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## An Impossible Solipsism: *Noise*<sup>1</sup> in *Le Passé Simple*

Garane A. Garane

*Le Passé Simple*, published in 1954 by Moroccan writer Driss Chraïbi,<sup>2</sup> represents in a way his personal itinerary. The novelist left his country, slamming the door behind him, and from 1954 to 1962, was the writer who, from exile, contested everything. By living in exile, he understood "everything", because the situation of the exiled is unique. The narrator is conscious of the fact that

every motor functions through difference. It isn't fed by it. Its condition lies in its reservoir. No motor could produce movement, if it wasn't assigned to and filled.<sup>3</sup>

In the epigraph to his novel, Driss Chraïbi quotes Albert-Raymond Roche:

And the black pastor said to me, we have also translated the Bible. In it, we found that God created the first black men. One day, black Cain killed black Abel. God appeared to Cain and said, "What have you done with your brother?" And Cain was so afraid that he turned white. And ever since then all of the descendants of Cain are white.

Chraïbi quotes Raymond Roche, who is one of his friends, because Roche believes that the French are in the process of civilizing the Arabs, and that the problem will be posed once the Arabs are civilized. The French will no longer be the center and they will no longer be "civilized" in relation to the Other. They would no longer have any reason for being. The author believes that the earth, which is the first reservoir of civilization, is Africa, the oldest continent. It is because he has become white that everything has changed.

In *Le Passé Simple* the mythification of the West will lead Driss, the narrator, to refuse the philistinism of Moroccan society, for exile disrupts petrification. The narrator states that he lived in nostalgia for the country of his birth and that he had always been a good Muslim. But he is no longer the same. A student of the French schools, son of a bourgeois, he lived in a sacred, unchanging Muslim atmosphere. But:

A while ago, if in the crowds and the lights and the noises I had been able to obtain intense pleasure, what harm? My emotivity. Yes, through sunsets, moonrises, winds, storms, the thick heat

of August, I was still receptive to all of that, and that pre-pubescent primal joy was still alive in me, which no reading of a book, no suffering, no dogma had been able to suffocate (78).

Here we have the entire condition of the African intellectual, cut off by his condition from the masses and a literary *bastard* (*métisse*) as well. Chraïbi starts out by contesting the East and the West, in order to finally arrive at this question: do the East and the West exist separately from one another? The "universalistic" tradition will coexist with the "desert" tradition in the mind of young Driss, at the end of the novel. One doesn't exclude the other: young Driss is like a puzzle. He is the sum of the two experiences and their balance. Both of the cultures (Arab and French) have kinetic energy, and produce unordered movement for the Moroccans who must, in the end, conserve the memories that created them. Driss must forget about running away from any system, any ideology. He is the very image of modern Morocco: a hodge-podge, unrestrained, who sees the birth of independent systems that want to create a new order which takes difference into account: Allah (the Father) and the new Allahs (French culture, the *nouveaux bourgeois*) can no longer produce an ordered world: new Africa is in an order born from the arbitrary, out of chaos and disorder. That is the very condition of his existence. In Africa, everything traverses itself, the all needs the small, the irascible lucidity that cannot quiet itself and that must say the unsayable: all is intermixed. "African" and French culture can therefore find a home in Driss, who becomes a collective being. But in order to exist, young Driss "must" accept the old Islamic order and the new. That is what Michel Serres, in his book *Genèse*, calls "*Le schéma un-tous*," "The one-all": Driss is African, Arab, French. He is Chemist, Man of Letters, and embodies the Present and the Past, etc. In sum, the African intellectual, like Chraïbi, is a complex unity, that is, a conflictual, contradictory unity, and subject to the sound and the fury. In *Le Passé Simple* there are four superstructures:

1. Cultures: Arab, French, Berber, African
2. Ideologies: religions (Christian, Muslim) and Nationalisms
3. Legal orders: "probable" Arab state and foreign "presence"
4. Illegal orders "officially": the black market, the source of the father's wealth.

Arab culture represents continuity. Berber culture is "oppressed" by the first. French culture, born from colonialism, is constructed in the gaps and contradictions between the first two cultures. At the ideological level, there is no debate between communism, socialism, and capitalism. The true debate is between Islam and the local culture that is its projection, and Christianity, incarnated by the French language. The

political system is the "probable" state-kingdom of Morocco, which obeys anti-Muslim "noise": the black market used by many, like Driss' Father (a "descendant" of the Prophet), to get rich. The Father is powerful thanks to the fluctuations in the economic system. As the Father explains,

Each of us, we borrowed from whomever we could, land and buildings. We were able to buy all of the tea that was sold at a low price (130 francs for a kilo) on the black market. Which we resold with all of the support and the blessings of the Administration legally, for a legal price 370 francs. A nice little operation. . . . Let me go on: profits immediately invested in the purchase of vacant lots, not far from Casablanca 5 francs per square meter, a windfall. According to my calculations, after the war, when the Americans start coming, the racketeers, cities springing up, airports begin to appear, in a few years, I'm patient, my vacant lots will be selling for 5.000 francs a square meter. That is what is asked of a Haj from the twentieth century - and that is how a Haj rebels and wears himself out (248).

That is why *Le Passé Simple* is dedicated to two people who have nothing to do with each other. The first dedication to François Mauriac: "At that time there was rebellion and hope." The date is 1954. For the part that deals with Hassan II (King of Morocco) "and the other valorous leaders of the Arab world," one can read "Will there be no more rebellion?" The date, 1977, marks the disenchantment and the distance between two conceptions of African intellectual life: the European reservoir and the African reservoir. The first is the revolt against the "archaic" system of Islam or the mythification of the "European center." The second represents all that is Muslim, Arab, "African", and Berber. The author, like many African intellectuals, is "stuck" between these two immense reservoirs *de chaleur*, from which emanate the Two Cultures. Both come from a dialectic of opposition. Throughout the entire novel, noise is produced by the author, impregnated with the culture of Mauriac, because he thinks, like Michel Serres, that "There will be no more eternal return" (58).

Driss considers himself an Arab dressed like a Frenchman, because Arabs dressed like Arabs are all dead. Throughout the unfolding of the entire novel, one can note the refusal of the two reservoirs: a refusal of difference, because it is constructed on technical superiority and on a "universalist" vision, which refuses any form of "parasitism", and a refusal of the voice of the ancestors. It is the "noise", misunderstood by both. It is out of Muslim culture, and by definition circular, that will be born the idea of distancing and borrowing rejection and novelty at the same time. It will come out of

the reference Koran-Father in order to know and to create. It rejuvenates itself through and against Islam, with ideas borrowed from French and Arab rhetoric. This leads to the complexity that will result in an unconscious acculturation, where Driss will confuse the transportation of concepts and their transposition. At the end of this process, Driss will become more culturally defined, because he will be born of an unwanted distancing.

Islam, rooted in the book, retarded Driss' development and it bequeathed him a double illusion: the belief in development through "*surformation d'imageries*" and the belief that there is something permanent that creates Arab identity, thanks to Islam. A reason of being has been incarnated in him for centuries: his Father is its representative. It is because of this archaism that the problem of the new is posed. Driss is the mixture of that which is archaic and new. His Father's experience is also his own: the conventional is important in order to create the new. Driss starts from the simple known and becomes through the composition of different images, such as the genetic order of constructions and reconstructions. The pure is initial and the impure is the most complex, that is, it is the contact between different sources that are supposedly pure. Driss' impurity is on the inside, in his very divagations. At the end of his trajectory, Driss himself will be divided between several different systems: Arab, Berber, French, and African, and between status: in effect, he is dissymetry installed and in place because he is the Father's descendant, but also hidden dissymetry, the one that cannot manifest itself, for the majority of Moroccans would not be able to accept him and consider him to be creative. Driss will always be like many African intellectuals, presence and absence. Excluded from the African citadel, they must at times create a space that is in the outside of this world, outside of their countries, of their primary institutions, and, especially, outside of the Text, "*hors du Texte*."

One can see from the outset that Driss Chraïbi has chosen silence. He is total confusion. But, at the same time, he sees a correspondence between *ces cours* and the situation:

The sudden reputation of this man made me think of my chemistry manuals: acids on bases, exothermics and salts (79).

The man in question is his Father, past and present Authority. The conflict of cultures took him from the heat: Africa, the mother. According to Serres, the earth ("*la chaleur*," the heat) is

[an] object of desire. Before discovering it as a reservoir, the symbiosis of man and earth had raised the hope that they could live together (59).

Europe took him from his mother, and rendered him extraterritorial. Far from her, the mother seems like an important object. He is unfinished because he is Noise without which the two centers could not exist. He has bypassed the dualism to become a triangle (without wanting to construct a third pole, which would put him in a position of absolute power): dualism is death, inexistence. The author wants to destroy the ineffectiveness of the center, of the means. For the reservoir of origin (Muslim society), Driss is Noise, complexity:

Calmly, you enter the European city. You have light skin, blond hair, blue eyes. The Prophet didn't single out his chosen ones. Why would he? He did not predict that his people would include chameleons. Looking at you, who would take you for an Arab? That is one of the things you are proud of. It's like being proud of pissing red and shitting blue. Two scenes. One side or the other (23).

We know that the author is Berber. He thus has a fairer skin, a fact that is already considered as a rupture in the system: even a fly is not a parasite in this society: "The fly again, the pot simmers on the coals. Nothing has changed" (29). Change is inside of him, but he cannot presume to change the Prophet's laws, transmitted to his Father, which will in turn be transmitted to him.

Driss is part of a primary totality, that is the world of Islam. We are in Morocco, in a Muslim country. Even if Driss attends the French school, he thinks, judges, lives, and acts according to parables, as do the public story tellers of the African continent. One can find no changes in the land of Islam. Islam represents memory, the great hot reservoir, closed and concentrated. Nothing changes in Morocco. He makes sarcastic comment: "Our soup is like our traditions. It is all at once an hors-d'oeuvre, a main dish, and a dessert" (11).

Driss does not fast. But he is part of the first reservoir:

Those hungry people and I are alike: we are each functions, them of thirteen centuries of Islam and the "Lord", crystallization of Islam. And we are unlike. For the same reason. One has more to fear from a wolf than from a pack of wolf cubs (194).

Driss is not the only one who doesn't fast. Only the elderly do it:

Even though for most of them it is a habit or a manifestation. . . My grand-father is a saint posthumously; because he was poor, pious and crazy (194).

It is the Muslim circle that surrounds him. It is a real world, not theoretical, an innate world, not a received one. His head is crammed with paternal information. The Father is the antinomy of noise. He is the reservoir "Formal and concrete universal, the sum of its predecessors," he is "the Universal motor (Serres, 61). The Father constantly reinvents "*le passé simple*". He is God on earth. He is everywhere in the text, everything is done according to him, because he is "The sum of all objects, but the object of all of enthusiasm, of knowledge, of greed" (60). He is heredity. He is the very Center when he prays:

We positioned ourselves in an isosceles triangle and the prayer began. The head goose was naturally the Lord (*Seigneur*). We knelt down, we prostrated ourselves, he on the prayer rug, we on the cold mosaic. He declaimed a verse, choosing the longest, the most rhythmic, the most monotonous. We chanted "Allah is great" every time we knelt and "Glory to God in the Highest" at each prostration. I listened to that grave voice, stripped of the slightest trembling. It was the voice of a man who spoke to God as an equal (37).

The Father is the reservoir of time: his family is descendant from the Prophet, because he is Fardi:

Up there, in the Lord's room, there are venerable parchments. I have consulted all of the them. They all affirm, "The son of Adam so and so states that so and so had heard that so and so heard so and so one day tell so and so that he remembered that so and . . .," etc. . . etc. . . here a dogma followed by instructions: not to be understood, not to be judged, to be believed, that is all that is asked. Amen (50-51).

The Father is important because he incarnates the Word, myth, ritual, the sacred structures, which in turn repeat the political, the social and the cultural structures in Moroccan society.

Under the Father's rule, all silence, all Noise is regulated, like the tea ceremony. The Father, who is called throughout the entire novel "*le Seigneur*" ("the Lord"), does not want any kind of change:

We understand that you are dressed in European clothes, said the Lord one day. Wearing a *jellaba* and a *chechia* to high school you would look like a camel at the North Pole. But once you get home, don't offend our sight: no tie, no long pants, roll them up to knees, like the Turks do. And of course, leave your

shoes outside: your father's room is neither a corridor nor a stable (11-12).

The *jellaba* and the *chéchia* represent tradition, the refusal of "parasitism," while at the high school, the tie and the pants represent the West, the future and the creators of noise vis-à-vis local society. Driss recognizes this intellectual ambiguity:

Imagine a Nigger turned white overnight, but whose nose was left black, either on purpose or by accident. I was wearing a jacket and pants. On my feet, a pair of shoes. A shirt. A belt at the waist. A handkerchief in my pocket. I was proud. Like a little European! As soon as I was among my friends, I felt grotesque. And I was (12).

His bearing, his way of dressing, of writing, constitute an infraction of order. He is unbridled effervescence: he studied chemistry, he has a predilection for the terms used in this science, and his Arab vocabulary in this work (41 words, according to my count) is mixed with the most abstract French terms, and French is mixed with images borrowed from Moroccan life. His friend Roche asks him to lend him 8000 words in order to write a novel. It is to show that he is in cultural solitude between two worlds. Young Driss represents the fermentation of several cultures.

Driss belongs to the family Ferdi, which in Moroccan Arabic means "knife," but also "solitary," and "pistol." This is significant, for Driss threatens his father with a knife at the beginning of the story. He understands that he is impurity, he does not yet know where his new-found condition, the birth of new knowledge will take him. He will bypass this "grotesque" situation, because one day he will have to bypass Islam and Voltaire in order to constitute something new. The fact that he finds himself "grotesque" is important, for he is in the process of reducing ideological illusion. His knowledge will no longer be neutral, between the pure and the impure: he will be both at the same time from now on. He cannot be the pure alone, just as he cannot be the impure alone. Traditional values deprecate the impurity of the new culture. He himself is a synthesis, a travestied intellectual, who enters into two orders. He fights against the weight of the past without rejecting it. He does not reject his Father, he does not reject French culture, even though both of them are exterior to his new personality. He is "*l'extériorité*" for he recognizes it and retains it. For centuries his country has lived in a past that was thought to be definitive, a past without breaks, spotless. For Driss the problem is not to be free, but to find a conciliatory route, an exit.



The house represents the refusal of complexity. Everything in it is silent, muted, mute. The entire system is built on the ablation. The house corresponds to the construction of knowledge in this society:

This rising of bile, some acrid chewing-gum, I chew and macerate them in the silence that followed my installation at the Lord's right hand. Because the silence is there and gets heavier the longer it lasts. . . . One day you taught me the *hadith* of the ablutions: abluitionned, one small fact is enough, even just a noise, to be soiled and thus constrained to more ablutions. Amen, Lord, Amen! (13)

The mother represents the marginalized, for generations, oppressed by the center. She also represents a "parasite", to be eliminated, to be silenced, so that the father can continue the story and the *history*. She is without noise.

She is the tattooed memory who can not constitute the triangle indispensable to the existence of the reservoir. The mother represents acceptance, silence: she will not constitute a noise until the moment of her suicide at the end of the novel. She calls her husband "master." The narrator says:

She was ready for any eventual catastrophe. What was she, except a woman whose thighs could be locked up for the Lord and over whom he had the power of life and death? She had always lived in houses with barricades, doors and barred windows. From the terraces, there was nothing to see but the sky and the symbolic minarets. One of God's creatures that the Koran has shut up: "Fuck them and fuck them again; in the vagina, it is the most useful; next, ignore them until the next time". Yes, my mother was that weak, submissive, passive. She had seven children, at regular intervals, two years (36-37).

She is a reservoir which contains the heat and the combustible necessary for the birthing of children, who are the fortune, the gold of African society. She is the force necessary to the Father's needs. All of her value is in her "work": clean the house and have children. Her entire being is linked to the East, the Orient and to Africa: nothing circulates in her, because she is, by definition, linearity. She will be between the two fires: the Father (the Law) and the Son (the Past, the Present, and the Future), because, as H  l  ne Cixous puts it, she is

Guilty of everything, at every turn. . . . A woman without a body, mute, blind, cannot be a good fighter. She is reduced to being a servant of the militant male, his shadow.<sup>4</sup>

His mother is like the white house, the place of tradition, where they live: she is the one who whitewashes the house twice a year. The death of his mother is like the death of his brother, who is simply a cadaver: in any case there are lots of children. The mother died by conforming to Moroccan society's precepts: a good mother, a good Muslim. By committing suicide she carried out her first sacrilegious act, because Islam condemns suicide. Silence constitutes a parasite. The order tries to live without much complexity: "There was another pause. Silence constitutes an opinion. Women are bought and children are made" (53). Anything exterior to family life creates noise in the Father's system. It is a limited noise, even if it is the beginning of the revolt against the reservoir.

Driss sleeps every night dreaming about what is beautiful, about pleasure and desire. It is during the night that he has the Power to think. It is in the shadows that he sees that he is the mirage of the duplication of the Father. At night, before going to bed, he wants to disengage himself from the system, he wants autonomy. At night he is "*la similitude dissymétrique*" between two ways of life, which engender duality. While closing his eyes, he realizes that he is the alterity necessary for the absolute. For him, difference is the industrialized world with its beautiful lips:

Lips of old women, of adolescents, of concierges, of saleswomen, of prostitutes and of average wives, all of them capture my attention, and I know several impossible to forget. Those are the lips of Europeans, of French women, indeed of Parisians. They have the right to the cream of civilization. The lips that meet their kiss, the zenith of refined scientific industry (sic) (88).

These women are the opposite of the women of his society. Their lips are transgression and they represent sexual liberty.

The entire country is in the image of the Father. The city of Fez is also tradition, the refusal of change: Fez is simply Islam (Muslims from the world over gather there, in fact). Fez's buildings are Immutability. Fez is the city of the past, the city of the saints, where his father was born, and He represents its center, its mentality, the refusal of the marginal and of the different. Fez is the city of the oldest university in the world. He goes there with his mother. While walking through this city, Driss accuses every passer-by, every stone, as though

they were the city itself. And it is here, in this city that represents Authority that he decides to rebel, to be confusion for himself and for his mother:

We were in Fez. . . . I don't like that city. It is my past and I don't like my past. . . . Fez is simply shriveled up. Yet, I know that as I get stuck there, it will grab hold of me and make me an entity, quantum, brick among bricks, lizard, dust - and without my needing to be aware of it. Is it not the city of Lords? A house, any boutique, a street corner is a brutal throw back to the material. . . . It has an odor, a color, a tone its own. Those who are exiled from it retain these characteristics. Wasn't the Lord born there? (65)

The father is the flag under which the battle is fought. As soon as his father is in financial trouble the "*Ligne Mince*" (the "Thin Line") takes Driss and at the mosque he prays for his father, by invoking another authority important to Islam: the Marabou, Driss' uncle. It is in the mosque that he feels confused, that he discovers that he is himself the fusion of two authorities:

The thin line is presently clear. . . . It says to me: you are a nigger. You have been a nigger mixed with white for generations. . . . You have come from the Orient and through your painful past, your imaginations, your education, you will triumph over the Orient. You never believed in Allah, you know how to dissect legends, you think in French, you read Voltaire and admire Kant. Only the West to which you are destined looks strewn with stupidity to you and you flee. What's more you predict its hostility, it will not accept you outright. On the verge of exchanging your theater box for a seat, you hesitate. That is why I appear to you. Since the first day I appeared to you, you are nothing but a wound (95).

Driss is complexity (Africa, the East, the West), but the West has triumphed over the others. He would like to revolt, but with Kant and Voltaire at his side. The reality: he is nothing but a wound. A point. There is no exit, because the West is like the East: the same ugliness. He is between the two worlds. His skin has changed as has his imagination.

Driss tries to revolt and to lead the family rebellion against the father, to the death of his brother Hamid, killed by the father. For once, he considers himself strange in comparison to the norm. Deep inside himself, he does not want to destroy Patriarchy, but only change theocracy. He puts himself in a position of authority, faced with his

mother depository of the Paternal system and the involuntary destroyer of all noise:

I thought you were weak and awkward, I said. Eating, drinking, sleeping, excreting, mating. Respectively the menus established by the Lord, the Lord's tea, five times a day, two times a day and according to the Lord's will. In the interval, you cook, clean, sweep, wash, sew, knit, bake bread, kill mice and cockroaches, mill the tea and sift it, keep a mental account, embroider handkerchiefs, beat on a tambourine and dance barefoot, kill flies. That I admit. What I don't understand is this obi. Why this obi? (119)

But the mother does not understand him: she wants to have another child to replace Hamid. She makes no "brouhaha", noise, because she wants to carry on the race. This is an auto(bio)graphical novel: it is true that Chraïbi's mother never left her house in 33 years!

Driss recognizes that he is a reproduction of the father, because he is the favorite, the chosen: "Still, I was aware: excepting an optical error, the Lord had completely reproduced himself in me. And I had the right to yell" (140). It is on the night of Power, the 27th of Ramadan that he protests, because it is on that night that, according to tradition God sent the Koran down to Mohammed, and every Muslim has the right to preach in the mosque: this is what young Driss does, as a manifestation of his independence from and acceptance of the Muslim system. But his brothers will refuse the installation of another system. They prefer to be close lipped "trapezoids"—that is, in a more narrow sense, inequality.

The revolt begins by stopping the instrument of Power: the hand of his father which will always hit him. Driss discovers that this hand is not of iron, as he had always imagined, but that it is weak. The father looks at his hand after the son has let it go: it is a hand made to make money to correct, to bless. It is an anti-noise hand. Driss will revolt against society, in order to discover that the other society created in the image of the West wants nothing to do with him.

The city itself corresponds to these places of change of culture and place. Symmetry ends in the Father's house:

I began walking once again toward the Lord's house. Everything was making me go back there and my burst illusions like soaps bubbles and my sterile revolt like old shit (203).

It is the repression of the African intellectual that cannot combine extremes and comes back to the nest, by mythifying it and by contributing to its exclusion: it is always recuperated by heat. That is

why, after his mother's suicide, the Father gives him a lesson of good conduct, by setting himself up as the Synthesis:

Don't tell me that you are superior to us in anything, your education. Voltaire, Henri Poincaré, Malet and Isaac, and the books that you read and the courses of your studies have been translated into every language. I've read everything, learned everything, but in Arabic, *mea culpa!*. . . Thus. Before the Protectorate. From all time. Since Omar and the Califas, here or there—and those who speak of reforms would do better to go whiten niggers. Then there was you. You the poison. And I didn't know that the Administration had taken up the task of instilling in our sons a poison in its cultural contributions; or if it was intentional, there is a rape of the soul, in any case ever since the day you went to high school, you have been nothing but that, poison. You saw social injustice everywhere, and, you said, in the same individual, from the minute to the next, temporal injustice: who asked you to see them, anyway? And who in the the hell taught you that those were injustices? You wanted to comfort the bitter—a wandering knight in the age of the black market!—you brandished the oppressed like a flag; you sowed rebellion among your brothers and you emptied *my* provisions to jackals from *my* granary, who went right off to take up again their good old begging habits, a bag of oats or of barley being enough to get them off? Are you kidding? The poison, you injected it even into your mother's extreme resignation. The idea of rebelling would never have entered her mind. You stuffed her with it. She died of it (244-45).

The difference between the Father and the Son is that the former sees the past as being more important than the present. The latter, on the contrary, sees that the present is nothing more than a combination of past elements, displaced, but that it all rests on complexity: it is not a question of "changing", but of "accepting" difference in order to better understand interdependence and interference. Complexity is not only accumulation, but it is also the acceptance of the fact that totality needs noise. The Son is the innovation that does not reject the Father. He wants from him the formal recognition of socio-cultural complexity. The Son represents the new language of the new generation. He is also the Future, because the Father has always chosen him to be the continuity: he is plurality. Driss has accepted the two universes and that brings him to assent. He is contaminated by the two worlds: he realizes the sharing of convention, the connivance of masques. He is the alterity necessary to the existence of the two different values. The Father limits himself to being solely a transmitter of legends, whose complexity is in

the past. But the Father realizes the fact that generations change, and that in Morocco, it is the young, pulled between two centers of decisions, that are touched the most. There is a malaise in this book. Malaise vis-à-vis the Ancestors who are not able to adapt to the circumstances that were created because of colonization. Malaise vis-à-vis the new French culture that attracts and rejects them. The Father speculated in the name of Allah: he became rich. The new generation speculates on Nothing, on Constraint. Constraint is always creative. The Father asks him to be realistic:

My time, your time, the patrimony that passed on from father to son like an old wine recipe, like a flame, but also successive periods, that are amended. My time: cut out in the name of Allah, speculate in the name of Mohammed, buy, sell, without pity, without scruples, money. And only, I touch here upon the real wound, only the Moroccan capitalists are taken into consideration, hold their own. We don't negotiate with utopians, but with oil, Sebti, the Sebti brothers, you have heard of them, not nationalist, simple millionaires, they don't care about politics, about Islam, about France. They are on their own, there are three of them, they do more for the well-being of the country than do all of the nationalists. They are feared, respected. Why? They have the means, rubies at their fingertips, to buy up all of the Cherif's territory. Your time: it will be one of consolidation. That is why I had you educated—So that you would be able to hold on to the patrimony. Where I would be unable to. Go to sleep (249).

The Father predicts that the Son will be the "*centripète*" and the centrifuge, imitation and distinction. He knows that his son is the opposite and that Islam lives, and changes itself into the opposite, so that there is substitution and coexistence. His Father is not his rival, but his model that he must venerate and surmount. Solipsism is no longer a reason for being. He has chosen to channel his son's desires instead of forbidding: he must come to a point where the son no longer hates him, by making of him an equal.

At the end of the novel, Driss accepts to be both continuity and discontinuity, for the new intellectual born of this debate in a new problematic relation. He will imitate models in order to create others, indispensable to their existence. But it is not a religious imitation. Driss never wanted to become his Father. The "*souci*" of being disorder in order will lead him down the road of synthesis because he cannot exist without accepting the complexity of the new Morocco. To leave behind ambivalence one must become the two reservoirs at the same time in order to be different. On the contrary, he wanted to be "French",

because he wanted to be the "Other" the rival of his own native cultures (Arab and Muslim culture). He is no longer what he was, and he isn't either an other: he is no longer a problem of Truth, but a problem of communication of different intellectual natures. He is African and Berber: in sum, wine will be mixed with camels' milk.

In the end, he feels a certain apprehension toward change. From the exterior, noise moves within him, in the third "field" which is the whole of the Western and Muslim reservoirs. He moves within his antinomy: everything exists through transformation. He is the opposite of his Father, who is the contrary of any infiltration of Western culture. But they are all the same terms or the same relation: none of them can exist without the other. Driss is the acceptance of a rigid order, hierarchized, stable (the Muslim and French orders), but he is the movement within them both.

He is conscious of the fact that the two systems carry within themselves opacity and imperfection, fragility and illusion. The African intellectual is unique, because he is a schizophrenic mixture, a Harlequin's costume where the functions of different orders and coefficients are visible. His future is connected to a dream: to create a "minor future" within "the major-futures". There are no models. One must mix in order to live.

By wanting to exist, Driss Chraïbi becomes a public writer. African literature always touches politics because its space is limited. The problem of the individual joins the familial triangle which is connected to other commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical, triangles. Driss is an indispensable element to the edifice called Africa. He is collective values condemned by politics and by different cultures. Cultural differences have marginalized him: he is the only one who can express a collective enunciation. As a result, he disappears as a subject, as the narrator and as the character, given that there are only collective enunciations.

In order to exist he must appropriate for himself two cultural orders: he no longer knows what he is, and he is "*le non-lieu*," the no-place, the nowhere necessary to both cultures. From now on, he is a reservoir that reassembles and diffuses a quantity of cultural variety with different explanations. He is no longer a chance although he has been chosen by accident by his father. Driss wants to abolish the chance, by looking for a multiplicity of different things: the before and the after are unified for him, because both are a fragment of the totality. He is "*entre le cristal et la fumée*," given that he is both at the same time. But he doesn't repeat word for word what Islam and French culture tell him, because Driss is a singular construction of Africa which changes into a pre-existing order. He is not the reduction of the multiple to the one that is the sum of all, of the imperfect to the perfect, because disorder is order. Islam and French culture, both of them foreign to the

African mind because both were imported, are both pillars of an order that wants to be perfect: he is the imperfection of both, the double without which there couldn't exist a system. Driss is African disorder: the new in the old and vice versa. The signifier (Driss) cannot be detached from the signified. At the end of the novel, he is not just one signified but several signifieds.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup>By "noise," I refer not to loud sounds, but to anything that disrupts significations, but still signifies and communicates. My use of the word is drawn from the work of Michel Serres. See also William Paulson, *The Noise of Culture: Literary Texts in a World of Information* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988).

<sup>2</sup>Driss Chraïbi, *Le Passé Simple* (Paris: Denoël, 1954). All translations are mine. The page numbers refer to the French texts.

<sup>3</sup>Michel Serres, *Hermès IV. La Distribution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Méduse," in *L'Arc*, 61, 1975.

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