

Book Review

- *Marie Vieux Chauvet's Theatres: Thought, Form, and Performance of Revolt*, edited by Christian Flaugh and Lena Taub Robles. Brill, 2019

The volume is about a Haitian play writer and novelist, Marie Vieux Chauvet (1916-1973), and redresses the lack of critical attention due to her work. The thematic, conceptual, and formal scope of the collection embodies the critical generosity that Chauvet inspires. Each of the contributing twelve chapters engages with “Chauvet’s black and brown human dramas” and how they ask us to “think of or imagine time anew, pre-, post-, and even amidst performances of revolt as well as revolution” (2); an undertaking all the more urgent in the current times of complex crises and intersecting violence in the Caribbean, and beyond. Part One opens with Régine Michelle Jean-Charles’s ecofeminist reading of *La Légende des Fleurs* and its potential to present an alternative vision of the world” (15). Despite falling “short of fully realizing a complete ecofeminist vision” (28), Chauvet allows us to see gender inequalities within the text as well as those in the outside world. Continuing with the focus on gender, Cae Joseph-Massena’s careful reading of *Le danse sur le volcan* centres on “figuration of voice” and “Eziliphonics,” demonstrating how the text denounces “masculinist and essentialist *noiriste* discourses” (31) and can “subvert categorizations of race, sex, and class” (33). Christian Flaugh reads Chauvet alongside Guy Régis Jr., a contemporary Haitian playwright, exploring how “their works underscore [...the] coterminous human im/possibilities of subject making” (49). Seen, read, and sensed together, Chauvet and Régis Jr, in Flaugh’s rigorous consideration, expand our “discussions of local and global processes of dispossession” (52), allowing to notice the varied repertoires of “revolting subjects that unfold in the forever intertwining local and global as well as male and female performances [...] of the flesh and its dirty love” (64).

Part Two opens with Charlee M. Redman Bezilla’s examination of the interweaving of theatricality and the carnivalesque in *Amour, Colère et Folie*, Chauvet’s most famous work. For Redman Bezilla, the “carnivalesque public spectacle creates an open space of potentiality and revolt within the novel” (69) while voicing a “biting critique of the Duvalier regime” (73). Stéphanie Bérard analyses *Le danse sur le volcan* from a contextual and historical per-

spective. The chapter details how Chauvet's account of Minnete and Lisse adds "a new temporal layer, that of narrative fiction, to the historical account" (86) of the famous opera singer and the actress in pre-revolutionary Haiti. What becomes clear, is "the complexity of women's of colour's resistance to challenge colonial prejudices and exclusionary social policies" (87). Anthony Phelps's poetic *Interlude*, reprinted here for the first time in English, testifies to Chauvet's importance as a Caribbean thinker and writer. For him, she was "a Legba, a path opener" (105). Jeremy Matthew Glick's discussion of how narrative works in *Le danse sur le volcan* in Part Three continues Phelps's and Bérard's consideration of the work's radical potential to disrupt conceptualisations of "revolutionary change and historical exposition" (109). Instead, the work "thinks the revolution's unfolding as an aside, an unfolding of daily life" (119) that continues to transform collective life and thought. Gabrielle Gallo, for her part, reads *Les Rapaces* alongside Lucha Corpi's *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*. The chapter's overwhelmingly thematic focus is partly redressed in its penultimate section: the two texts as a tool of revolt and demonstrate how crime narratives are uniquely positioned "to examine the relationship between justice and power" (139). Part Three closes with Ioana Pribiag's call, anchored in her reading of *Colère*, to reconsider notions of the bio-political and "the gender-neutral language of [its] most prominent thinkers" (145). A powerful corrective, Chauvet's works insist "on the openly phallic nature of power relations" (145), exposing "[the] patriarchal background against which postcolonial authoritarianism performs its violent rituals" (156).

Part Four shifts in emphasis, centering on translation and adaption. Judith G. Miller's analysis of José Pliya's three-part stage production of *Amour, Colère et Folie* highlights how the play's formal choices emphasize the "traumatized but resilient body of the main characters" (165) yet downplay the "tremendous complexity of the Haitian context" (165). Directly building on this detailed analysis, Lena Taub Robles reflects on her translation of Pliya's work into English. As Taub Robles proposes, translation "arises from a polyphony of authors, playwrights, characters, and critics" (183). From translation, Nehanda Loiseau's chapter shifts to discuss devising a performance "that puts Bouquet's [eighteenth century] image into conversation" (215) with *Le danse sur le volcan* and Fouchard's *Theatre in Saint-Domingue*. Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken's compelling analysis draws on her task as a translator of *La Légende des Fleur* and delineates how Chauvet's work underscores "the importance of understanding the vexed ontological terrains that constantly implicate Whiteness in its oppression" (229). As such, Chauvet urges us to rethink "how to best engage in relationships with each other, in a landscape that is broadly and metaphorically racially 'bloodied'" (222) – an urgent undertaking pertinent to the Caribbean and Latin American scholars, more broadly. In the closing "After-Words", Kaiama L. Glover and Guy Régis Jr. both share how their respective encounter with Chauvet – in research, translation, or theatre – continues to inspire their praxis of resistance and revolt, and opposition to

the status quo. The volume powerfully demonstrates the urgency of including Chauvet among key Caribbean literary and intellectual figures. The main challenge, one inherent in all edited collections, is the tension between critical heterogeneity, on the one hand, and a sense of coherence between the different sections of the volume as well as contrasting takes on the same works, on the other. For a reader less acquainted with Haiti's history or the timelines of exile and displacement of Chauvet's life, even a cursory chronology of key events as well as Chauvet's work would have been very helpful.

Overall, the volume provides an excellent and urgently needed introduction to literary and critical richness of Marie Vieux Chauvet's writing. *Marie Vieux Chauvet's Theatres* demonstrates her work's radical potential to offer an innovative conceptualisation of resistance and revolt, opening up the way for further comparative Caribbean and Latin American perspectives. As such, the volume will be of interest to scholars of Haitian and Caribbean studies, Francophone literatures, as well as those interested in the complex relationship between exile and revolt, and the role of literature in realising these transformations.

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