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Retellings of the Caribbean

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SPACE AS LIVED EXPERIENCE IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE. RETELLINGS OF THE CARIBBEAN

Theo D'haen

Until Professor Ferrini kindly asked me whether I would be interested in speaking in her Seminar on Hegel, relating the latter's philosophy, and especially his essay on *The natural context or the geographical basis of world history*, to literature, I had never given much thought to this matter, and therefore my first reaction was to declare myself incapable of doing so. However, after some reflection, and frankly speaking also taunted by the «world history» in Hegel's title, a subject close to what I have been much interested in of late, that is to say world literature and world literature histories, I changed my mind. I should add that, next to world literature and its vicissitudes, over the past thirty years or so I have also devoted much attention to, successively, the study of postmodern, postcolonial, and most recently European literature. I do not know whether this makes me sound like the proverbial sheep with five feet, I am sure that to your ears it makes me at least sound like a very odd creature. In any case, after having reread Hegel's essay, and having roamed a little over what I myself had done over the last few decades, I thought that perhaps I could make a number of these, and your interests come together in what follows. Concretely I will be reflecting on how what Hegel is interested in the essay of his in question, and of which Professor Ferrini has given such an able summary in her kind introduction to my presentation, that is to say geographical space, defined in its most basic sense as the nature to be found at a particular location and more abstractly as the position such a natural location occupies in the imaginary of a particular period in European history, figures in some fictions relating to the Caribbean. Inevitably, while doing so I will have to fall back on things I did before, so it may well be that some of you may recognize some passages in my talk, but I do hope to have succeeded in giving them a new twist, and to have built them into a different argument than any I have ever presented anywhere before.

Let me start by offering you a passage from a well-known mid-nineteenth-century novel. It is a fairly long quote, so I beg you to bear with me.

Editor Cinzia Ferrini.

It was a fiery West Indian night; one of the description that frequently precede the hurricanes of those climates. Being unable to sleep in bed, I got up and opened the window. The air was like sulphur-streams – I could find no refreshment anywhere. Mosquitoes came buzzing in and hummed sullenly round the room; the sea, which I could hear from thence, rumbled dull like an earthquake – black clouds were casting up over it; the moon was setting in the waves, broad and red, like a hot cannon-ball – she threw her last bloody glance over a world quivering with the ferment of tempest. I was physically influenced by the atmosphere and scene, and my ears were filled with the curses the maniac still shrieked out: wherein she momentarily mingled my name with such a tone of demon-hate, with such language!

[...] A wind fresh from Europe blew over the ocean and rushed through the open casement: the storm broke, streamed, thundered, blazed, and the air grew pure. I then framed and fixed a resolution. While I walked under the dripping orange-trees of my wet garden, and among its drenched pomegranates and pineapples, and while the refulgent dawn of the tropics kindled round me – I reasoned thus, Jane – and now listen; for it was true Wisdom that consoled me in that hour, and showed me the right path to follow.

The sweet wind from Europe was still whispering in the refreshed leaves, and the Atlantic was thundering in glorious liberty; my heart, dried up and scorched for a long time, swelled to the tone, and filled with living blood – my being longed for renewal – my soul thirsted for a pure draught. I saw hope revive – and felt regeneration possible. From a flowery arch at the bottom of my garden I gazed over the sea – bluer than the sky: the old world was beyond; clear prospects opened thus: «Go», said Hope, «and live again in Europe: there is not known what a sullied name you bear, nor what a filthy burden is bound to you» (Brontë 1966: 335-36).

I am sure many of you have recognized this passage as being from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, a novel published in 1847. The speaker of this passage is Rochester, the nobleman that the novel's eponymous heroine Jane Eyre had hoped to marry, and with whom she has actually been standing before the altar, but about whom it has been revealed at the very last minute, before any marriage vows could be exchanged, that not only he has been married before, but that actually he is still married. In fact, he is still married to the «maniac» from the passage I just quoted to you. That maniac in *Jane Eyre* goes by the name of Bertha Mason, and she has been immortalized in literary studies as the proverbial «madwoman in the attic» from the 1979 study by the same title of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, as well as been the subject of a famous 1985 study by Gayatri Spivak, *Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism*, an essay she subsequently reworked into a chapter of her 1999 *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Now you may well wonder why I am mentioning these

works of Spivak to you in such detail as to give you their titles, but I think that already from the last of these titles you may glean how closely literary analysis can follow, or copy, philosophy, as Spivak's *Critique* is obviously modelled on the more famous series of *Critiques* of Kant, Hegel's immediate predecessor. Such will also be the gist of my argument, namely that philosophy and literature in fact are two sides of the same coin, highlighting the same issues from different perspectives, with literature imaginatively projecting what philosophy discursively argues. At the same time the title of Spivak's earlier essay makes the link with imperialism, and therefore also with colonialism and postcolonialism, as also with feminism, all subjects that have stood at the center of literary studies for the last few decades.

According to how Rochester tells the story, he has been goaded into a marriage with the «maniacal» – with all the overtones of lunacy and unchastity or «hystericalness» this term carried in the nineteenth century, particularly when applied to a woman – West Indian Creole Bertha Mason. It is his own father and elder brother that have arranged the marriage. On the one hand this is because, fearful of English laws of primogeniture pertaining to titles of nobility and landed possessions, they are desirous of keeping their family's English estate undivided. On the other hand they are also anxious to secure the rich dowry that Bertha's father and elder brother are only too glad to pay to be rid of the girl. Once the marriage concluded, Rochester and Bertha settle down on the West Indian plantation that forms part of her dowry. However, the marriage soon sours, Rochester finding Bertha to have «a nature wholly alien to [his own]» (Brontë 1966: 333). From various hints thrown out in the form of imagery used – Bertha's «pigmy intellect» (Brontë 1966: 334), for instance – we may perhaps surmise that there is an element of miscegenation involved, a common prejudice with regard to «Creoles» in nineteenth-century England. Rochester's remark that «her family wished to secure me, because I was of a good race; and so did she» (Brontë 1966: 332), may point in the same direction. While in the West Indies, one night Rochester is awakened by Bertha's yells, and then follows the passage I quoted to you earlier.

Striking in this passage is how in the first paragraphs the qualities of the landscape and of its climate and temper are transposed upon the character of Bertha, in practice making the two interchangeable. It is easy to see here how this tallies with Hegel's remarks at the beginning of his essay on *The natural context or the geographical basis of world history* that «where nature is too powerful, [man's] liberation becomes more difficult» (Hegel 1975: 154), more difficult, that is, than in areas, regions or zones where nature is less powerful. For Hegel, the distinction here is primarily between what he calls the frigid and torrid zones, and the temperate zone. In the former, he claims, the life of the intellect and of reason are well-nigh impossible. It is the latter that is the natural home of these things, and given the difference in available landmasses in the

northern and the southern hemispheres it is the northern part of the temperate zone that «must furnish the theatre of world history» (Hegel 1975: 155). Given the other natural features of this northern temperate zone, moreover, it is the north-western part of Europe that must play the main role on this stage. Of course, this quite conveniently is where Prussia, and more generally soon-to-be-united Germany, or even more generally what he calls «the *Germanic* world» (Hegel 1975: 206), are situated. Now we can see Hegel's thought as topically inscribing itself in Prussian *raison-d'état* on the road towards German unification and hence the culmination of world history. Along parallel lines, though in different political circumstances and from different premises, we can see Johann Wolfgang von Goethe predicating, not long after Hegel's *Philosophy of World History*, in 1827 to be precise, the coming-into-being of a «world literature» (Eckermann 1987: 211). More immediately though, of course, Hegel was building on similar what we would now call «para-philosophical» speculations on the relation between climate and the intellectual capacities and achievements of the various continents and peoples of the earth as proffered by Montesquieu in his 1748 *De l'esprit des lois*. In his recent *Europe (In Theory)*, Roberto Dainotto (2007) shows how such speculations were raised to theory and even dogma over the course of the rest of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth and even early twentieth century with regard to perceived or posited differences in scientific capabilities and achievements between the various parts of Europe, primarily Southern and Northern Europe. Earlier, Robert Young has done the same with regard to the differences between Europe and the non-European world, and particularly Europe's colonies, in a.o. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990). Young, of course, was building on Edward Said's celebrated *Orientalism* of 1978, which laid bare the discriminatory mechanisms of Western, or European, science, scholarship and philosophy versus the rest of the world. Dainotto can be said to translate Said's European extra-European-directed «orientalism» into an intra-European «Southernism», «Midi-ism» or «Mediterraneism».

To return to *Jane Eyre* and the passage quoted, I would have you notice the ease with which Rochester there talks of «his» garden, while of course this is part of the dowry Bertha brings with her. Notice also how that same garden, when it is being mentioned the second time, after Rochester has resolved to return to Europe, takes on the character of an English country garden, while when first mentioned it was still definitely a tropical one. Notice at the same time how it is the wind from Europe that brings with it reason and wisdom, and that these two qualities are being mentioned in the same breath in the same sentence in which also features the name of the character that comes to stand for the very embodiment of these same virtues, and thus for England: Jane Eyre. What is at stake here, then, is not just the opposition between two kinds of nature, two kind of landscape, but likewise, and perhaps primarily so, the

«natural» right of one, the English or by extension European, to dominate the other, or non-European. Now this is a topic that has been present in English literature from the very beginning of England's engagement with the non-European world. The most famous case in point is that of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Without going in too great a detail, I want to briefly rehearse how this mechanism works in *The Tempest*, as it sets the scene for much of what follows after in English or British or European literature. And of course *The Tempest*, like *Jane Eyre*, is at least partially set in the West Indies. I say partially because according to the logic of the play itself its setting is an island in the Mediterranean, somewhere between North Africa and Italy – perhaps we should think of it as an imaginary incarnation of that Lampedusa that in 2011 so much dominated the news on our screens with respect to the immigrant streams from Africa toward Europe. However, when Shakespeare conceived of *The Tempest*, towards the end of the first decade of the seventeenth century, the islands that dominated the then news, in the then mass media of the times, which is to say broadsheets and journals of voyages of discovery, were the Bermudas, or as Shakespeare calls them in *The Tempest*, «the Bermoothes». Shakespeare's mention of the Bermudas in his play is not a matter of sheer coincidence. Shortly before the writing of *The Tempest* an English ship, sailing for the North American territories then recently claimed by England, had suffered shipwreck on one of the Bermudas, and the tales of the survivors, on eventually making it back to England, had made the headlines, if you will permit me to use this expression *avant-la-lettre* here. The island on which *The Tempest* is set, then, shares many characteristics with these descriptions of the Bermudas.

Elsewhere I have analysed *The Tempest* in terms of pastoral, and of how it posits the transformation of an initially wild and god-forsaken place into a scene of domestication, thus legitimizing Prospero's return to Milan and to his rightful station as Duke thereof. The transformation of the island, moreover, follows the transformation of Prospero himself from an inattentive dreamer and therefore ineffective ruler, pre-occupied with his books of magic, into a realist concerned with that fetish of late-Renaissance political thinking: good governance or the rightful exercise of sovereignty. What particularly concerns me here, though, is the impact this has on the relationship between Prospero, the white European, and Caliban, his non-European servant or slave. Caliban is the original and in essence rightful ruler of the island, as Prospero used to be of his dukedom Milan. The relationship between Prospero, his daughter Miranda, and Caliban, is highlighted in the following passage, from (Act I, Scene II, ll. 334-367; in Kermode 1964: 31-33), in which we first meet Caliban, called forth by Prospero to do the latter's bidding:

Cal. This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me; wouldst give me

Water with berries in 't; and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I lov'd thee,
And show'd thee all the qualities o'th'isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:
Curse'd be that I did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king: and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o'th'island.

- Pros. Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have us'd thee,
Filth as thou art, with human care; and lodg'd thee
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honour of my child.
- Cal. O ho, O ho! would't had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This island with Calibans.
- Mir. Abhorred slave,
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confin'd into this rock,
Who hadst deserv'd more than a prison.
- Cal. You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!

The transfer of power over nature from the original «plantation holder» of the island – Caliban – to the present – Prospero – is highlighted in this scene. When he appears, Caliban wishes all kinds of natural nuisances upon Prospero and Miranda, stretching from «As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd / With raven's feather from unwholesome fen», over «a south-west» to blow on them and «blister [them] al o'r», to «toads, beetles, bats» (ll. 323-324, 325-26, and 342). Prospero, in return, warns Caliban that he shall give him «cramps / Side-

stitches that shall pen [his] breath up» (ll. 327-28), that he shall release urchins and bees upon him, and that he shall «Fill all [his] bones with aches», and «make [...] [him] roar, / That beasts shall tremble at [his] din» (ll. 372-73). The difference between Prospero's and Caliban's threats is that Prospero has the power to implement his, whereas Caliban does not. The latter admits as much in an aside: «I must obey: his Art is of such pow'r, / It would control my dam's god, Setebos, / and make a vassal of him» (ll. 374-76). The last clause, of course, neatly summarizes the entire passage preceding, in which Caliban has lamented his loss of sovereignty over the island, and in which Prospero has legitimized his assumption of sovereignty in terms of the «good governance» I discussed earlier. A strong argument, as far as Prospero and Miranda see it, is that they – and specifically Miranda in the Kermode Arden edition I used, though some editions attribute the relevant speech to Prospero – taught Caliban language. Caliban's reaction to this, is: «You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!» (ll. 365-68). In this instance too, of course, Caliban's «curse» will not take effect. Though he can mouth the words of power, he has none. Dispossession of language, then, equals dispossession of sovereignty – over nature as well as in general: Caliban's words no longer «translate» into reality, whereas those of the new «plantation holder» do.

Most interesting, however, is the official legitimization proffered for the overturn of the initial relations obtaining between Prospero and Miranda, and Caliban: Prospero accuses Caliban of having designs on his daughter's chastity. In the context of the play Miranda's maidenhood has to be preserved because her father intends to use her as bait for the son of the powerful king of Naples, and so to enter into an alliance that will restore him to his dukedom. An «unnatural» previous alliance of his daughter with Caliban would therefore ruin Prospero's prospects of regaining his title and his land. Beyond, this, though looms a larger matter. John Gillies, in his 1994 *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, discusses the issue of miscegenation in *The Tempest* in the wider context of Elizabethan controversies with regard to the legal structure the budding English, and later British, empire should adopt. Specifically, he sees much of Shakespeare's work as rehearsing a question that already dogged the ancient Greeks and Romans: whether to valorize the putative purity of the system's center over the «otherness» of the conquered periphery, or to welcome the variety and mixing of all of the empire's constituent parts. In ancient Greek history, Gillies sees the position of purity as upheld by the original Greek city states, whereas he sees Alexander the Great as representative of what we now would call «hybridity» or «multi-culturalism». The «Roman» play in which Shakespeare most directly addresses these issues is *Antony and Cleopatra*, with Antony defending a position similar to Alexander's in the Greek or Hellenist world, while Caesar represents the opposite position.

If we now again return to *Jane Eyre*, we can see that the very scant West Indian episodes of that novel (they only occupy a very few pages at the center of the book) strongly support the purist, centrist position. This can be seen very clearly in the way the book's narrative voice upholds the idea that the law which gives Rochester full possession of his Creole wife's fortune is wholly good, whereas the law that denies him the right to annul his marriage to her, or to consider it void, is wholly bad. Earlier I pointed out that in nineteenth-century England there was a very strong injunction against miscegenation or the «mixing of blood». Racial theories of the time held that such mixing would lead to infertility, and to all sorts of degeneration. Climate theories such as propagated by Montesquieu and his followers, and as you know from the essay by Hegel which you have read and to which I referred to earlier, saw Creoles as suffering from the «natural» debilitation of body and mind that would have resulted from exposure to the tropics over several generations. And if the word «creole» originally designated colonial settlers descended from white Europeans, by the end of the eighteenth century, and certainly so in English, the term also carried the connotation of racial impurity, implying precisely the in-mixing of «darker» blood, resulting from an «unnatural» union between white and black, that is to say master and negro slave woman. These slave women were thought to be naturally promiscuous and seductive, and therefore to the highest degree prone to the – again – «natural» inclinations of the «weaker vessels» that were women. Women were thought to be lacking in intellect and willpower to begin with and therefore to be more apt to give in to temptations of the flesh. These had to be countered by male rationality, and by the natural mastery of man over woman. On both accounts Rochester, according to his own version of his life in the West Indies, had initially failed in falling victim to temptation. Bertha is the literal embodiment of that temptation, and as such also an impersonation of the lure of the tropics in the guise of its lush nature. The point of Rochester's West Indian experiences, then, is that they teach him what to look for at home: a pure English maiden, or Jane Eyre, parallel to his longing for the purity of English air and English nature.

Let us now turn to another novel, not in English this time, and not set primarily, as is the case with *Jane Eyre*, in England, but entirely in the Caribbean. Again I want to start with a few passages – they are in French, but I hope you will be able to follow them anyway, and in any case I will briefly summarize them afterwards:

Le feu avait été allumé en des quantités d'endroits à la fois, et des flammes jaillissaient tout partout. [...] À quatre heures et demie du matin, quand les premières pompes à eau arrivèrent enfin de Anse-Bertrand, il ne restait pratiquement rien à sauver. Près de quatre mille hectares de canne étaient parties en fume, et Aymeric de Linsseuil était sur la paille (Condé 1995: 155-6).

Premier-né ne toucha à rien à L'Engoulvent, qui en avait bien besoin, pourtant, étant donné qu'on l'avait laissé tant de temps inhabité, à pendre le soleil et la pluie. Les murs restèrent lézardés, le toit peuplé de chauves-souris et de rats, les poutres rongées de poux de bois. Quant aux iguanes, ils continuèrent de dormir sur le glacis dans leurs maroquins d'écailles (Condé 1995: 335).

The passages I read to you detail the destruction of two houses on Guadeloupe, the first called Belles-Feuilles, the second L'Engoulvent. At variance with what we saw in the passage from *Jane Eyre*, there is no reference here to a European nature that offers an escape from tropical violence and disaster. On the contrary, tropical nature here destroys the houses of two white people on Guadeloupe, without any hope for them of returning to Europe to there, like Rochester, recoup their fortunes or regain a breath of fresh European air. Unlike Charlotte Brontë's novel, the French text does not date from the mid-nineteenth century, but rather from the very end of the twentieth century. Its title is *La migration des coeurs* and it was published in 1995. Its author is the Guadeloupean Maryse Condé, one of the most famous French-language writers of the last few decades.

What makes *La migration des coeurs* so interesting is that it is a rewrite of another famous novel, by nobody less than Charlotte Brontë's sister Emily Brontë. The English translation, by Maryse Condé's husband Richard Philcox, and published in 1999, is titled *Windward Heights*, and that, if such would still be necessary, also cues you to the original's title: *Wuthering Heights*, originally published in 1847, the same year as *Jane Eyre*. I take it that you are all familiar with the story of *Wuthering Heights*, so I am not going to rehearse it here. Suffice it to say that most of the characters that occur in *Wuthering Heights* reappear in *La migration des coeurs*, as do many of the situations and events of Emily Brontë's novel. Instead of being set at the end of the eighteenth century, and in the northern parts of England, though, Condé's novel is set in the late nineteenth century, and in the West Indies, or, as the French say, «les Antilles».

Earlier we saw how in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* the dominance of white over black, European over non-European, is sealed by words, by the power of language, in the sense that through conquest, and via the mechanisms of «Orientalism» sketched by Edward Said (building on the theories of amongst others Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), the white man imposes his views, his laws, his «magic» upon those he has conquered or in any way possible made his «subjects». We see something similar happening in *Jane Eyre*, where the characterization of Bertha as a lascivious and promiscuous «maniac» is accomplished through Rochester's account of her. In colonial literature this is a well-known phenomenon, and it is one that for instance Gayatri Spivak has drawn attention to in her famous 1988 article «Can the Subaltern Speak?». We can perhaps most easily instance this through the

example of Daniel Defoe's 1719 *Robinson Crusoe*, a tale I am sure you are all familiar with, and in which we hear about the island Robinson comes to inhabit, and «good man Friday» whom he meets there, and who effectively becomes his slave, uniquely from Robinson's account of things. That is why Simon Gikandi has claimed that their entry into so-called modernity «has often demanded that the colonized peoples be denied their subjectivity, language, and history» (Gikandi 1992: 2). One way in which so-called postcolonial writers have attempted to turn the tables is to try and wrest the power of the word from European man by re-appropriating and dis-locating those European works of the imagination that participate in «orientalising», that is to say in fact discriminating against, the world beyond Europe by re-writing them from the point of view, or in the language of, the marginalized or «subalterned» non-European.

In *La migration des coeurs* this re-writing takes various forms. Here I want to concentrate on the houses destroyed by nature that I referred to before. It is clear that «L'Engoulvent» in *La migration des coeurs* stands for «Wuthering Heights» in the eponymous novel, while «Belles-Feuilles» stands for «Thrushcross Grange». You will recall that in Emily Brontë's novel there is a move from Wuthering Heights, old, almost medieval in appearance, and situated on the top of a steep slope, to Thrushcross Grange, more modern, more domestic also, and situated in a valley. In essence, *Wuthering Heights* is a story of love and revenge, or perhaps more accurately: of revenge through love. That is the reading of the novel that everyone knows. However, *Wuthering Heights* is also much more than that. It is also a story of social snobbery and ostracism, and of how an outsider, Heathcliff, first cozened by one of his betters, adopted into the latter's house, and even made into a favorite, after the death of his protector is reduced to the status of a servant by the dead man's son. Spurned by his adoptive sister, Catherine Earnshaw, as a marriage partner because of his lowly social position, and this even though she loves him, Heathcliff vanishes, only to return after Cathy has married the aristocratic, wealthy, and handsome Edgar Linton. Heathcliff now deliberately sets out to ruin both the Earnshaws and the Lintons, first by seducing and then marrying Edgar Linton's sister Isabella, and by leading Hindley Earnshaw, his adoptive brother and heir to the Earnshaw estate, to an early death by dissipation. Heathcliff takes over the Earnshaw estate. Hareton Earnshaw, Hindley's son, Heathcliff relegates to the position of a lowly servant, duplicating his own former condition under Hindley, and he relishes keeping the lad an illiterate bumpkin. To cap it all, Heathcliff succeeds in marrying his and Isabella's weakly son Linton to Cathy Linton, or Cathy II, daughter to the «original» Catherine Linton-Earnshaw, so as to inherit also the entire Linton fortune upon his own son's death. In the figure of Heathcliff, then, we see the ruthless rise to power of a have-not in the midst of a society traditionally run along the lines of landed and inherited wealth and power. Surely it is also not a coincidence that Mr Earnshaw found Heathcliff on the streets

of Liverpool, one of the fastest growing industrial and commercial centers of early nineteenth-century Britain, with a large urban proletarian underclass, which was held in abhorrence by the more established classes. Written during a period of intense social unrest in Britain, while Europe was wracked by revolutions, *Wuthering Heights* thus voices some of the most potent social and political fears of its age.

Following the conventions of the Gothic novel within which *Wuthering Heights* at least partially inscribes itself, the abject horror in which Heathcliff is held translates in his being consistently demonized. All along, he is compared to a fiend, a ghoul, and a devil. When Mr Earnshaw first brings Heathcliff – then still unnamed – into his house, he refers to the child as «a gift of God; though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil» (Brontë 1965: 77). Isabella, cruelly treated by Heathcliff, wonders if he is «a devil» (Brontë 1965: 173). And when Heathcliff is dead, old Joseph, the religion-crazed servant at Wuthering Heights, remarks that «Th' divil's harried off his soul» (Brontë 1965: 365). There are undoubtedly lingering overtones of the gothic in this, as in everything that the Brontës wrote. For instance, Heathcliff on his deathbed resembles nothing so much as a vampire waiting to have a stake driven through his heart. Still, there is more to *Wuthering Heights* than gothic thrills, and it is this that makes it such a seminal novel for its age.

Heathcliff not only personifies the demonic lower classes. He also stands for everything foreign early nineteenth-century English society feared and abhorred, but which it at the same time often found sexually alluring. Like Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, so too Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* has the trappings of a Byronic hero, with all the attractions this holds, but also the dangers it spells, for early Victorian society. Rochester, however, only needs to expiate certain youthful sins and mistakes to remake himself into a mainstay of Victorian society. His purging significantly takes the form of eliminating his first wife, the mad Creole woman that clings to him like an incubus, and prevents his full re-integration in English life. Rochester's eventual marriage to Jane seals his successful re-entry into full Victorian Englishness. The role Heathcliff plays in *Wuthering Heights* actually is closer to that of Bertha Mason than that of Rochester.

Mr Linton dubs Heathcliff «a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway» (Brontë 1965: 91), and Mrs Earnshaw and Hindley refer to Heathcliff as a gypsy (Brontë 1965: 77 and 80). Though primarily inspired by Heathcliff's dark complexion, and by his long black hair, these designations also consistently hint at the possibility of Heathcliff not being of European stock. We should not forget that nineteenth-century – and in fact most of twentieth-century – Europe considered the gypsies as Asian or «Egyptian». Likewise, «American» undoubtedly refers to what we would now call «Native American», whereas «Spanish» coming so soon upon «American» at least invites the interpretation «Spanish American», and therefore Creole, that is to say: mixed-blood in the racial typology of nineteenth-century

science (Young 1995). Moreover, as I already mentioned earlier, Mr. Earnshaw had plucked Heathcliff off the streets of Liverpool. In the nineteenth century, Liverpool was not only England's, and Europe's, main port for trade with the Americas, it was also where many Irishmen looking for escape from their impoverished island disembarked, and often stayed. The native Irish, we recall, in the nineteenth century were often thought to be descended from early pre-European Iberians, and were not considered fully «European» anyway. In fact, as of the late sixteenth century this had been one of the main legitimations for the English treating Ireland as a colony (Westerweel 1989). The clearest allusion to Europe's colonial subjects, of course, is «Lascar», that is to say an Indian or South-Asian sailor. The horror in which these, and by extension all other colonial subjects were held in Europe, specifically when encountered in Europe itself, is clear from the famous passage in the 1821 *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, in which Thomas de Quincey relates how one day a «Malay» visited his cottage, and how this led to De Quincey's having nightmares for years to follow (De Quincey 1971: 108-9).

Finally, the sentence with which Mr Earnshaw introduces Heathcliff to his wife is oddly reminiscent of the famous line at the end of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in which Prospero, about to leave the isle where the play is set, and asked what is to be done with Caliban, answers, «This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine». This line has been widely interpreted as referring to the relationship obtaining between rulers and subjects, masters and slaves, indicating both the claims to ownership of the dominant party, but also the concomitant responsibilities issuing from this. The relationship between Heathcliff and his early nineteenth-century environment, then, mirrors that between Europe and its colonies, between Europeans and their colonial Others. In Shakespeare, the question of where this will eventually lead is held in abeyance: at the end of the play we do not know what the future has in store for Caliban, nor for Prospero. Especially Caliban seems in limbo, forever suspended in some form of presumably benign bondage, and this equally presumably in his own interest. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester's taking Bertha Mason to England, and what happens with her, and with him, from there on, may well be read as Charlotte Brontë's nineteenth-century answer to Shakespeare's early seventeenth-century question. Trans-lated from her native ground in the colonies to the heartland of England the particular darkness that is Bertha need be contained, and eventually purified. In *Wuthering Heights* Caliban, alias Heathcliff, obviously has broken his bonds.

In fact, Heathcliff threatens to fully take over from his former masters, and even seems poised to subdue them into slavery in their turn. In good Victorian fashion, though, Emily Brontë lays the very fears she so skillfully has roused, by having her novel end with the traditional romantic marriage, reconciling opposites and restoring order and balance to society. Concretely, Emily Brontë has (the second) Cathy Heathcliff, née Linton, after her husband's death, fall in love with Hareton Earnshaw, and vice versa. Under her tutelage, Hareton changes from a frog into a

prince, from a dunce into almost a don. Heathcliff, seeing Hareton coming to resemble more and more the Cathy Earnshaw he loved, cannot bring himself to oppose the impending union between Cathy Heathcliff-Linton and Hareton. Moreover, he is increasingly led astray by spectral visions of the first Cathy. With Heathcliff's self-announced, but otherwise inexplicable death, and Hareton's and Cathy Linton's marriage, everything reverts to normal. The ancient families of Earnshaw and Linton resume control of their houses, their fortunes, and their lands. With the earlier death of Heathcliff's son, and now his own death, all further threats of «foreign» blood sullying England's purity have vanished. In both social and racial terms, then, order and purity have been restored. The colonial «Other» threatening to invade Europe's heartland has been successfully eliminated. Again, Heathcliff here resembles none so much as Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*.

In *La migration des coeurs*, a number of the fears of *Wuthering Heights*, but also of *Jane Eyre*, come true. Condé's novel is not set in the middle of the nineteenth century, but around the turn of the twentieth century, when in the French Antilles black socialists were increasingly calling the tune. In the figure of Razyé, Condé's Heathcliff, the have-nots and colonial subjects take over from the white plantation owners and industrialists, personified by Aymeric de Linsseuil. In fact, the first passage from *La migration des coeurs* I read to you chronicles the burning down of Aymeric de Linsseuil's sugar cane plantation by the socialist revolutionaries and hence its return to «nature». In *Wuthering Heights* the final removal of Hareton Earnshaw and Cathy Linton from Wuthering Heights to Thrushcross Grange is symbolic for the choice they, and England make: for gentrification and the more smiling aspects of country life, in short, everything we have come to call «Victorian». In *La migration des coeurs* the destruction or falling into ruin of Belles-Feuilles and L'Engoulvent signal the end of white rule on Guadeloupe. Both will be replaced as significant places of action by a third dwelling: the dilapidated La Pointe townhouse, in a poor black neighborhood, that Razyé and his white wife, Irmine, sister to Aymeric de Linsseuil and the counterpart to Isabella Linton from *Wuthering Heights*, abandon L'Engoulvent for. Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism* (Said 1993), has unveiled how the ease and comfort, and the manicured lawns of English nineteenth-century country-life were built on the exploitation, to the point of destruction, of the natural resources of the colonies. Said's example is Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. I hope that my earlier reading of *Jane Eyre* has made it clear that Rochester's fortune, and hence ultimately Jane's ease and comfort, and her accession to the landed gentry, rest on the dispossession of the «colonial» Bertha Mason. I will have you notice, moreover, that in *Jane Eyre* too a move takes place from an older and more Gothic dwelling, Thornfield Hall, to a more modest and more modern farm manor, symbolizing the Victorian domestication of Rochester, and of life, in that novel. In *La migration des coeurs* colonial nature, along with the colony's inhabitants, reclaims its rights.

In fact, colonial and tropical «nature» reclaims its rights also in another re-writing of *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel published in 1966 by Jean Rhys, herself a West Indies white Creole. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* we hear the story of her marriage to Rochester, how she was brought to England by him and locked away in the attic room of his manor, Thornfield Hall, from Bertha Mason herself. In fact, we learn that she is not called Bertha at all but rather Antoinette, and that even Mason is not her original family name but that of her stepfather. Rochester, then, in this version of the story turns out not only to have dispossessed «Bertha» of all her material possessions but even of her name. This act, of course, runs parallel to the colonial practice of re-naming newly possessed lands.

Wide Sargasso Sea, although it is a very short novel, is actually also a very complicated one, and I do not want to go into too much detail here, and I am undoubtedly already taxing your patience and goodwill, and must therefore hasten to the end of my story. Suffice it to quote the last paragraph from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, spoken by «Bertha»:

Grace Poole was sitting at the table but she had heard the scream too, for she said: «What was that?» She got up, came over and looked at me. I lay still, breathing evenly with my eyes shut. «I must have been dreaming», she said. Then she went back, not to the table but to her bed. I waited a long time after I heard her snore, then I got up, took the keys and unlocked the door. I was outside holding my candle. Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage (Rhys 1968: 155-6).

What Bertha is brought to England and Thornfield Hall for she now knows to be to set the manor ablaze! In that fire she will immolate herself, but she also destroys the place of her incarceration, and the possession of her husband/goaler Rochester. In the process she also returns Rochester and his bride-to-be Jane to a more natively-English way of life, built on the productive use of the land itself rather than on wealth extracted from the colonies. What matters most, though, is that in this version Bertha's death by fire does not betoken the exorcism of an evil spirit bedeviling the happiness of a pure English couple, and therefore of the English country-side, but rather the legitimate revenge of a wronged «Other» woman.

What I hope to have proved by my reading of these few texts – and I could adduce many more examples, but have chosen to limit myself to some of the better-known cases – is that the premises upon which Hegel built his «The natural context or the geographical basis of world history» are still operative, if not as tenable grounds for a viable contemporary philosophy, then at least as a ground for imaginatively re-writing and thus righting the relationships that

obtained, and in some instances continue to obtain, between Europe and its colonies, or by extension the non-European parts of the world, and that more often than not were built on precisely these very premises.

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