie-like character.

Furthermore, even with this background information, as his story progresses, Ti Jean, the hero, becomes a literal zombie just as Hurston describes. The zombification of the

protagonist in *Ti Jean L'horizon* represents the idea that there is a necessity of having a living-dead nature in order to save the future.

However, Ti Jean's connection with the dead and his zombie-ness are truly spotlighted when he voyages to Africa after the sun is swallowed by the beast. When Ti Jean first arrives in Africa he is greeted by a boy, and Ti Jean asks him why the times are so strange, to which the boy replies: « Parce que vois-tu, dit-il, c'est un temps où les morts remontent de la terre... » (130). This explanation is followed shortly after by the description of how Ti Jean, while in Africa, is given the name Ifu'umwâmi by the tribe of his ancestors. The explanation of this re-christening follows: «...nous te proposons de vivre parmi nous sous le nom d'Ifu'umwâmi, ce qui signifie dans la langue ancienne: Il-dit-oui-à-la-mort-et-non-à-la-vie. Ce nom te convient-il? – Roi, roi, dit nostr'homme sourire pour sourire: nul n'a jamais choisi son nom, ni la couleur de ses entrailles » (162). Even though Ti Jean is far from home, he is still followed by death; and, though he receives a new name, he is yet again destined to become one who partakes of both the world of the dead as well as that of the living. Ti Jean's recognition of this fact with the phrase “no one has ever been able to choose his name nor the color of his entrails,” serves to underscore the idea that even in another world, death and life's opaque nature is an important factor. So while Ti Jean is not literally killed at this point in the novel, he becomes an entirely new creature from his previous Guadeloupian self and is indeed resurrected with a new name, turning him, once again, into one of the living-dead: someone who says “yes” to death.

While the necessity of the characters' having zombie-like traits in order to fulfill their destinies is apparent, at a more fundamental level, in order to become a hero, one

must be born into a place where heroism is required. While Pipi is born into a world of shifting paradigms, Ti Jean is born into a world of stagnation, presided over by the living-dead. This situation in and of itself creates a world which needs saving. In his article « Masses, Meutes, Individus » in *Politique des Zombies*, Pascal Couté writes:

En effet, *tout* mort-vivant est susceptible de faire d'un homme un nouveau mort-vivant qui à son tour devient vecteur de contamination, ce qui induit une croissance exponentielle des zombies. Ces derniers se définissent par un devenir-majoritaire, puisque leur caractéristique fondamentale les conduit à supplanter en nombre les vivants. Ces derniers sont clairement présentés comme n'ayant d'autre *horizon* qu'une existence minoritaire. (143, emphasis added)

While Couté may be discussing the zombie according to the films of George A. Romero, I have emphasized the word “tout” in the above passage because the situation of the zombie in Romero’s films and that in Schwarz-Bart’s novel is not entirely dissimilar. While Schwarz-Bart’s zombies are not cannibalistic, nor able to pass on the zombie “disease” themselves, they are nonetheless a mass of beings with a living-dead existence: an existence that continues to spread.

I have also emphasized the word “horizon” in the above passage because it appears to be a word frequently used when dealing with zombies. Even though the zombie of Schwarz-Bart and that of Romero are worlds apart in their depictions, the word “horizon” seems to connect them. In addition to the reason for his name explained above, the “horizon” in *Ti Jean L’horizon* is not simply a reference to an old Creole folktale nor is it merely a christening of his unique powers to go from the land of the dead to that of the living. The reason the idea of the horizon coincides easily with the idea of the zombie is because both are representations of hybridity combined with elusiveness. Living and dead in an unstable world are just as variable as earth and sky on the horizon.

Furthermore, as in the way the term is used by Couté, somehow the horizon represents a vision of the future. Given this situation, the world into which Ti Jean is born is one of evil and instability in need of a hero to save it. If not for the existence of the zombie-infested world in which Ti Jean resides, he would have no destiny to fulfill. The zombie-ness of setting is another way in which Ti Jean's character is required to embrace the living-dead in order to impact his surroundings, and his name symbolizes the volatile nature of the present as well as indicates his potential for salvation of the future.

### **2.3 The Zombie: The True Antillean Hero**

While the use of the zombie as a figure of history is an essential idea to both narratives, as the narrator of *Chronique des Sept Misères* describes: « Cela se sait maintenant: l'Histoire ne compte que par ce qu'il en reste; au bout de celle-là rien ne subsiste, si ce n'est nous – mais c'est bien peu » (240). History has no importance if it is not able to be translated through a character with a human voice. The heroes in Chamoiseau's and Schwarz-Bart's works provide this necessary voice, and it is the protagonists' zombie-like aspects which allow them to vocalize history. Chamoiseau writes: « La voix du zombie [Afoukal] lui parvint déjà décroissante: Eh oui mon fi, pièce d'or, pièce bijoux, les vieux nègres d'ici croient encore que toutes les jarres plantées en terre contiennent des trésors...ils ont raison, mais ils oublient que toutes les richesses ne sont pas d'or: il y a le souvenir... » (238). Only through their ability to be both living *and* dead, a gift embodied by the zombie figure, are the protagonists in *Chronique des Sept Misères* and *Ti Jean L'horizon* able to provide this treasure of memory for the French-Antillean people.

### Chapter 3. “A Basket Without Handles”: The Zombification of Writing

« Cesse d'écrire kritia kritia, et comprends: se raidir, briser le rythme,  
c'est appeler sa mort...Ti-Zibié, ton stylo te fera mourir couillon... »

– Patrick Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnifique*, 76

In his best-known work *Pays Sans Chapeau*, a novel in which the entirety of Haiti has been overtaken by hordes of the living dead, author Dany Laferrière writes: « Je n'écris pas, je parle. On écrit avec son esprit. On parle avec son corps » (11).<sup>13</sup> As we have seen, a zombie is essentially a working body without a soul. The deliberate separation between the body and the spirit in the above passage indicates that the narrator of *Pays Sans Chapeau* is a zombie in terms of the manner in which he controls the construction of the novel. The narrator claims to be presenting his story by “talking,” a process he has described as an act of the body, not by “writing,” an act of the soul. For him, writing is a task reserved for the living. Even though *Pays Sans Chapeau* is a written work, according to Laferrière, the writing of this particular novel has little to do with the message he intends to convey.

Similarly, both Chamoiseau and Schwarz-Bart go to great lengths to emphasize the impotent and sometimes morbid nature of the act of writing novels that attempt to depict Antillean identity. Schwarz-Bart's epigram to *Ti Jean L'horizon* reads:

Les paroles du nègre n'entament pas sa langue, elles n'usent, elle ne font saigner que son cœur. Il parle et se retrouve vide avec sa langue intacte dans sa bouche et ses paroles sont allées rejoindre le vent...Et comme le léopard meurt avec ses couleurs, nous tombons mortellement avec notre Ombre, celle qui tissent nos histoires et qui nous fait renaître chaque fois, avec un éclat différent... (5)

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<sup>13</sup> For synopsis of *Pays Sans Chapeau*, see Appendix B.

While Barbara Bray's English translation of *Ti Jean L'horizon* identifies the word « langue » in the above passage as “tongue,” a word which does not necessarily imply writing, in French, « langue » can also be translated as “language.” If the latter translation of this word is correct, then the *langue* Schwarz-Bart describes can also be used to include the act of writing. In this case, Schwarz-Bart is making a similar statement to Laferrière. In the above passage, Schwarz-Bart contends that it is not the *telling* of the stories (the writing) which carries weight, but the stories themselves which are essential and indeed, as the word “renaître” would indicate, eternal.

Similarly, Chamoiseau downplays the act of writing. In his preface to *Chronique des Sept Misères*, Edouard Glissant explains Chamoiseau's attitude towards writing: « Dans l'univers multilingue de la Caraïbe, il [Chamoiseau] nous avertit lui-même qu'il se considère comme 'un marqueur de paroles', 'oiseau de Cham' ou 'Chamgibier', à l'écoute d'une voix venue de loin, dont l'écho plane sur les lieux de notre mémoire et oriente nos futurs » (6). As quoted by Glissant, Chamoiseau's contention that he is merely a “scratcher of words” indicates his feeling, just as in Laferrière's or Schwarz-Bart's novels, that the act of writing is somehow meaningless and that his role as author is merely one of an automaton, forced to put pen to paper at the will of a distant, more powerful entity.

Chamoiseau explores his attitude toward writing in other works as well. For example, the idea that the inscription of Creole folklore or history is sometimes considered a form of bastardization can be seen perhaps most interestingly in the introduction to his *Creole Folktales*. In this collection of Creole folklore, Chamoiseau goes so far as to compare the act of writing with being cursed by a supernatural entity:

...I did not try to strip the tales you are about to read of all their mystery, nor did I append a glossary. Allow the strange words to work their secret magic and above all, read these stories only at night. Remember, I wrote them with the moon as my sole companion, for fear of being changed into a basket without handles – a fate described by the old Storytellers, who must have been amused even then to know that I would never, oh never, tempt such a fate just to see... (xiv)

In the above passage, Chamoiseau essentially describes his fear of being zombified by the act of writing. “A basket without handles” is an object that cannot be carried or controlled by its handler. This situation is much like that of a zombie: a being which no longer has possession of its own will.

This conundrum of portraying the French-Antillean experience through novels (usually written in French) is a long-disputed issue among the Francophone-Caribbean literati. It is a fact that the French Caribbean is a largely oral culture. Chamoiseau himself writes: “Our Creole culture was created in the plantation system through questioning dynamics made of acceptances and denials, resignations and assertions. A real galaxy with the Creole language as its core, Creoleness, has, still today, its privileged mode: orality” (*Créolité*, 95). Many authors tackle this problem by writing in Creole, as evidenced above by Chamoiseau’s reluctance to add a glossary of Creole terms in *Creole Folktales*. However, the issue remains that even the act of putting words on a page is thought to undermine the true portrayal of Antillean narrative.

While Chamoiseau is forthright about the dilemma of the written word to portray an oral culture, Schwarz-Bart also appears to embrace the contradictory and occasionally morbid nature of writing. In her introduction to the English translation of one of Schwarz-Bart’s most popular novels, *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle*, Caribbean literature scholar Bridget Jones describes an important aspect of Schwarz-Bart’s writing

in how Schwarz-Bart attempts “to render the consciousness of a Creole speaker not by creolized dialogue or footnotes, but by sustaining the strangeness of an unfamiliar world-view” (xii-xiii). In this sense, Schwarz-Bart, while being a much more flowery and descriptive writer than Chamoiseau, is nonetheless a “word-scratcher” in terms of how she consciously preserves the mystery of the orality of the Creole language because she finds it impossible to render an accurate description of Antillean narrative through the process of writing. In this same vein, Nicole Simek points out famed Antillean writer Maryse Condé’s acknowledgement of “[in reference to Simone Schwarz-Bart’s *Ti Jean L’horizon*], the need to respect the opacity of literary texts” (Simek 22).

Both Chamoiseau and Schwarz-Bart recognize that the act of writing is in many ways incapable of faithfully representing Antillean culture. Here again, the zombie provides a solution to the problem of providing an accurate representation of culture in Martinique and Guadeloupe. Given the fact that both authors are required to *write down* their thoughts in order to be heard in a literary world insistent on textuality, Schwarz-Bart and Chamoiseau are essentially zombies in that it is not their desire to write, but they are *forced* to do so at the will of the literary world. This is exactly like a zombie whose personal wishes are discarded in favor of the demands of a more powerful entity. Indeed, the act of inscription essentially kills orality and resurrects it under the new, potentially soulless incarnation of the novel. Both Schwarz-Bart in *Ti Jean L’horizon* and Chamoiseau in *Chronique des Sept Misères*, accept the act of writing as a form of zombification.

### 3.1 Chamoiseau's Morbidity of "Word-Scratching"

In *Chronique des Sept Misères*, the idea of writing itself as a living-dead entity can be particularly seen in the appendices Chamoiseau added at the end of the novel. Even subconsciously it seems that Chamoiseau could not avoid the trope of the zombie in terms of the development of *Chronique des Sept Misères*. In the appendices, there is a section called simply "Chutes et Notes," a collection of thoughts Chamoiseau accrued while composing his novel which he explains came about from « Quatre années d'écriture. Un genre d'obsession: des phrases que l'on griffonne, des mots, des répliques. Une idée que l'on prend d'écriture sans trop savoir ce que l'on va en faire » (269). A great deal of these seemingly dismembered streams of thought described by Chamoiseau involve aspects associated with the living dead. Chamoiseau, in one of these snippets, writes simply: « toutes qualités-modèles de chair mortes » (272), giving no context or explanation for this phrase. This lone quote, which is not even a complete sentence, indicates that thoughts of the living-dead kept reappearing to him as he wrote *Chronique des Sept Misères*.

Likewise, another one of Chamoiseau's snippets reads: « Il y avait chaque jour un mot chaviré de notre langue pour tomber dans l'oubli. Ils n'y faisaient pas de fleurs ou même de vestiges pétrifiés en savane. Fuite sans marronnage » (273). The fact that Chamoiseau's words do not "push up flowers" after they have "plummeted into oblivion" can remind the reader of a zombie who is not allowed to decompose completely and provide nourishment for the earth before it is ripped from the ground.

Finally, in the appendices to *Chronique Des Sept Misères*, Chamoiseau writes: « Il y voyait toute une géographie d'ombres où commettre de vastes naissances »

(279). The fact that the verb “committed,” a word traditionally associated with madness or crime (particularly murder), is given “birth” as its subject, is an idea completely in keeping with the process of zombification, for although the maker of the zombie is essentially creating or “birthing” a new creature, this “birth” is an act far worse than the killing itself.

In a more general sense however, the very fact that Chamoiseau felt the need to add appendices is in and of itself a form of textual zombification. To add an appendix is to rebirth a text, for the novel itself has already been finished. The characters have fulfilled their destinies and the story has been told. However to add extra, and indeed pertinent information to an already-written text is to resurrect an already dead entity. Therefore, the structure of the novel itself in *Chronique des Sept Misères* is an embodiment of zombification, for the novel no longer has the “life” given to it by a plot or characters, but is unearthed and becomes subject to mere statements of thought.

However, far from limiting the authenticity of the text, the zombification of Chamoiseau’s novel renders a more folkloric and oral depiction of Martinique than an unaltered text would have. Zombification, while an act of death, is nonetheless an act of creation. In his review of *Chronique des Sept Misères*, Martin Munro writes:

Because written literature has long been the domain of the colonial master, a means of control of the colonial other, the very question of *how* to tell a story takes on connotations of treachery and complicity. The act of writing is seen as a compromise to French culture and a betrayal of Creole tradition in that, historically, when they were not excluded from the world of literature, non-white Martinicans were essentialized, patronized, or exoticized beyond recognition. Preferring the term “marqueur de paroles” (translated in Glissant’s preface as “word scratcher”) to the conventional denomination of author, Chamoiseau transforms the literariness of the written word and alters the bond between the author and unknown reader into a situation more typical of oral culture, whereby

the narrator becomes a “conteur” or storyteller addressing a circle of listeners. (1103)

Because of the text’s zombie-like nature, the barriers of orality and textuality can be cast aside to create a new kind of text altogether: one with the accessibility of reading but which does not disregard the Creole tradition of orality.

### 3.2 Schwarz-Bart’s Narrative Zombification

While Schwarz-Bart has no appendices in *Ti Jean L’horizon*, her psychological connection to the living-dead as an author can be seen in moments woven into the narrative. *Ti Jean L’horizon* is divided into nine “books,” each one describing a different phase in the protagonist’s quest to save the world. On the title page for each “book,” the narrator speaks directly to the reader, informing him/her about what is about to take place. Perhaps the most pertinent of these introductions occurs in Book Four in which Schwarz-Bart writes: « Livre Quatrième: Où l’on voit comment Ti Jean atterrit au pays de ses ancêtres, par le gouffre qui s’était ouvert dans les entrailles de la Bête ; suivi du récit de la première journée du héros, misère, misère vous dis » (122, emphasis added). It is interesting to note that up until this point in the narrative, which is the beginning of the part in the novel where Ti Jean is given the name which means “He says yes to death and no to life,” Schwarz-Bart has not used the word “récit” in her introductions to the “Books.” Her previous introductions have begun in the following manner: « Livre Premier: Où l’on voit l’histoire... », « Livre Deuxième: Qui comprend... », « Livre Troisième: Où il est dit... », all of which are phrases which convey a more or less factual introduction. It is only at this specific point in the novel, when Ti Jean begins to interact

with the dead, that Schwarz-Bart references the fact that she is telling a “récit.” Schwarz-Bart could have just as easily avoided the word “récit” in this introduction and written something to the effect of “followed by the first day of the hero,” a phrase which would have continued the factual tone of her previous introductions. However, the conspicuousness of the word “récit” followed by the phrase “misère, misère vous dites” makes it unclear whether Schwarz-Bart is referring to the tribulations of the hero or emphasizing the difficulty of writing the “récit” itself in this part of the novel. If the latter interpretation is correct, then the fact that Schwarz-Bart emphasizes the difficulty of writing the portion of the narrative in which Ti Jean literally becomes one of the living-dead indicates that she places no less importance on the “zombie-ness” of writing than Chamoiseau and indeed finds it an important aspect of the narration of the novel.

### **3.3 The Undead Pen**

As is now clear, Chamoiseau was influenced by the idea of the living dead even from the conceptual stages of his novel. Likewise, the at-times seemingly insecure and morbid narration of Schwarz-Bart’s novel in describing important events in the life of her protagonist indicates that the idea of the living-dead influenced the creation of *Ti Jean L’Horizon*. Both *Ti Jean L’horizon* and *Chronique Des Sept Misères* employ a sort of zombified narration as well as use the idea of the living dead to influence the content of their novels.

This idea of the zombification of writing offers an altogether different concept of reading a French-Caribbean novel than has been established in many well-known theories of literature. Mary Cashell explains Jacques Derrida’s concept of the reader as the true

creator of a text: “According to Jacques Derrida’s studies of language, neither writing nor any other formula of representation is capable of completely or faithfully conveying a so-called ‘original’ meaning...In essence, here, language betrays its author” (4). In this concept of reading, the author is powerless to control the interpretation of his/her work by the reader. Likewise, Cashell describes another famous theory of reading by Roland Barthes:

According to Barthes, the author does not exist. In fact, Barthes rejects the concept of the author who gives birth to a text and instead offers up a new approach to writing. He presents the notion that each text has what he refers to as a *scripteur* who comes into existence at the same time as the text. The *scripteur* has no passion, no emotion, and no sentimentalism, and the text creates the *scripteur* at the same time that the text is created. All of the meaning that comes from the written words is derived solely from in the process of the reader’s interpretation. (9-10)

In both of the above cases, the author is absent at the moment a novel reaches the hands of the reader; for Barthes even, famously, the author is dead (his essay is titled “La Mort de l’auteur”).

The zombification of the author then in *Chronique des Sept Misères* and in *Ti Jean L’horizon* offers an alternative to the well-known idea that the author is dead: the author in the case of the above novels is *living-dead* and therefore presents a new form of “mediation” (Derrida’s term for the gap between the acts of writing and reading in a text’s transmission) which engages the reader in an undead discourse: a discourse which conserves certain aspects of orality while providing the accessibility of textuality.

While we have seen the importance of the zombie figure as a representation of history and its usefulness in depicting important aspects of the protagonists, the zombie is also used as a symbol for the act of writing itself. This latter aspect confirms that the

zombie is an indispensable figure in all aspects of the composition of these two influential novels. Without the metaphor of the living dead, the characters, the portrayal of Antillean history and culture, and even the writing of the works themselves would be, as Chamoiseau writes, “baskets without handles.”

## Conclusion

It is difficult to overstate Schwarz-Bart and Chamoiseau's influence on the Antillean literary canon and in particular their contributions to the appreciation of Creole mythology. Chamoiseau, the founder of Créolité – a movement so influential it has transcended Caribbean literature and woven its way into the realm of internationally lauded literary theory – and Schwarz-Bart, an author whose personal and cultural style of narrative has influenced authors from Maryse Condé to Dany Laferrière, have shaped modern Antillean writing in innumerable ways. Not the least of these impacts has come through their acceptance and praise of Creole folkloric figures such as the zombie.

Regarding West Indian mythology, Caribbean literature scholar Jack Corzani argues:

Just as they did for Greco-Roman mythology, scholars were often content to draw up lists of supernatural features found in West Indian tales (“Maman d’ l’eau,” “Zombi,” “soucougnan,” “Bête à Man Hibè,” etc.) and folklorize them by failing to put those imaginary creatures back into their own context, into the mythical discourse from which they arose, thus dispensing with any reflection about myth itself, its function, and its meaning. Such an approach hides significant deficiencies that should be questioned. (131)

The role of folklore in the Antilles, of which the zombie makes up a significant portion, holds a special historical and cultural significance seldom found in any other region of the world. Chamoiseau describes the importance of the folkloric tradition in explaining French-Antillean identity:

While their [folkloric tales'] ludic function is undeniable (for surely laughter is the greatest wellspring of hope for those forced to live in a kind of hell), when taken as a whole, these tales provide a practical education, an apprenticeship in life—a life of survival in a colonized land. The Creole tale says that fear is inevitable, that every blade of grass may conceal a monster, and that one must know how to live with this. The Creole tale reveals that overt force guarantees

eventual defeat and punishment, and that through cunning, patience, nerve and resourcefulness (which is never a sin), the weak may vanquish the strong or seize power by the scruff of the neck. The Creole tale splatters the dominant system of values with all the immoral-or rather, amoral-guile of the poor and downtrodden. Yet these stories contain no “revolutionary” message, and their remedies for misfortune are not collective ones...And so we might conclude, as Edouard Glissant suggests, that what we have here is an *emblematic detour*, a system of counter-values, or a counterculture, that reveals itself as both powerless to achieve complete freedom and fiercely determined to strive for it nonetheless. (*Creole Folktales* xii-xiii)

To use folkloric figures in French-Antillean literature is to add a significant historical and cultural dimension to the construction of a novel. In her analysis of Edouard Glissant’s interpretation of history, Nicole Simek explains: “To restore history to a people...is to raise collective consciousness, equipping – ‘arming’ – that collectivity with the means to imagine new modes of being” (63). The importance of the zombie in French-Antillean folklore, along with the unique place of folklore itself in French-Antillean society, makes the zombie a key figure in French-Caribbean literature. While folkloric figures in this description can combat the effects associated with the lingering legacy of slavery, one can see how many of the qualities of folklore can be used to combat oppression in a modern context as well. For example, Wade Davis explains the flat and often bigoted portrayal of zombies in modern American and European culture. In deciding to study the causes of zombification, he explains: “...the entire notion of the zombie, what with the Hollywood movies and all, had been used in explicitly racist ways to denigrate the Haitian people and their culture, and if we could do something to set that record straight, that would be a real achievement” (Press 413).

While Davis takes a scientific approach to restore the zombie to a respectable position, Chamoiseau and Schwarz-Bart use the zombie in their novels to embrace

folklore in a literary sense. In this regard, the use of the figure of the zombie serves more than a phatic purpose but indeed can provide hope for the future as well as acting as a reminder of the glories and sufferings of the past. This idea is perhaps best summed up in one of Pipi's final conversations with the zombie Afoukal in *Chronique des Sept Misères*:

Afoukal ne lui parlait plus de l'esclavage. Il était devenu questionneur, curieux de notre vie, et singulièrement de notre avenir. -Qu'allez-vous faire de toutes ces races qui vous habitent, de ces deux langues qui vous écartèlent, de ce lot de sangs qui vous travaille? Pas plus que nous, Pipi ne s'était jamais posé ces questions-là. Ses bredouillements consternaient le gardien de la jarre: pas peur, maître-chose... On va repartir en Afrique...-Quoi ? Quelle Afrique ? s'exclamait le zombi. Y'a plus d'Afrique fout ! Où c'est d'abord, l'Afrique? Où sont les sentiers, les traces du retour ? Y'a des souvenirs du chemin sur les vagues ? -On va trouver, t'inquiète... -Trouver kisa ? De quoi êtes-vous capable ? Vous êtes comme des poteries qui restent à cuire : une terre étrangère jamais mise au pas, des sangs et des races en mandoline mal accordée... Que pourriez-vous donc faire de l'Afrique? (213-214)

Only this living-dead representation of history can have force enough to forge a path to French-Antillean self-discovery and thus establish an optimistic view of the future: a future that *accepts* the horrors of slavery and colonization yet encourages the struggle for a brighter future. While the zombie indeed represents the importance of history, it is in the idea of the zombie's ability to be an object of the past while impacting the present and future that the figure of the zombie reaches its true fruition. Schwarz-Bart and Chamoiseau give zombie-like characteristics to the heroes of *Ti Jean L'horizon* and *Chronique des Sept Misères* because in their ability to be members of the realm of the dead they may preserve traditional Creole culture and guard the memory of colonialism while their abilities to be resurrected suggest that Antillean tradition can benefit the future as well. This fact, as well as the zombie-ness of written literature itself in an oral

culture, serves to suggest a solution to the problem of creating textual Antillean authenticity.

Afoukal may well exclaim, “Y’a plus d’Afrique fout ! Où c’est d’abord, l’Afrique? Où sont les sentiers, les traces du retour?” There is no way back, only forward through history, through incorporating it into the new body of the hybridized island identity. “Africa,” the mythical space of the past and its narratives of loss, is no longer the geographical terrain in question; the history has been resorbed into a writing of the present, a present constantly in evolution and which makes the new space adaptable – and therefore capable of survival. In this way the zombification of writing in Caribbean literature suggests a more optimistic vision than the ways the figure has appeared in other, western, science fiction and horror. Its Antillean manifestations in literature from Guadeloupe and Martinique evoke a uniquely forward-thinking view *combining* mythology and modernity, past and future. If there is one unified Antillean identity it is one which embraces changeability. The use of the zombie by Schwarz-Bart and Chamoiseau discards the idea of water and geographical separation as barriers – as Lionnet describes – in favor of an interpretation of Creoleness or Antilleanness as a transnational, transoceanic conception of identity.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Glossary of Terms**

**Béké:** Creole word originally meaning “slave-owner.” It is used in the modern lexicon to mean upper-class people of European heritage.

**Créolité:** A literary and linguistic movement developed by Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau which suggests that the African diaspora, as well as other groups such as French-Canadians, are united under the historical trauma of colonial oppression. However, due to the fact that these places are so diverse racially, geographically, culturally and linguistically, the very nature of their complexity and mélange of cultural aspects is a more accurate definition of “Creole” identity.

**Djobeur:** In Martinique, this is a term used to refer to workers with no fixed income who earn their living by completing various tasks of manual labor. In *Chronique des Sept Misères* this term is almost exclusively applied to people who transport goods from the docks in Fort-De-France in wheelbarrows.

**Romero, George A.:** American film-maker most well-known for his zombie films in the 1960’s, 1970’s and 1980’s. His trilogy of films, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), and *Day of the Dead* (1985) are responsible in large part for the popularity of the zombie in American and Western European culture. While Romero’s depictions of zombies have little to do with their Haitian origins, he is credited with offering a new definition of zombies as a soulless horde capable of transforming human beings into zombies themselves through simply biting or scratching.

**Ti- Jean L’Horizon:** A recurring character in many Antillean myths. While he is depicted in a variety of different ways depending on which tale of him is being told, he is defined by his cunning and resourcefulness, especially in out-smarting slave-owners.

## **Appendix B**

### **Synopses of Novels**

***Chronique Des Sept Misères:*** *Chronique des Sept Misères*, written in 1986, is Patrick Chamoiseau's first novel. It follows the life and adventures of a Martinican man named Pierre Philomène Soleil, or Pipi. The novel begins with the lives of Héloïse and Anatole-Anatole, Pipi's parents, and in what manner Pipi is conceived. After Pipi is born the novel shifts focus to how Pipi grows up to become the king of the Djobbeurs (see Appendix A) in Fort-De-France by transporting a giant yam through the streets of Martinique. Along his travels he hears of buried treasure guarded by a zombie named Afoukal. Pipi then becomes obsessed with the treasure and goes on a quest to find it. At this point, he meets the zombie and has several interactions with him. Pipi learns how to grow vegetables at which point he meets famed writer and politician Aimé Césaire. After gaining an understanding of Martinican history from Césaire, Pipi returns to Fort-De-France. Finally, following a final encounter with Afoukal, Pipi is allowed to uncover the treasure, which turns out to be a handful of earth.

***Pays Sans Chapeau:*** *Pays Sans Chapeau*, written by Haitian author Dany Laferrière in 1997, is a story told autobiographically about an author who, after years of exile, returns to his native Haiti where he finds his homeland has been overrun by zombies. The book goes back and forth between sections entitled "Pays rêvé" and "Pays réel." After revisiting several places he knew as a child, in the end, the narrator visits the Land of the Dead and completes his novel with the help of spirits he encounters there.

***Ti Jean L'horizon:*** *Ti Jean L'horizon*, written by Simone Schwarz-Bart in 1979, follows the life and adventures of Ti Jean, a boy from Guadeloupe who comes into the world at a time when the sun is swallowed by a giant beast. In order to save the world, he enters the inside of the beast and travels to Africa where he joins the tribe of his ancestors. He then enters the Land of the Dead and searches for a way back to his native Guadeloupe. After receiving directions from a witch, Ti Jean is finally allowed to leave the Land of the Dead but finds himself in France. He turns himself into a crow and stows away on a boat back to Guadeloupe. When he finally arrives, using a magical musket he acquired while in Africa, he finally slays the beast and returns the sun to the world.

## **Vita**

Andrew Hill is a graduate of Whitman College where he majored in French with a double minor in history and theater. He began his graduate studies at Louisiana State University in 2009 where he has since worked as both a Research Assistant and a French Language Instructor. His interests lie in Francophone literature of the Caribbean, specifically in works surrounding both the “Négritude” and “Créolité” movements.