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Jason Herbeck, *Architextual Authenticity: Constructing Literature and Literary Identity in the French Caribbean*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017. x + 330 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. £85.00 (hb). ISBN 978-1-78694-039-1.

Review by Allison Connolly, Centre College.

Literature of the French Caribbean is replete with images from the natural world, from the flora and fauna in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, to the grandmother's garden in Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Téliumée Miracle*, to the mangrove in Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la Mangrove*.<sup>[1]</sup> Over the years, many scholars have been inclined to approach this body of literature from an ecocritical perspective, resulting in a number of valuable studies examining the interaction between characters and their natural surroundings.<sup>[2]</sup> Jason Herbeck's impressive monograph broadens the field of literary landscape studies through his focus on manmade structures: "I break with longstanding critical convention to focus on the human as opposed to natural landscapes of French-Caribbean literature" (p. 29). His rigorous analyses of human landscapes in works by Edouard Glissant, Maryse Condé, Daniel Maximin, and Yanick Lahens serve to complement prior scholarship as well as provide new critical perspectives relevant to postcolonial studies across the board.

The volume includes an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. Herbeck's introduction establishes his theoretical framework: "The purpose of this study is to delve into the process by which past and present issues of identity in the region have been and continue to be understood, engaged, expressed, and in fact *constructed*" (p. 2). As such, he lays out his dual-pronged methodological approach, examining both architecture and the Genettian concept of architexture, "the generic, discursive, lexical, thematic, and structural blueprints from which a text emerges and is created" (p. 28). As his title indicates, the formation and expression of *authentic* identities lie at the heart of his study. In the context of French-Caribbean literature, how are authentic identities built and communicated? Herbeck examines multiple uses of the term "authentic" (pp. 5-6) and defines it as "that which is not copied or imitation" (p. 27). Additionally, in the vein of Crutzen and Schwägerl's concept of Anthropocene, or the Age of Man, Herbeck adopts the term Colonocene to denote "the irreversible consequences of the colonial era" (p. 8). His discourse on French-Caribbean identity formation clearly springs from a firm grounding in and strong understanding of postcolonial thought.

Chapter one is essentially an extension of the introduction in which Herbeck further elucidates and solidifies his argument for bringing together the architectural and the architextural. In a lively presentation of Haitian Gingerbread houses, he declares they are "an inherent feature of authentic Haitian architecture despite what is visibly a wide degree of varying physical characteristics between individual structures" (p. 41). Created by adapting local, French, and Victorian styles, their diversity does not preclude their Haitian authenticity. The chapter suggests that the diverse, yet authentic houses parallel the elusive authenticity of French-Caribbean identities. Following the discussion of Haitian architecture, Herbeck presents three very brief analyses of texts by Lahens, Evelyne Trouillot,

and Raphaël Confiant. The pages do demonstrate the rich potential of Harbeck's architectural-architextural pairing, but the commentaries are somewhat unsatisfying due to their brevity.

Chapters two through five comprise the in-depth literary analyses of identity and authenticity for which Harbeck lays the foundation in the introduction and first chapter. He illustrates the significance of a house in Glissant's *La Lézarde* as a structure that is "potentially elastic, capable of evolving over time" (p. 91), similar to human identities. He remarks the "inescapable influences of the Western/French presence in the Caribbean" (p. 155) in Maryse Condé's *La Traversée de la Mangrove*, yet also notes that it is a novel of passage, challenging "the very dimensions of these influences from a more liberated, yet not-as-readily defined *exterior* Creole space of construct" (p. 141). Harbeck also takes into account the interior of the house in Maximin's *L'Île et une nuit*, likening its "ever-evolving interior architecture" (p. 208) to a Caribbean literary identity in constant evolution. He treats several structures from the human landscape, incorporating works from two generations of French-Caribbean writers. Harbeck does not set out to create a comprehensive study of manmade structures in this literature. Rather, he engages in detailed, comparative discussions of the selected texts, which subsequently persuade his reader to contemplate the dynamic, critical potential of houses represented in Francophone literature of the Colonocene.

Deftly moving between consideration of physical and textual structures (intertext, peritext, hypertext, hypotext), Harbeck's monograph makes a compelling case for his architectural/architextural approach in the domain of French-Caribbean literary studies. The volume's most forward-looking contribution lies in chapter five's analysis of post-earthquake literature in Haiti. Distinguishing writing of reconstruction (creative, constructive) from writing of disaster (defeatist and debilitating) (p. 236), Harbeck expounds on both concepts through his discussion of Lahens's *Failles* and *Guillaume and Nathalie*. Furthermore, he highlights the swift and abundant literary production since the 2010 earthquake, suggesting that this in itself is a sign of reconstruction following devastation.

Through his cogent analysis of French-Caribbean texts, Harbeck expands scholars' ongoing discussions of literary landscapes. In his careful and sustained discussion of authentic literary identities, there may be too much emphasis on the notion of authenticity. Given that understanding of authenticity is subjective, ever changing, and perhaps doomed to failure, attention to that which is authentic seems to be less fruitful than examinations of architecture and architexture. Each chapter of *Architextual Authenticity* includes a number of key quotations in French, all of which develop and illustrate Harbeck's arguments. However, the nuanced and often complex quotations are not translated into English. This could prove to be troublesome for readers whose French is rusty or who are unable to understand complex, theoretical French. Finally, when parts of said quotations are italicized, Harbeck usually notes "emphasis added" or "emphasis original," a helpful way for the reader to distinguish between author and scholar. Yet on occasion, italicized quotations are not labeled accordingly (pp. 94, 180, 181, 183). This is a minor quibble, but one that could cloud understanding on the part of the reader.

The above notwithstanding, this is an excellent book whose impact promises to be far reaching. Although Harbeck's study focuses on the French Caribbean, his architectural/architextual methodology will be a natural fit for other areas of the Francophonie, such as Francophone Canada or New Caledonia. In addition, the architectural/architextual approach could be adapted to address questions raised in migrant literatures penned in various diasporas around the world.

## NOTES

[1] Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1983); Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Pluie et vent sur Téliumée Miracle* (Paris: Seuil, 1972); Maryse Condé, *Traversée de la Mangrove* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989).

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[2] See Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley, eds., *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005); Eric Prieto, "Landscaping Identity in Contemporary Caribbean Literature," in *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures* (New York: Lexington Books, 2003); Sarah Phillips Casteel, "New World Pastoral: The Caribbean Garden and Emplacement in Gisèle Pineau and Shani Mooto," *Interventions* 5.1(2003):12-28.

Allison Connolly  
Centre College  
[allison.connolly@centre.edu](mailto:allison.connolly@centre.edu)

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