

UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA IN GISÈLE PINEAU'S *L'EXIL SELON JULIA* AND *FLEUR DE BARBARIE*

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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AND FICTIONAL WORKS of Guadeloupean author Gisèle Pineau provide a compelling insight into the questions of utopia and dystopia in literature. Her 1996 autobiographical narrative, *L'Exil selon Julia*, and her 2005 novel, *Fleur de Barbarie*, constitute particularly intriguing studies in relation to these themes. The former focuses on Pineau's Creole grandmother, Man Ya, who comes to live with the family in Paris while Pineau is growing up in the 1960s. Man Ya suffers from deep alienation in this foreign environment and craves to be reunited with the country of her birth. Through Man Ya's eyes, Pineau explores the contrast between the notion of an ideal Caribbean homeland rooted in nature and the exclusionary environment of metropolitan France. In *Fleur de Barbarie*, Pineau explores from a different angle "the love-hate relationship with France, the homesickness and sense of unbelonging"¹ that afflict her characters. For Josette, the protagonist, France emerges as the utopian ideal, a land of promise and opportunity in contrast to the emotionally stunted life waiting for her in the Caribbean. Torn between mythical notions of France and the Caribbean, as well as the unsettling realities of both places, Pineau's characters struggle to find an identity for themselves in a space where "an unresolved past and an unsettled present loom large."² Pineau expertly reveals the way in which utopia and dystopia vary according to the individual: for Man Ya, rural Guadeloupe is utopian and Paris dystopian, but for Pineau's parents, the categories are reversed; for Josette, the Caribbean is far from ideal, while for her half-brothers growing up in Paris, it is the site of a tropical wonderland. These contrasting visions underscore the complex nature of French Caribbean identity and the islands' troubled historical

relationship with France. By viewing these books through the lens of utopia and dystopia, it is possible to draw some conclusions about ongoing identity issues in contemporary French Caribbean society.

In the context of this analysis, the terms “utopia” and “dystopia” will be applied in specific ways. The two books selected for this study effectively illustrate how identity and belonging are equated with utopia, and feelings of alienation and otherness with dystopia. Pineau’s works consistently emphasise the need to strike a balance between utopian and dystopian visions of the past and present, and of one’s identity. She suggests that it is just as stifling to live according to an unattainable and (by definition) unreal utopian vision (past or present) as it is to focus on an alienating and dysfunctional reality. *L’Exil selon Julia* and *Fleur de Barbarie* constitute contrasting examples of the ways in which utopia and dystopia in the French Caribbean context are inextricably linked to the region’s traumatic past.

L’Exil selon Julia contains many autobiographical elements that shed light on Pineau’s personal experience of the Caribbean as a place of exile. It also demonstrates her attempts to make sense of the competing models of the Caribbean—both utopian and dystopian—offered by her parents and her grandmother. For the former, Guadeloupe remains a place scarred by the legacy of slavery and limited in opportunities for social advancement; for the latter, the island is a Garden of Eden and the only place where one’s soul can truly flourish. The young Pineau finds herself torn between these two starkly opposed visions of the same place. Her quest for identity is further complicated by the fact that she does not experience the Caribbean first-hand until her teens and she remains an outsider in her “native” France.

In contrast to *créoliste* writers of her generation such as Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant who grew up in the Caribbean, Gisèle Pineau was born and educated in Paris. As she states in a 1995 essay:

je n’ai pas vécu une enfance antillaise sous les tropiques. J’ai connu la cité, ses alignements d’immeubles gris, la froidure des hivers en France, la neige, les manteaux de laine et l’indicible sentiment d’être exclue, inadaptée, déplacée dans cet environnement blanc-carré-policé.³

Her father’s military career brought the family to France and she spent her formative years living in the concrete desolation of a Parisian *cité*. For the young Pineau, the concept of a homeland is highly problematic and she struggles with what she terms an “exile by inheritance”.⁴ Her parents’ decision to leave Guadeloupe engenders a loss of cultural identity for their daughter, making Pineau susceptible to idealised utopian or, in contrast, dystopian visions of her island—neither of which offers a balanced view.

Pineau's perception of her Guadeloupean heritage remains filtered through the lenses of others, leaving her struggling to find a cultural anchor that can help her counter her powerful feelings of exclusion in France.

As an adult, Pineau came across further avenues of otherness in her career as a psychiatric nurse, a profession that she continues to practise in Paris today. This job brought into sharp relief certain aspects of her own identity crisis, exposing her to Caribbean people unable to accept the competing forces of their Creole identities—African, French and Caribbean; black, white or *métis*—and still bearing the psychological wounds of the Caribbean's slave past:

je suis sans cesse confrontée à la folie de ces Antillais qui ballottent et butent, comme caisses vides à fond de cale, incapables de s'accepter en tant qu'Antillais-Créole, méprisant leur couleur de peau, revendiquant leur seule africanité ou francité, rêvant d'un retour.⁵

These formative experiences of childhood exclusion and first-hand exposure to what Simone Schwarz-Bart has called "la folie antillaise"⁶ are explored in many of Pineau's books. Indeed, Pineau has stated that part of her decision to become a writer was to claim a more balanced cultural identity for herself and to overcome these debilitating experiences of otherness.⁷

Pineau has frequently written about her experience of racism as a child, lamenting her outsider status as a black child in a predominantly white environment. In a recent interview, she has spoken of her sense of kinship with African-American writers, rather than with *créoliste* writers, who also suffered as a minority group in a country dominated by white people.⁸ The opening lines of *L'Exil selon Julia* attest to her sense of exclusion, reconstructing the racist tirades white children would shout at her at school: "Négro, Nègresse à plateau, Blanche-Neige, Bamboula, Charbon et compagnie".⁹ Pineau writes passionately of her sense of exclusion in 1960s France—"Seule noire de ma classe au début des années soixante. Seule noire à marcher dans les rues sous le regard inqualifiable des Blancs, si nombreux"¹⁰—and sadly this experience of otherness and exclusion was to plague her well beyond her childhood years. While she endured the hurtful words of her classmates, Pineau secretly dreamt of returning to her parents' homeland, Guadeloupe, which loomed large in her imagination thanks to her grandmother's evocative stories. For the young Pineau, the rich colours and scents of this island, brought to life so vividly by Man Ya in Creole, promised a sense of belonging, a history and a culture that would counter the effects of her metropolitan exile. However, when Pineau finally had the opportunity to set foot on Caribbean soil in 1970 with her father's transfer to

Martinique, she discovered that she was once again marked as an outsider. Unable to speak Creole, and unfamiliar with the Caribbean way of life, Pineau and her siblings were quickly characterised as “Negropolitans”—black people with sophisticated Parisian ways that served little purpose in the Caribbean. In a 2004 interview, Pineau speaks of her incomprehension of her parents’ decision to leave their native island: “I held it against my parents for a very long time that they had made a ‘Negropolitan’ of me. Especially when I came back to the Antilles, as an adolescent, I didn’t understand why you could leave your country and inflict that on your children.”¹¹ As Beverley Ormerod asserts, “Gisèle and her siblings, for all their metropolitan sophistication, are presented as the truly displaced characters in [*L’Exil selon Julia*], with an incomplete awareness of their own alienation, but an urgent need to define their identities in the light of Caribbean cultural history.”¹² The following extract from a 2002 essay by Pineau encapsulates the identity issues she faces in this state of inherited exile:

J’ai marché sur ces routes.

J’ai fouillé les mémoires, passionnément.

J’ai mendié les paroles, souvenirs, proverbes, tim-tim et paraboles.

J’ai condamné ceux qui m’avaient invitée dans cette vie, sur cette terre.

J’ai grandi en France, malgré moi, rageuse, entre les murs de béton d’une cité de la banlieue parisienne.

Je suis, ce qu’on appelle aux Antilles, une Négropolitaine.

Ni d’ici, ni d’ailleurs...

Une enfant de la diaspora. Née en France, Seigneur!

Déchue de l’identité guadeloupéenne.

Ersatz de Guadeloupéenne.

Et j’ai remercié Dieu d’avoir adouci mon purgatoire en plaçant Man Ya à mes côtés.¹³

Man Ya becomes the young Pineau’s salvation as she feeds her granddaughter nourishing tales of a utopian homeland. Man Ya joins the family in Paris when her son “kidnaps” her during a visit to Guadeloupe, after witnessing the continual abusive behaviour of his father, nicknamed “le Bourreau”, towards his mother. Although she suffers enormously from her husband’s mistreatment of her, Man Ya never complains and is happy to accept her fate as a woman on the earth. This resigned yet resilient attitude echoes Pineau’s description of stoic female slaves in *Femmes des Antilles*,¹⁴ and Pineau has drawn parallels between Man Ya’s private abuse and collective female suffering under slavery. Despite her unhappiness, however, Man Ya does not want to leave Guadeloupe and she loses her zest for life during her

period of forced exile in Paris. “Elle débarque tout juste en terre d’exil et cinq encablures de chaînes viennent d’être ajoutées à son existence. Elle pleure déjà son pays perdu. Elle regrette déjà sa vie raide” (*L’Exil*, p. 38). Man Ya’s existence is dependent upon her connection with the natural splendours of Guadeloupe, her tiny cabin without water or electricity, her status as “une vieille négresse marronne dans la campagne”.¹⁵ Indeed, it is her memories of her beautiful tropical garden—“un lieu merveilleux où toutes espèces d’arbres, plantes et fleurs se multiplient dans une verdure accablante, quasi miraculeuse, argentée çà et là d’une lumière qui ne diffuse qu’au seul cœur de Routhiers” (*L’Exil*, p. 17)—that provide her with a direct link to her homeland and thereby a sense of her identity. By remaining spiritually connected to the Guadeloupean landscape, Man Ya manages to weave a thread between the past and the present, between exile and belonging, which fortifies her and gives her strength in the oppressive environment of a Parisian *cit*é. Despite rare moments of happiness, such as the blossoming of spring in Paris after a harsh winter when Man Ya can finally feel the earth in her hands again, Man Ya’s memories of a utopian Guadeloupe are the only things that sustain her.

For the young Pineau, Man Ya transmits a powerful vision of what it means to be a Caribbean person. Her colourful stories told to her grandchildren in Creole bring to life the history, culture and language of her native island. Pineau discusses this subject in her 1995 essay “Écrire en tant que Noire” and she attributes to her grandmother her own passion for the French Caribbean. In contrast to Pineau’s parents, who are intent on social advancement by assimilating the family as much as possible into the French culture, Man Ya satisfies her descendants’ needs to know their origins, warts and all. “Elle avait hérité des histoires de sa mère, de sa grand-mère tandis que mes parents voulaient se débarrasser de ce passé un peu encombrant et ne répondaient pas à mes questions.”¹⁶ The cultural history that Man Ya passes on through her tales, her songs and especially the memories of her Creole garden fills this gap in such a way that Pineau manages to create her own cultural identity—an identity that continues to nourish her imagination today. Man Ya’s reminiscences conjure up a utopian space that allows both storyteller and listener the comfort of feeling connected to a culture and history.

From a psychological point of view, Man Ya is an intriguing person. With her rough features, dark skin and inability to speak French, she is frequently an embarrassment to her family, yet she also embodies a quiet strength of spirit. Beverley Ormerod comments that what could be

conceived as a steadfast refusal to adapt to a new environment can in fact engender positive and unexpected consequences. While “there is no element of self-discovery in Julia’s Parisian experience [...] there is self-disclosure, a constant, unselfconscious revealing of self, which is to become the culturally determining factor in the life of her grand-daughter Gisèle.”¹⁷ Kathleen Gyssels asserts, moreover, that Man Ya is a “[v]ictim de l’exil, certes, mais non de l’aliénation et du complexe d’infériorité, [elle] figure [...] comme parangon de la résistance à l’assimilation.”¹⁸ Her unwavering fidelity to her own culture, which, on the one hand, appears rigid and self-limiting, in fact has a fortifying effect on her descendants. Pineau for one is able to construct an identity for herself that stems from the oral traditions of Creole culture. In contrast to Pineau’s parents and other upwardly mobile “Negropolitans” in their circle, Man Ya emerges with the most secure sense of identity. The former, while reaping the benefits of beautiful clothes, secure jobs and flawless French that their Parisian life offers them, must also negate the Caribbean aspects of their identity. Pineau and her siblings are frequently told: “Enfants! Rien, il n’y a rien de bon pour vous au Pays [...]. Antan, ce fut une terre d’esclavage qui ne porte plus rien de bon. Ne demandez pas après ce temps passé! Profitez de la France! Profitez de votre chance de grandir ici-là!” (*L’Exil*, p. 28). However, Pineau demonstrates throughout *L’Exil selon Julia* the psychological cost that such blind interiorisation of European values entails, not only for her parents, but also for their children.

Pineau has commented that Man Ya effectively saved her from a state of perpetual exile: “Pont de corde jeté au-dessus de l’Atlantique entre la France et la Guadeloupe, la parole de ma grand-mère Man Ya m’a consolée en me conférant—un temps—l’illusion d’une identité à laquelle j’agrippais, trésor de l’exil.”¹⁹ Man Ya’s role in the psychological life of her granddaughter demonstrates what Dominique Licops has called *épanouissement*—a blossoming of identity which is “based on autochthony, a natural and unmediated relation to the earth, such as that between tree and soil.”²⁰ Man Ya’s presence provides a contrast to the negative picture of the Caribbean painted by Pineau’s parents and the dystopia she experiences in France as a child. While Pineau does not blindly accept her grandmother’s utopian vision, she is given an alternative that allows her to forge her own identity path. Pineau’s “third way” is reminiscent of Patrick Chamoiseau’s *négrillon* in *Chemin d’école*,²¹ who also negotiates a space for himself that differs from the conflicting models presented by his elders. *L’Exil selon Julia* is a powerful statement about the need for each person to claim their own subjectivity in a world increasingly characterised by physical or psychological migrations.

Pineau's personal quest also highlights the particular difficulties of defining one's identity when your homeland is divided.

Fleur de Barbarie offers a markedly different vision of what it means to be a Caribbean person. In contrast to *L'Exil selon Julia*, which portrays an overwhelmingly positive Guadeloupe, this 2005 novel problematises and questions the notion of Caribbean identity, particularly in the relationship with metropolitan France. Pineau explores the ambiguities of contemporary French Caribbean selfhood through the eyes of Josette Titus, a young woman who is conceived in shameful circumstances by her sixteen-year-old mother Pâquerette and later abandoned. Repeating a cycle of rejection that began when her own mother, Théodora, abandoned her on learning of her pregnancy, Pâquerette absents herself from Josette's life—first emotionally and later physically. Josette eventually finds a stable home with a white rural foster family in Sarthe, France, at the age of four, after years of being shunted from one disastrous home to another. Her happiness is forever changed, however, when she receives a letter from her absent mother five years later announcing that she is to move to Marie-Galante—one of Guadeloupe's neighbouring islands—to live with her grandmother, Théodora. Josette's arrival in the Caribbean sparks a series of psychological struggles in which she seeks to uncover the secrets of her family's past and the reasons for her mother's continued rejection of her. She also suffers from a highly problematic relationship with Théodora and with Margareth Solin, her grandmother's employer and a decorated woman of letters.

Unlike the Caribbean utopia that Man Ya conjures up, Pineau draws on images of slavery to depict the otherwise idyllic Marie-Galante in *Fleur de Barbarie*. Describing the island as a penal colony and a place of exile, and drawing parallels between Margareth's treatment of her employees and the masters' treatment of their slaves, Pineau aligns Marie-Galante more closely with a dystopia than a utopia. Indeed, Marie-Galante is one of the few islands in the Caribbean which still has visible traces of slavery today.²² Where nature is luxuriant and beautiful in *L'Exil selon Julia*, the natural world in this novel often suggests poison and barrenness. The title, *Fleur de Barbarie*, for example, juxtaposes the beautiful and the barbarous. The name "Pâquerette" further evokes the negative side of nature: "la fleur du mal qui reflourissait chaque année. Avec ses épines venimeuses, elle empoisonnait tout ce qu'elle touchait, semant la terreur et la désolation dans son sillage".²³ In a 2006 interview, Pineau asserts that the floral names of her female protagonists—Pâquerette, Margareth, Rosy—embody the fragility and ephemeral nature of her characters and, by extension, French

Caribbean identities.²⁴ Nature in this context does not provide the sense of rootedness and spiritual beauty that it does in *L'Exil selon Julia*. While Man Ya pines for her tropical garden when imprisoned in the Parisian *cit *, Josette is struck by the absence of familiar French landscapes when she first moves to Marie-Galante: "il n'y avait pas de champs de bl  comme dans la Sarthe, pas de vaches, pas de pommiers, mais des plantations de canne   sucre et des bananeraies" (*Fleur*, p. 33). Man Ya comes to life in the Caribbean landscape, but Josette withers away and becomes "une sorte d'arbuste d racin  qui avait trop longtemps voyag " (*Fleur*, p. 37). The Caribbean becomes a place of exile for Josette, a beautiful but isolated island that is far from her *chez moi* in France. Pineau thereby highlights the complexity of claiming an identity when a sense of home is not simply tied to a person's place of origin.

Pineau draws further contrasts between the two books in the relationship between grandmother and granddaughter, again reversing the categories of utopia and dystopia. While the relationship between Pineau and Man Ya in her autobiographical narrative is overwhelmingly positive, that between Josette and Th odora is marred by family secrets, shame and misunderstanding. The latter relationship is far from idyllic and Josette consistently feels she is a burden in the eyes of her grandmother. "Longtemps, aux yeux de ma grand-m re, je crois avoir repr sent    moi seule une foule grouillante de questions sans r ponses, aussi le fruit du d shonneur et de la honte" (*Fleur*, p. 17). Th odora, weighed down by her secrets and long-held grievances, cannot resist casting Josette in the same mould as her irresponsible daughter P querette, most memorably labelling her a barbarian when she behaves inappropriately at church. Where Man Ya develops resilience and spirit in order to endure the pains of her existence, Th odora fashions herself in the role of victim, licking her wounds and brooding over past sadness.

Th odora's inability to reconcile herself with her past suggests the difficulties some French Caribbean people continue to struggle with in relation to their own unjust history of slavery and colonisation. Th odora becomes emotionally stunted, unable to give herself to her granddaughter in her time of need, thereby prolonging a state of personal alienation down the family line. Like her mother before her, P querette cuts herself off from her daughter, depriving her of maternal love and a stable family life. As Josette grows up, she too struggles to open herself up to others and finds the idea of having a loving relationship and children unfathomable. *Fleur de Barbarie* dramatises on an individual level some of the paralysing effects of a painful past, and their psychological and physical consequences on successive

generations. Pineau thereby hints at the way the French Caribbean's slave past also conditions the lives of many of the islands' inhabitants. Théodora's inability to embrace her past, both good and bad, means that she stagnates emotionally in a state of dystopia.

Pâquerette operates more as an absence than a presence in the novel, but she too embodies the way in which the inability to come to terms with one's history can cripple the present and future. Despite the early promise she shows in life, Pâquerette never fully recovers from the premature death of her father. At sixteen, she falls pregnant to a lecherous, nameless man and has to sell her body to provide for her daughter. While she manages to recreate a family life with another man and bears three sons to him in Paris, she also creates permanent scars in her abandoned daughter. She briefly reunites with Josette in Paris when she wrenches her from her foster family and prepares her for her trip to Marie-Galante. However, she refuses even to embrace her daughter and treats her like a foreign object. This lack of maternal love etches deep emotional scars in Josette that haunt her throughout her childhood and adolescence. It is possible to argue that Pâquerette recreates some sort of utopia for herself in her new family, but she bequeaths at the same time a burdensome emotional dystopia for her daughter. In a similar way to Théodora, Pâquerette allows her own psychological inadequacies to pass down the family line. Despite such pessimism, however, Pineau suggests a degree of hope in her characters. Just as Pâquerette has gained some degree of happiness by reinventing herself in France, Josette too arrives at a sense of self-awareness by the end of the novel that promises she will be able to overcome the emotional absences of her childhood.

To some extent, the decorated writer Margareth Solin gives Josette the best chance at dealing with her past. Appearing at once as a fairy godmother and an ogress, the long-dreamed-of mother and a selfish egotist, Margareth in effect embodies both utopia and dystopia. Margareth shares Josette's love of writing and the reader later discovers that she also holds the key to unlocking some long-held family secrets. Throughout their long association, Margareth and Josette have a love-hate relationship, seeing both the good and bad of themselves reflected in the other. Margareth's gradual disclosure of the tragedies of her own past, which in turn is linked to Josette, is paralleled with the role of writing in dealing with this past. Like Pineau herself, Josette spends many hours from the time she is a child scribbling down her impressions, inventing new worlds for herself and creating an identity and a place of solace. Through Margareth's example, Josette learns to identify the redemptive power of writing that provides a sense of justice

in an unjust world. Josette's description of Margareth's literary project highlights the conflation of public and private histories: "Elle mettait son talent au service des déshérités de la terre, montrait les peuples qui n'étaient pas conviés au grand banquet, tous les exclus soûlés de drogue et de musique qui traînaient encore les chaînes de leurs pères" (*Fleur*, p. 290). Josette's own writing trajectory begins with a utopian revisioning of her past—"je me réinventais un passé d'eaux calmes, sous les ailes d'une mère aimante et d'un père connu. Je me composais une enfance créole bercée par les alizés de Marie-Galante, auprès d'une grand-mère saine d'esprit" (*Fleur*, p. 298)—but it later matures into a more balanced exploration of both the good and the bad elements that form her individual history. Josette is eventually able to reconcile both parts of her identity and as an adult is able to return to Marie-Galante on her own terms. To some extent, Josette's metamorphosis mirrors Pineau's own identity journey—she is able to accept the dystopian elements of her and her country's past but is also inspired by its utopian aspects.

The character of Josephine Baker also plays an important part in Josette's journey of self-discovery. In fact, Josette is groomed for Josephine Baker-like stardom by her foster carer Tata Michelle in France. Like Pineau, Tata Michelle sees Josephine Baker as a hero figure and she takes it upon herself to re-christen Josette as Joséphine, constantly referring to her glorious future career. One of Josette's most triumphant moments is when she assumes the role of Josephine Baker for a high school carnival. Wearing a skirt of bananas, just as Josephine did, Josette becomes an instant star on local television and simultaneously the symbol of moral ruin for Théodora. For Josette, though, this experience triggers the beginning of her release from her grandmother's shackles and her reconciliation with her past. "J'étais Joséphine et je n'avais pas honte de mon histoire. C'était mon existence et je ne l'avais pas choisie" (*Fleur*, p. 163). According to Pineau, Josephine Baker is an inspiring woman who overcame the limits of her class and race to become an international phenomenon and a powerful supporter of human rights. In a 2005 interview, for example, she states that "la figure de Joséphine Baker est là, parce que je me sens proche de cette femme: comme moi, c'est une descendante d'esclaves, comme moi, elle a souffert de la discrimination et du racisme [...] elle a voulu concrétiser chacun de ses rêves et changer le monde".²⁵ For Josette, drawing inspiration from Baker's legacy allows her to negotiate her way between competing identities and contrasting homelands, leaving her with a more balanced sense of utopia and dystopia that is reminiscent of Pineau's narrator in *L'Exil selon Julia*. By the end of the novel, Josette's literary agent, Rosy, refers to her client's

successful overcoming of her identity crises: "T'es une star de retour au pays [...]. La merveilleuse Joséphine Titus sur les traces de son enfance antillaise" (*Fleur*, p. 273).

While post-colonial critic Mireille Rosello pessimistically predicts that "les peuples de la Martinique et de la Guadeloupe ne guériront peut-être jamais de leur exil, ne parviendront peut-être jamais à le définir",²⁶ Pineau's works provide a powerful sense of hope. Many of her books depict the painful realities of a dystopian Caribbean exile, but also enact a literary return to the native land which allows her characters to come to terms with their heritage.²⁷ The "schizophrenic connection between the place of origin and the place of exile, inscribing a recurring cycle of departures and returns that reflects their struggle to conform to their double/dual identity",²⁸ does not disappear for her protagonists, but it is a battle faced head on and with dignity. For Pineau, it is her position as a writer that allows her to speak radiantly of the optimism and connectedness she feels with her fellow Guadeloupeans. Her work is evidence of the possibilities of a more balanced space between Caribbean utopia and dystopia.

La langue française—ma langue maternelle—, traversée dans mon écriture par le souffle de la langue créole—ma langue grand-maternelle—, exprime une autre quête: celle de la connaissance. Elle narre mon histoire (entre les Noirs et Blancs, français et créole, France et Guadeloupe, oral et écrit, normalité et anormalité) mêlée à celle des êtres—mes ancêtres—qui connurent la déportation, la cale des négriers, la Traite, l'exil et l'esclavage. Elle raconte les miséreux d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, les exclus, les héritiers de l'esclavage, les descendants meurtris, les opprimés, les victimes honteuses de l'histoire. Par mon écriture, j'ai fait serment d'allégeance à tous ces personnages qui, sortant de l'ombre de ma mémoire, sont habillés de mots imposés, inspirés.²⁹

As this study has demonstrated, then, *L'Exil selon Julia* and *Fleur de Barbarie* effectively encapsulate some of the complexities involved in examining utopia and dystopia in the French Caribbean context. Pineau's books underscore the ways in which the enduring dystopian legacies of both personal and collective histories provide ongoing challenges for her characters in the present. However, her works suggest that it is just as limiting to live according to an unattainable utopian vision of the past or present as it is to focus on an alienating and dysfunctional reality. Pineau offers an alternative vision of approaching French Caribbean identity issues by rejecting restrictive categories that confine people to a state of hopeless despair or naïve idealisation. By equating identity and belonging

with utopia and feelings of alienation and otherness with dystopia, Pineau's works highlight the value in balancing the competing utopian and dystopian visions of the past and present in terms of one's identity. Her writing, while never denying the dark side of reality, offers an optimistic path towards the future.

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Notes

¹ Beverley Ormerod, "Displacement and Disclosure in Some Works by Gisèle Pineau", in Mary Gallagher (ed.), *Ici-Là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French*, Amsterdam & New York, Rodopi, 2003, p. 213.

² Njeri Githire, "Horizons Adrift: Women in Exile, at Home, and Abroad in Gisèle Pineau's Works", *Research in African Literatures*, 36, 1, 2005, p. 81.

³ Gisèle Pineau, "Écrire en tant que Noire", in *Penser la créolité* (sous la direction de Maryse Condé & Madeleine Cottenet-Hage), Paris, Karthala, 1995, pp. 289–291.

⁴ Nadège Veldwachter, "An Interview with Gisèle Pineau", *Research in African Literatures*, 35, 1, 2004, p. 182.

⁵ Pineau, "Écrire en tant que Noire", pp. 294–295.

⁶ Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, Paris, Seuil, 1972, p. 42. Schwarz-Bart elaborates on this concept in a 1979 interview, describing "la folie antillaise" as "le génie particulier de l'Antillais. Le moteur de sa conduite. Je ressens, chez les gens que j'observe, une grand part irrationnelle... Cette façon d'appréhender le monde, de ne pas vouloir calculer, de se donner entièrement à l'instant. Cela vient peut-être de notre histoire, du fait que l'on ne pouvait pas faire de grands projets... C'est une façon de s'assumer ou de ne pas vouloir s'assumer. C'est une façon de sentir notre histoire, même confusément, quand on ne la connaît pas." Héliane & Roger Toumson, "Interview avec Simone et André Schwarz-Bart: sur les pas de Fanotte", in *Textes, études et documents* (no. 2) (sous la direction de Roger Toumson), Paris/Gérec, Fort-de-France, Éditions Caribéennes, 1979, pp. 17–18.

⁷ Gisèle Pineau, "L'Identité, la créolité et la francité", in Thomas C. Spear (ed.), *La Culture française vue d'ici et d'ailleurs*, Paris, Karthala, 2002 p. 220.

⁸ Veldwachter, "An Interview with Gisèle Pineau", p. 185.

⁹ Gisèle Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, Paris, Stock, 1996, p. 11. All subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁰ Pineau, "Écrire en tant que Noire", pp. 289–291.

¹¹ Veldwachter, "An Interview with Gisèle Pineau", p. 182.

¹² Ormerod, "Displacement and Disclosure", p. 215.

¹³ Pineau, "L'Identité, la créolité et la francité", pp. 219–220.

¹⁴ Gisèle Pineau & Marie Abraham, *Femmes des Antilles: traces et voix*, Paris, Stock, 1998, p. 11.

¹⁵ Christiane Makward, "Entretien avec Gisèle Pineau", *French Review*, 76, 6, 2003, p. 1209.

- ¹⁶ Makward, "Entretien avec Gisèle Pineau", p. 1203.
- ¹⁷ Ormerod, "Displacement and Disclosure", p. 215.
- ¹⁸ Kathleen Gyssels, "L'Exil selon Pineau, récit de vie et autobiographie", in *Récits de vie de l'Afrique et des Antilles: Enracinement, Errance, Exil*, (sous la direction de Suzanne Crosta), Fort-de-France, GRELCA, 1998, p. 175.
- ¹⁹ Pineau, "L'Identité, la créolité et la francité", p. 220.
- ²⁰ Dominique Licops, "Origi/nation and Narration: Identity as Épanouissement in Gisèle Pineau's *Exil selon Julia*", *MaComère*, 2, 1999, p. 81.
- ²¹ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Chemin d'école*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994.
- ²² Gisèle Pineau, Unpublished Interview with Bonnie Thomas, Paris, 22 August 2006.
- ²³ Gisèle Pineau, *Fleur de Barbarie*, Paris, Mercure de France, 2005, pp. 63–64. All subsequent references are to this edition.
- ²⁴ Pineau, Unpublished Interview with Bonnie Thomas.
- ²⁵ Chantal Anglade, "Fleur de Barbarie: Joséphine Pineau et Gisèle Pineau en langue barbare", http://www.remue.net/article.php3?id_article=1063, consulted 19 March 2006.
- ²⁶ Mireille Rosello, *Littérature et identité créole aux Antilles*, Paris, Karthala, 1992, p. 92.
- ²⁷ See, for example, *Un papillon dans la cité* (1992), *L'Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* (1998), *Chair piment* (2002) and of course *Fleur de barbarie* (2005).
- ²⁸ Priscilla Maunier, "Odyssey of a Double Consciousness: Commonalities and Disjunctions in Contemporary French Caribbean and Réunionese Novels", *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 8, 2, 2005, p. 178.
- ²⁹ Pineau, "L'Identité, la créolité et la francité", pp. 222–223.