

Compte rendu

Menard, Nadève. *Écrits d'Haïti. Perspectives sur la littérature haïtienne contemporaine (1986-2006)*. Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2011, 486 p.

Marie Line Charles
University of Missouri

By compiling a number of earlier interviews with notable Haitian writers (each conducted by a different scholar), Nadève Menard, a Haitian professor teaching at the National Teachers' College in Haiti, provides readers with some fascinating insights into the complex methodologies underpinning literary production in the post-Duvalier period. This period is seeing a dynamic proliferation of creative works in all genres both by writers living in Haiti and those outside its borders. Menard probes the "liberated" generation's commentaries and writings in order to establish a snapshot of the current status of Haitian literature. As indicated above, one of the most compelling features of the work is that it places equal emphasis on some of the most celebrated authors of the Haitian diaspora (such as Danticat and Laferrière) as well as those lesser known artists who remained in Haiti both during and in the aftermath of the Duvalier dictatorship. By affirming the legitimacy and the talent of Haitian writers who either by choice or by necessity created their works of art in Haiti during this period, Menard offers a broad and inclusive overview of her country's national literature. In the interviews, writers are provided with the opportunity to share detailed accounts about the struggles they had to overcome, the inspirational forces that fueled their creative commitment and the goals they tried to accomplish with their literary endeavors. The interviews also yield important information relative to the wealth of themes, styles, and genres that particularize the works of contemporary Haitian writers.

By design, the book does not have a central theme, allowing for an eclectic mixture of literary approaches, writing styles, political ideas, and genres (novels, poetry, sort stories, plays, etc...) and an ample selection of authors. There is no political agenda or precise problematic driving her choice of authors. Rather, her concern is to be as inclusive as possible and bring the rich complexity, esthetic sophistication, and innovative creativity of contemporary Haitian literature to the forefront of scholarly attention through a representative compilation of texts and textures. Menard admits that spatial limitations obliged her to make decisions regarding who to leave in and who to leave out, but she succeeded in providing readers with a balanced

amalgamation of literary styles, genres, and viewpoints. Noteworthy also is the fact that the writers interviewed cover a wide geographical area, including France, Canada and the United states, among others.

There are six primary sections that group together writers and works in no particular order. The texts in each section are linked by theme, genre, or subject matter. Section one for example, "Writing History", features texts particularly focused on Haiti's history, and includes an interview with Evelyne Trouillot by Marie Frémin, a researcher from the University of Cergy-Pontoise in France. Other authors in this section include Jean Metellus, whose literary view point is expressed during a discussion panel held by the publishing house L'Harmattan in Paris; Fabienne Pasquet, interviewed by Cyrille Francois, also from Cergy-Pontoise; and Jean-Claude Fignolé, interviewed by graduate student Lucienne J. Serrano of the University of New York. The five remaining sections, "Psychic Wound", "Writings of Body and Elements", "The How of Writing", "Conquering Space through Writing", and "Writing the Land", group together interviews that relate in some way or another to each chapter headings. The last section features, among others, interviews with Lyonel Trouillot and Gary Victor, winner of the 2003 Prix du Livre Insulaire, at Ouessant in France to name but this prize.

The book will appeal to both the novice Haitian scholar and seasoned researchers. Those not familiar with Haitian literature or the problems writers encountered during the Duvalier dictatorship and afterwards will gain a better understanding of Haiti's internal politics, its social hierarchies, and its recent history. Seasoned critics will be able to broaden their perspectives after reading the commentaries offered both by the writers themselves and the thought-provoking exchanges with the scholars, journalists and literary specialists who interview them. Some discussions revolve around the use of Creole, raising interesting questions for anyone doing research on the issue of post-colonial language dilemmas and the socio-political ramifications of bilingual nations.

This is a beautifully presented work that will hopefully be translated into other languages in order to raise global awareness about the complexity, sophistication, and richness of Haitian literature and thought. Despite the media's largely negative portrayal of Haiti, the country is home to a vibrant community of scholars and writers whose ideas merit increased exposure in the academic community. This work is an ideal starting point towards accomplishing this goal.