

CARIBBEAN MIGRATIONS MARYSE CONDE ON THE TRACK OF EMILY BRONTË

Theo D'haen
Leiden University

Maryse Condé's *La migration des coeurs* (1995) is part of that massive wave of rewritings of European classics that has marked the postwar – some would simply say the postmodern – period in literature.^{*} The phenomenon is especially widespread in English-language literature – particularly as written by postcolonial and minority writers, and specifically with regard to classics set in the Caribbean, but certainly not limited to it. Elsewhere I have extensively theorized upon this phenomenon (D'haen 1997a, 1998). Here, I simply want to perform a reading of Condé's novel.

I

The discovery and subsequent colonization of the Caribbean as of the turn of the sixteenth century by the then emerging European nation states coincides with the rise of modernity (Todorov 1984). Europe's ascendancy and ultimate hegemony (even if in retrospect only temporary) in turn is closely correlated with some of the major tenets of modernity, to wit a reliance on science and scientific method and a belief in history as the record of progress, inviting a future-oriented way of thinking. It is these tenets that set modernity apart from the middle ages. They fuel the relentless and ever faster compression of time and space that characterizes modernity. In fact, the European voyages of discovery are themselves an early intimation of the onsetting compression of space under modernity. It is also these same tenets that Europe, and particularly North-Western Europe as most strongly affected not only by the Renaissance and the voyages of discovery, but also by the Reformation – a combination Jürgen Habermas (1990a) sees as decisive for the onset of modernity, increasingly comes to see as

differentiating it from the rest of the world. With the rising power of Europe, this difference comes to be interpreted as legitimation for Europe's – and ultimately Northern Europe's, and even England's – dominating the world. Throughout modernity, the Caribbean remains the region most fully incorporated in what Immanuel Wallerstein has called the World System centered upon Europe, and consequently it is also the place where the impact of the shifts in attitude and approaches taking place in Europe – and later in Europe's heir, the United States – is most fully felt.

A number of English classics marks the various stages of the process I just sketched. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) draws an image of what Early Modern Europe increasingly came to see as its "Other" in Caliban, scion of a North African witch and a Caribbean island nature spirit, and in the figure of the aristocratic white man Prospero legitimates Europe's rule. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) whitewashes early capitalist and imperialist Europe's wholesale occupation and colonization of its overseas possessions by having its hero land on an uninhabited island, and in the guise of Friday condones the enslavement of the natives by masking it as a liberation from equally native oppressors and touting it as educating the childlike and untutored. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) encodes the difference Europe near the height of its powers perceived between itself and its Others in the opposition between Jane Eyre – English and of fiery temperament, but ultimately in control both of herself and her environment, and therefore also free, among other things to marry her longtime Byronic suitor Rochester – and Bertha Mason, Caribbean creole, and first wife of Rochester, who keeps her locked away as "the madwoman in the attic."

In *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Jane Eyre*, the only voice heard is that of the white European. This is to be taken quite literally. In the single instance in Shakespeare's play that Caliban himself tries to tell his own story, he is immediately silenced and his "his-story" is "overwritten" by Prospero. The only narrator in *Robinson Crusoe* is the hero himself. And in *Jane Eyre* the story of Bertha Mason is told by Rochester, and only takes up a few pages in what is a long novel. In other words, in all of these works Europe's Others are always and uniquely represented as such in the words and through the eyes of characters that explicitly represent

themselves as incarnations of Europe's Self. For Caliban, Friday, and Bertha Mason, then, what Simon Gikandi has said in *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (1992: 2) is incontrovertibly true: "entry into the European terrain of the modern has often demanded that the colonized peoples be denied their subjectivity, language, and history", "the central categories of European modernity" (1992: 4). In their struggle to recover these things, Gikandi posits, "Caribbean writers, in response to their historical marginalization, have evolved a discourse of alterity which is predicated on a deliberate act of self-displacement from the hegemonic culture and its central tenets" (1992: 19-20), particularly "the hegemonic European idea of the modern as an affect of Western reason and history" (1992: 4). Gayatri Spivak (1993) and Homi Bhabha (1990) have taught us to think of such post-colonial writing, as we now usually tend to call it, in terms of subalternity. According to them, authors emanating from the ranks of the (formerly) colonized and writing in the language of the (former) colonizer, write *supplementally* (with a term borrowed from Derrida 1976) to the master(s) canonical discourse. One obvious form the supplemental character of post-colonial writing can take, then, is that of a re-writing of the relevant canonical texts. This is precisely what Caribbean writers have been doing since the 1950s, and in their wake also a number of other writers originating from, or writing on behalf of, population groups marginalized under modernity.

The Tempest probably holds the record when it comes to being most frequently re-written (Nixon 1987, Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, and Zabuz 1994). Sometimes this happens from the point of view of Caliban, as with Caribbean George Lamming (*Water with Berries* [1971]), on other occasions the focus is on a creolized Miranda, as in *Indigo* (1994) by Marina Warner, herself English but of Caribbean creole descent. Often too, though, Shakespeare's play is re-written from a more generally racialized or gendered position, as with the African Americans Paule Marshall (*Praisesong for the Widow* [1983], Marshall's ancestry is Caribbean) and Gloria Naylor (*Mama Day* [1988]), white Americans like Rachel Ingalls ("Mrs Caliban" [1982]), and Englishmen like Tad Williams (*Caliban's Hour* [1994]) (D'haen 1997b). Of course, Aimé Césaire in 1969 also gave us a French-language re-write of *The Tempest* as *Une tempête*. Robinson

Crusoe is re-written in support of black and female emancipation in South African John Coetzee's *Foe* (1986). Earlier, Michel Tournier had already pressed Robinson into the service of ecologism and of the Paris '68 revolt against utilitarian modernity in *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967). Gaston Compère too turned Robinson against the ideals of the Enlightenment as the crucible of modernity in *Robinson 86* (1986) (Bertens en D'haen 1988). *Jane Eyre* has been rewritten most memorably as *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1967), by Jean Rhys, English but of Dominican descent.

II

With the island of Dominica, we finally also arrive at Condé's *La migration des coeurs*. Part of the action of Condé's novel is laid on Dominica, and more particularly in Roseau, the island's capital, and also the place where Jean Rhys was born and grew up. It is my contention that Condé has done this precisely to indicate that *La migration des coeurs* is not only, as is obvious to any reader, even if only from the novel's dedication, a *lecture* of Emily Brontë's *chef-d'oeuvre* *Wuthering Heights* (1847), but also, or rather, precisely a *lecture* through the prism of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and even of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In what follows I will refer to this only in passing, but I believe it could well be systematically elaborated.

In first instance, then, *La migration des coeurs* is a re-write of *Wuthering heights*, or, with its French title, *Hurlevent*. There is no need to go extensively into the plot of both novels. Suffice it to say that Condé for the most part faithfully transposes Emily Brontë's characters and plot to the Caribbean, and often she even does so down to the last detail. Catherine – Cathy – Gagneur and her daughter Cathy de Linsseuil from *La migration des coeurs* correspond to Catherine Earnshaw and her daughter Catherine Linton from *Wuthering Heights*. So do Razyé and Aymeric-alias-Premier-né to Heathcliff and his son Linton. "Razyé" in French Caribbean creole refers to a wild plant, just as "Heathcliff" at least suggests something similar in English. Cathy Gagneur and her brother Justin demand that their father bring along a violin and a whip, respectively, when he goes to La Pointe, just as Cathy Earnshaw and her brother Hindley do when their father goes to Liverpool. Rather than in the

correspondences, then, it is in the differences between the two books that meaning opens up.

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 low social position, 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, 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, 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. 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.

The fear in which the Heathcliffs of the age were held is indicated by *Wuthering Heights'* particular Heathcliff relentlessly being 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" (77). Isabella,

cruelly treated by Heathcliff, wonders if he is "a devil" (173). And when Heathcliff is dead old Joseph, the religion-crazed servant at Wuthering Heights, remarks that "Th' divil's harried off his soul" (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 what 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 brings him closer to Bertha Mason than to Rochester.

Mr Linton dubs Heathcliff "a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway" (91), and Mrs Earnshaw and Hindley refer to Heathcliff as a gipsy (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 gipsies as of Asian or North-African origin. 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 in Liverpool. In the nineteenth century, Liverpool

was not only the 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-East 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 Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), in which Thomas de Quincey relates how one day a "Malay" visited his cottage, and how he had nightmares about this for years after (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 *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 skilfully 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 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 what must be 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 threat of "foreign" blood sullying England's purity has 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*.

III

In *La migration des coeurs*, a number of the fears of *Wuthering Heights*, but also of *Jane Eyre*, come true. In the figure of Razyé the have-nots and colonial subjects take over from the white plantation owners and industrials, personified by Aymeric de Linsseuil. Condé takes care to present this social and political changing of the guard as involving the entire Caribbean, and as emanating from the lower strata of Caribbean society. In order to do so, she uses various strategies that at the same time mark the difference of *La migration des coeurs* with *Wuthering Heights*.

To begin with, there is the element of geography. *Wuthering Heights* is set in one location, involving two houses: Wuthering Heights, the ancient Earnshaw abode, and Thrushcross Grange, the home of the Lintons. As such, Emily Brontë's novel emphasizes the stability and continuity, the very settledness of English country life. Even though threatened by a Heathcliff and all he stands for, the idyll of England at the heart of Empire must be preserved. *La migration des coeurs*, on the other hand, skips from Cuba to

Guadeloupe, to Marie-Galante and to Dominica, and back to Guadeloupe. Everywhere society is seen to be in turmoil, whether it be in the run-up to the Cuban War of Independence in the early pages of the novel, or later in the French Antilles, where black socialists are increasingly calling the tune. Dominica, a British possession, in fact still seems most secure socially.

At the same time, houses play an important role in *La migration des coeurs* too: L'Engoulvent, the mansion of the Gagneurs, is the obvious counterpart to Wuthering Heights, while the domain of the de Linsseuils, Belles-Feuilles, equally obviously responds to Thrushcross Grange. 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*, though, there is a third dwelling that plays an important role: 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. This deliberate move to what are definitely urban proletarian quarters suggests that Razyé is not so much bent on usurping the power and wealth of the *békés* as simply on destroying them, and first and foremost of course Aymeric de Linsseuil, the husband of the (by this time late) Cathy Gagneur. At the same time, and apart from the more personal aspects involved, this move also firmly roots Razyé as representative of the impoverished black masses.

Next, there is the narration itself. *Wuthering Heights* is told by what is basically a disinterested yet also faintly ironic third-person narrator, Lockwood, who moreover mostly only relays to us what Nelly Dean, at various times housekeeper to the Earnshaws, the Lintons, and Heathcliff, tells him. Lockwood is a fashionable London gentleman, and through his eyes and in his words this wild tale of the Yorkshire dales takes on rustic overtones, and even becomes slightly antiquarian, almost like Walter Scott holding up a remote part of the Scottish Highlands for our inspection and amusement. This effect is even heightened by the use of dialect for the speech of Hareton Earnshaw (before his transformation) and old Joseph. The norm, it is clear, is standard English as spoken by

the literate classes of nineteenth-century Britain. How very different all this is in *La migration des coeurs*! The majority of chapters has a straight third-person omniscient narrator. In the remainder, a variety of characters, from Irmine and Justin Gagneur, to a number of servants and a fisherman, take the floor. Especially the speeches of the latter are shot through with *patois*, and throughout the novel it is implied that creole is the norm, not the French of the "hexagone."

If we wanted to drag in some theory, then, we could argue that *La migration des coeurs* satisfies all requirements Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari formulated for what they called "minor literature" in their *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure* (1975). Condé's novel is a minority construction within a major language, that is to say: it deterritorializes that same language, it is political in intent, and it is expressive of a collectivity. In other words: the triumph of Europe's "Other" seems assured here, and the reversal of the social order implicit in *Wuthering Heights* complete. This seems even confirmed by the fact that in *La migration des coeurs* the children Razyé has with Irmine survive, in contrast to what happened with Heathcliff and Isabella's son. Premier-né and all the other children of the union just mentioned are of course hybrids – what could be finer proof of the ultimate victory of *la créolité*? And yet, this is where the tables begin to turn in *La migration des coeurs*.

Whereas the brief marriage of Linton and Cathy Linton in *Wuthering Heights* remains childless, in *La migration des coeurs* Premier-né does have a child – Anthuria – with Cathy de Linsseuil. The latter dies in childbirth. At first sight, this again seems to reverse the pattern of *Wuthering Heights*, then. It is not the representative of the usurping class that dies, but that of the ruling class – even if by the time Cathy de Linsseuil and Premier-né meet the de Linsseuil family has been reduced to poverty. However, throughout the novel it is hinted that Cathy de Linsseuil is unusually dark for a *béké*. The reason, it is suggested, is that her mother, Cathy Gagneur, was herself already a mulatto, if very light-skinned. At the end of the novel, though, it seems more than likely that Cathy de Linsseuil is actually the daughter not of Cathy Gagneur and Aymeric de Linsseuil, but rather of the former and Razyé! This would make Cathy de Linsseuil and Premier-né half-sister and -brother. No wonder that Premier-né, in the free indirect speech with which the

novel concludes, and absorbed "dans la pensée d'Anthuria," muses that "une si belle enfant ne pouvait pas être maudite" (337).

In thruth, we might well conclude that Razyé in the end is bitterly thwarted. Unlike in *Wuthering Heights*, where Heathcliff deliberately engineers the union between the son he despises, yet needs to accomplish his revenge, and Cathy Linton, Razyé in *La migration des coeurs* ultimately remains in the dark as to his own son's marriage to Cathy de Linsseuil, as he dies without learning of it. And while all the time aiming to strike at Aymeric and his family, Razyé will ultimately have destroyed the child he himself – unbeknownst to him – had with Cathy Gagneur in Cathy de Linsseuil. In fact, at every step children prove the undoing of Razyé's revenge. Justin-Marie Gagneur, the nephew in whom Razyé sees a great resemblance to Cathy Gagneur, abandons him for Aymeric de Linsseuil, like his aunt before him. After Razyé's death and his own return to Guadeloupe, Premier-né settles, with Anthuria, at L'Engoulvent. There, he falls into the slovenliness that also marked his father when pining for Cathy Gagneur upon her first turning away from him. However, the point is also made that Premier-né, who first made the acquaintance of Cathy de Linsseuil, a school teacher, when seeking her help in gaining an education, now for ever will remain untutored. If Justin-Marie, then, plays the role of Linton, Premier-né stands in for Hareton Earnshaw. At the end of *La migration des coeurs*, though, no one will come and rescue Premier-né.

Perhaps most poignant of all, the younger children Razyé has with Irmine will, after his death and with the fortune he amassed – most often illegally – but which he himself did not care about, and which he did not permit his wife or his children to enjoy during his lifetime, be educated in France: the boys "dans un collège de jésuites à Bordeaux," Cassandre "au pensionnat des soeurs à Versailles" (300). Cassandre, not coincidentally, is the lighter-skinned of Razyé's and Irmine's children, and apparently destined for success: "Elle avait joué du piano devant le gouverneur et avait baisé la main de monseigneur l'évêque" (330). Premier-né and Cathy de Linsseuil, as well as their daughter Anthuria, are very dark. It seems, then, as if in Razyé's children everything he strove for is undone. Irmine, who all her life grovelled before Razyé, whom he despised and only married to spite her brother, Aymeric, proves strongest in the end. She will

have her children, or at least those that can still be "saved," properly equipped to enter "society." Even if their skins are dark, their manners, if not their hearts and souls, will be white: "peau noire, masques blancs" as Frantz Fanon (1952) famously put it. In fact, a similar coming to naught of Razyé's aims is suggested by the facelift Irmine operates on the house Place de la Victoire in La Pointe. From the neglected and dilapidated dwelling Razyé chose as a symbol of outsidership, Irmine with Razyé's money crafts a proper bourgeois "maison-de-maître."

IV

What are we to conclude, then, from *La migration des coeurs*? Is it, like its model *Wuthering Heights*, an ironic – and perhaps even approving – comment on the ultimate unchangeability of things and on the inevitability of the bourgeois order under modernity? Certainly this is what Irmine's victory would suggest. Yet we should not forget that there is still Anthuria. Is she truly "maudite"? If so, the story ends with Irmine and the *béké* order. If not, she may turn into the kind of postmodern female storyteller or family *chroniqueur* we remember from earlier works by Condé, for instance *La vie scélérate* (1987), or from other Caribbean-related authors' re-writes, such as Marina Warner's *Indigo*. Then, the story Anthuria tells might well change everything. Finally, perhaps we also better heed Cassandra. With a name like that, who can tell?

Note

*This article first appeared in *Histoire, jeu, science dans l'aire de la littérature*, Mélanges offerts à Evert van der Starre, eds. Sjef Houppermans, Paul J. Smith and Madeleine van Strien-Chardonneau, Amsterdam/Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000, pp. 202-14.

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