



CHAPTER 3

Constructing the Self Between Worlds

Travelers, says François Hartog in his analysis of Herodotus, are “passers of differences” (1980, 249–259). Yet writing had to obey rules, and travelers wrote for an audience consisting of patrons on whom the publication depended. Not only did “difference” in whatever shape it took not have a given place in this context; travelers’ authorial room for maneuver was clearly limited and enmeshed in a web of discourses. Take the case of Du Tertre. He sometimes speaks in favor of the Crown. At other instances, he acts as spokesman for the inhabitants, settlers as well as Natives. Furthermore, like in most travelogues, the narrative is not based on the traveler’s own observations alone. It relies on what he himself observed and went through on the islands as well as on historical documentation along with accounts told by others through various different sources. The archipelagic grounding of travel writing thus clearly has its limits, dictated not only by political and economic aspirations but also by the circumstances of reception. Precisely because of this embeddedness, the traveler’s self emerges as a site where representational negotiations were played out.

This chapter investigates these limits of representation by examining how the travelers’ self functions as a mediator between worlds. The claim made in this chapter is that travel writing from early colonization is structured around an unstable, transitional self that mediates the representations of new island societies in the making. Speaking in the voice of people in France with interests in the islands, the traveler-writer performed

control and fueled the economic exploitation of the islands. At the same time, in order to construct knowledge, they played on proximity with the archipelagic society, putting other perspectives to use. The chapter argues that the self turns into a site where the effect of otherness can be detected; it becomes the narrative locus of unsettlement.

I consider the self in terms of a textual product, which has an operative function in the representation of the islands and is articulated between the world described (the islands) and the world addressed (France). The concept “the self” was a new invention in France in the seventeenth century, and even though the travelers themselves did not use the expression *le moi*, it is productive for me here because it enables a wider understanding of personhood, subjectivity, and consciousness in relation to the outside world (Carraud 2010, 169–173).¹ Even if travel writing did not present a theory of the self and was not an introspective discourse at the time, it was considered a vector for self-knowledge. Descartes’s *Discours de la méthode* begins as a travelogue, but the philosopher warns the reader not to venture too far and return once knowledge of the world had been achieved. The Cartesian model, which has dominated theories of the self from Immanuel Kant to Charles Taylor, might then hint at a connection between travelling and self-construction, but the articulation between the two is complicated and hardly evident. Put bluntly, Descartes’s conceptualization of the *ego* starts when travel ends. He turns his back on the world. Travelers do the opposite; they work with the world, but whether the world helps understanding the self or vice versa, if the self becomes a vector for understanding, the world depends on the traveler and on the context. This is what I will be discussing in the introduction to this chapter in order to place Caribbean early colonial narratives in a larger discourse of travel and the function of the self.

In *The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France* (1996), Tom Conley argues that the seventeenth century’s “invention of the self” stems from the emergence of cartographic writing in the wake of European discoveries during the Renaissance, which in turn is connected to an emergent sense of nationhood. Travelers to the Caribbean can be situated on the margins of the development charted by Conley. Rather than a clear sense of nationhood, the narratives reveal the anxiety of societal formations. The establishment was motivated by profit and power, but

¹In his discussion of the nominalization of “the self” in French [*le moi*], Vincent Carraud observes that the invention of this category proceeded through a paradox: Pascal both objectified the *ego* by turning it into a self, but in so doing he emptied it of all substance (2010, 40).

the interactions set in motion by the colonial imperative were inevitably susceptible to producing “heresy, immorality, and violence” (Garraway 2005, 25). Geographical and cultural distance challenged the ambitions of extending France in the islands, and the self reflects such anxieties. Moreover, none of the Caribbean travelers inhabit an authorial position. Even if there are moments of self-heroization, writing the Caribbean world does not correspond to the “self-birthing” that Conley detects in cartographic writing (10–11). Rather, the self is a shifting category with a range of rhetorical and epistemic functions. Some passages heroize the traveler; others show how they are seeking information that they might or might not get. In travelogues written in the first person singular, the traveler often appears as a marginal observer and not as the agent of historical events. Even within the same text, the traveler may take different positions and emerge through various modalities of writing. This suggests that rather than seeing the traveler’s self as a fixed narrative instance or as a coherent agent, we need to conceptualize it as a figure of transaction between different modes of knowledge and of writing.

Early colonial travel writing to the Caribbean is further problematic to frame within the genre, as it took shape during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It represents a particular form of voyage that, because of its entanglements with the early colonial project and because of the cultural and geographical distance to France, is forced to struggle with generic codes and conventions. Caribbean travels appear to have been at odds with existing models for travel, which made the structure and organization of travel writing confusing. Missionaries did not observe, collect, and then moved on; they were travelers who sojourned in one place rather than following an itinerary. As for buccaneers, their travels were erratic and circumstantial. These are locally and historically determined types of voyaging, which depart from the general conception of traveling as a method for thinking that developed during the late-seventeenth century. According to this model, which referred to much more travelled spaces and resonated with the humanist tradition, traveling gave a discursive frame for empirical knowledge in so far as the voyager’s itinerary and movement forward suited the *disposio* of classical rhetoric (Dorion 1995, 84–85). The itinerary was mirrored in form, and the narrator’s observations and experiences made it possible to construct the account as a plot and individualize the story (Dorion 1995, 73). Contrary to such structures, itineraries in the Caribbean context, if we can speak of any itinerary at all, were random and could hardly be mirrored in the structure of *disposio*. Even accounts structured linearly insert descriptive passages

pertaining to natural history writing and, generally, the texts appear as patchworks of generic influences.

It is equally difficult to find a space for them within later models of grand explorations to new lands (Stagl 1995, 82). While the European explorer situated himself in a solitary space, as the undiscovered lands and peoples were considered the antithesis of sociability (Lamb 2001), those travelling to the islands intervened in an already-discovered space and engaged in the formation of a new society. Yet, this society was not comparable to the French world of sociability where the texts were to be received. So in relating events, objects, and experiences and transforming them into objects of curiosity, the narratives forged a passageway in order to inscribe the sojourn into the social space in France. Travelers to the Caribbean were thus in between two major models for travelling. They were simultaneously solitary in a supposedly “savage” space and also social in the sense that they partook in the formation of early colonial society. This liminality affected the construction of the figure of the traveler, which brings me to a particular textual tension, namely that the question of the self cuts across several domains implied in travel writing, notably that of sociability and epistemology.

Friedrich Wolfzettel has demonstrated that the seventeenth century marked the birth of the modern traveler who systematically disenchanting faraway places, parting from earlier models of travelling, where observations were presented with the aim to seduce the audience by convincingly showing the marvels of the world (1996, 151). As the mode for construction of knowledge changed, so did the role of the traveler, both as a narrative subject and an epistemic object. We may call it the birth of a realist mode of telling that would from then on dominate travel writing and partly distinguish it from literary writing. Subjective experience and observation as means for establishing empirical knowledge was from then on part of the apodemic method of describing the world as an instrument of investigation and not itself as an object of inspection (Dorion 1995, 64). Yet, such a shift in the construction of knowledge did not directly lead to an emergence of the self. Quite the contrary, empirical observation still had to be backed up by bookish knowledge, based on Ancient Greek and Roman sources. The travelers’ experience could not alone constitute the foundation of knowledge (Licoppe 1996, 10–14). As argued by John Gascoigne (2013, 226), the period was actually marked by a decline in the reliance on the senses to gain knowledge of the world. Adding to these epistemic reasons for downplaying the self, travel writing was fraught with

a bad reputation. There is a French expression that the farther one goes the easier it is to lie. Indeed, in the seventeenth century there was a general idea that all travel narratives were mere fiction, precisely because first-person narration was not considered trustworthy (Stagl 1995). In other words, the “epistemic situation” in which travel writing was shaped was profoundly contradictory, and in this genre, perhaps more than in others, competing ideas concerning how knowledge was acquired, constructed, and presented evolve around the function of the self.

The uncertain role and status of the self created a discursive situation, where the traveler-narrators were obliged to show themselves as worthy narrators who could master their impulses and organize methodologically the amount of information and knowledge gathered; they were reasonable and capable of adapting to the demands of the public while remaining true to what they observed. There is a constant effort to show the reader what kind of travelers they were. In particular, missionaries sought to distance themselves from adventurers and colonizers. To them travel was not an adventure or an impartial observation of foreign peoples and land; it was seen as a test of endurance (Wolfzettel 1996, 168). This confirms Gascoigne’s point: the self was not considered a solid reference for the construction of knowledge. To hold that position it had to perform a narrative that could insert it in a social network. But it is precisely by cutting across empirical and bookish knowledge, sociability, and religion that the traveler’s self can function as a site for negotiations between epistemic models and different modes of relationality to the outside world.

Considering all these factors, we have to think of these texts as permeated with ambivalence; they are simultaneously authoritarian, distancing themselves from the world described while imposing an order of interpretation, but also self-reflective on a personal (the direct experience of traveling and the positioning of the travelers in their home context) and societal (reflection on how their own society is organized or, in the case of settlement, how to organize a new society) level. This put Caribbean travelers in a double-bind position that is constantly reflected in their writing. As foreign knowledge brought back home could be regarded as disconcerting, even dangerous, potentially leading to the destabilization of social order, the travelling self becomes the site of tensions, where the foreign world is tested. It is here in this kind of double orientation, outwards and inwards, that power is both constructed and threatened.

In order to pay attention to these ambiguities and tensions, my reading relies on research that argues for a reconsideration of the construction of

the self in the seventeenth century. Terrence Cave (1999, 112) claims that the *grand récit* of the modern self is that of the Cartesian ego, shadowing the diversity and complexity that characterized the discussion around the self during the seventeenth century. Christopher Braider (2018, 14, 42; 2012) also suggests that the centrality of Descartes's theorization of the cogito has been over-estimated. Indeed, Vincent Carraud's (2010) thorough examination of the birth of the idea of the self shows the complexity of this process. Notably the dualistic separation between body and mind was far from representative for the period. Instead the works of these scholars underscore in different ways more uncertain formulations of the relationships between man and the world, based on Montaigne's heritage. It is not my intention to situate each individual traveler's position in regard to the philosophical traditions in France—such mapping would risk obscuring the Caribbean dimension of their texts. My argument is that the travelogues work through experimental modes of subjectivity in order to account for an early colonial world of transition. The writers were not dislocated from this world but took direct part in the shaping of settlement and early colonial society; sameness and otherness were subjects for negotiation. It is here that the travelers' *I* is an important category to analyze to understand the effects of otherness on the narratives: the traveler-narrator turns into a figure of transactions between the old world and the new, in terms of both a narrative instance and a material body. The manifestations of the travelers' selves signal anxieties and tensions, and such troubled traces in the texts both sustain and sap the construction of a dominant discourse.

I will start by looking at the conditions that determined travel writing, including both the external circumstances for publication and the representational conventions. The objective is to investigate how the travelers manipulated the codes to forge ways to mediate the island world by working through perspective shifts in the narratives. Next, I will investigate examples where the self is objectified in order to configure knowledge, drawing on physical experience. The analysis of such an experimental self, as I call it, will be followed by an analysis of interactions with enslaved and Indigenous peoples. Looking at the figure of the commentary, I will investigate how travelers put the self in strategic use to negotiate enslavement, in terms of both a topic and a reality. Relationships to Indigenous peoples will be examined as an issue of cultural influence. This will ultimately lead me to a critical discussion of how the travelers take on the posture of an intermediary between worlds that are both under the influence of and distant from the tropics.

SELF AS MEDIATOR

Early modern published texts are embedded in paratexts (Maclean 1991; McCabe 2016; Smith and Wilson 2011), constituting what Dominique Maingueneau would call the conditions for the traveler-narrators' enunciation, conditions that run through the narratives (2004, 34). In particular, larger published travelogues organized in sections, more or less based on the model of Plinian natural and moral history, contain internal paratexts such as introductory passages to specific parts, giving them an architectural structure with various entrances (Kullberg 2020, 80–92; Ouellet 1990). The idea of paratexts traversing the narrative implies that they are integral to it; they are not artificial ornaments separate from the body of the texts. The relationship between the frames and the content should rather be considered in terms of interaction. In a way they concretize the gap between codes for representation and the represented world, and at the heart of that interaction, we find the traveler-narrator, moving between the rhetorical (textual) and the contextual conditions of the narrative. This setting frames travel not as an account of solitary adventure but as a space of sociability.

Yet that space of sociability was not uniform. This was indeed typical for travel writing at the time: travelers spoke for different interests and addressed various audiences. Travel writing is thus always to some extent based on a multiple-narrative voice. Moreover, it is not just composed of the travel-narrator's observations; the entire structure builds on other sources (letters, edicts, memoirs, and so on) and other discourses (cited passages from other voyagers, savants or from locals). This way, the traveler-narrator is as much a distributor of discourses as an observer of foreign places. But even if the genre of travel writing was malleable and allowed for experimentation, the dynamics between generic rules and the world described were complicated in the context of early colonialism. Combining erudite descriptions of nature with *galant* adventures, for instance, was not in itself problematic, but travel writing in France had been formed through encounters with other, less faraway places, with other political contexts than what was about to take shape in the Caribbean. The newly established colonies entailed an amalgamation of interests. Patronage could extend not only to financers of the book proper but also to investors in the trading companies and to religious orders, whose roles and interests were not yet clear. Concerning the multiplication of stylistic registers mirroring the implied audiences, the dominating register ties into

observation and description of the natural world and of society, but without following a fixed model for organizing the information. My point here is to suggest that travel writing in the Caribbean worked to carve out a conceptual but also an economic, a political, a religious, and an aesthetic space for the islands in France.

To understand what this entailed on a representational level, I will start by mapping the audiences and their functions. Patrons validated the content, both in terms of the quality of the writing and of its truthfulness and relevance, and promoted it to specific audiences (Regourd 2008). Missionary accounts, often placed among scholarly, religious, and courteous discourses, had to be scrutinized and confirmed by the head of the Orders of the Catholic Church that would validate the moral and political content as well as the utility for future missions. Yet, for the majority of published accounts from the Caribbean, including those written by missionaries, it seems more important to acknowledge worldly patrons over spiritual ones in the paratexts, suggesting that the political and economic tended to override the spiritual in the larger context. Jesuit missionary Bouton (1640) dedicated his text to the “messieurs de la Compagnie des Isles de l’Amérique,” indirectly evoking Nicolas Fouquet. Dominican Du Tertre depended on Achille de Harlay, father and son, who were important investors in the establishment of the islands and also held central positions in France’s political life and erudite circles. The publication of the last volume of his *Histoire générale des Antilles* in 1671 appeared under the patronage of Bignon, newly appointed as head of the Royal Library and close to Colbert, which could facilitate a favorable reception of Du Tertre’s book in scholarly circles and in the center of political power (Kullberg 2020, 47–49). According to the anonymous author of a short biography of Du Tertre (1844, 16), Colbert made additions to the final volume that came out in 1671. In other cases, the embedded structure of travel writing had several functions at once, as in mission accounts determined by both religious and political discourses.

Missionary texts constructed an evangelical rationale behind the settlement, which allowed for distinguishing French colonial claims as supposedly less driven by profit than the English and the Dutch, and tied them to the Counter-Reformation in Europe. The travelers would then use this narrative task to indirectly justify and promote their own work. As priest for the Order of Senglis, Biet, for instance, was sent as chaplain for the settlers and not as a missionary. His critique of the failures of evangelization should be read as a way to advocate for a new religious strategy in the

islands: that the role should be not to convert Caribs but to serve the monarchy by surveilling the colonies. Biet writes in the preface that he is not afraid to be taken for an imposter “because Monsieur Bigot godson of the late Monsieur de Roiville our General, a good and flawless man, can assure that he has helped me to write all the things that the Reader will see in all the rest of this voyage” (1664, NP).² Of course, Monsieur Bigot may not necessarily have intervened in the actual writing, even if the quote leads us to believe that that was in fact the case. His role as a “ghost writer” to use an anachronistic expression figuratively, is conceived of as being direct in so far as his presence solidifies the account and thus gives weight to Biet’s endorsement of a mission that would focus on keeping order in the new colonial society rather than converting Natives.

Clearly, the auctorial position is not only multiple; it is also malleable. The travelers inhabit what Jérôme Meizoz (2007) calls a literary “posture,” both within and outside the texts. Drawing on literary discourse analysis, Meizoz argues that such a posture is created at the crossroads between a text (through rhetorical modalities) and its institutional, aesthetic, and epistemic context (17). The point is obviously to say something about twentieth-century authors in regard to the late modern literary field, but the notion of posture is indeed relevant for early modern writers as well although the stakes were different. The way the travel-narrators positioned themselves could change from one edition to the next depending on the patron, even if it is the same trip that is being accounted for. Rochefort’s *Histoire naturelle des Isles de l’Amérique* was re-edited three times during the seventeenth century—1658, 1667, and 1681. This happened even if the status of the book in France was unsure, due to him being a Protestant and to the accusation made by Du Tertre that he had stolen Du Tertre’s manuscript (Roux 2011). But Rochefort apparently found a way to manage his marginal position, precisely by presenting himself differently in the prefaces and by activating useful patrons. When Rochefort republished the book in 1667, the same year as Du Tertre’s second edition came out, he included four letters from key actors in the establishment—two letters from Poincy the governor of Saint-Christophe who had passed away in 1661, one from de Val Croissant de la Palme en Amérique, and one from Édouard Graeves, governor of the French colony in Florida—to assure the reader of his eligibility as a *relateur*.

² Je ne crains point que l’on m’y puisse accuser de fausseté, puisque Monsieur Bigot filleul de feu Monsieur de Roiville nostre General, homme de bien & sans reproche, peut assurer qu’il m’a aidé à écrire toutes les choses que le Lecteur verra dans toute la suite de ce Voyage.

The preface quarrel between Du Tertre and Rochefort is important. It demonstrates how travel writing in the Caribbean worked to shape a discourse—a network of texts constructing a body of knowledge—through the positioning of the travelers in relation to one another, to their protectors, and to the circles where their texts would be received (Regourd 2008). Both were read by participants of one of Paris's most important scientific circles, the Montmor Academy, consisting of mathematicians, astronomers, and physicians (Brown 1934; Cunningham and Roger 1996; Regourd 2008; Stroup 1990). Du Tertre refers to his protector's cabinet of curiosity and library as sites of distribution for his book. Rochefort explicitly explains which sources he has used as a model for the form of his account. Illustrations also play a role here: Rochefort states that he has received charts and architectural drawings from Monsieur de Poincy. Du Tertre's engraver, Sébastien Le Clerc, is at the beginning of his career but was probably at the time of the publication of *Histoire Générale des Antilles* already associated with the newly established *Académie des Sciences et de l'Art* (Préaud 1983). Throughout the narratives, traveler-narrators will manifest themselves and refer to important figures within erudite circles, such as unspecified professors at the University of Paris or, more specifically, the King's gardener, and directly address the curious reader.

Taken together, the paratexts and the preface games are textual spaces for flattery that can be regarded as exercises in classical rhetoric, where the traveler situates himself in relation to other travelers and to the different societies and people on whom they depend. At the same time, they form a kind of epistemic pillar in that they validate the account, thus assuring the reader that the text that will follow is not pure fiction but a reliable source of knowledge. But there is more to it. The traveler-narrators appear as a multiple narrative voice, and this in turn makes for a play with perspectives and with various discourses on which the narratives build. All of this will affect the representations of the islands. I am suggesting that while travelers might have limited auctorial agency, they use their embedded position strategically in the narratives.

The first articulation of such strategy appears in the interaction between paratext and text and infuses the narratives with dialogism, staging a direct communication between text and context. It resurfaces throughout the narratives each time the traveler mentions circles or individuals in France. Du Tertre encounters ginger for the first time in Paris and recalls that moment when he tastes and describes it in the context of Guadeloupe. References to debates and mentions of specific readers inscribe that link to

Europe in the body of the texts. Knowledge is thereby constructed through a double spatiality, secured by the traveler-narrator. In Maurile de Saint-Michel's account, for instance, the manifestation of the self frames the image of the islands as a speech act that reverses the perspectives: France is "over there" even though it is made clear in the preface that the text was written a long time after Maurile de Saint-Michel had already returned to France. *Icy*—"here"—refers to the Caribbean as if the account was written *in situ* from a local point of view: "In France, our Frenchmen slept in good beds, & and here in beds hanging in the air that the Savages make themselves and name Hamats [sic]: I have shown one to our Fathers in Paris..." (1652, 30–36).³ Life in France is rendered in the past tense, whereas the Caribbean practices are in the present. The spatial adverb shifts the perspectives and displaces the narrator, making him a traveler within the text while at the same time clearly linking him to the archipelago.

Distance between the worlds is incrustated in the texture of the narrative by means of the dialogic structure. What differs between travelers is how this distance is worked through in the narratives. Maurile de Saint-Michel, in the example above, displays a dynamic between the two time-spaces, producing difference and tension. In other cases, the considerable cultural and geographical distance between France and the islands may cause disturbances. The traveler-narrator holds the position of mediating that distance, either using it as dynamic fuel or overcoming it. Borrowing from Philippe Lejeune's terminology for autobiographical writing, Ouellet (2010, 12, 20–21) theorizes the web of voices surrounding and determining travel writing in terms of "pacts" first between the traveler and his protector, then between the traveler and the world he describes, and finally between the traveler and the reader. What may be noted in early colonial Caribbean travelogues is that not only do these pacts overlap; they also include the reader and the Caribs as (fictive) travelers. This leads to the second strategic use of the paratexts in the representations of the islands: the traveler-narrators *activate* the worlds they describe so that mobility becomes part of a representational strategy that connects the "savage" space of the islands with that of sociability in France.

This strategy is particularly prominent in Dominican Chevillard's *Les Dessins de l'éminence de Richelieu* (1659), published under the protection

³ Dans la France nos François couchoient dans de bons lits, & icy dans des branles en l'air que les Sauvages font eux-mêmes & les nomment *Hamats*: l'en monsté un à Paris à nos Pères.

of M^{me} de Montmoron, a famous *préciseuse*, who assured that the book would be welcomed within the salon culture. The narrative is framed through a discourse of desire in a language embellished with precious style. Chevillard's narrative is presented as a travelling book that transports the people of the Caribbean to France. Like lovers, the Caribs supposedly adored the Catholic religion unconditionally and the patroness is placed as their guide in the mysterious land of Christianity. M^{me} de Montmoron is pictured as the guiding star for the book in France; it was she who made the passage to America possible: "You have already been a lighthouse for the book as it crossed the oceans" (1659, NP).⁴ This is part of the rhetorical frames of the preface game, where the narrator presents the foreign world as a gift to the patron.

The passage sketches out a triangular structure—the reader/patron, the narrator, and the foreign lands—within which the narrative voice negotiates. It draws up a closed system of circulation, projecting structures of power fundamental to European society that will be repeated throughout the centuries in different settings and violently enacted through the trans-Atlantic triangular trade (Miller 2008, 4–5). There is thus a political motivation undergirding the dialogic structure, paired with the ambition to move the reader. Here lies a representational challenge: travel writing should not only inform about foreign worlds; it should be able to transport the reader. The editor of the French translation of *Histoire des flibustiers aventuriers* writes in the preface that Exquemelin "expresses himself so vividly in regard to everything that appears so that those who do not feel like leaving their country think that they travel with him."⁵ The idea, then, is to bridge distance through means of movement: metaphorically to bring the reader along but also rhetorically to move them and thereby spur the imagination and seduce them. The dialogic stance set up by the embeddedness becomes a narrative tool to activate the imagination and better showcase the islands.

The most illustrative example can be found in the unpublished letters of Jesuit missionary Le Breton, who was stationed in Martinique and evangelized among the Natives on Saint Vincent in the 1680s. He directly addresses his reader:

⁴Vous lui avez déjà servi de phare pour repasser l'Océan.

⁵S'exprime si vivement sur tout ce qui se presente, que ceux qui n'ont poins envie de quitter leur país, croyent voyager avec luy.

if you board a boat to get closer, insensitively, progressively, [the island] will expose itself to your eyes. Oh! What a spectacle it offers in this moment, one can hardly believe it, and what beauties and what marvels, by successive paintings so to speak, it touches the mind! [...] I hear you: sickened after a painful crossing, you suggest that you would land over there. Right, I would like to very much; if you take away all the North region (and a bit of the East while you are at it), which ruffled by a long line of reefs, shivers in winds that blow in a sinister way, beaten by the random movements of a very agitated sea, in any bay of the south or in the west it is possible to set anchor securely, without any risk, because all of this coast line lacks sea beds and reefs. Without any delays then, let us land. (1982, 36)⁶

Le Breton constructs the reader as a traveler and a protagonist who has just seen land after a long, tiresome journey. The islands reveal themselves gradually as the reader approaches the coast in a pinnace along with the narrator. From the pinnace, the coast lines of Saint Vincent are unveiled until they finally reach a peaceful harbor. The mental state of the reader/traveler adds a layer to the description: the island is even more appealing through the eyes of an exhausted traveler who has finally found a haven, contrasting the hardship of the journey with the calmness and luxury of the islands. And whereas dangers are hinted at (reefs, strong winds, agitated sea), they are securely contained in the image thanks to the knowledgeable guidance of the traveler-narrator.

The passage is a striking example of a strategy of doubling the perspectives and working with contrasts. The temporal perspective is deferred: by using direct invocation, the temporal distance that separates travel from writing is transcended. Narrative enunciation and visibility coincide on the pages of the book, giving the impression that the traveler takes the reader by the hand and brings him along to the faraway places. The present is carved into the narrative as a temporary vanishing point where the reader

⁶ Si vous montez sur un bateau pour en approcher davantage, insensiblement, progressivement, [l'île] se découvrira d'elle-même à vos yeux. Oh ! quel spectacle elle offre à ce moment, on aurait peine à le croire, et quels agréments et quelles merveilles, pour ainsi dire par tableaux successifs, elle touche l'esprit ! [...] Je vous entends: éccœuré par une pénible traversée, vous vous proposez d'aborder là-bas. Soit je veux bien; si vous exceptez toute la région du Nord (et tant soit peu celle de l'Est) qui, hérissée d'une longue file d'écueils, frisonne aux vents soufflant de façon sinistre, battue aussi par les mouvements en tous sens d'une mer prodigeusement agitée, dans n'importe quelle baie du Sud ou de l'Ouest il est possible de jeter l'ancre avec assuranc, sans aucun risque, car toute cette côte est dépourvue de bas-fonds et d'écueils. Sans délai donc, abordons.

and the narrator can merge and (re)experience the travel: the narrative perspective is not that of an all-seeing but absent eye, but that of a present, seeing body. The traveler deploys what Maurice Merleau-Ponty would have called an embodied vision, which Christine Buci-Glucksmann holds as typical for the Baroque (2013, 39). In Le Breton's case, it is a rhetorical construct rather than a result of direct observation. But even as narrative perspective is here used to tease the imagination, the vision it engenders is, in the words of Buci-Glucksmann, "*an operation*, an act that generates a multiplicity of perspectives, the division of the visible, the invention of an aesthetic within a rhetoric that will stage it and control its effects in order to better convince and seduce" (2013, 5). Le Breton does not simply picture a reader; he invents the reader as an agent, asking what they see as they travel along. In so doing, he manipulates both the world of reception and the world described.

There is a profound ambivalence here. Focusing on seducing the audience, the embodied perspective evacuates lived experience on the islands. It is used to animate a coded imagery of paradisiac islands to promote the new establishments. Not only is distance erased, but the brutal aspects of settlement are wiped away. The mediation secures a fiction, a desire for control over the island world. Yet in staging reader and traveler together, the narratives leave traces of this fictionalization they construct, suggesting that there is no direct, transparent translation of the world of the islands to the world of Europe. The literary devices thus expose the need for a passage between worlds so that disturbances can be avoided. The narratives simultaneously mark and bridge these ruptures. This also says something about the epistemic basis of the texts. Knowledge of foreign worlds is constructed through a dialogic invocation of the senses, propelling imagination and creativity, which recalls Ofer Gal's and Raz Chen-Morris's qualification of the "baffling paradox" of Baroque science, where "objective knowledge relied on the mind's creative, *poetic*, engagement" (2013, 7). Through this lens, the inclusion of the reader operates as an epistemic passage: it enables engagement with the place through a fictive construction of travel. It is on this note that the interaction between the paratextual and the textual turns into a representational strategy. By enacting the relationship to the audience, the narratives actualize multiple perspectives. This is a way to redirect the narratives toward the Caribbean and simultaneously construct the traveler-narrators as mediators between the worlds. From this point, they can also distribute the narrative to other voices and discourses to further strengthen the sense of engagement.

What we may conclude from these analyses is that distant observation is not enough; the mediation between worlds requires narrative embodiment, whether to exoticize or to engage in the foreign world. That embodiment is created through structure and style in order for the narrator to fill the function of a guide who leads the readers, so that they observe and live the places described together. Or he posits himself as a reader, affected by the representation of the islands. Taken together, the rhetorical seduction, the passages provoking the senses, form a narrative that can contain the islands within recognizable frames while constantly bordering on the uncontainable otherness (storms, earthquakes, passing the ocean, “Savages”). And whereas this position may be carved out in highly coded narratives, it exposes an underlying tension, hinting that the prerequisite for the narrative is the experience of difference and distance.

EXPERIMENTAL SELF

When Du Tertre describes the *acoma*, one of the largest endemic trees of the Caribbean, he writes that the fruits are almost like olives but bigger, and the leaves are large and long like pine trees [*bois épineux*] but they are smooth and wide. He further includes a brief anecdote about a free Black man taking the sap from the *acoma* to cure Du Tertre of his toothache (1667 t2, 158). The tree is vision, touch, taste, and practice, constructed through knowledge from Europe, his own experience, and the exchange with others. In this setting, the traveler’s self assures the transmission of knowledge. But it does so by another kind of embodiment than what we saw in the first section of this chapter. Du Tertre uses his own body as a laboratory. It is through his touch, smell, and direct experience of the tree and its effects on the body that knowledge is constructed. There are several examples of this method to gain knowledge, where the body helps to textualize strange phenomena and plants. Travelers describe how they react after eating a certain plant to give examples to future voyagers. Maurile de Saint-Michel tellingly ends his narrative with very hands-on advice to the reader who wants to undertake the same journey. He warns them not to eat certain fruits, not to nap after dinner (to avoid fevers), and so on (1652, 287). I argue here that these examples constitute the self as a site for knowledge production where the effects of the other world can be detected.

This observation leads us from rhetoric embeddedness and embodied perspectives to an analysis of instances where the self is constituted in such a way that it can serve as a basis for epistemological claims. As a narrative

instance, the first person is a meta-narrative marker, which underscores the links to the audience. Expressions like “I forgot to inform you...” or “as I mentioned earlier” tie the narrative web together while enhancing the bond with the reader. The traveler also intervenes in the first person singular to justify certain narrative and stylistic choices and to announce what will be covered in the section in question. Moreover, the traveler-narrator appears in encyclopedic passages to ensure the link between description and empirical observation. These manifestations are often generic and expressed in phrases such as “I noted” or “I saw,” tying observation to narrative voice. The *I* serves as a veracity marker, sometimes accompanied with brief evocations of how a “curious” object was localized and collected as well as how others have described it.

As rightly observed by Ouellet (2010, 18), the emergence of the self, both as a meta-narrative marker and as a veracity marker, testifies to the difficulty of textualizing the foreign world. It cuts through the narrative, fragmentizing the story, and in this movement these interventions show that the travel-narrator cannot create a coherent and smooth narrative out of the heterogeneous elements in island society. Instead, knowledge is presented as it is acquired in the moment, as processual rather than established. Moreover, in many cases, the subjective markers only open the description; following “I have seen...” the traveler-narrator fades away. In other words, the visual presence of the narrator-traveler reveals little of how knowledge is constructed via the self. The texts clearly confirm Gascoigne’s (2013) claim that empirical observations of the natural world did not alone foreground the scientific revolution that would take place in the eighteenth century. Rather, the senses are used by the travelers to motivate the categorization of the world based on the Ancient Greek and Roman world view and contributed with enriching the numbers of details rather than forging a new episteme.

In the tensions that arise when empirical observations of the islands based on the senses are subsumed under existing models for writing and thinking, another aspect of the self becomes apparent. Not just the body but the self of the traveler becomes the site for experimentation. The self is, in other words, objectified. What we have is not solely an embodied vision but a construction of knowledge that is embodied and yet distanced from the narrative *I*. It is precisely in the position of an intermediary that the traveler expresses a desire for mastering this complex world. Yet in the same movement, the traveler becomes a site for experimenting with ideas of self as affected by otherness: an embodied mind that not only has seen but has experienced the islands he describes.

We can find evidence for such an experimental self, positioned at once as subject and object of the narration, in Labat's account from the end of the seventeenth century. As mentioned earlier, his *Nouveaux Voyages aux Isles de l'Amérique*, published for the first time in 1722 and re-edited six years later, is quite different from the others particularly in regard to the subjective stance: here we have a voyager who places himself in the center of the narration and who speaks assertively from his subjective position. After having included the usual praises for the protector, Labat proceeds in the preface to present his narrative as a journal whose form is not modelled on previous travelers nor the Ancients; it follows his own "natural inclination." To some degree he still works within the coded genre of the paratexts, but he uses them as a site to refute the Plinian structure of natural and moral history, calling it dogmatic and tedious. Aesthetics prevail as a rationale for the construction of the narrative: Labat advances that a "classic" natural history would not only bore and confuse the reader but also the writer: "I thus preferred to follow my journal and write things down as I saw, learned or practiced them [...]" (1722 t1, xxxv).⁷ What is interesting is that not even here, where the narrative is built around the perspective and voice of the voyager, does subjective vision assert knowledge. Quite to the contrary, Labat claims that many travelers have *seen* the islands, but only he has *known* them.

What does this mean, knowing the islands? On the one hand it is for Labat a question of presence and immersion in the life of the islands. Biet and Rochefort are both refuted on this basis: they never really lived or took part in island society. On the other hand, the object of the narration seems to matter. Labat applauds Du Tertre for having told the history of the islands but criticizes him for not focusing on nature. The argument hints at what will be constitutive for European thinking about nature: it is separate from history. However, Labat further notes that the nature worth describing consists of colonial implants, notably sugar production. In the context of the colonies, nature is paradoxically excluded from history and inscribed in cultivation. Labat basis his argument for writing on the islands on his own position in regard to the colonies. He *knows* the islands because he *practices* sugar production, he observes nature in time, and, most importantly, he experiences life on the islands.

⁷J'ai donc mieux aimé suivre mon Journal, & écrire les choses à mesure que je les ai vûës, apprises ou pratiquées.

Tellingly, Labat's book is ornamented by a frontispiece with a portrait of himself and not with an allegorical representation of early colonial encounters, as is the case with Du Tertre's and Rochefort's (Fig. 3.1).



Fig. 3.1 Labat *Nouveaux voyages aux Amériques* (1742). Frontispiece. Source: gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Public domain

The frontispiece from the 1742 edition shows an authoritative traveler, whose sharp gaze penetrates the environment as well as the inner thoughts of the people he encountered. Labat is not a missionary who speaks in the name of somebody else. This is indeed *his* story, and his links between the colony and France are symbolized by the schooner that can be spotted on the ocean in the background. Yet nobody can fail to see that Labat is carried by an anonymous enslaved man who looks straight at the beholder. The man holds Labat's portrait in his arms and uses his bended knee to support the weight. There is no ambiguity here as to what labor enabled his practice and motivated missionary activity on the islands. The presence of the enslaved man is a double signifier, for it hints both at the objective and at the material condition of Labat's mission—convert Africans who were sold and forced to work for them. The snake that is placed under the frame is interesting. Martinique was known as the snake island, so it could be a geographical indication. However, there is more to it. Snakes were the one thing Labat feared more than anything during his years on the island. The serpent's presence in the portrait could be read as a symbol of the missionary's triumph over deadly creatures and other threats in the Caribbean. Alternately, the frontispiece captures that which cracks his authoritarian control over the depiction of the islands. The fear of snakes is related to the vulnerability of the (white) body in the tropics. Thus, the snake points at the multiple facets of the self in a narrative constructed around the first person singular: Labat is both authoritarian and subjected to the environment, subject and object at the same time.

While most travel accounts from the islands contain numerous descriptions of people suffering from all sorts of ills, with long digressions concerning different kinds of remedies and medical plants and stones, no other traveler stages himself when sick to the extent that Labat does. *Maladie* is the word opening his book. A contagious disease had killed a large number of missionaries, and due to these fatalities the then-30-year-old Labat got the opportunity to be stationed as a missionary in Martinique. Even before embarking for the Caribbean he fell ill. While waiting for the ship in La Rochelle, he was struck by a fever so “furious that one thought I was heading for a journey where one doesn't need a ship” (1722 t1, 20–21).⁸ Thanks to his rhetorical skills and the ignorance of the other missionaries, who thought that the vivid red color of his cheeks was a sign of health rather than high temperature, he managed to persuade the captain

⁸ Si furieux qu'on crut que j'étois à la veille d'un voyage où je n'aurois besoin de vaisseau.

to let him board the ship despite his condition. The fever continued for several days and people assumed him dead. But Labat survived and remained healthy during the rest of his journey across the Atlantic. The initial scene detailing Labat's own disease and recovery (and even pseudo-resurrection) is repeated throughout the travelogue; several subsequent passages describe how the missionary falls ill and recovers. Medical discourse was still in the seventeenth century considered to be part of the description of nature and therefore a given theme in travel accounts. Such imbrication between medicine and natural description would suggest that, in describing their own illnesses, travelers indirectly placed themselves within the foreign natural world (Wisecup 2013). There is thus no fixed distinction between nature and culture; it is a fluid zone where the self seems to be the instance separating or merging the two.

Labat's first auto-description of illness serves to give him a space and a role within the early colony. He fell severely ill during his first year in Martinique: one Thursday after mass, he writes, "I suddenly was attacked by a headache as strong as if I had received a blow from a hammer" (1722 t1, 435).⁹ The headache was followed by back pain, and he had to be carried to bed, where he developed a high fever. The symptoms were immediately recognized as yellow fever,¹⁰ and Labat received treatment: blood was drained from his feet in order to prevent the disease from reaching his brain. Labat relates how he vomited blood, was covered with black spots and fell into a deep sleep, during which he sweated "the rest of the venom." Even if the sickness has a clear place in the passage, the description is first and foremost an account of the care he received from fellow missionaries and other friends, all of them named in the passage. This is not a heroic recovery: he survives thanks to a community of people who know the Antillean environment, the inconveniences, and the remedies. When Labat ultimately arises from his sick bed, he has been transformed: he has "changed skin." The idea to slough off his skin not only associates Labat himself with the snakes he loathes; sickness becomes a trope for a kind of acclimation process: by surviving the fever Labat has proven himself worthy of belonging to a Caribbean community. He was not born on the

⁹Je me sentis tout d'un coup attaqué d'un violent mal de tête comme si j'eusse reçu un coup de marteau.

¹⁰For a study of the historical agency of sickness, notably tropical disease in the context of colonization, see J.R McNeill's *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (2010).

islands but through malady he stages a re-birth and Labat posits himself as “creole.”¹¹ As Adlai Murdoch points out there is an ambiguity in the French understanding of the word creole since it referred to both whites and blacks born in the colonies (2016, 103). Labat is neither of those but strangely, as we shall see later on, he appears, with Kamau Brathwaite’s terms, as “a committed settler” (quoted in Murdoch 2016, 103) who feels an alliance with the island, an alliance which gives him insight into Caribbean life and provides him with knowledge inaccessible to outsiders. According to the theories of the time, Creoles were immune to yellow fever, so surviving this dangerous illness was the ultimate proof that he had become an inhabitant of the islands. He himself thus partly asserts those theories of acclimation in which he was interested (Garraway 2005, 134). Being in the Caribbean transforms his tastes, habits, and physical constitution, enhanced by his love of food—he digests the Caribbean, so to speak, without succumbing to the illness in the process. It is as if he desires to become other but only in so far as he can control the process.

In other words, the description of sickness unfolds into a narrative of how Labat finds his place and integrates into Martinique’s early colonial society. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the story of his slow but steady convalescence is intertwined with descriptions of the landscape and, more particularly, of his own plantation, Fonds Saint-Jacques. During his convalescence, Labat cares for his garden, so not only does he himself recover; he reanimates his plantation. But he does not stop there: by telling about how he gives an orange tree from his garden to one of his beneficiaries in Paris and has it sent across the Atlantic, Labat manages to weave an intricate pattern between the islands and the imperial center. Via his own recovering body, he thus turns sickness into a narrative motor in the story of how his self painfully but successfully becomes an intermediary between France and the islands. The sick body functions as a modality, linking the voyager to the outside world, giving malady purpose and meaning. Interestingly, the subsequent chapter also deals with illness but addresses the illness of the enslaved Africans and Creole young women. In contrast with Labat’s physical endeavor, Black people and women are linked to inner suffering (melancholia and mental illness). As opposed to Labat’s own “real” illness, their maladies are classified as silly superstition,

¹¹ The word *créole* is used in French for the first time in 1670 and is rarely used in the texts studied here. I will come back to the linguistic and identitarian implications of the term in the next chapter.

and the physical pain and even deaths due to these “fantasies” are described as self-imposed by eating dirt. There is a particular topology of illness that is worth studying, and a lot could be said about the links between the body of the self and the body of the other in this context (see Williard 2021b, 89–90). Here I am interested in Labat’s framing of women’s and enslaved peoples’ diseases in relation to his own endurance. By describing their illnesses as imaginary and due to anti-social behavior and placing this description next to the chapter dealing with his own recovery from yellow fever, Labat succeeds in using sickness to narrate how he himself merges with the colonial landscape and community while, at the same time, emphasizing his *difference* in regard to women and enslaved peoples. While his difference is beneficial to colonial society, theirs is socially disruptive. Indirectly then, by centering on himself and his ability to overcome a disease, he actually frames the malady that women and enslaved peoples inflict upon themselves as an expression of refusal. For sure, he condemns it as illusionary and a result of impaired minds, nevertheless the evocation of the practice of eating dirt, along with the fact that this practice will be a repeated trope, introduces an embodied presence of the enslaved in the text, hinting not only at a conscious strategy to end one’s gruesome condition, but also at a different world view, based on alternative knowledges and experiences that do not enter into Labat’s writing.

Disruptions thus haunt even the most self-assuring narrative sequences. Labat’s own body will eventually turn into an experiment so that his control is again challenged. The second time Labat was afflicted by yellow fever, sickness takes on a different role. In these descriptions body and mind are objectified in order to construct medical knowledge. When Labat got ready to return from a brief sojourn in the city of Saint-Pierre in 1697, he felt “attacked by a violent pain in the head and in the kidneys, accompanied by heavy fever, sure signs of yellow fever” (1722 t4, 2).¹² Like the first time, yellow fever *attacks* the missionary, only this time he knows what will follow. Using the reflexive *je me sentis attaqué*, Labat inserts a split between the writing subject and the body experiencing the violent pain caused by the disease. The same sentence structure reappears later on when he details his physical reactions: “I was taken by a cough, or rather by a very strong vomit of blood that made me fall

¹²Je me sentis attaqué d’une violente douleur de tête & de reins, accompagnée d’une grosse fièvre.

into convulsions” (2).¹³ Instead of portraying himself in the act of vomiting, Labat makes the physical reaction the very agent of the sentence. The vomit takes over the writing subject. The narrative choice of writing the symptoms as agents underscores how the disease takes control. So if the “classic” travelogue is structured around the connection between the observing eye and the writing *I*, the one developed by Labat in this passage depends on the narrative split between the sick body and the writing subject, where the experience of the disease connects the one to the other. The visual autopsy of the outside world is now replaced by an autopsy of sensation and physical experience. Labat is “surprised by lethargy,” again suggesting that he is reduced to a mere object ruled by the disease. A similar structure reappears in the passage describing an unidentified disease from which Labat suffered a year later.

This illness is given an entire chapter, starting with a simple observation that on the third of November, “I was attacked by a long and dangerous disease,” and ending on a scientific note with a description of the *ipecacuanha*.¹⁴ Fever is personified, and caught in a state of somnia the missionary loses his agency. The descriptions of illness are thus governed by observation and deduction, but the constitution of knowledge is no longer based on the visual, as in the first descriptions of illness. Now it stems from the realm of physical and sensuous experience: Labat does not see the signs as much as he *feels* them. In all of the depictions of illness the narrative “suspense” lies in the details of the unfolding disease since we already know the outcome. Labat will survive, but the description is so vivid that the reader is drawn in by the disease and momentarily forgets that it will pass. However, the motive is not to move the reader sentimentally. Rather, the sensational aspects seem to serve as support for empirical knowledge: they are part of the disease; they speak about the disease and help to identify and define it. Once he has recovered, he can rationalize and turn the sensations into knowledgeable discourse. Thus, in the travelogue, Labat’s self is conscious and physical at the same time due to the split, created in the narrative, between the narrated and the narrating subject.

¹³ Il me prit un crachement, ou plutôt un vomissement de sang très fort qui me faisait tomber dans des convulsions [...] j’étais obligé de jeter des grumeaux d’un sang épais et recuit.

¹⁴ Samir Boumediene offers an analysis of fever and of the use of *ipecacuanha* (2016, 210).

This way illness turns into a struggle for knowledge, placing the disease and the body at the center, in contrast to the first case of yellow fever when he was dependent on the people around him: malady is not a fixed trope but evolves along with Labat's sojourn. Having spent three years in Martinique, with knowledge of the environment and the climate, he portrays himself as capable of acting as his own doctor and master of his own body, and he questions the expertise of his fellow missionaries, surgeons, and doctors.¹⁵ For example, he refuses to take the *ipecacuanha* even though this particular plant had a very good reputation at the time and was ordered by a royal doctor who had just arrived in Martinique from France. Instead, Labat preferred to rely on the vernacular knowledge he had acquired during the years on the islands.¹⁶ This adds a dimension to the botanical descriptions that are linked with disease: by virtue of his own illness, Labat not only objectively depicts the plant; he also narrates the prescription, how the medicine is taken, and what effect it has on the body and mind. He initiates the description using the impersonal pronoun "one" and the present tense in the opening sentence, then subtly glides into the subjective mode, announced by transitioning from the present to the past tense. The focal subject comes back after a long digression, depicting the characteristics of the plant to describe its internal effects. The experimental self supplements the distant neutral observation. Being both the descriptor and the object for description puts Labat in a unique position for diagnosing and understanding illness. There are several passages underscoring his ability for self-diagnosis: "I myself discovered two days after that I had lost an increasing amount of blood, which augmented my appetite" (1722 t4, 3).¹⁷ Again Labat uses a reflexive syntax to enhance the privileged position of being at once part of the disease and able to describe it from a distance. The medical experts only have access to visible signs, whereas Labat follows the internal, sensuous manifestations of the disease.

Yet, deducting knowledge from sensuous experience implies several difficulties on a narrative level. As the disease progresses he loses

¹⁵Doctors were common in the Antilles until the eighteenth century with the growth of sugar economy. See Pierre Pluchon *Histoire des médecins et des pharmaciens de marine et des colonies* (1985, 90–93, 98).

¹⁶There are many examples of him testing Amerindian or African cures or cures he himself made using local products, such as using grease from turtles to relieve chest pain (1722 t4, 232).

¹⁷Je m'aperçus deux jours après que je rendais du sang dont la quantité s'augmentait de jour en jour, faisait croître mon apétit.

consciousness, from which he ultimately “returns as from a profound sleep” (1722 t4, 2). Here Labat is entirely at the mercy of the disease’s ravages: he falls into spasms, losing all track of time and space, and soon after, he falls deep into sleep, not noticing how he sweats abundantly or how his staff moves him from one bed to another, changing sheets and washing his feverish body. The description is thus structured around a narrative eclipse. The narrative subject is entirely absent in this passage; only the experiencing body remains. Labat then returns as a narrative voice and point of view. After having quickly observed that the room is not furnished the same way it was before he passed out, he can deduce what happened. The entire eclipse puts into focus the very physical and asubjective experience of illness. In this moment, Labat, who usually separates object and phenomenon in order to think and describe clearly and distinctly, constructs knowledge from a more dynamic form of experience, intimately tied to an uncontrollable body. Here, we are beyond empiricism as observation and move toward a Baroque form of experience (Cascardi 2018, 459).

In Labat’s account, the momentary absence of the reasoning mind does not exclude the production of knowledge. On the contrary, valuing physical experience allows him to constitute a new kind of thinking based on a process of decentering the self in order to better understand the illness as an object of knowledge. Being an object of both scientific and anthropological knowledge, the body is integrated into the depiction of alterity and becomes a constitutive part in the process of understanding. Labat’s experience of malady is then the site for a radical form of empiricism that has not yet been translated into the discourse of philosophy but remains explored only within the limits of his chronological travelogue. By turning his own body into a stage where the drama of transatlantic contacts unfolds, Labat is stressing the importance of sensuous experience for thinking about the self in relation to the world. This recalls what Cascardi describes as the “dynamic ontology of the baroque” that seeks to avoid “schematizing our relationship to the world as one between a ‘knowing’ subject (a subject of consciousness) and an object-world to be known” (2018, 458–459). The self emerges in the tension between physical experience, unconsciousness, and conscious analysis of the episode.

On the one hand, Labat’s experimental self translates into a discourse of knowledge and power: he investigates himself in order to assert an authoritative voice. On the other hand, what the narrative analysis has shown is that the fabrication of such authority depends on a momentary

loss of control and a moment of fusion, an openness to the foreign world. This contradictory articulation echoes Christopher Braider's observation about the notion of the self in the seventeenth century: "[...] person itself is experiment: we are what we learn, and then become, as an expression of our interventions in the empirical order of things" (2018, 78). The idea of a separation between self and the world, which is at the basis of modern concepts of subjectivity, is indeed a construction "to interpret a relation in which no such thing is possible" (2018, 78). This is profoundly troubling. Illness is perhaps the most concrete example of how alterity not only enters into the body of the traveler but shapes the self. The martial vocabulary describing sickness (*je me sentis attaqué*) in Labat's text suggests that malady is localized outside: it is the *exo* intruding on body and mind. Here the islands are depicted as foreign and contagious, passing through different channels: climate, nature, and nutrition. The moment when the individual traveler overcomes these threats provides a story of the French community progressively overcoming the dangers of the tropics.

In a way, Labat affirms both the idea that mobility can cause damage to the individual as well as the collective body and the conviction that such damage can be regularized. The traveler's self thus needs to be multiplied and transformative in order to assert that control of the potential threat of foreignness. Labat's experiences of malady and his transformation of this experience into a discourse of knowledge only works because the apparently coherent subject is slippery: it is objectified and becomes a site for experimentation. Perhaps it is not by mere coincidence that Labat's "experimental autopsy" developed in this particular context when the islands transitioned from early to high colonialism. In the confined space of Martinique already mapped out, there is no absolute alterity, so he pushes his chronological travelogue to its extreme, where he himself, by exposing his sick body, ultimately turns into an object for exploration. A traveler engaged in the place for sojourn such as a missionary to colonies is indeed a particularly interesting case for thinking about the self in relation to the world since the goal was also to think through not just the individual traveler's experience but the social body's experience, asking the question of how it would be possible to form and sustain a French society in the Caribbean.

COMMENTING ON SLAVERY

Writing about Caribs and enslaved peoples brought forward that upon which settlement was built and which was held as fundamentally distinctive from France itself: the expulsion of indigenous peoples and the enslavement of Africans. This implied having to confront, whether directly or through strategies of avoidance, violent dimensions of the early colonization that would jeopardize the construction of the fiction of French involvement in the Caribbean. In the next two sections, I investigate how the traveler-narrator negotiates enslavement and missionary work, arguing that these topics constitute particularly complex sites where influence is played out, both in terms of French influence on the island world and its peoples and the impact of these people on the travelers. Indigenous peoples and enslaved peoples were not presented as autonomous categories in the narratives but are presented in relation to contexts of reception, history, and the development of early colonial society. My point of departure is that otherness is not an absolute category in the travel narratives; rather it is represented as relational, deeply enmeshed in historical and textual contexts: Caribs and diasporic Africans provoke different anxieties in the travelogues. Their othernesses imply different relationships to space, time, and place and function within the burgeoning colonial society.

Texts written before the Franco-British treaty with the Caribs in 1660, like Du Tertre's and Rochefort's, are directly concerned with territorial rights and engage with Caribs as agents in the course of historical events. In this context, it is not surprising to see that Caribs tended to occupy a larger space in the narratives than enslaved people. After 1660, territorial disputes with Natives were no longer an urgent question, and interrelations between them and the French were no longer a part of the societal fabric on the islands to the same extent. But the decreasing Carib impact on the islands occurred in parallel with the increasing presence of the "Savage" as a cultural trope in France. Books such as Du Tertre's contributed to turning the Native Caribbean into an important *objet de curiosité*, leaving the realm of knowledge to enter into the sphere of philosophy, literature, and the arts, grounding the strong French discourse of the "noble savage" that would flourish during the eighteenth century (Chinard 1911, 1913; Atkinson 1924). Travelers knew they would please the audience when writing about Caribs. They also knew that writing about enslaved persons would not attract as much attention as Caribs, and this was not just because they would remind the reader that France did allow enslavement on their territories.

Diasporic Africans did not have a coded frame of representation. They belonged to the lowest cast in Caribbean colonial and settler society and lived in a place to which they did not belong. So while there was a representational scene for describing the “natural inhabitants of the islands,” writing about diasporic Africans implied integrating them into colonial society. What I suggest here is that facing the Caribs, who are native to the region that the French are in the process of territorializing, travelers express an anxiety of influence. Existing as a topos, the Caribs can be integrated into writing, but this process also reveals and puts into text the fear of becoming other, of assimilating with the archipelagic tropics. Enslavement implied other anxieties pertaining to the construction of colonial society and an emergent discourse on racial differences. I will start by looking at how the traveler-narrators express an anxiety about representing and being part of a society built on enslavement and then examine the anxiety of influence in the last section of this chapter.

A comparison between Du Tertre’s two editions demonstrates how the representation of enslavement evolves with the context. In the 1654 edition, he voices critiques against slavery, citing both Ancient sources (Plato) and religious arguments. Slavery is not a defensible institution, neither from the point of view of political philosophy nor from the point of view of the church. Nevertheless, he concludes, it is impossible to force the settlers to abolish the “shameful trade” (1654, 474). The vocabulary is telling: he condemns the practice while seeing it as a part of the emerging colonial capitalist system. Slavery is a trade and not yet a societal structure. At the publication of the 1667 edition, the number of slaves had increased significantly, and plantations prospered. The Dominican mission had also begun to shift its focus from converting Natives to converting enslaved persons. In this context, Du Tertre states that he will only approach the subject as a “historian” and not express any opinion regarding the jurisprudence of the practice. Most notably, the comment suggests that he will no longer speak as a religious person or even in his own voice. In other words, Du Tertre takes on a role in order to write about a topic toward which he is clearly hesitant on a personal, religious, and philosophical level, but which he considers a political and societal necessity. The stand is profoundly contradictory, as he is prompt to comment on both the practice and the people involved in it at the same time as he seems to eschew it, as if he wanted to give the impression that they did not really constitute an important part of early colonial society. Thus, between the lines emerges a profoundly troubling aspect of (early) global modernity that anticipates the violence it has set in motion but denies it in the name of progress.

There was indeed an unwillingness to engage directly with the subject of enslavement; the topic was fraught with “fundamental absences” (Harrigan 2018, 2) and “representational displacements” (Dobie 2010, 5). This calls for an investigation of how enslavement, filtered through the travelers’ self, becomes a textual site where both power over and exploration of the new society are displayed in terms of what has been identified as ambivalence (Miller 2008; Dobie 2010; Harrigan 2018; Williard 2021a). All travelers defend slavery in one way or another. Most missionaries had slaves in their parishes, and as representatives for the interest of the French habitants working for the maintenance of the settlements, they are trapped between a moral abstract reasoning and direct involvement in the island societies.¹⁸ Even Labat, who bought and owned enslaved persons and did not refrain from detailing severe torture that he sometimes carried out himself, raised the issue of the profound immorality of keeping converted souls in slavery (Harrigan 2018, 145). The role of religion, not institution of slavery itself, is the issue of Labat’s concern. Nevertheless, his comment tells that there was indeed a fundamental ambivalence undergirding the theme. I read that ambivalence not as a sign of silencing slavery but as an expression of an ongoing conceptualization of the societies in formation that disturbed the traveler’s ability to perform as a mediator between worlds.

I propose approaching the topic at the intersection between abstraction, direct experience, and context by looking at an important feature in travel writing (Ouellet 2010, 4), namely the commentary. Furetière’s dictionary (1690) defines *commentaire* as an “interpretation” and “addition” to the core text, in travel writing often in the form of *exemplum*, a brief anecdote exemplifying the statement made. *Le commentaire* was considered necessary when a text was too difficult or when a particular subject was too obscure, which explains their given place in travel writing to far-away locales: strange phenomena required clarification. The commentary thus constitutes an important modality, where writing is weaved into context and ultimately where the self of the traveler emerges in order to navigate between existing discourses and personal experience. Whereas most commentaries simply serve as explanations to descriptions or narrations of historical events, comments pertaining to the inclusion of enslavement

¹⁸The link between slavery and burgeoning global capitalism has been studied extensively; notably, see Caroline Oudin-Bastide’s *Travail, capitalism et société esclavagiste: Guadeloupe, Martinique (XVIIe-XIXe siècle)* (2005).

and diasporic Africans are more complex; they are deeply enmeshed in ongoing debates, and competing views exist within the same narrative.

In fact, enslavement seems to warrant more comments than other themes, illustrating that this was a subject with multilayered conceptual frames that could not always be adjusted to what the travelers lived and observed on the islands. Travelers did not yet have a fixed idea of what that early colonial society was; quite on the contrary their travel narratives contribute to exploring this society in the making. Part of that complexity is the fact that slavery distorted the mirror between the islands and France, mediated by the travelers' self. Sue Peabody has convincingly demonstrated in her research that France in particular lauded itself for being the nation of liberty, abhorring slavery (1996). There was also a critical debate in France against slavery that began in the sixteenth century (Harrigan 2018, 55; Rushforth 2014, 88–95). Yet, as we know far too well, neither the debate nor the concern with national self-image hindered the French from engaging in transatlantic slavery, and while the topic was perhaps more problematic here than in other European nations, only Rochefort, the Protestant whose books on the islands were published in Rotterdam, stresses that the practice deviates from French and European laws (with the exception of Spain and Portugal, he points out) and that there is “no slavery in France” (1667, 132). The quick reference to Rochefort's discussion shows that slavery is conceptualized as a global contemporary practice but that France cannot inscribe its own practice of slavery into that model.

The idea of slavery as a global phenomenon had been circulating in France since the sixteenth century, and it was understood in a web of religious discourse, ancient philosophical and juridical sources, contemporary debates around natural law, historical and contextual circumstances (Harrigan 2018, 52–64). Since engagement in the burgeoning colonies was motivated by self-interest and profit and the patrons had in most cases invested in the companies or in the missions, there was little discursive space for the travelers to strongly object to either enslavement or the expulsion of peoples. Criticism or doubt had to be voiced indirectly, embedded in personal anecdotes and opinions, backed up by other sources and authors. So rather than tracing a coherent conceptualization of enslavement that could be inferred in a specific voice, the self operates as a relay in a multifaceted web, seemingly functioning as a guarantee that competing perspectives remain, thus hindering the construction of a coherent conceptualization of slavery. It is not that they worked against it.

Quite to the contrary, they set up the threads for modern expressions of racism and for discourses surrounding slavery as a practice.

The travelers used commentary to construct slavery through a prism of comparisons with ancient and contemporary forms of slavery in the Old World as well as in the New. The comparisons allowed precisely for that which Dobie calls representational displacements, enabling the travelers to engage in the controversies around the topic in France. Travelers comment on Indigenous forms of slavery, mostly bondage of war captives, but they also note that Natives bought and kept diasporic Africans enslaved.¹⁹ They further relativized their own practice as enslavers with descriptions of forms of enslavement existing in Africa, as if the European trade simply tapped into already existing societal orders. Pelleprat comments extensively on Africans' habit of selling their wives or children (without specifying the source), whereas nothing is said about the French part of the transaction. Moreover, the material conditions of African societies were juxtaposed to those of the islands. Harsh living conditions forcing parents to sell their children and brutal forms of government allowing sovereigns the right to sell their subjects were presented as reasons why diasporic Africans were better off in the Caribbean, where they were fed.²⁰

Another type of comparison is the focus on other European nations' involvement in slavery and the slave trade. Biet, for instance, does not say much about enslavement in the French context but describes in detail British slavery on Barbados, pointing out that this nation treats their slaves worse than everybody else. Here the self emerges in a scene of torture that Biet witnessed: a "poor woman" around thirty-five years old treats the wounds she had received from being burned; Biet is "horrified" (1664, 291). He continues to detail punishments so horrendous he had to intervene himself to stop the course of action (291). The enslaved man who was about to be tortured supposedly threw himself at Biet's feet to thank him. The scene constructs the self as compassionate and humane, which is

¹⁹ Ashley Williard examines the enslavement of indigenous women as a foundational gendered trope in seventeenth-century texts on the Caribbean (2021a, 31). For the relationship between colonial and indigenous slavery, see Brett Rushforth's *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France* (2014).

²⁰ This argument will be rebranded by Germain Fromageau in 1690s (Harrigan 2018, 59). He ruled in 1698 that an enslaver had to guarantee that slaves had been acquired by legitimate means (Davis 1966, 197). Implied here is the role of the mission in general, since the religious orders active in the French islands had abandoned the goal of converting Natives by the middle of the century.

precisely the views that Biet will voice in defense of a French “civilized” form of slavery that would also, contrary to the British who did not convert enslaved peoples since English law forbade enslavement of Christians,²¹ take care of their souls (292). These “sorts of people,” he states, referring to Africans, had to be treated with “rigor” but there is a limit to the cruelty, for Jesus suffered for them too (291). The politics of the conversion of slaves turned into an operative difference in order to defend French slavery in light of other, supposedly crueler contemporary forms of enslavement, a trope that will persist and evolve during the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries. It still echoes in discourses on race in France up to this day.

The crux is that the comparison intended to promote the French system of inclusion of enslaved persons through evangelization lay bare the most problematic dimension of enslavement, especially from a missionary point of view. The narratives are haunted by the question of whether it is right to keep fellow Christians in slavery (Harrigan 2018, 56). The repeated argument is that enslavement rescued diasporic Africans since it provided them with the opportunity to be converted into Christianity (Miller 2008, 18–19). But this argument inevitably led to the question of whether converted slaves should be freed. This was the opinion of the Capuchin order; they argued that an enslaved person who had been baptized had to be considered a free person. According to them such a system would be beneficial for the entire colony since it would prevent revolts, suicides, and abortions. It would also bring more souls to the church, but the basis of the idea is that transatlantic slavery would engender new free Christians who would make up a society based on cooperation. The Capuchins’ desire to implement such radical missionary politics was met with skepticism, but it was not entirely refuted.

Some resolved the issue by claiming that baptized individuals would indeed be free but not in this world. Conversion had liberated them from enslavement under Satan, but they would remain slaves in flesh until the

²¹ On this point, see Richard Ligon’s *Histoire de l’Isle des Barbades* (1657, 84–85). Ligon tells about Samo who wants to know how a compass works. According to the narrative, Samo finds it difficult to understand and after some reflection he expresses the desire to be converted to Christianity, hoping it would provide him with the key to knowledge. Ligon accounts the episode to Samo’s enslaver, who explains that this is impossible due to the English law. The narrative ends with Ligon criticizing the basis for British conversion policies since enslaving a Christian is not the same thing as converting an enslaved person, echoing the French discourse around the issue.

afterlife. Others, like Du Tertre, were caught between the two models. Throughout Du Tertre's comments, one can trace the presence of Aristotle's ideas of natural slavery as a means to forge a new form of slavery. He could thereby separate French slavery from the enslavement of prisoners of war, practiced by Native Caribbeans as well as Africans, according to the travelers' sources, which for Aristotle was monstrous because it forced individuals into servitude. Natural slavery, on the other hand, existed in the interest of community, was based on mutual relationships, and would ideally develop into friendship (Harrigan 2018, 54). However, since Aristotle's philosophy of natural slavery was used by the Spanish to justify the slavery of Indigenous peoples in the sixteenth century, few travelers cited this source.²² The Spanish arguments were generally refuted in France at the time (Rushforth 2014), and in the context of the early French colonization it was crucial to avoid being associated with Spanish history in the Americas (Harrigan 2018, 55).²³

But there was another problem with the Aristotelian model: it did not fully adhere to transatlantic slavery in so far as diasporic Africans were indeed forced into slavery, following what Aristotle saw as the monstrous practice of enslaving prisoners of war. It is clear that travelers single out transatlantic slavery as being particularly cruel and dehumanizing: slaves were treated like "beasts" (Rochefort 1667, 135); while horses were used in France, settlers used humans for the same kind of work (Pelleprat 1658, 50; Du Tertre 1667 t2, 475). Du Tertre includes an entire section on the ways in which enslaved individuals were punished but comments that he cannot possibly give an exhaustive picture since there were no codes regulating punishments. The lack of form seems to help him broach the subject, for it prevents him from being exhaustive. He can thus evoke the issue, which is in and of itself an expression of the condemnation of slavery, while avoiding the most gory details so he would not compromise those with interests in the slave trade or the sugar production. Travelers

²² Maurile de St. Michel uses this binary model to justify transatlantic slavery. He distinguishes between forms of slavery and elaborates on a scale among these forms. There are barbaric forms of enslavement that are contrary to Christianity and civil society, he claims. In so doing, he concurs with anti-slavery arguments circulating in France at the time while at the same time proposing that transatlantic slavery is of a different kind and has its commercial *and* moral (or religious) *raison d'être*.

²³ Clearly, the slave trade and the enslavement of diasporic Africans are thought about together with the history of the *conquista*. When the French repeat Spanish practices, the narratives of these exploits have to present French conduct as different from the Spanish.

also considered transatlantic slavery as being historically produced. Du Tertre in particular is sensitive to the residues of colonial capitalism, which he regards as the foundation of the colonies. At the same time, he argues that the thirst for profit is causing the brutal exploitation of enslaved persons, which he holds as unique to transatlantic slavery. Since the French only went to the islands for the sake of profit, they would inevitably push their slaves to death (1667 t2, 523) and show no compassion, even when individuals were sick (1654, 475). From the perspective of the enslaved individual, it is the prospect of working all their life for another person and not retaining anything for themselves that turns slavery into such a cruel destiny (1667 t2, 525). And, as suggested by Harrigan, here lies the most coercive effect of enslavement in Du Tertre's opinion, namely the awareness of being caught in a condition built on an "unbreachable gap that separated his labour from capital and time" (Harrigan 2018, 185). Du Tertre's main concern is not liberty, but the nature of a person's condition. The slave works for life without the possibility of changing that condition or gaining anything from it. Whether the enslaved persons would make similar conclusions is of course impossible to know from the travelogues. However, the mention of suicides and escapes tell about strong desires to free oneself from that condition.

In other words, the comparative lens is a sign that enslavement was not yet a fixed concept, nor did it have a fixed form. The travelers work through it and try to make sense of it as part of the early colonial society. Yet this exploration also testifies to a desire to construct a new, "good" form of enslavement, meaning that the relational construction of slavery is simultaneously an example of representational displacement. Du Tertre, for instance, seems to suggest that in transatlantic slavery the two forms of slavery identified by Aristotle are intertwined. He explores the possibility of turning an act that was initially monstrous and refutable into a natural condition. On this note, Du Tertre oscillates between a Christian rationale, suggesting that the deportation from Africa enabled conversion, which was a gift; in exchange for perpetual and cruel servitude, they would be granted eternal liberty in the afterlife. More importantly, Du Tertre seeks to configure a social fabric that would keep enslaved peoples in check without abusing them and allow for mutual relationships between enslavers and enslaved, as if the idea of slavery as "social death" could be overcome by inserting another form of sociability, affirming Orlando Patterson's argument that slavery exists and is sustained by an intricate web of social structures and cultural imaginations (1982). Instead of

citing Aristotle, Du Tertre frames the idea of slavery based on friendship, with references to Seneca, supported by personal anecdotes in order to integrate ideals of a form of slavery based on mutual confidence into his own experiences. He pairs this with observations regarding diasporic Africans' infinite love for each other (1667 t2, 500).

Yet the reference is equivocal. While the communitarian bond could be a prerequisite for developing strong relationships between enslaver and enslaved, it also suggests the opposite, that enslavement strengthened internal bonds between diasporic Africans as an expression of protection against enslavers. What is particular with Du Tertre's account is that he inscribes enslaved peoples as agents in the construction of the fraternal model of slavery. Out of his examples emerges a fusion of Catholic religious ethos and what he identifies as diasporic Africans' sense of community. While suggesting that enslaved individuals were an integrated part of early colonial society, Du Tertre's Senecan framework also tends toward a fictionalization of enslavement. Fictionalization function as a Derridean supplement when the social reality of slavery—his direct observation—runs counter to the model he is trying to forge. Curiously, Senecan references become pastoral background scenery, turning the islands into a theatre of illusions, where the reader can imagine a societal fabric of mutual relationships between those who dominate and those who are dominated.

Du Tertre continues to understand enslavement in direct relationship to what he observed on the islands as an enslaver and a missionary. Still he cannot help but question this experience, and he grapples with the injustice of enslavement throughout the chapter. It is significant that Du Tertre explicitly takes on the role of a historian in this context. By taking this posture and by citing the Ancients rather than speaking directly for himself, he can hide his own voice while addressing the issue (Ouellet 2010, 76). It allows for an abstract construction of slavery, which seems necessary in order for him to fully pursue the argument that it is needed in the colonies. A similar shift toward distance can be detected in Labat, who would himself buy slaves and contribute significantly to the plantation industry by developing new techniques for sugar refinement. One of the first things he notes when embarking on the islands is the scars on the backs of the enslaved people who unload the cargo. He speaks in the first person, saying that he is startled, as if these marks signal to him that he is now entering into a new social order. Then he quickly disowns his initial reaction stating that "one gets used to it" (1722 t1, 65). But, in order to

get used to it, the traveler must shift from the first person to the third, thus distancing himself from the emotions the cruel practice provokes. The necessity to create distance when facing the cruelty appears as an indirect effect, a disturbance in the narrative suggesting that even if the narrative generally supports enslavement, the observer had to turn the eye away when faced with the actual practice.

The abstraction of slavery as a topic thus seems to build on a split in the traveler-narrator's self. Yet, we note that when the abstract comment then turns to the *exemplum*, the self reemerges. Rather than a split, this manifestation of the self here mediates experience. Much of the ambivalence seems to stem from these tensions. This becomes more evident when juxtaposing Du Tertre and Labat, oscillating between abstraction and engagement, with Maurile de St. Michel, where experience never interferes with reasoning. Maurile de St. Michel enters in direct conversation with his presumed reader, deploying expressions like "you will say" and "if you suggest..." when arguing for slavery. In a most assertive way, he refers to life on the island to discredit anti-slavery arguments, yet he frames this life as fiction, as a construction from a distanced narrative perspective. Mixing Aristotelian ideas of natural slavery with the Biblical myth of Ham, Maurile de St. Michel concludes the passage on slavery by speaking directly to a group of undifferentiated Africans, identified only by the evocation of the color of their skin: "No longer be surprised, poor Negros, if you are born to servitude and if your bloodline will be slaves until the Last Judgement; it is a punishment for your father's ingratitude" (1652, 91).²⁴ This is a discourse of authority, though it shares the formal features of dialogism. Direct exchanges with enslaved people are never included in his account.

So on the one hand, we have a pro-slavery argument solidly based on abstraction, mediated by a distanced self. On the other, passages where travelers include experience in their comments open up for ambiguities that may even contradict the pro-slavery stance and rely on an engaged self. The moral dilemmas of travelers who were face-to-face with the cruelty of the bondage they supported turns into a representational dilemma. Du Tertre, for instance, shows at various occasions a consciousness of enslaved peoples' suffering by means of empathy and identification. "It is as if", Du Tertre writes, "the blackness of [Africans'] skin was the trait of their misfortune, one treats them like slaves, one feeds them as one wants

²⁴Ne vous etonnez donc plus, pauvres Negres, si vous estes nez à la servitude & si vostre lignée sera esclave jusqu'au jour du Jugement; c'est pour punir l'ingratitude de vostre père.

to, one pushes them to work like animals, and one draws as one wishes until their death all the service of which they are capable” (1667 t2, 493).²⁵ The comment stems from a troubling sense of empathy, and Du Tertre projects this feeling onto the reader, appealing to identification and pity with the diasporic Africans, at the same time as the mention of blackness serves to signify these individuals’ “condition.” Only black people are treated this way; Du Tertre says it bluntly, and in so doing he is simultaneously racializing their condition and recognizing their suffering.²⁶ In another passage, he writes, “I don’t know what this nation has done, but it’s enough to be black to be taken, sold, and engaged in a ferocious servitude that lasts all of life” (1667 t2, 494).²⁷ Likewise, Biet noticed the “trembling” of their voices as a sign of their humanity and compared their faith with that of galley slaves, judging the condition of enslaved Africans as much worse (1664, 291).

Passages building on experience such as these encircle the important role of the shifting self in the construction and maintenance of conflicting views around enslavement. Travel writers became increasingly aware of the unsettling effect of their emotions in relation to enslaved individuals and to the slavery system. But instead of suppressing the emotional effects, they use them in the articulation of a “human,” Catholic form of enslavement, thus catering to those involved in the settlement for profit and at the same time saving France’s ideal as a nation abhorring slavery. This can be seen, for example, in a passage in Pelleprat’s account from 1655. This Jesuit missionary is mainly focused on narrating an evangelical mission to

²⁵ Comme si la noirceur de leur corps estoit le caractere de leur infortune, on les traite en esclave, on les nourrit comme on veut, on les pousse au travail comme de bestes, & l’on tire de gré ou de force jusqu’à leur mort, tout le service dont ils sont capables.

²⁶ While race was primarily a category of filiation, referring to bloodlines in the aristocracy in seventeenth-century France, a racist discourse began taking shape. It is not yet tied to a biological rationale but rather to climate and character. Commenting on skin color is symptomatic for the ambivalence here. It singles out the trans-Atlantic slave trade since it pertains only to blacks, whose internal difference is rarely recognized, but evolves into a justification of it. The “nature” and “temper” of Africans make them more suitable for enslavement than other groups, meaning that the bondage of blacks would be less cruel. For studies on early modern race, see Guillaume Aubert (2004); Pierre H. Boule (2007); Andrew S. Curran (2009, 2011); Arlette Jouanna (1975); Mélanie Lamotte (2014), Noémie Ndiaye (2022), and April G. Shelford (2013). For race and gender, see Elsa Dorlin (2006) and Ashley Williard (2021a).

²⁷ Je ne sais que cette nation a fait, mais c’est assez que d’estre pris, vendu, & engagez à une servitude facheuse qui dure toute la vie.

the Galibis on the coast of today's Venezuela, and his comments on enslaved peoples are mostly distanced. However, when seeing the deported Africans come out of the ship when arriving in the Caribbean, his own voice emerges: the sight fills him with "horror and compassion" (1658, 55).²⁸ A bit further down he writes, "I admit that the slaves' condition is extremely crude and that it is infinitely difficult for these poor peoples to see themselves sold, often by their own fathers and their seigneurs, to strangers..." (55).²⁹ The enslaved Africans are referred to as "people" in the quote, and their feelings are taken into account when Pelleprat voices his view on slavery. However, the passage takes another turn when the missionary starts justifying the practice. Here he mobilizes the argument that conversion to Catholicism levels out the pain of enslavement, but he does so by speaking through the impersonal "on" (one) and the collective "nous" (we). Again, we note that when the self—present in the beginning of the passage—encounters its limits and becomes incapable of engaging directly with what they clearly identify as horrendous consequences of enslavement on human beings, as a result, it fades away into impersonal pronouns and abstraction. However, in the case of Pelleprat, the self will reappear. In a twisted argument he starts by negatively commenting on these people's appearances, only to use the comments as a point of departure from which the diasporic African could ameliorate: "I do not know if my eyes were charmed," Pelleprat comments, "but I usually found them in good shape and pleasant after their baptism" (1658, 57).³⁰ There is the unsettling notion that somebody might have cast a spell on him, but the main point is that the newly converted individuals have an effect on the travel-narrator's self. The latent racism expressed in descriptions essentializing the Africans into a *type*, which will turn into a racist trope contributing to modern forms of biological racisms, serves to justify the positive effects of enslavement. Interestingly here, for the enslaved individuals the effect is external, whereas it effects the missionary internally.

²⁸ The scene can be compared with descriptions of arrivals of Europeans for whom entering the archipelago is a triumphant resurrection after the transatlantic crossing. Glissant also speaks of the slave ship and the Atlantic in terms of death and rebirth, but this occurs through suffering and denial of connections with the African continent. The second birth in the Caribbean leaves a heritage of traces and echoes (1997, 5–9).

²⁹ P'avouë que la condition des Esclaves est extrêmement rude & qu'il est infiniment sensible à ces pauvres gens de se voir vendus, souvent par leurs peres, & par leurs seigneurs à des estrangers.

³⁰ Je ne sçay si mes yeux estoient charmez mais ie les trouvois pour l'ordinaire bien faits, & agreables après leur Baptesme.

What we have is a subtle shift in the narratives: enslavement concerns the observer, and this conscious or unconscious engagement shows in a change of register in the comment from description to sentimentality, which in turn becomes an instrument of control. On this note there is something particular with Du Tertre's expression of ambivalence. His narrative holds these unresolved tensions, which allows him to take opposite stances while trying to conceptualize the new island society. But there are also passages where his self seems directly implied. The most striking image is his comment on the pleasure he takes in watching Black toddlers play about while their mothers are at work.

It is an incomparable pleasure to watch three or four Blacks play together while their mothers work, because they mess around, fall down on each other, one is on top one minute the next on bottom, still without hurting each other, so well that they do not cry or scream and do not distract their mothers from their tasks, if it's not to breastfeed them. (1667 t1, 509)³¹

This is at once a comment and an example, drawn from everyday life on the islands, at the same time as it is phantasmagoric. The scene is unique: only when commenting on the splendors of natural springs in Guadeloupe (1667 t2, 20) does Du Tertre come out with such an intimate observation directly tied to his personal experience. But what is the pleasure here? The passage comes right after describing how diasporic Africans care for their children. Du Tertre states their practices as good examples, compared to European habits. There is then an admiration or desire for robust young bodies that survive.³² In this snapshot, the missionary animalizes the toddlers, and he will indeed say that French newcomers to the islands sometimes take them for monkeys. But he ascribes their strength to cultural practices, stated as examples for Europeans. The desire for strong, surviving Black bodies cannot be disconnected from a colonial desire for the laboring body. These are bodies that in the future will work for the good of the colony. It is on this point that this scene of everyday life glides into

³¹ C'est un plaisir nompareil que de voir trois ou quatre Nègres se jouer ensemble pendant que leurs meres travaillent, car ils se barbotuillent, se renversent, & tantost dessus, tantost dessous; sans pourtant se faire aucun mal, si bien qu'ils ne crient point, & ne détournent point leurs meres de leurs bensonges, si ce n'est pour leur donner à téter.

³² For an analysis of a desire for enslaved women's reproductive bodies in Du Tertre, see Williard (2021a, 58).

a phantasmagoric mode: the image of toddlers playing while their mothers work gives an ideal vision of enslavement, which echoes in other passages, as when Du Tertre suggests that their houses are like those in the Golden Age, as described by Seneca, only then to say that the sight of their beds is frightening (1667 t2, 517). The example illustrates how classical sources are adapted to fit the argument made and work in tandem with direct observations, but also it shows how that experience can be distorted by desires. In the tension between knowledge and experience, fictionalization comes into play.

What does this tell us? It shows that the self mediating between context, experience, and knowledge paved the way for the sentimentality that will come to permeate debates and texts on slavery from the eighteenth century onwards (Festa 2006). It is in this indefinite zone that power is constructed. It also shows that while ambivalence toward enslavement is an expression of coming to terms with new societal forms, commentaries on enslavement increasingly tend to annul the ambivalence, repressing that tension upon which it builds. Obviously, passages such as these do not reveal the experience of the enslaved persons, but they do leave an imprint in the narrative, forcing it into fiction and contradiction. Yet their point is to enhance the emotional effects on the traveler-narrator. Rarely if ever do travelers turn to the enslaved individuals to sound out the effects of the lived experience in brutal bondage. Instead, the self of the traveler is constructed as a reflection of the effect of God on enslaved Africans. This is indeed most obvious in texts by Jesuits, who considered themselves to be defenders of enslaved and free Black peoples (Harrigan 2018, 10).

Let us look closer at a text by Mongin, who arrived in Martinique in 1682, when Louis XIV had reinforced Colbert's colonial politics and sent his first royal intendant to the islands to administer and control colonial affairs. The French slave trade was about to expand considerably, and the number of slaves had doubled since Du Tertre wrote his general history of the Antilles. Mongin was assigned to work exclusively with converting enslaved peoples on Saint-Christophe, where approximately 2500 individuals were under his supervision. Yet judging by his initial letters, where he tries to persuade his superiors in France of the value of working with slaves in the Caribbean, this task was not as valued as evangelization among Natives. In this context, it appeared more important than ever for Mongin to stress that evangelical work among the slaves was fruitful and spiritually rewarding. Throughout his letters, Mongin underscores the devotion with

which the enslaved people sing to the glory of God and how the songs bring him to tears. He tries to convey these emotions to readers. “I admit that their gatherings with the songs they sing, surprised by their very pleasing voices, seem as new and as touching as the first day and that I find it very difficult to hold back the tears on these occasions” (1984, 52).³³ Mongin is overwhelmed by the expressive force of their voices, which causes a physical and mental reaction: he cries. The image is that of a successful conversion, in line with Jesuit ideology (Lauzon 2010, 84). What is interesting is that it is not the enslaved people per se that cause emotion. Mongin is touched by *his own* work: hearing them sing the gospels moves him and is proof that they have become Christians.

Even when he sets out to illustrate Africans’ natural inclination to embrace Christianity, Mongin includes his own sentiments in the description, saying that he is “emotionally touched” each time that he thinks of the enslaved people’s generous actions. Also, in examples where he aims to show the good effects of Christianity on enslaved peoples’ conditions, it is ultimately the missionary’s own reactions that are central. This is the case when Mongin tells of encountering an enslaved woman whom he recently had married and whose “sentiment” he “cannot forget” when he “met her on the road laden with a burden that was too heavy for her strength” (1984, 95).³⁴ The passage continues to perversely contrast the heavy load with the lightness of Christian life. “She whimpered in pain beneath her burden,” Mongin writes, “but as soon as she saw me her sorrow disappeared, she threw her burden on the ground and came to me snapping her fingers, for that is the sign of their joy. And, coming up to me with a cheerful face, she said ‘Oh! Father,’ she said, ‘Louis is good for me!’”³⁵ He then continues to comment that her reaction is a direct effect of the Christian institution of marriage among the enslaved population. His example constructs a chain of affect that ends with the traveler-narrator, who presumably can transmit the emotion to the reader: “The

³³ Je vous avoue que leurs assemblées avec les chansons qu’ils y chantent, étonné par des voix très agréables, me paroissent aussi nouvelles et aussi touchantes que le premier jour et qu’il m’est bien difficile de retenir les larmes dans ceste occasions.

³⁴ Mais je ne puis oublier les sentiments d’une bonne négresse [...]. Je la rencontraï en chemin chargée d’un fardeau au-dessus de ses forces.

³⁵ Elle gémissait sous la charge lorsqu’elle m’aperçut, mais aussitôt son chagrin disparut, elle jette son fardeau à terre, elle vient à moi en claquetant les doigts, ce qui est la marque de leur joie, et m’abordant d’un visage gai: ‘Ah ! Père, que Louis est bon pour moi!’

naïveté of this creature drew tears from my eyes, and as she perceived the consolation that her words had given me, she repeats them whenever she sees me.”³⁶ Through “naïve” gestures and simple words, which the young woman repeats after seeing the effect they have on the missionary, Mongin constructs a scene where Christianity’s supposedly softening impact on the cruelty of slavery is literally performed by this enslaved woman: she suddenly forgets the heavy burden she carries and only feels the emotion of gratitude toward the church for making her a wife.

The narratives reveal that observing enslaved peoples’ suffering had an effect; between the lines, the experience of bondage transpires as a profoundly disruptive element. What happens as slavery is increasingly naturalized is that instead of suppressing these effects, a traveler like Mongin will work with them. He enhances sentimentality as a fundamental ingredient in the social fabric of slavery. Whereas sympathy may evolve into a religious *ethos*, it never leads to a profound questioning of the social system of slavery. Quite to the contrary, the religious ethos provoked by pity and compassion reinforce the political system by mitigating its inherent inhumanity and cruelty, paving the way for the mechanism of avoidance that will characterize France’s relationship to slavery in its territories. The engaged self is thus insidious: it operates through emotions of bonding (sympathy, identification, empathy) only to construct the fiction of good slavery. It also introduces a slight shift in perspectives so that the identification with the enslaved other is never complete. While showing an awareness of the enslaved peoples’ agency, Du Tertre underscores that their notion of freedom is not the same as Europeans. These persons suffered in Africa due to famine and wars, he states, claiming that their captivity has to be relativized. Further, he suggests that Africans do not attach the same value to the homeland but are happy wherever they are as long as they have food and are not treated badly (1667 t2, 526). Statements like these testify that while enslavement provoked ambivalence, the travelogues contributed to forming the “social specificity of slaves” (Harrigan 2018, 319). Race will become part of that social specificity, as history will show, and the seventeenth-century travelers’ commentaries laid the ground for the articulation of such discourses of bordering and separation.

³⁶ La Naïveté de cette créature me tira des larmes aux yeux, et comme elle s’aperçut de la consolation que ses paroles m’avaient donnée, elle me les répète quand elle me rencontre.

INDIGENEITY AND STYLE

There was already an imaginary of American indigeneity in place in France in the middle of the seventeenth century that the travelers had to mediate while also channeling their encounters with Caribs and the impact of these encounters on the formation of early colonial society. What is clear is that travel narratives negotiate between the two extremes of Indigenous imaginary: the “Nobel Savage” and the “Barbarian Cannibal.” Throughout the accounts, relationships with Caribs vary depending on the context, revealing complex interactions rather than a dualistic rapport. Much like the French, the Caribs intervene in an intricate web of history and culture where they use the French against the Spanish. The French play along with this strategy since they, too, compete against Spain. The Caribs thus represent many things at once and are tied to imagery as well as to history. This might explain why the Caribs appear to have an impact that goes beyond the experience of encounter. What interests me here is to analyze how the interactions with Caribs are played out on the level of style, thus examining another type of effect of others. The travel-narrators display both fear of and desire for the Indigenous people and their way of life; they are torn between playing with the proximity to the Indigenous and, at the same time, holding the promise of control over the untamed forces of island cultures and nature.

In a preface dedicated to Nicolas Fouquet, who financed the Jesuits, Pelleprat identifies himself as an American, meaning an Indigenous man: “This kindness, Monseigneur, which gives a poor American the liberty to offer you this small book [...]” (1658, NP).³⁷ The book and its author belong to the New World, they are intertwined with the subject of the account destined to please Fouquet. It is a posture and a fictionalization of the traveler no doubt. Nevertheless it is significant. When Pelleprat claims to be “American” he signals a latent concern in all travel writing, that of the foreign world having an influence on the self and on society. Even if the tone is partly playful, Pelleprat does indeed say that he has undergone a change during the course of his sojourn among the indigenous on Saint Vincent. He is now a mixed self who belongs to two worlds.

Raymond Breton takes on a similar role in the preface to his Carib-French dictionary. Writing after his return to France, Breton posits himself

³⁷ C'est cette bonté, MONSEIGNEUR, qui donne la liberté a un pauvre Ameriquain de vous offrir ce petit ouvrage.

as an old man who gathers his memories. There is a nostalgic note in Breton's preface that is quite rare for Caribbean travelers and instead echoes Jean de Léry leaving the Tupinambá in Brazil a century before or, three centuries later, Claude Lévi-Strauss describing his feelings when departing from the Nambikwara in *Tristes Tropiques*. "For how long have I been savage among them," Breton asks, "withdrawn on a shore, waiting for their good graces, which are quite difficult to win, their quite rare generosity and very strange occasions" (1999, iii).³⁸ In Breton's passage acting like a Carib corresponds to being anti-social. We are thus at the antipodes of Rochefort's and Chevillard's paratextual courtly exchanges between the patron and the Caribs that were discussed in the first section of this chapter. And whereas Léry expresses nostalgia and regret for having to leave life with the Tupinambá, Breton focuses on his own situation and transformation: he "was savage among them." He suggests that he was at their mercy, dependent on whether they wanted to interact with him or not. He also suggests that being savage is a relative term: in Carib society it is he, not them, who is undomesticated one.

In these cases, the traveler-narrator emerges as an unstable self under influence as a result of engagement with otherness. A traveler who lived among the Caribs on Dominica in the 1680s takes on the pseudonym "De Wilde," as if he sought to underscore the transition he claimed to have undergone during the years in the islands. In the preface, Moïse Caillé de Castres, who is the writer behind *De Wilde ou les sauvages caribes insulaires d'Amérique* (2002 [1694]), briefly summarizes the phases of transcultural contact, leaving out the uneven power relations that dictate these contacts. At first, De Wilde was shocked by the "horrible things" he witnessed, but, he argues, as the human mind is fashioned in such a way that it gets used to situations, soon enough he was no longer surprised (81). Going "wild" is here equivalent to adopting acts, habits, and cultural practices that are not specified in the preface but are described as "barbarian."

Not far from De Wilde's mental transformation, Du Tertre comments in the first edition of his general history of the Antilles that, during the stay in the islands, his writing underwent radical changes and had not followed the development of the French language. Upon the return to France, he writes, "I found the French language in such a high degree of politeness that I had reasons to believe that the rudeness of my style would throw off

³⁸ Combien de temps j'ai été Sauvage parmi eux, retiré sur une grève, attendant leurs bonnes grâces assez difficiles à gagner, leur commodité assez rare et l'opportunité très bizarre.

even the most vulgar reader and would make him consider my discourse as savage as the lands that I describe” (1654, NP).³⁹ In terms of a rhetorical strategy, the claim made by Du Tertre in the preface says something about the conception of the representation of foreign places. It expresses a desire to make otherness both visual and audible through writing. Abiding by the codes of writing, the traveler asks for permission to speak, but he finds himself in a contradictory position. Writing brings Du Tertre joy because of the subjects treated (the islands, their history and peoples), echoing Breton’s nostalgia, at the same time as he is taken aback by linguistic fallibility. The French language had been radically refined (“high degree of politeness”) and Du Tertre is incapable of adapting the codes of good writing as a consequence of his Antillean sojourn. The representational dilemma is not located in a linguistic discrepancy. The problem is not so much that the French language did not have the terms to describe the Caribbean but that his style—and as an extension, himself—has become influenced by the outside world, and this jeopardizes his ability to act as a mediator between worlds. I will look into the complex question of languages in the following chapter. Here the problem is rather that of influence: Du Tertre’s style has become as *savage* as the islands, which is why it will be difficult to seduce the reader.

The strongest image of how language mediates radical and potentially dangerous transitions is given by the Caribs in the Carpentras manuscript. The anonymous buccaneer relates that the Natives were eager to learn French and to teach their language to the French. To them, if we are to believe the narrator, language learning equaled a metamorphosis. They encouraged language learning,

by telling us ‘learn it well and when you know it, you will go naked like me, you will paint yourself red, you will have long hair like me, you will become Carib and you will never want to go back to France. And I, speaking like you, I will take your clothes and go to France to your father’s house and I will take your name and you will take mine.’ (2002, 117)⁴⁰

³⁹ Je trouvai la langue Françoisse dans un si haut degré de politesse; que j’avais raison d’appréhender que la rudesse de mon style ne rebutasse même les plus grossiers, & ne leur fit estimer mon discours aussi sauvage que le pays que je leur décris.

⁴⁰ Nous exhortant d’apprendre leur langue, en nous disant ‘apprends-la bien et lorsque tu la sauras, tu iras nu comme moi, tu te feras peindre en rouge, tu porteras des cheveux longs comme moi, tu deviendras caraïbe et tu ne voudras plus retourner en France. Et moi, parlant comme toi, je prendrai tes habits et m’en irai en France à la maison de ton père et je m’appellerai comme toi, et toi comme moi’.

The passage gives a rare glimpse of a Carib philosophy of language, even if the information and context given are too scarce to draw solid conclusions. What is interesting is that it finds an echo in the preface trope of a style influenced by “savageness.” Learning another language is taking on that culture, inhabiting the other person’s name, and the linguistic exchange is also physical, as they ask the Europeans to spit in their mouths and in their ears.⁴¹ In the Caribs’ eyes, as told by this anonymous pirate, the linguistic metamorphosis appears as exciting, whereas it seems more problematic in Du Tertre’s version, hinting at the anxiety that the traveler’s self also might be inhabited by the world they mediate through writing. Du Tertre’s linguistic transformation is simultaneously a *litotes*, downplaying his authorial pretensions (he is a traveler not a writer) and eulogizing French sociability, and a way to voice the concern of foreign influence on the traveler, on language, and on society.

It could be argued that it is precisely the artifice of such stylistic claims that support the argument that neither the travelers nor their writings have been influenced by the other, supposedly “uncontrolled” nature at all. Instead, the exotic scenes in the prefaces displaying Natives addressing the patrons through the intermediary of the traveler, along with claims of having become Americans or writing in a style “sauvage,” illustrate Normand Dorion’s contention that the art of travelling in the seventeenth century was classicist, modelled after gardening (1995, 92). A good travel writer was someone who possessed the skills to take “savage plants” and “civilize” them by including them in the harmonious structure of a garden. Maurile de Saint-Michel uses this common metaphor, depicting his *relationship* as a garden from the Indies: “where I show America’s flowers and fruits, the troubles and the melancholia as well as the cypresses will not be out of season” (1652, 276).⁴² Style includes the “savage” by virtue of perfecting it, not by turning “wild.”

This captures the impact of contemporary aesthetic notions, notably *bienséance*, requiring that expression reflects good conventional behavior and is designed to please, on the conception of alterity in itself and also of

⁴¹ “In order to understand [their language] better they made us spit in their mouths and in their ears, believing that this would make them learn French sooner, taking information from us about how we named each thing and they told us how they named it in Carib.” Afin de le mieux comprendre ils nous faisaient cracher dans leur bouche et dans leurs oreilles, croyant par ce moyen apprendre plus tôt à parler le français, s’informant de nous comment nous nommions chaque chose, et ils nous disaient aussi comment ils les nommaient en caraïbe.

⁴² Où l’ay fait voir des fleurs & des fruits de l’Amérique, les soucis & melancolies aussi bien que les cypres n’y seront pas hors de saison.

how otherness could be represented by the second half of the century. Indeed, Du Tertre testifies to the importance of such codes when evoking the level of “politeness” of the French language. Ideals of a clear, moderate, and pleasing style, of *bienséance* and good taste, developed as a way to release writing from the ridged rules of rhetoric based on the Ancients and inscribe it in the social web of the *salon* culture (Vialleton 2018). But while “stylistic gardening” might be necessary to attract the audience, evocations of cultural and linguistic transformations indirectly question the classicist impulse. They point to the possibility that otherness nonetheless had an impact on the representation, which thereby goes against the domestication of otherness so that it could fit into existing norms for representation. As the editor of Exquemelin’s book states in the preface, the merit of this particular pirate story is that “it is not the words’ radiance that reflects on the objects but the radiance of the objects that reflects on the words” (1686, NP).⁴³ Words are subordinated to exterior reality and testify to the narrator’s ability to adapt the writing to the subject. Consequently, otherness was not and could not be entirely domesticized or excluded from the narratives. To act like a Carib, to describe one’s style as “savage,” and other such rhetorical tricks suggest that to best account for foreign reality, writing had to be influenced by it. A world that does not confirm to the order of French society is not only there to be adapted to that order. Quite on the contrary, otherness acts productively on the travelogue, on its very core: writing itself.

This duel orientation enables the construction of the traveler-narrator as being at once same and other: the traveler turns himself into a modality to configure the unresolvable tensions between writing norms and experience, between fiction and empiricism. Buccaneer accounts provide an interesting illustration of this paradoxical posture. Exquemelin, for instance, struggles with the plausibility of his account. The life of a buccaneer is in itself so extraordinary that even a truthful witness such as himself will appear as a *romancier*, an author of fiction (131). In saying this, Exquemelin anticipates the readers’ skepticism as a way to side with them and to pose himself as belonging to their world, not to the islands. He is thus duel—the one who has been on the other side, lived incredible things, but also who has returned and can speak with the voice of the reader. The success of his story depends on the distance between the

⁴³ Ce n’est point l’éclat des paroles qui rejaillit sur les choses, mais l’éclat des choses qui rejaillit sur les paroles.

narrator writing and the pirate he himself once was, assuring the reader that he has not become entirely transformed by otherness.

The tension cuts through language too: the incredible stories of adventures in lands with strange nature and peoples should evoke that strangeness but in a language that does not go against norms of sociability. In other words, both as a narrative instance and as a category for experimentation, the travelers express a self caught between the world of the Caribbean islands associated with associability, the polite sociability of France, and the society that the French were in the process of building in the archipelago. Rather than detecting a divide between uncontracted nature and culture, as in the case of the travelers of the great explorations according to Stagl (1995) and Lamb (2001), the narratives testify to a kind of colonial liminality. They recognize and manifest otherness while at the same time try to control it. This tension runs through the texts and is revealed in the ways in which the construction of the traveler-narrator's self is constantly contrasted with other actors who interact with and are thus also under the influence of otherness, notably translators.⁴⁴

Translators are mentioned in some narratives but often in passing, like ghosts assuring a link of communication. Father Raymond Breton, widely known for being the most knowledgeable missionary in the culture and language of the Caribs, writes that he was residing “alone” among the people of Dominica. At the same time, he mentions on several occasions that he has an interpreter by his side. Others recognize the translator and some are even named. Biet writes that he and the crew were received “quite favorably” by the Natives thanks to a young man called Vendangeur, “who had been there before and knew their language well, and had the skill to make himself loved by these people” (1664, 74).⁴⁵ Without Vendangeur they would not have survived, Biet admits. His information is an exception in point. Generally, travel writers do not waste time on interpreters. Sometimes they appear in scenes of negotiation as mediators. Sometimes we learn that an interpreter was sent to another island or to the mainland to bargain with the Natives. Some of them were sent out with the explicit task to train as translators among the Caribs. Pelleprat

⁴⁴For studies on the role of translators, see Céline Carayon (2019) and Federico M. Federici and Dario Tessicini eds. (2014), as well as Philippe Jacquin (1987), who focuses on translators in New France.

⁴⁵Qui avoit esté autrefois, & sçavoit bien leur langue, ayant d'ailleurs l'adresse de se faire aimer de ces gens là.

mentions that Father Méland brought a boy with him on a trip to the mainland with the intent to leave him with the Indigenous people so that he could learn their language. Méland calls the boy or the expedition – it is difficult to decide what he is referring to exactly – an “experiment” (1658, 4).

From scattered pieces of information such as these, it is possible to deduce that in most cases the interpreters were commoners who, for various reasons that often remain obscure, had stayed with the Natives for a longer time and thus learnt their language or knew how to communicate with them by means of gestures or mixed languages. Their actual skills or the circumstances around their recruitment as translators are rarely if ever mentioned, and only rarely do they occur as persons in the narratives. The same goes for other crucial intermediary figures such as Indigenous women. Those travelers who stayed longer with the Caribs—the anonymous buccaneer, de Wilde, and Breton—survived and acquired knowledge about Indigenous life and language thanks to women. The support they describe gives an idea of women’s room for manoeuvre in Carib society and how they could influence decisions generally allotted to men. It also shows that European travelers were far from penetrating Indigenous society; they lived on the margins and were not part of the social fabric. Nevertheless, the narratives give an impression of proximity at the expense of these other intermediary figures whose presences are obscured, absorbed into that of the traveler-writers who made use of them.

The absence-presence of interpreters inserts two layers into the narratives. First, it implies that the communication with peoples and the construction of knowledge about the islands rely on others. Again, the narrative voice proliferates, only this time the other voice is downplayed and not highlighted, as it was in regard to patrons. It would be tempting to consider the removal of the interpreters in terms of replacement and self-heroization: travelers would silence their reliance on other peoples’ skills in order to better posit themselves as the real translators of the New World. Such an interpretation is no doubt accurate: there was no need to cite all sources, especially not those that were based on subalterns. However—and this leads us to the second layer—while the traveler-narrators indeed wanted to act as intermediaries between the Islands and France, they did not want to be confused with interpreters. *Truchement* is the term usually employed to designate the interpreters in the seventeenth century. A word derived from Turkish (Gomez-Géraud 1987, 333), it contains the foreign within the designation, suggesting that the person

doing the interpretation has incorporated the foreign world. Many travelers to the Caribbean underscore precisely this—the incorporation of alterity—as characteristic of interpreters. These figures were not always regarded as trustworthy, especially if they spoke too well of Native society (Gomez-Géraud 1987, 320), and their contacts with foreigners were sometimes lethal. Biet tells about a translator who was killed for having trusted the Natives too much (1664, 155, 158). In short, while there are similarities between travelers and interpreters in so far as they belong to two worlds at once, the interpreters are one step closer to otherness (Carayon 2019, 301). The act of writing holds the line between self and otherness in place.

The line between the traveler and the figure of the interpreter reveals a particular anxiety, namely that of transculturation. I chose Fernando Ortíz's concept transculturation because it takes into account unequal power relations but is focused on the interactional dynamics of cultural encounters rather than on the result of such encounters (Ortíz 1995, 102). Ortíz's concept does not emphasize the merging of different cultural elements. Instead it insists on the generation of productive differences: cultural encounters do not necessarily entail the repression of one culture, even when produced in extremely unequal situations of power. There is thus an element of Baroque, "contrapunct" (99), maintained while transculturation takes shape. He further argues that a "vital change" occurred as a consequence of intense cultural encounters of colonialism on the island spaces. Despite colonial powers trying to police and suppress people and their cultures, the (violent) encounters entailed "the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena..." (102), which became part of the economic motor and has determined historical events. Ortíz writes,

[...] these continuous, radical, contrasting geographic transmigrations, economic and social, of the first settlers, this perennial transitory nature of their objectives, and their unstable life in the land where they were living, in perpetual disharmony with the society from which they drew their living. (101)

What we have are tensions, violences, uprootings, and disharmony rather than one dominant discourse of power separating groups; the transcultural clash happens in between. His theories find echoes in later conceptualizations of creolization. Kamau Brathwaite draws from Ortíz and localizes creolization to plantation society "as a transformative productive space not only for tropical exports but also for cultures and languages" (cited in Garraway 2005, 17). Glissant's theorization of the term also

builds on the historical experience of plantation society, and his insistence on the process rather than the result of cross-cultural encounters is close to Ortíz. Creolization, in Glissant's view, puts emphasis on the unpredictable dimension in such processes, which he turns into a philosophy of Relation, a non-systematic mode of thinking that is not built on binary exclusions but on dynamic, uncertain processes that create new differences rather than erasing them (1997, 11; 89).

What is useful in the context of seventeenth-century Caribbean writing is that rather than seeing cultural mixing as one-dimensional and linear, Ortíz and, later, Glissant and Brathwaite maintain elements of tension. In fact, Ortíz underscores the importance of historical contextualization and argues that the "transmutations of cultures" (*transmutaciones de culturas*) began with the *conquista*, thus pre-dating the plantation society. Transculturation is thus not exclusive to Cuban society or to a particular historical period. Rather, Ortíz's concept requires situational readings in order to be operative. Looking at the French context of the settlement with its locally determined power structure, the traveler performing the role of a "savage" figure at the same time as he asserts his power over writing and knowledge gives a space for a configuration of transculturality that is never resolved. In these texts, the self becomes at once an agent of control and a modality through which the agency of others is mediated. The narratives abound in passages evoking Frenchmen in the process of transforming and becoming other.

In 1640, Bouton warned that the French lost all sense of sociability in the settlements as a result of lack of spiritual guidance. Du Tertre paints in vivid colors how a colony of Frenchmen succumbed to cannibalism as a result of extreme famine in Guadeloupe. They did not kill each other but opened graves to eat their dead friends. In Du Tertre's narrative, they are animalized, tearing up the earth "like beasts" and eating "their own excrements" (1667 t1, 77–80). "Othered" French go "all naked," swim like the Natives (Biet 1664, 235), and paint their faces (Coppier 1645, 4). Biet writes of a French man who joins the Caribs in their festivities to get over his "melancholia" (1664, 106). Maurile de Saint-Michel writes that there are French people who "become Savage, hiding in the woods, living off fruits, and like owls and night birds do not come out except at night to go peck around" (1652, 38).⁴⁶ The capitalization of the adverb suggests an

⁴⁶Il y a icy de nos François qui deviennent Sauvages, se cachans dans les bois, vivans des fruits d'icieux, & comme ces Hiboux & oyseaux nuictiers, n'en sortans que la nuict pour aller picorer.

association with the Native Caribbeans, whereas their behavior is linked to animals. The difference between human and animal is articulated in terms of scale through the insertion of the Carib as a third term of comparison. He continues to explain that some people have even chosen this life: “I know some of our passengers who have more or less chosen this life over enduring the pain of being poor servants and living freely with those who paid their passage to the islands” (38).⁴⁷ Far more inhuman than an “animal-like” life as practiced by the “Savages” is the subjugation of indentured work and servitude. De Wilde supposedly “saved” an English girl who had been taken by the Caribs. The adventure is framed as a romance: the girl, naked and covered in *roucou* like the Caribs, is devastated that she has to leave a young Carib whom she loves (Caillé de Castres 2002, 113). In a similar vein, the Carpentras manuscript tells of four soldiers from Languedoc who settled among the Caribs to have more liberty (2002, 220). In fact, when Captain Fleury finally managed to restore the ships and was ready to return to France, the majority of the crew wanted to stay with the Natives (243).

In these cases transculturation is always framed as resulting from a lack of control in the social order.⁴⁸ Becoming other is a critique against governors who treated them badly or as a critique against France, saying that the colonies and/or the missions were in need of much more support. There is thus a political motivation behind many of these descriptions that partly explains the exaggerated style and sometimes speculative content. Transculturation is configured as a consequence of history, as being inherent to early colonization. And indeed it was a collateral result of territorial expansion and a deliberate politics through missionary work. The anxiety of influence is therefore always also turned inward; it is a reflection of the implication of settlement and colonization.

But transculturation goes in both directions, though it is articulated differently when Caribs are concerned. When Du Tertre tells about his first meeting with a Carib who spoke a little Spanish and immediately came up to him to ask for a necklace with a crucifix, his narrative trembles

⁴⁷ Je çay quelques uns de nos passagers qui ont plustost choisy cette vie, que de supporter les peines des pauvres serviteurs, & de vivre privément avec ceux avoient payé leur passage.

⁴⁸ See Atkinson (1924, 32–33). The French revolts against the authorities were considered to be inspired by the local societal structure. Missionaries played a particular role in counterbalancing such influence. At the same time, Natives enjoyed a higher degree of liberty, and compared to compatriots living under absolute monarchy in France, French islanders had more liberty (35).

(1667 t1, 59). He cannot read the other person and immediately thinks the man is an impostor who only desires the material object. The inability to interpret the other leads Du Tertre to, momentarily at least, doubt himself and the role of the mission. Here the potential failure of influence is threatening. Yet we are still far away from the politics of assimilation to the colonial culture, which will come to dominate French imperial policies. For example, most Caribs who were converted carried double names: a Christian name and a Carib name. The practice of the double name suggests a certain acceptance of belonging to several cultures at once, in line with the idea of the unresolved. A Carib captain called Baron by the French is an example of this. Baron appears in several accounts, and his ability to navigate between French and Caribs was crucial for the Dominicans' work in the region. At one point, he is said to have prevented a major war between the Caribs and the French. The content of his discourse of persuasion escapes the missionaries, no doubt due to linguistic incompetence. But Du Tertre portrays his discourse as transcultural performance. According to Du Tertre, Baron wore European clothes, notably a skirt supposedly stolen from an English woman, at the occasion (1667 t1, 64). The scene is ambivalent. Baron, dressed in a woman's skirt while "haranguing," is ridiculous. At the same time, his cross-cultural dressing is described as a stroke of genius, thanks to which the war can be avoided. So even a central figure such as Baron is not presented as a missionary or diplomatic success. He was never fully converted, it seems.

The travelogues contain many examples of Natives who claim to have converted to Christianity but who have in fact not changed their ways of living at all. For some travelers it is a question of geography: a Native may act like a Frenchman in France, but once he has returned to his family on the islands he goes back to his "natural" way of being. Labat relays a similar account about an African man returning to his old habits as soon as he came back to Africa (1722 t4, 129). Differences between peoples are here sustained and linked to culture and geography. Yet that production of difference simultaneously sets up the limits, for missionary work in particular. The fear of not being able to fully impose Catholicism is a persistent trope in discourses dealing with early colonial encounters. All kinds of local influences, be them climatic, cultural, or linguistic, are framed with expressions pertaining to treason, lies, and performativity. Persons living between two or several cultures are necessary but met with suspicion. In a way, they enact the uncertainty of cross-cultural encounters, an uncertainty expressed in the variety of terms used to capture such processes. *Truchement* was in

itself a foreign term. Syncretism derives from Greek “syn” (“the convergence of two opponents with a third”), οὐν (“with”), and “cret,” which means “to act or speak like a Cretan, i.e., an impostor” (Malczuzynski 2009, 298). Interpreters and converted Natives could potentially betray the French allies and deceive their spiritual fathers. Biet writes: “When they showed us more affection, it was when they thought about massacring us and killing us” (1664, 353).⁴⁹ However, such deceptions could also be read as a sign of agency. In her analysis of the figure of the *truchement* in the Oriental context, Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud concludes that theatricality is a way to question transculturality. In “playing a role, the interpreter keeps his distance from the foreign culture that he imitates,” she writes and concludes by saying that it seems like the theatrical dimension of interpretation “reveals a resistance to transculturation by staging a fake acculturation” (1987, 327). Following this argument, passages revealing Caribs’ consciousness toward transculturality may be read as indirect expressions of disturbance.

Returning to the case of Du Tertre, who cannot understand the first Carib man he encounters, we may in fact say that indirectly the agency of the Carib man leaves a mark in Du Tertre’s writing. It shows that we cannot limit our understanding of the construction of the travelers’ self by letting French codes of representation over-determine the reading. It also articulates itself in an entangled relationship with the world described, and this entangled relationship shows that power relations, no matter how unequal they may be, were fluid. Instances open up a crack in the narrative of a self that can master the world described. This also explains why missionaries notably seem haunted by the idea of a faked conversion: it would indirectly question their role in the early colonial society. It testifies that the politics of domination by imposing French culture may derail and that they have little power to control the other’s refusal. Expressions of fear and vulnerability destabilize structures of power, even if the unsettling may be temporary and ultimately perhaps contribute to further enhancing the construction of a rigid hierarchical structure of domination. When facing Baron and other peoples living between cultures and languages, the traveler-narrators are momentarily unsettled. These people are neither/nor, meaning that the narrative of control encounters its own limits. Indirectly, the various instances of influence mediated through comments

⁴⁹ Lorsqu’ils nous témoignoit plus d’affection, ç’a esté pour lors qu’ils songeoient à nous massacrer & à nous faire mourir.

on writing or through narration of particular experiences of otherness express social anxieties: what happens when cultures and languages intermingle? They appear as modalities to think through the possibilities and dangers of the new colonial social order without offering a model. In this situation they themselves start playing with the possibility of cross-cultural relations; they operate in the in-between.

* * *

When Hispanophone Caribbean writers rearticulated the notion of the Baroque in the twentieth century, the notions of *mestizaje* and *criollo* were central. Alejo Carpentier speaks of a “self-awareness” within what he identifies as the “American man” as “Other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a criollo,” and he concludes in saying that, “the criollo spirit is itself a baroque spirit” (1995, 100). By virtue of its mixed character the American Baroque contains a processual and anticipatory dimension. Its “spirit” is that of pointing forward. Glissant suggests something similar in seeing creolization as an unpredictable process; it points forward but is connected to that which is present and past. Paradoxically, one could say, there is this kind of spirit or striving processuality in the early French Caribbean archive through the anxiety of influence mediated by the travelers’ selves. But whereas Glissantian creolization maintains uncertainty—it is what is just happening—the striving processuality of travel writing is caught up in (early) global modernity driving forward, policing the forces of creolization for the sake of progress and profit. French colonialism, as Doris Garraway shows, deliberately sought to avoid becoming as mixed as the Spanish islands (2005, 211). In her analysis of creolization in the early modern Caribbean, she observes that in the French context, discourses of power kept “colonial populations artificially separated and contained along lines of race and class” (2005, 21). She reads this in the light of racial mixing and argues that there is “a libidinal economy undergirding exploitative power relations among whites, free nonwhites, and slaves in the colonies” (26). Colonial power operated by policing and bordering ethnic relations so as to control the forces of creolization, even if these operations could never fully work.

My analysis has shown that although the French travelers did not overtly identify themselves as Creoles in the ways the Spanish in the American context did, they write a self in conjunction with island experiences and practices at the same time as they were shaped by the setting

where they were published. Travelers exercised authority in discourse and practice while they themselves were being subjugated to authority. The double-bind position makes way for a writing that constantly encounters the limits of control. Configured through the traveler's self and expressed as anxiety of influence, creolization and *mestizaje* haunt these texts.

Yet those expressions of anxiety and ambivalence that the travelers played out deliberately or not through the construction of the self are indirect signs of the effects of others. The travelers reflect and are reflected in societal experiments, in aesthetic and epistemic constructions, and in direct experiences with peoples and environments. The figure of the traveler-narrator does indeed traverse the narratives in shifting nature and function. It is by virtue of handling the inherent diversity of the early colonial island world that the traveler-narrator can posit himself as a transatlantic mediator, not to resolve the tensions but as someone who can uphold a plurality of perspectives. This explains why travelers fashion their selves through various strategies of representation and that these strategies may open up rifts in the narratives, where impacts of others may emerge. They use the geographical double-bind and the formal constrains, and—whether it is intentional or not is less important—their writing becomes a site for thinking and experimenting with new social forms in the early colonial context. They invent themselves between these worlds, play with their roles and display fears while setting up the illusion of control or power over the forces of transculturation unleashed when several worlds meet. So while the traveler-narrator utilizes perspectives and sensibilities in order to constitute himself as an authority of the islands, those instances open up uncertain sites of dialogism, self-experimentation, and the possibility of performative transculturation. This is where the discourse of authority slips, and we can trace others operating in the shaping of island society.

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