

Patrick Chamoiseau, *Écrire en pays dominé* [Writing in a Dominated Land] (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 301-10, extract translated by Jean-Paul Martinon.

To rebel against to-day's hegemonies can take place without a spectacle. The symbolic can generate profound acts. Psychic waves can perform wide assaults. I wasn't sure if I would succeed (there was nothing to win); however, in the deadly system in which my country [*La Martinique*] enlisted itself, I made sure to increase the unpredictable—this endless supplier of entropic abysses. Writing [*L'Écrire*] irradiates in its own soil. There is always something about to-day's hegemonies that can be squeezed out, that can be turned—and hopefully weakened—into minute diversions with infinite potential. [*Aimé Césaire's*] *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, read by a few West Indians, provoked both positive and negative changes to both our Negro imaginary and our visions of Africa and colonialism. Moved by obscurity like [*Franz Fanon's*] founding *Speech*, I went from crossroads to crossroads; his work reverberating at every turn. Glissant haunted me. These writers' efforts revealed our virtues. Their “prophetic visions of the past” quenched my thirst; their oracles provoked leaps and motivated the writing of many books.

Books—old-chaps, old accomplices!

These poems obsess you. This obscure sentence threads itself in the windmills of your reawakened conscience. Their tangled beauty rises up towards your full moon. These books reassure you with their crimson colours. These authors come together—

in your world, on the distant shores that arise in you—and predict what is most essential—a murmur. The world discretely emerges through them, stripped from the confined topographies of languages, races, and nations. Without measure, they throw you onto banks of unrelated realities: sea, earth, water, ice, fire, desert, jungle, flesh, rocks... an impressive dispersion. *I wasn't alone! I wasn't alone!* The Masters of the imaginary against hegemonies! Of course, petitions, demonstrations, human-rights defenders, urban shelters, the Parliament of Writers, all worked against these brutal hegemonies, but without the heretic nature of symbols, the mobilisation of troublesome words, the great storm that gathers what appears divided, none of this would have had any power. I was no longer a “Printer of Words” or a fighter: I became a *Warrior*, with all the weight of this word, bringing peace amongst irreconcilable beings, performing unyielding and questioning gestures, provoking doubting bursts of laughter, ironic rituals, devising rigid and fluid frameworks, sparking lucid flashes of lights and beliefs, resisting brute desires for embalmed mummies. Warrior of the Imaginary.

The old warrior tells me: ... You are so funny! You are so funny! You? A Warrior? (*He laughs, shrieks, laughs again, then his voice gathers itself, coarse clay*)... Listen to me: Colonisation forced people to confront the issue of a Bound-World. This colonial Other who does not belong to my world, who neither respects or obeys our rules, blusters me (my people, but above all this “I” expelled from the “We”) like a dead leaf into the stormy weather of this Bound-World... Thus colonised, we become, (probably more than any others) more prepared for a world that turns World...

(For a time, his voice becomes quieter, muffled, and preoccupied)... The Web's tribes are now threatened in their most fundamental rights. They resist as much as they can alongside Hackers and Cyberpunks against these furtive government forces that work tirelessly to create tangles of unquestionable rights. These world surfers are surrounded by talismans, fetishes, and mascots; they move like warrior dancers... Divided in their resistance for still a few more days! You must help these barbarians, my little warrior. Be part of this widespread thread against this widespread menace! Be a part of this dispersion of deviant and mutating behaviour. Let's prop marginal disorders against the most extreme form of order! (He laughs, mocking me)... But tell me more about your Warrior story... —Inventory of a Depression

To-day's hegemonies drown our imaginary inside an invisible net. This is an aggression without assault, an invisible take-over. Born in our Culture—I thus call our reactions-productions-emotions, the turmoil of our being—, our imaginary becomes a tool in our relation to the world, which it produces in return. It represents an imminent authority, individual-collective, collective-individual that conditions being, determines the unconscious, organises consciousness, regulates the heights of our waking-life in which Truth, Justice, Willingness to be, Willingness to act... all reside. With the imaginary, one can see reality, one can understand it, measure the folds and the recesses. Armed with this filter—once dominated (re-profiled by insidious influences)—reality appears differently, with new charms, seductive shapes, and different splendours. The filter allows light to pierce darkness

and darkens what appears self-evident... that of being dominated. It keeps within us the feeling that our choice follows our intimate self, and gives us, in appearances only, the feeling of freedom. It allows for renewed acts, beliefs, and discourses that come to reinforce it. In this way, the subsidised and financially dependent economist can provide the justification for subsidies and financial dependency with the conviction of having come up with a genuine idea. The labourer, the intellectual, the politician, the businessperson, the artist... will all do the same within their zone of influence. A self-governing realism will be fostered, predator of all other possibilities, and will treat any other form of alternative as an unhealthy utopia: This is how those who identify themselves as outsiders will rally together. The imaginary is indestructible. It knows no bounds. No turrets, no armies, or bullets. It appears nowhere and can intimate itself everywhere. The outcome (whether works of reflection or visions of the world) is always judged by the limits that the imaginary sets itself, and the way it impresses itself upon the grooves thus created.

The unforeseen remains, here again, that of flight [*marronage*].

Life viruses, deviants, retro-rebels, marginal poets, hit-artists, all of whom without even feeling the burden, derail, expel, hack in a hurry, and become necessary opponents, aggressors without aim, dreamers without ideals. Battling out a war they don't understand.

I saw them. I used to know them.

I drank the weak and bitter Punches of their disasters.

Adrift on this dawning chaos, I began to conceive a Warrior of the imaginary. He is more clear-sighted than others, but only when it comes to the vision this clear-sightedness provides him. He envisions the battle plan. He projects his war onto the template of a folly, onto a stage where he acts against his ascribed role. He imposes himself the task of being a worker, shaker, infestation, inside scrambler, bulldozer, rebel, drifter, a loiterer outside oases, a sower of rotten seeds, a dodger of evidence, a diver of virtualities, a eulogist of the unknown—the end of certainties. He must doubt, abandon himself, and programme unrealistic ends amidst his own conditioning. And eventually, shadows will appear, slivers of light will turn into cluster stars, a celestial roof will be set in motion, all projections from the big-bang of dreams. Warrior of the imaginary, you will never know when your spirit will be free from this projection. You will never know when you will have achieved the rainbow that animates you. *You will die where you live*, father of vigils, always mistrustful of your own vigilance. You will continue—heretic—in order to invent other skies, without ends and without moralising tales.

The old warrior tells me: ... Good, good, I finally recognize myself here! (*He murmurs an Amazonian warrior's song, and then his voice softens, coppered*)... In the Transmit-World, positions and promises of allegiances will pulse and multiply. One will identify to one's tribe, clan, calling, race, clients, consumer-centres, cyber-groupings. One will be dependent on Centralised-servers... each of which will follow erratic and drifting modes of operation. The problem will be to preserve unshaken (amidst this whirling expansion

of consciousness) one's creative abilities, one's vitality, one's capacity to nourish the intimate flicker provoked by a movement that never stops... (*His voice becomes full of scorn, spit*)... Feed the rhizome the sparks of our difference, the promotion of womanhood, the respect of languages, cultures, traditions, odd accents, participatory citizenship, the belonging to an Us-World, the ecology of relational differences, human solidarity, the flow of science amongst experts and amateurs, the specialised nourishment provided by a transversal diversity, the fecund tie... (*Screams of hunters*)... Again heretics! —*Inventory of a Depression*.

To be a Warrior is to venture into obscurity. To be a Warrior is to derail the highest peaks of spirit in order to force Writing to take the most extreme of decisions—decisions that always work best when the unutterable is concerned. To be a Warrior is to bring the ambiguity of reality at the *opening* of a text, the complexity of each sentence generating many awakenings. To be a Warrior is to alter perceptions, generate shocking reactions, billows of laughter, and surprises. It also means to create musical hypnosis, abrupt opacities, unbridled fantasies, bamboozling tales, and excesses of unfamiliar habits on illegal border-areas. The aim is to generate an event that is singular for every reader. And whether one is clear-sighted or not, the psyche always excludes itself. This is freedom.

From Glissant: Bring your Place to the world, and the world to your Place, and bring Places together. Write in this circulation; from the Place to the All-World, and from the

All-World to the Place, this is what one calls hailing the Relation. —*Sentimenthèque*.

From André Frénaud: Against “fatal inabilities”: the lyrical gesture that binds humanity, masterful poetry... —*Sentimenthèque*.

Hurry Warrior; bring your books with you. You are at once exalted and exhausted by all that has been written and said. Literary powers have already worked hard. So hurry in all humility. Measure the need for Writing; tackle the way it wounds and gauge the place it occupies in the world. Writing is not a certainty, but an adventure. Writing inhabits readings, arises from a body’s tremors, takes-off from the vaults of the spirit. React to reality. Never aspire for achievement. The Creole storyteller always altered his tales according to the moods of his listeners and to their silences. His Speech was like an enquiring twig probing unfathomable depths. A sudden turbulence would awaken him and those around him. He also relied on other storytellers to bring him either help or the threat of silence. He always stood alone surrounded by watchful and judging eyes. Their Speech always promised. His Speech always reliant on theirs. Their tales always ready, aware of the dangers and the need for humility. All night, in competing solidarity. Warrior, this is how you multiply Writing.

From Branislav Nusic: Leave potent ashes to those who will come from us. —*Sentimenthèque*.

From Vincent Placolty: Against forgetfulness, *the smell of camphor, perfume of all distresses*, and the consummation

of what cannot be said, language holds back between worlds. —*Sentimenthèque*.

To be a Warrior is to be sensible to the existential. This has nothing to do with comprehension, but with perception. The Warrior fears militancy, dogmas, doctrines... He always borders on the inexpressible and intones towards the unsaid. He is also always acquainted with the opaque. The Warrior grasps human facts as if a flow of inextricable information. He never concerns himself with ethnological, linguistic, or historical surveys. He also never concerns himself with poetic fire—without either being subsumed by these concerns. An act of knowledge. A mind-wave electrifies the fictional totalisation of the world and its powerful Centres. A gold harvest sublates humanity and sheds away the night. Knocked off course by the existential, led by Diversity, you abandon yourself, Warrior, to the extremes.

Locality as horizon.

This horizon opens onto a world whose fortifications can only crumble (or change) like these identities, these territories, and these borders that in youth always look like rigid certainties.

The old warrior tells me: ... ah, my son, I hear you; you come to me at last! (*He laughs, then clears his throat*)... From the rhizome, people will be flooded by unprecedented shockwaves (not unlike those provoked by colonisation) that will decimate their traditional, natural, cultural, and historical environments. Our resistances must not only attempt to think them through (vain effort), but foster the

very disposition of the hazardous and brutal mutations to come... Well acquainted with fluid soils, our resistance must guess and plan the fragile realities that are coming. Our resistance must frustrate the delusions that always quench our thirst. Keep this investigative course, my son. Keep it coming even without magnetic North or compass and come, come, come... (*He breathes heavily*)... Think of the Griots [*West African poets*] or the Creole storytellers, their lost languages, subjugated, exterminated; think of these marginal imaginaries... (*He now mumbles in an incoherent language which alters his voice*)... Talk, it is now time to talk and infuse the codes with the obscure song of languages. —*Inventory of a Depression*.