



NARRATIVE DEVICES IN PAULE MARSHALL'S FICTION

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Abstract:

Like various other African-American female writers' fictional works, Paule Marshall's creative art is anchored in her triple roots (American, African and Barbadian). She thematizes countless sociocultural phenomena narrowly related to her ancestral background. Substantively, her novel titled *Praisesong for the Widow* embodies some analeptic narrative devices, which revitalize her community's painful cultural experiences. With a pronounced passion for literature, she mingles, on the one hand, historical facts with fictional ones, black dialect with English, and on the other hand, fictionalizes tales, myths, legends, proverbs, and songs. Her literary imagination teems with some noteworthy extratextual values connected with the African, Caribbean and American societies. Those geographical spaces are mainly inhabited by the African descents. Deported during the colonial period, the latter's ancestors take with them some of their African values, such as language, religion, and many other substantial traditional/cultural practices. The change of environment favors the implantation of that legacy in America and elsewhere. However, over centuries, those inherited resources undergo the impact of the values pertaining to the host spaces, thus provoking a cultural bereavement/alteration or shock whose immediate repercussion is known as acculturation. The longer this sway persists, the more Blacks suffer from diverse crises. With no instant palliative measures, which can enable them to fight against the exotic cultural domination, each of Marshall's fictional beings deems it necessary to return to their ancestors' benchmarks for a whole restoration of their "lost self". In terms of aesthetic scope, the novel under consideration breaks with a number of artistic traditions. The subversion of some of the canonical norms and interweaving of linguistic devices, colonial facts, mythical, legendary, proverbial, ancestral figures, epitomize that rupture and desire for innovation. An in-depth study of those textual clues will therefore contribute to bringing out the significance of the author's literary vision. To achieve those objectives, the criticism of postmodernism will serve as the methodological framework. Its principles will help to scrutinize both intergeneric devices, and hybrid/pacifist practices.

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1. Introduction

A retrospective look at the period ranging from the 1920s up to now contributes to disclosing the crucial and continuous role played by African-American literature in the promotion of Blacks' cultural identity and dignity.

Pointless to rehash the painful and dark historical interlude experienced by the black community and its persistent drawbacks, the least to indicate is that the transplantation of Blacks in the West Indies and American societies is keenly the result of the transatlantic trade. The latter suffers from odious and unparalleled crimes that the African-American literature is committed to reconstructing in a detailed and plausible manner. Black female/male writers (poets, novelists, essayists, and playwrights) play a crucial role in the process of restoration of their collective memories. Writers, such as W.E.B. Dubois (1868-1963), Claude McKay (1890-1948), Maya Angelou (1890-1948), Nella Larsen (1861-1964), Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1986), Langston Hughes (1901-1967), Countee Cullen (1903-1946), Paule Marshall (1929-2019), Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965), Ernest J. Gaines (1933, 2019), Nikki Giovanni (1943), Alice Walker (1944), and various others show in their respective writings how bright and educated Blacks are. Through their literary works, they depict Blacks as victims of a historical incident, but successfully advocate their sense of humanity, love, brotherhood, and intellectuality. Without upholding a policy of chaos nor desire for revenge towards their white executioners, they embark on a peaceful, but resolute decolonizing process.

In this regard, they restore their truncated and caricatured image. Through some ingenious, literary creations or games, they openly express (externalize) their non-conformist/postmodernist narrative strategies. In his book entitled *De la Renaissance à la Postmodernité: Une histoire de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine*, Gilbert Hottois displays the characteristics of postmodernism as follows, "[the modernist practice aims at] decrying the absolutist and totalitarian conceptions claiming to reduce everything to the unity of a definitive and immutable truth"ⁱⁱ (Translation mine). Taking the substance of their texts from their ancestral heritage, the black writers manage to provide their literature with an attractive brand, even an identity. On the linguistic and narrative levels, they appropriate the black dialect formerly used by their ancestors on the Southern plantations and thematize their disarray.

On the toponymic and onomastic levels, they fictionalize their geographical roots and praise the names pertaining to some of their iconic, historical, and political figures. Better still, they associate some of Blacks' common causes, inter alia equality and freedom. With this paradigmatic shift, they impose their own vision of society, which is apparent through the practice of "plurivocality" and "intergenericity". The plurality of narrative voices and the non-compliance with the boundaries between the different

ⁱⁱ "[La pratique postmoderniste vise à] dénoncer les conceptions absolutistes et totalitaires prétendant à tout ramener à l'unité d'une vérité définitive et immuable" (Hottois, 1997)

literary genres, gives rise to the emergence of an antithetic narrative power, which challenges the auctorial authority, resolutely demanding more autonomy. In essence, the colonial authority is discredited. In his book titled *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, David Harvey asserts:

"The postmodern novel, McHale (1987) argues, is characterized by a shift from an 'epistemological' to an 'ontological' dominant. By this he means a shift from the kind of perspectivism that allowed the modernist to get a better bearing on the meaning of a complex but nevertheless singular reality, to the foregrounding of questions as to how radically different realities may coexist, collide, and interpenetrate. The boundary between fiction and science-fiction has, as a consequence, effectively dissolved, while postmodernist characters often seem confused as to which world they are in, and how they should act with respect to it." (Harvey, 1990)

More explicitly, Marshall's black characters embody a kind of counter-power. Put it differently, the discursive strategies used by the black writers advocate their "know-how" and "know-how-to-be". On the artistical level, their texts poeticize both Caribbean and African cultural markers, thus standing out from Eurocentrism. Practically, this aesthetic or poetic subversion constitutes the symbol of the metaphor of rupture, but beyond that aspect, it inaugurates an era of renewal in which the scriptural, diegetic, or rewriting material primarily participates in the construction of black identity.

To dig into those narrative devices, whose textual incorporation helps the black writers free themselves from the damaging artistic restriction in which the unique and dominant thought inherited from colonization inscribed them, the current study will focus on Paule Marshall's narrative techniques. This choice is far from being exclusive; it is rather explained by the pertinence and relevance of the encoding patterns utilized in the novel under investigation. Thus, despite the numerous and relevant scientific works already achieved on this African-American writer's fiction, each new reading devoted to her text arouses a curiosity, in particular, the one connected with the comprehension of any of her characters, utterances, or discursive devices. The interconnection between her novels and other fields of knowledge postulates and urges, in a certain way, the interpretative continuity of her literary project. In other words, her writing is profusely "wealthy" in values. This semantic asset provides her creative art with an essential place both nationally and internationally. Moreover, her postmodernist trend embodies various profound values. This means they need to be addressed for a further insight into her fiction. In the article titled "Postmodern/Poststructural Approaches," Jennifer J. Mease expresses her postmodernist vision as follows:

"One might describe postmodernism as a particular way of doing or being that challenges the conventionally accepted notion of universal truths and norms by playing with and embracing alternatives to those truths and norms" (Mease, 2017).

Significantly, Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*ⁱⁱⁱ prescribes a discourse, which challenges the traditional artistic and social norms.

With reference to the details displayed above, interrogating Marshall's literary production seems to be an ambitious exercise, for such a project will help to account for her narrative techniques. For that purpose, it is necessary to consider some of the approaches devoted to her fictional vision. Through a comparatistic approach, Linda Pannill conducts a thorough analysis on *Marshallian* characters. Examining *Praisesong*, she focuses on Avey Johnson's physical appearance. According to her view, this female character has assimilated the Western values:

"The protagonist, Avey Johnson, on the surface more conventional than Marshall's earlier novel heroines is always properly dressed in muted colors, with hat, purse and glove-muffled hands, her full underlip carefully 'folded'" (Pannill, 1985).

Likewise, Avey Johnson's husband Jay Johnson appropriates the American capitalism, that is to say, he adapts to the socio-economic realities of his host society. However, not exerting a decent profession, he indulges in several lucrative activities. Pannill's study considers that endeavor as being exhausting and disappointing, *"through a series of flashbacks we learn about her vibrant husband, Jay, how he was transformed by overwork, disappointment, and the acceptance of white, middle-class values into a different man, Jerome"* (Pannill, 1985). Clearly, Jay Johnson's death can be deemed as one the drawbacks of his exhaustion.

Missy Dehn Kubitschek is also one of Paule Marshall's critics. Her critical study titled *"Paule Marshall's Women on Quest"* (1987) interrogates *Brown Girl, Brownstone* (1959), *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), and *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983). To carry out her analysis, Kubitschek leans on Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and examines Marshall's female characters. With reference to her approach, Marshall's text incorporates the *Campbellian* Universalist scheme:

"Stepito's racially specific theory of immersion, and the gender-specific paradigm of Christ: Various parts of these complex novels conform to each of the suggested structures, but their meanings are modified by their simultaneous participation in the other paradigms; in addition, Marshall highlights age, continual process, and female mentoring and its relationship to empowerment and subsequent articulation as significant elements of her women's quests." (Kubitschek, 1987)

In this passage, Kubitschek exposes the values, which render the quests of Marshall's female characters possible. Besides, in *"The Widow's Journey to Self and Roots: Aging and Society in Paule Marshall's Praisesong for the Widow"* (1987), Barbara Frey Waxman delves into the benefits of the spiritual journey undertaken by Avey Johnson. This journey appears to be symbolic, for it provides the travelers, such as Avey

ⁱⁱⁱ For any other references to the novel under investigation, we will use *Praisesong*.

Johnson to discover themselves, to know their individual "Self" and realize that they belong to a large and united community. Questioning Avey Johnson's trajectory, Waxman maintains the following:

"On Carriacou, Avey discovers her link to the Arada nation and finally becomes herself, reassuming her true name, Avatara, for in African cosmology it is through nommo, through the correct naming of a thing that it comes into existence. By knowing her proper name Avey become herself." (Waxman, 1987)

In addition to Waxman's reflection, Paulette Brown-Hinds addresses Marshall's novel. She begins her analysis by revealing that dance acquires a healing virtue in *Praisesong*:

"In Paule Marshall's fiction, traditional dance rituals provide healing of the spirit and a means for expressing the relationship between the self and the larger community" (Brown-Hinds, 1995).

More importantly, the dance performed by the Caribbeans during the "Annual Excursion"^{iv} has a spiritual significance. As a cultural marker, each ethnic group performs its dance and experiences a specific historical fact. This enables the performers or subjects to identify themselves as members of a given tribe. In this sense, the dance symbolizes the threads, which help the characters connect with their original or ancestral community.

Further, in her article "'Will You Come and Follow Me?' Walking Literacy and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*" (2015), Folashade Alao shows that the extratextual values, such as walking, literacy, cultural rituals, and myths are substantial for diasporic or exilic subjects. To Alao, those figures help the exilic beings connect with their ancestral roots. With regard to walking, Alao uses the example of Marshall's female character named Avey Johnson. According to Alao's study, the latter receives some pieces of advice (historical teachings) from Aunt Cuney during her stay in Tatem. That Old woman hikes with her and relates to her the story of the landing of the first Africans on the American coast. This storytelling, which consists in passing on past events to young generation is instructive for those who undertake the Annual Excursion. As to the second value (literacy), it helps to graphically materialize Blacks' collective memory. As far as the rituals and myths are concerned, they are an integral part of the cultural markers. By appropriating them, the diasporic or exilic subjects revitalize their cultural heritage. Moreover, those cultural values participate in the construction of Blacks' identity. The utterances below provide further details in this regard:

^{iv} A spiritual journey to the Caribbean Isles; through this displacement, the Carriacouans pay tribute to their ancestors (Old-Parents).

"In [her novel], Paule Marshall draws a connection between walking, literacy, and African diasporic cultural rituals and myths (...). Memories of walking, (...), although they are relatively brief, are critical to the novel and help initiate Avey's cultural rebirth, her physical awakening, and the unearthing of suppressed spatial knowledge (...). Memories of past bodily movement, particularly guided walking, also enable Avey to comprehend the bodily movement of her ancestors, recounted in folklore and oral recollections, as an affirming and empowering model to navigate contemporary physical displacement and cultural alienation." (Alao, 2015)

The above example also posits the ancestral figures' assistance as one of the prerequisites that the diasporic or exilic subjects need to construct their cultural identity.

Alao, therefore, praises the paramount action undertaken by Aunt Cuney in mentoring Avey Johnson. By complying with that old woman's prescriptions, Avey Johnson appears, over the course of the narrative, as a redeemed being. From the same explanatory perspective, Sutapa Pal and C.S. Robinson's critical study titled "Transformation and Recreation of Self-Identity in the Women Protagonists of Paule Marshall" (2017) questions three of Marshall's novels, namely *The Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969) and *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983). Addressing the third one, both critics show how influential American capitalism and culture are.

To them, Avey Johnson's financial or economic assets fail to provide her with identity security. Thanks to her economic wealth, she easily takes care of herself and her family, but a gap is created between her and her home community. The quest for material seems to be the main cause of that cultural break or disconnection. According to the analysis of both literary critics, Avey Johnson agrees to comply with Aunt Cuney's advice in order to resolve her problematic cultural crisis. Therefore, she decides to participate in the Annual Excursion in order to reconnect with her ancestral heritage. This return to the Caribbean Island is regarded as a promising way, for it restores her cultural past. All her crises and nightmares disappear after being purified by Lebert Joseph and her daughter (Rosalie Parvay). Better still, Avey Johnson discovers her "Self" and connects with the *Others*. She is taught about her place and role in her community.

As one can notice, the above critical review of literature is far from being exhaustive. Put it differently, since its publication in 1983, the novel under investigation is persistently interrogated in the context of varied academic and scientific studies. Each of them comes up as much as possible with the analysis of Marshall's aesthetic vision. Nevertheless, despite the notable advances recorded, *Praisesong* remains unstable and elusive; thus, it is still the object of scholars' curiosity. In view of that observation, one is tempted to puzzle over the particularity of *Marshallian* literary project. Moreover, without falling into the trap of unfounded criticisms, it is relevant to display the essential reason, which justifies and consolidates the choice of the current study. By associating the paratext (title) with the substance, *Praisesong* incorporates some narrative devices, which ideologically depict the oppressed people's need, namely the desire to completely decolonize the backward minds still attached to colonial imperialism. In her postmodern

novel, Marshall inaugurates an original narrative strategy that Kibédi Varga Áron qualifies as “renarrativation” (Áron, 1990), which privileges contradiction, openness, plurality and difference that Achille Mbembe equally describes in his book *De la postcolonie: Essai sur l’imagination politique dans l’Afrique contemporaine*:

“As to the notion of postcolony, it simply refers to the identity of a given historical trajectory: that of societies that have recently emerged from the experience of colonization, which must be considered as a relationship of violence par excellence”^v. (Translation mine)

Clearly, Marshall thematizes some cultural values pertaining to the black community –a subtle way of wresting freedom and proclaiming Blacks’ artistic autonomy from the Eurocentric one. Through this literary “renarrativation strategy,” she successfully promotes black identity. Her challenging, innovative narrative techniques are therefore far from being the property of a bygone era; they rather take into account today’s social realities, and show how today’s societies, namely (American society) remain plagued by ignoble practices inherited from colonization. The current study is therefore relevant and meritorious to be conducted, but to efficiently decipher the narrative devices contained in *Praisesong*, the criticism of postmodernism will serve as the methodological tool. According to Yves Boisvert’s postmodernist approach:

“Postmodernism is not an aesthetic school but rather an aesthetic attitude, which enables several completely different, even contradictory, styles to mix ‘harmoniously’. It is a form of ‘melting pot’ (...) with the postmodernism, there is not anymore a style of dominant period.”^{vi} (Translation)

With reference to Boisvert’s view, this study will deal with two aspects: intergeneric devices and hybrid practices.

2. Intergeneric Devices

This section aims at listing and analyzing the textual clues, which corroborate intergenericity. But, before beginning with that exercise, it is relevant to provide a critical and explanatory approach to the notion of intergenericity.

The notion of intergenericity can be appreciated as a creative practice used in some literary texts. As such, one of its main particularities is that it privileges the opening of the borders between genres. It rejects any scriptural practice urging protectionist or

^v « Quant à la notion de postcolonie, elle renvoie simplement à l’identité d’une trajectoire historique donnée : celle de sociétés récemment sorties de l’expérience de la colonisation, qui doit être considérée comme une relation de violence par excellence. » (Mbembe, 2000)

^{vi} « Le postmodernisme n’est pas une école esthétique mais qu’il s’agit plutôt d’une attitude esthétique qui permet à plusieurs styles totalement différents, voire même contradictoires, de se côtoyer ‘harmonieusement’. Il s’agit d’une forme de ‘melting pot’. (...) avec le postmodernisme, il n’y a plus un style d’époque dominant. » (Boisvert, 1996)

confining policy. Basically, it breaks the barriers between the genres and establishes a sort of globalizing dynamic whose aim is to link the generic universes. Thus, there is a real fluid movement back and forth between genres. In other words, intergenericity advocates the mixing of genres in which generic autonomy is challenged in favor of generic heterogeneity. Through his book entitled *Le monde postmoderne : Analyse du discours sur la postmodernité*, Yves Boisvert defines postmodernist practices as follows:

“The work of interconnection requires a large dose of creativity and an open-mindedness, which forces us to go beyond all the taboos and dogmas, which have been in place for centuries. This intellectual creativity has caused the erosion of the great modern and traditional narratives on the one hand, and the rise in importance of the small ones on the other.”^{vii} (Translation mine)

In this creative state, where one cannot exist without the other, where there is a need to coexist in the sense that one borrows certain values from others, it can be argued that there is an emergence of the policy of interdependence. If that practice is apparent in various literary genres, it should be noted that it is quite recurrent in the novelistic one. In *Praisesong*, it acquires a profound aesthetic significance. For instance, in his book entitled *Roman des origines et origines du roman*, Marthe Robert provides one of the relevant characteristics of the novel, which helps to confirm the practice of intergenericity in *Praisesong*:

“With this freedom of the conqueror whose only law is indefinite expansion, the novel, which has abolished once and for all the old literary castes –those of the classical genres–, appropriates all the forms of expression, exploits to its profit all the processes without even being required to justify their use. And in parallel to this dilapidation of the literary capital accumulated by the centuries, it seizes sectors increasingly vast of the human experiences, of which it often boasts to have a thorough knowledge and of which it gives a reproduction, sometimes by seizing directly, sometimes by interpreting it in the way of the moralist, the historian, the theologian.”^{viii} (Translation mine)

This quotation corroborates in a very faithful way what intergenericity is and how it operates in literature. The specific case of the novelistic genre shows the inexistence of barriers between it and the other fields of knowledge. This genre takes all the possible

^{vii} « *Le travail d'interconnexion demande une importante dose de créativité et nécessite une ouverture d'esprit qui nous oblige à passer outre tous les tabous et dogmes mis en place depuis des siècles. Cette créativité intellectuelle provoqua d'un côté l'érosion des grands récits modernes et traditionnels, et de l'autre la montée en importance des petits.* » (Boisvert, 1996)

^{viii} « *Avec cette liberté du conquérant dont la seule loi est l'expansion indéfinie, le roman, qui a aboli une fois pour toutes les anciennes castes littéraires –celles des genres classiques –, s'approprie toutes les formes d'expression, exploite à son profit tous les procédés sans même être tenu d'en justifier l'emploi. Et parallèlement à cette dilapidation du capital littéraire accumulé par les siècles, il s'empare de secteurs de plus en plus vastes de l'expérience humaine, dont il se targue souvent d'avoir une connaissance approfondie et dont il donne une reproduction, tantôt en saisissant directement, tantôt en l'interprétant à la façon du moraliste, de l'historien, du théologien.* » (Robert, 1972)

powers. In accordance with those precisions or details, let us underline that Marshall's creative art appropriates that conquering strategy by incorporating historical facts. The ensuing utterances exemplify that viewpoint:

"To people in Tatem it was simply the Landing. It was here that they brought 'em. They took 'em out of the boats right here where we's standing. Nobody remembers how many of 'em it was, but they was a good few 'cording to my gran' who a little girl no bigger than you it happened." (Marshall, 1983)

Plainly, the above utterances relate the transatlantic trade during which several Africans lose their African roots forever. This fact is indisputable and proven by history books, such as Alice Bellagamba's *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade* (2013). The fictionalization of that burning social fact is an occurrence of interdiscursive practice through which the literary subject assumes the role of historian. This consists in informing objectively, using tangible evidence. By transgressing the boundaries between novel and History, Marshall creates a new order, in which the novelist is no longer closed or confined in his watchtower, but actively contributes to urging minds to a relational paradigm shift. The use of adverbs of place and action verbs, such as "here" and "happened" in the above utterances shows that Marshall is committed to rendering Blacks' past in an authentic or truthful manner as historians do. *A priori*, as Dominique Maingueneau maintains,

"any discourse is traversed by interdiscursivity, its constitutive property is to be in a multiform relationship with other discourses, to enter into interdiscourse"^{ix} (Translation mine). *Praisesong* includes mythic, poetic, cultural, and historical discourses.

By providing her novel with socio-historical facts (typically linked to her community's past), Marshall claims the noble place devoted to Blacks in the history of the American society. Through the same perspective of reconstruction, *Praisesong* dwells on details, such as the ill-treatment of the African deportees. The following utterances underscore that thesis:

"They just kept walking right on out over the river. Now you wouldn't thought they'd of got very far seeing as it was water they was walking on. Besides they had all that iron 'em. Iron on they ankles and they wrists and fastened 'round they necks like a dog collar. 'Nuff iron to sink an army. And chains looking up the iron. But chains stop those Ibos none." (Marshall, 1983)

Those textual clues reveal the difficult conditions in which the Africans, captives of the colonists, are deported to the American coasts. Beyond the dehumanizing aspect

^{ix} « Tout discours est traversé par l'interdiscursivité, il a pour propriété constitutive d'être en relation multiforme avec d'autres discours, d'entrer dans l'interdiscours » (Maingueneau, 2002).

of that practice, the novel under investigation implicitly conveys a certain moral value, namely banning humiliations and advocating a certain universal brotherhood from which humans (regardless the color of skin, or religious tendencies), evolve harmoniously. Better still, by naming the victims of the transatlantic trade "Ibos", *Praisesong* requires a compensation for that ethnic group. At this level, the legal principle or rule appears through the narrative spine. To put it like Mikhail Bakhtin, words in a literary context are never closed or confined:

"Word is not a thing; it is always dynamic, always changing place in which, the dialogical exchange takes place. It is never satisfied with an awareness, with a single voice. Word's life is its movement from one speaker to another, from one social community to another. In addition, word never forgets its path, cannot get rid entirely of the hold of the contexts of which it has been part."^x (Bakhtin, 1970)

More explicitly, Marshall's text is an open entity; it is in dialogical relation with other genres as indicated by Marthe Robert:

"Thus, unlike the traditional genre, whose regularity is such that it is not only subject to prescriptions and proscriptions, but made by them, the novel is without rules or restraints, open to all possibilities, as it were undefined on all sides".^{xi} (Translation mine)

Comprehensibly, the novel under consideration breaks all the proscribed and prescribed rules and ploughs its own furrows consisting in inscribing Blacks in the historical continuum. However useful it may be, it should be emphasized that Marshall's writing covers a number of values taken from the oral and biblical traditions. To a certain extent, one can even say that *Marshallian* fiction promotes some of the figures of orality, notably proverbs, tales, myths, legends and traditional songs. Let us address, for example, the first *point-valeur*^{xii}. This textual value is the matrix through which the African

^x « *Le mot n'est pas une chose, c'est le lieu toujours dynamique, toujours changeant, dans lequel s'effectue l'échange dialogique. Il ne se satisfait jamais d'une conscience, d'une seule voix. La vie du mot c'est son passage d'un locuteur à un autre, d'une collectivité sociale à une autre. Et le mot n'oublie jamais son trajet, ne peut se débarrasser entièrement de l'emprise des contextes dont il a fait partie.* » (Bakhtin, 1970)

^{xi} « *Ainsi, à la différence du genre traditionnel, dont la régularité est telle qu'il est non seulement assujéti à des prescriptions et des proscriptions, mais fait par elles, le roman est sans règles ni frein, ouvert à tous les possibles, en quelque sorte indéfini de tous côtés.* » (Robert, 1972)

^{xii} *"Analyzing the notion of point-valeur, Vincent Jouve maintains the following, "by 'point-valeur' I mean the manifestation of values at the local level. If the narrator intervenes in the global evaluation, the different characters of a story convey their own axiological universes which are not necessarily in conformity with the vision of the narrator. The value-points are therefore, in general, very numerous in a narrative: they can differ according to the characters, as well as according to the stages that mark the journey of the same actor."* (Translation mine) / « *j'entends par 'point-valeur' la manifestation des valeurs au niveau local. Si le narrateur intervient dans l'évaluation globale, les différents personnages d'un récit véhiculent des univers axiologiques qui leur sont propres et qui ne sont pas nécessairement conformes à la vision du narrateur. Les points-valeurs sont donc, en général, très nombreux dans un récit: ils peuvent différer selon les personnages, aussi selon les étapes qui scandent le parcours d'un même acteur.* » (Jouve, 2001)

ancestors' precious knowledge is preserved, and passed on from generation to generation. In this regard, the example below embodies a profound cultural significance:

"(...) before her eyes adjusted enough for her to discover that the darkness contained its own light. She was able then to separate the sky from the land and to make out the vague shapes of the houses and trees she had seen from the dining room window earlier."
(Marshall, 1983)

At the beginning of *Praisesong*, Marshall's *Praisesong*, her female character (Avey Johnson) named is a profane, but as depicted in the above quotation, her ritualistic passage is achieved. In other words, she is culturally born again; she can see things differently, distinguish social facts and remember her past. According to Lebert Joseph's word, the newly initiated subject's behavior is positive –the latter is now able to establish a connection between the teachings received from Aunt Cuney in Tatem and those received from the Old traditionalist man named Lebert Joseph in Carriacou (Caribbean). Indeed, through Lebert Joseph's use of proverbs, the enunciative and epistemic modalities emerge. When speaking, he utilizes the assertive form. He is also convinced and aware of the truthfulness of his utterances. By thematizing some proverbial figures, one can consider *Praisesong* as a "melting pot" of different genres. This generic hybridization, beyond the formal/structural disorder it creates, renews the structure of Marshall's novel. Each intrusion of new generic values metaphorizes discontinuity, thus violating the principle of narrative linearity, which is recurrent in classical texts.

Moreover, the arising or advent of a new artistic paradigm to fulminate against or inveigh against the traditional social, economic, cultural, and political order is perceptible in *Praisesong* through the interweaving of traditional tales, myths, legends, proverbs and songs. Through those hybrid or heterogeneous extratextual figures, a writing of difference emerges. In essence, its main ideology is the emancipation of African-Americans from colonial bondage. Through the practice of storytelling, the essence of Blacks' culture is exposed. The ensuing example helps to comprehend how those cultural markers convey some moral values:

"Is true. You don' know what's to happen in this life. We might run into rough water. Is a channel where two currents butt up and sometimes it has a little rough water there. Nothing to speak of, though. Nobody takes it on. Mostly the sea does be smooth as silk. But rough water or smooth, you seldom ever hear of a boat giving trouble on the excursion. Tha's one thing you put your mind to rest about." (Marshall, 1983)

The "tale of the crossing" teaches Avey Johnson about the merits of showing good behavior in society. As mentioned here, Lebert Joseph is not the author of that tale. He receives it from his ancestors. Now, he transmits it to Avey Johnson. His desire is to contribute to perpetuating it. Examining the features of the tale, François Theuret avers:

"The tale, marked by orality, is fascinated by the power of the word and pays extreme attention to the form. The reciter retains formulas sometimes here of a magic value. It is moreover a recurring theme in the corpus of marvelous tales, that of the right word: this hero having heard a magic formula only once must very precisely keep it and very exactly restore it under penalty of the greatest misfortunes."^{xiii} (Translation mine)

In *Praisesong*, most of Lebert Joseph's teachings are delivered in form of tales. He is such a master of storytelling that he is depicted as one of the primary repositories of the ancestral heritage. He does not hesitate to assert his powers. Through his deeds, he confirms his ancestral power. For instance, he advises the Carriacouans to scrupulously abide by the values that he transmits to them. In one of his teachings to Avey Johnson, he asserts:

"I tell you, you best remember them! (...) If not they'll get vex and cause you nothing but trouble. They can turn your life around in a minute, you know. All of a sudden everything start gon' wrong and you don' know the reason. You can't figger it out all you try. Is the Old Parents, oui. They's vex with you over something. Oh, them there." (Marshall, 1983)

As revealed above, the tales told by Lebert Joseph aim at perfecting the African descents who take part in the spiritual journey (Annual Excursion). As the narrative unfolds, the traditional values shape them. In *Praisesong*, the picture of the ancestors (Old Parents) is primarily historical and mythical. To Lebert Joseph, the ancestors protect the Carriacouans and all their other relatives scattered throughout the West Indies, Canada, and United States. This myth can be called the "myth of the ancestors". A close look at it, helps to realize that it is a "founding myth". The Carriacouans believe in its relevance in their lives. Therefore, some functions can be assigned to it. A number of functions are found in Philippe Selliers's article titled "Qu'est-ce qu'un mythe littéraire?":

"This narrative is anonymous and collective, elaborated orally over generations, thanks to what Lévi-Strauss calls 'the erosion of its most friable particles'. Long reworked, the myth reaches a conciseness and a strength that, in the eyes of some mythologists, makes it far superior to those individual arrangements that are called literature. The myth is held to be true: a sacred story, of magical efficacy, recited in precise circumstances, it is clearly distinct, for its followers themselves, from all fictional stories (tales, fables, animal stories...). The myth fulfills a socio-religious function. As a social integrator, it is the cement of the group, to which it proposes norms of life and whose present is bathed in the sacred."^{xiv} (Translation mine)

^{xiii} « Le conte, marqué par l'oralité, est fasciné par le pouvoir de la parole et porte une attention extrême à la forme. Le récit retient des formules qu'il restitue à la lettre, car le chant sonore des mots se double quelquefois ici d'une valeur magique. C'est d'ailleurs un thème récurrent dans le corpus des contes merveilleux, que celui du mot juste. » (Rullier-Theuret, 2006)

^{xiv} « Ce récit est anonyme et collectif, élaboré oralement au fil des générations, grâce à ce que Lévi-Strauss appelle 'l'érosion de ses particules les plus friables'. Longtemps retravaillé, le mythe atteint une concision et une force qui,

The Carriacouans show a profound attachment to the “myth of the ancestors”. To argue like Roger Caillois,

“The myth represents to consciousness the image of a behavior whose solicitation it feels. When that behavior exists elsewhere in nature, it, therefore, finds its effective achievement in the objective world. From that point of view, one could easily define the Carriacouans’ mores as a myth in motion.”^{xv} (Translation mine)

Importantly, the literarization of the “myth of the ancestors” in *Praisesong* is a literary device, which promotes spirituality and cohesion among the African descent. The attachment of Marshall’s characters to archetypes proves their act of believing in a transcending being or spirit is not exclusively linked to the Western world. Indeed, by analyzing the spiritual significance of myths, Mircea Eliade avers:

“The one who reproduces the exemplary gesture, is thus transported to the mythical era in which the revelation of this exemplary gesture takes place”^{xvi} (Translation mine).

In *Praisesong*, Lebert Joseph and his daughter Rosalie Parvay are among those who repeat the exemplary gestures (archetypes). Each repetition transports them to a distant era. For instance, the celebration of the Big Drum helps the participants reach the ancestors’ world and commune with them. From a sociocultural point of view, the mythical teachings have a unifying and socializing force. Through them, the African descents share a common ideal, which is their identity. In terms of narrative technique, beyond the values listed above, various others (legends and biblical narratives) are recurrent in *Praisesong*. The utterances below provide some of them:

“And the minute those Ibos was brought on shore they just stopped, my gran’ said, and taken a look around. A good long look. Not saying a word. Just taking their time and studying on it. And they seen things that day you and me don’t have the power to see. ‘Cause those pure-Africans was peoples my gran’ said could see in more ways than one. The kind can tell you ‘bout things happened long before they was born and things to come long after they’s dead. Well, they seen everything that was to happen ‘round here that day. The slavery time and the war my gran’ always talked about, the ‘mancipation and

aux yeux de certains mythologues, le rend bien supérieur à ces agencements individuels qu’on appelle littérature. Le mythe est tenu pour vrai: histoire sacrée, d’une efficacité magique, récitée dans des circonstances précises, il est nettement distinct, pour ses fidèles eux-mêmes, de tous les récits de fiction (contes, fables, histoires d’animaux...). Le mythe remplit une fonction socioreligieuse. Intégrateur social, il est le ciment du groupe, auquel il propose des normes de vie et dont il fait baigner le présent dans le sacré. » (Sellier, 1984)

^{xv} « *Le mythe représente à la conscience l’image d’une conduite dont il ressent la sollicitation. Quand cette conduite existe ailleurs dans la nature, il trouve donc sa réalisation effective dans le monde objectif. De ce point de vue, on pourrait aisément définir les mœurs des Carriacouans comme un mythe en acte. » (Caillois, 1938)*

^{xvi} « *Celui qui reproduit le geste exemplaire, se trouve ainsi transporté dans l’époque mythique où a lieu la révélation de ce geste exemplaire. » (Eliade, 1969)*

everything after that right on up to the hard times today. Those Ibos didn't miss a thing. Even seen you and me standing here talking about 'em...' (Marshall, 1983)

"And what did they find beloved when they came to pray that morning, the poor, grief-stricken Mary Magdalen and the other Mary, mother of James and Joses? Can you tell me? What was the first thing struck their eyes that Sunday morning in the garden? You guess it. The stone to the sepulchre was gone. The great stone that it had taken nearly an army to put into place had been rolled just as nice as you please off to one side. And the soldiers the Pharisees had left to guard the sepulchre were as dead men, we are told standing there. And as if that wasn't enough who should the two Marys see sitting on the rolled-away stone but one of God's angels, his countenance of lighting, his raiment white as snow..." (Marshall, 1983)

The first example (1) has a historical scope, but in reality, it is a legend, which reveals the African deportees' mystical power. Indeed, after realizing that the American space is hostile, they initiate a process of return to their ancestral roots. But this time, some walk on water and others fly away. The fictionalization of this legend confirms the extent to which Marshall's novel is anchored in orality. Through this "oralized novel", the narrative authority is challenged, the narrative turns discontinuous. Various narrators reveal their experiences, thus creating several micro-narratives. This gives rise to polyphony. Defining polyphony, Vincent Jouve notes:

"One will speak of 'polyphony' (the term is, of course, borrowed from Bakhtin), when it is impossible to bring the different points-valeurs of the text to a unique orientation. As soon as there is scattering and contradiction between different judgments, which emanate from the same source ("the authority of the narrative"), we are confronted with a polyphonic text."^{xvii} (Translation mine)

Obviously, the postmodernity, whose varied occurrences punctuate Marshall's novel is not a vain aesthetic practice. It participates in the denunciation of a dominant and absolute ideological system. If the novel titled *Praisesong* is to be contextualized, one can assert that it is a response to a dominant ideological practice whose most harmful consequences are the stifling of all revolutionary trends aimed at decrying or deconstructing the sociopolitical, socio-economic, socio-cultural order (old norms). In this sense, the occurrence of polyphony as an emergent, contradictory voice and innovative practice has an ideological significance. Mikhail Bakhtin writes in this regard:

"The subject divided by its listening -by its desire- to the other does not break the semantic identity of the word as a linguistic unit (word, sentence, utterance). It also breaks the

^{xvii} « On parlera de 'polyphonie' (le terme est, bien sûr, emprunté à Bakhtine), lorsqu'il est impossible de ramener les différents 'point-valeurs' du texte à une orientation unique. Dès qu'il y a éparpillement et contradiction entre différents jugements qui émanent de la même source 'l'autorité du récit', on est confronté à un texte polyphonique. » (Jouve, 2001)

ideological identity of the statements and of the text in general, that is to say the contradiction of an ideology (identical to itself): it dissolves the ideological principle of identity. That is to say that, in the novel polyphony, assumed or questioned by the various discursive instances.” (Bakhtin, 1970)

In other words, in *Praisesong*, Avey Johnson's and Jay Johnson's voices are non-conformist. They break the socio-economic, political barriers imposed by a certain white elite. First, they appropriate the ideals of pragmatism. This means they act in an active way to create the necessary and appropriate conditions, which could enable them to free themselves from the social bondage in which they are trapped. The achievement of that commitment is positive (substantial) because the latter (Avey Johnson & Jay Johnson) fulfil their dream by acquiring economic or financial upward mobility. Aunt Cuney's voice is protective. It promotes ancestral values. Through Aunt Cuney's historical teachings, the African descents are kept connected with their past. Aunt Cuney's voice saturates their memory.

As far as Lebert Joseph is concerned, his voice facilitates the initiation of disconnected subjects. His teachings and incantations promote the Carriacouans' spiritual immersion and socio-cultural insertion. Clearly, the occurrence of polyphony in *Praisesong* challenges the narrator's voice, which sometimes feels inundated and discredited. Further, the narrative polyphony brings to an end all dominant trends or vision establishing an era of "peaceful coexistence". Analyzing the issue of enunciation *Le soupçon et le doute : de la postmodernité du fantastique*, Ingrid Bastard maintains,

“The act of enunciation is also characterized by a plurality of narrative voices” (Translation mine).

Through the same explanatory perspective, Janet Paterson avers,

“Those voices are either split, duplicated, fragmented (...) They seldom produce a unified discourse. On the contrary, they refuse to accept a single vision and a single authority, and subvert all notions of control, domination and truth” (Translation mine).

Besides, Marshall's writing includes some biblical narratives and traditional songs. Indeed, the second example (2) corroborates that viewpoint. The incorporation of those values proves that Marshall's fiction is a sort of "crossroads" where fragments taken from different genres "meet" and "cohabit". In terms of creativity, Marshall's fiction appears as one of the channels through which Christian teachings are bestowed or delivered. Indeed, far from praising Christianity, the novel under investigation embraces the ideals of postmodernity, which breaks with absolutism. This is materialized through the hybridization of various generic values. Referring to the critic André Lamontagne's postmodernist perception, Marc Gontard maintains the following:

“Despite the divergences mentioned, there is a relative unanimity around a postmodern poetics, which would be articulated around the following elements: self-reflexivity, intertextuality, mixture of genres, carnivalization, polyphony, presence of the heterogeneous, impurity of codes, metaphysical irony, derealization, destruction, of the mimetic illusion, indeterminacy, deconstruction, questioning of History and of the great emancipatory utopias, return of referentiality and of the subject of enunciation.”^{xviii} (Translation mine)

A close analysis of Marshall's text contributes to discovering its narrow connection with the figures brought out by Lamontagne. Her postmodern novel advocates peaceful coexistence between literary genres. That process of democratization of the fictional universe discloses the significance of literature as shown by Dominique Ranaivoson and Valentina Litvan in their introductory section to *Les héros culturels: Récits et représentations*:

“The success of [fiction], the place of myths or epics attest to the central role of literature in the construction of memories. Whether they are ethnic, national or universal, they are historically constructed by actors immersed in their history and inhabited by representations.”^{xix} (Translation mine)

In detail, postmodern practices are visible in Marshall's fiction through discursive devices, such as the poetization of traditional songs. Through the prism of those micro-narratives, the word is given to the Caribbean populations (Carriacouans); thus, their vision of the world is conveyed. The following songs exemplify our approach:

“Pléwé mwé, lidé, Pléwé Maiwaz oh... /Kôsolé Zablette ba mwê/we di la wen Juba/si mwê mérite/Pini mwê/si mwê ba mérite/Pa'doné mwê...” (Marshall, 1983).

In terms of metaphor, the Western world and the African one coexist through the textual occurrence of Christian values and African ancestral heritage. Dealing with that cohabitation in *Le monde postmoderne: Analyse du discours sur la postmodernité*, Yves Boisvert asserts:

^{xviii} « Malgré les divergences évoquées, il existe une relative unanimité autour d'une poétique postmoderne, qui s'articulerait autour des éléments suivants : autoréflexivité, intertextualité, mélange de genres, carnavalisation, polyphonie, présence de l'hétérogène, impureté des codes, ironie métaphysique, déréalisation, destruction, de l'illusion mimétique, indétermination, déconstruction, remise en question de l'Histoire et des grandes utopies émancipatrices, retour de la référentialité et du sujet de l'énonciation. » (in Marc Gontard, 2013)

^{xix} « Le succès [de la fiction], la place des mythes ou des épopées attestent du rôle central de la littérature dans la construction des mémoires. Qu'elles soient ethniques, nationales ou universelles, elles sont historiquement construites par des acteurs immergés dans leur histoire et habités par des représentations. » (Ranaivoson & Litvan, 2016)

"Postmoderns affirm that the different values, ideologies and truths that are offered to individuals are henceforth condemned to live peacefully together. It is therefore an opening marked by the peaceful coexistence of styles and modes."^{xx} (Boisvert, 1996)

To Boisvert postmodernism advocates a global society imbued with justice, equity, equality, and recognition of the *Other*. In a subtle way, Marshall's novel uses a creative game in which she unites different genres. Through that union, we can see, in action, postmodernist ideals, which require the harmonious interweaving of values, (myths legends, tales, proverbs, biblical accounts, and traditional songs). On the sociopolitical level, *Praisesong* advocates a policy of recognition of the *Other* as one's equal. To further this study, let us tackle the second stage titled hybrid/pacifist practices.

3. Hybrid/Pacifist Practices

This section aims at showing how the hybrid/pacifist practices operate in Marshall's novel. Here, *Praisesong* is regarded as a "linguistic materiality".

Considering a text as a hybrid entity implies that the latter is made up of several values. Sometimes, the recurrence of cultural or linguistic markers confirms that there is hybridity in the text. To some extent, those heterogeneous figures have a specific aesthetic scope, which can contribute to creating and setting up a new order. What is essential is that each of those textual clues takes on an ideology, which either depicts an internal or external situation. In other words, textual hybridity conveys an ideology whose domain of influence transcends the barriers of the fictional universe. In any case, novels, such as *Praisesong* construct various values. Indeed, *Praisesong* is a privileged location where the black characters practice linguistic activities. Defining what the notion of character implies in his book entitled *La poétique de Dostoïevski*, Mikhail Bakhtin maintains, "the character is nothing but a discursive position of the 'I'; a discourse ('a word') in dialogue with that of the 'I' who writes through another 'I' who writes with oneself" (Bakhtin, 1970). The words of Marshall's characters substantiate the presence of different linguistic systems. To have further details, let us examine the utterances below:

"He would burst out in dialect and, coming over, scoop Sis up in his arms. 'Come to yo' pappy an' set on his knee/.../Who's pappy's darlin'...' he'd ask, '... an'/who's pappy's chile...?'Then: 'Whisht you could allus know/eah an' cleah skies; /Wisht you could stay jes' a chile on my breas' -/Little brown baby wif spa'klin' eyes!" (Marshall, 1983)

"Her pleasure had always been greatest those times when he had talked to her. Amid the touching and play at the beginning and play at the beginning Jay sometimes talked, telling her, his mouth with the neat bush of hair against her ear, her cheek, and the feather-touch of his hand on her skin, what her arm to lead her the dance floor." (Marshall, 1983)

^{xx} « Les postmodernes affirment que les différentes valeurs, idéologies et vérités qui s'offrent aux individus sont dorénavant condamnées à cohabiter pacifiquement. Il s'agit donc d'une ouverture marquée par la cohabitation pacifique des styles et modes de vie. » (Boisvert, 1996)

From a linguistic point of view, examples (1) and (2) are not similar. (1) contains some dialectal utterances, (2) is composed of the English ones. But, what is relevant is that at both levels, (1) and (2) are included in the same text (novel). In (1), the narrator relates Lebert Joseph's words. The fragments put into inverted commas belong to him and are dialectal. This dialect is also used by the Carriacouans. It helps them commune and communicate with their ancestors. In terms of cultural value, it contributes to consolidating their lineage bonds. The resulting cultural connection is meant to be perpetuated. During the "Annual Excursion", the Carriacouans only use the ancestral dialect to express their traditional and cultural attachment to their roots. For instance, to perform their traditional songs, the Carriacouan tribes use their ancestral dialect.

Through that use, the policy of togetherness advocated by Marshall's creative art turns concrete. Indeed, the Carriacouan *Patois* is a sort of cement; the subjects who use it in Carriacou, share the same cultural roots. Moreover, by its use, some feelings of brotherhood arise between the Carriacouans. Better still, the Carriacouans' dialect is a cultural marker, which helps the Caribbean populations construct their collective identity. When well-mastered, it can favor the Carriacouans' and other diasporic members' sociocultural insertion. Further, those who are unable to use it feel isolated; they do not understand the messages conveyed by their Carriacouan relatives. Accordingly, they feel as if they were outsiders. In *Praisesong*, the heterodiegetic narrator displays Avey Johnson's experience as follows:

"I tried asking them about a taxi, but they all spoke Patois –at least that's what it sounded like... 'she tried not to think of the man who had spoken English and the scare he had given her. He nodded. 'Oui. Patois, Creole, whatever you want to call it,' he said. 'Is just some African mix-up something. You used to hear the Old people 'bout here speaking it when I was a boy, but no more. Only the out-islanders still bother. That's another thing about them. They can speak the King's English good as me and you, but the minute they set foot on the wharf for the excursion is only Patois crossing their lip. Don't ask me why.'" (Marshall, 1983)

In the above quotation, the relevance of the black dialect is plainly revealed. Through it, Lebert Joseph advises Avey Johnson against asking him about what accounts for the Caribbeans' persistent interest given to that dialect. Despite Lebert Joseph's interdict, it should be noted that the exchanges between the subjects who participate in the "Carriacou Excursion" are carried out in a purely traditional context. As such, the privileged medium of communication is the black dialect. Avey Johnson explains the characteristics of that linguistic system as follows:

"Is just some African mix-up something. You used to hear the old people" (Marshall, 1983).

Certainly, the Carriacouan *Patois* has a communicative function, but beyond that apparent virtue, it helps Lebert Joseph formulate incantations, prayers, songs, and many

other values, which efficiently help to pay tribute to the elders. *Praisesong* celebrates the virtues of the black dialect; in doing so, the English language loses its artistic hegemony. The Western modern artistic norms are subverted in favor of that of postmodernity, which privileges plurality. Quoting Janet M. Paterson in his critical study titled *Le soupçon et le doute : de la postmodernité du fantastique*, Ingrid Bastard asserts:

“Following the thinking of the philosopher [Jean-François Lyotard], we can assert that a literary practice is ‘postmodern’ when it questions, at the levels of form and content, the notions of unity, homogeneity, and harmony.”^{xxi} (Translation mine)

In practice, the black dialect enriches the English language. To some extent, both linguistic systems are complementary. Each of them plays the conventional role, which is communication. Culturally, to comply with the rules prescribed by the traditional dances, such as Beg Pardon, Bongo, Dama, Juba, Chambas, Temne, Moko, Arada, and various others, the Carriacouans use the black dialect. Each of those ethnic groups has a peculiarity, which can only be obvious during their performance. Indeed, through the dancers' performance, one can determine their cultural roots. Lebert Joseph is one of the experts in that regard. In Carriacou, he instructs Avey Johnson:

*“Is the Banda people turn now,” he informed her sometime later/Then: ‘Arada, oui’ (...)
Cromanti. Is Cromanti people you see in the ring now’ Later: ‘Congo, oui. They had some
of the prettiest dances.”* (Marshall, 1983)

Admittedly, Lebert Joseph's question, “what nation you is,” which is addressed to Avey Johnson breaks the rules of English grammar. By subverting the grammatical norms, Marshall instores new ones. In the context of the “Annual Excursion,” the purpose of that subversion is more cultural and communicative than grammatical. Here, Lebert Joseph's purpose is to determine Avey Johnson's identity roots. In reality, the latter is entirely Americanized and ignores who she is. Standing before Lebert Joseph, she is unable to provide a satisfactory answer. That situation seems inconceivable to the Old traditionalist Lebert Joseph. But, he expresses his anger in a subtle way without offending Avey Johnson:

“It have quite a few like you. People who can't call their nation. For one reason or another they just don't know. Is a hard thing. I don' even like to think about it. But you comes across them all the time here in Grenada. You ask people in this place what nation they is and they look at you like you's a madman. No, you's not the only one.” (Marshall, 1983)

This passage exposes Lebert Joseph's exasperation, resentment, or indignation towards disconnected beings –those who have lost the notion of their cultural roots and

^{xxi} « *En suivant la pensée du philosophe [Jean-François Lyotard], on peut affirmer qu'une pratique littéraire est 'postmoderne' lorsqu'elle remet en question aux niveaux de la forme et du contenu. les notions d'unité. D'homogénéité et d'harmonie.* » (in Bastard, 1999)

who cannot express themselves in their dialect or who cannot « call their nation » (Marshall, 1983). To him, the black dialect is like the “backbone;” without it, no one can stand up and pretend to walk. Plainly, being unable to use one’s dialect, exposes oneself to any sorts of external cultural influences. In essence, the black dialect is a medium through which the African descents’ cultural values are expressed. It is essential in the construction of the cultural identity of the disconnected beings. Its incorporation in *Praisesong* contributes to popularizing black ancestral values. Better still, one of the features of Marshall’s artistic postmodernist vision is the poetization of the black dialect. That dialectal incorporation provides the text with a fragmented, heterogeneous feature, and leads to a ‘normative crisis’. The values formerly acquired as absolute norms are overturned and dissolved. According to Yves Boisvert’s analysis,

“The dissolution of absolute truth is central to the postmodern [literary] corpus”^{xxii}
(Translation mine).

Without openly stating that she is a postmodernist writer, during her lifetime, Marshall consistently claims her commitment to deconstructing the American narrative by instilling in it the substances by which her community can feel worthy. Thus,

“[Marshall’s postmodernity] is characterized, too, both by what it rejects in the immediate past, in the period that precedes it, and by what it creates, by the (unanticipated, original) meaning of the displacements it provokes”^{xxiii} (Translation mine).

In other words, Marshall’s creative art (fiction) crosses the linguistic boundaries of Eurocentrism. The hegemonic position of the Western languages is deconstructed, subverted by the remarkable textualization of the Carriacouan *Patois*. Its textual recurrence breaks the narrative linearity and inserts discontinuity in *Praisesong*. Indeed, Lebert Joseph’s and Avey Johnson’s repetitive interventions in the narrative spine give the impression that they are also narrators.

The above analysis discloses the hybrid feature of Marshall’s novel. Beyond that, let us underscore that one of the essential characteristics of the postmodern *critique* is tolerance (affective tone). The novel under investigation retraces the colonial period; the reconstruction of that painful interlude does not aim at exhorting the victims to take revenge. By the picture of colonization, there is an unrevealed desire to trace the roots of the black Diaspora. As shown in *Praisesong*, the Africans who disembarked on American shores are mainly captured in West Africa –the textualization of the “Ibos” community is a perfect illustration. Beyond the reconstruction of the colonial facts, Marshall’s fiction advises against any forms of extremism. Her novel suggests an exemplary society in which the victims of colonization (African descents) do not only blame their ex-

^{xxii} « *La dissolution de la vérité absolue est centrale dans le corpus [littéraire] postmoderne.* » (Boisvert, 1999)

^{xxiii} « *La postmodernité [de Marshall] se caractérise, elle aussi, à la fois par ce qu’elle récuse dans le passé immédiat, dans la période qui la précède, et par ce qu’elle crée, par le sens (imprévu, original) des déplacements qu’elle provoque.* » (Varga, 1990).

executioners, but sensitize them. The victims are urged to overcome the colonial bondage. This implies that the latter improve their relationship with their ex-executioners. The ensuing utterances epitomize that invitation:

"That's what most of these Negroes out here still haven't gotten through their heads. Instead of marching and protesting and running around burning down everything in the hope of a handout, we need to work and build our own, to have our own. Our own! Our own! Shouting at her. Lashing out periodically at her, himself, his own and at that world which had repeatedly denied him." (Marshall, 1983)

In these utterances, there is no call for vengeance. What is substantial is the exhortation to both awareness and revolution. Indeed, the purpose of such a commitment is to help the black characters acquire their financial emancipation. Pointless to rebash, colonization deprived the latter of their rights and humanity. However, through "tolerance" and other pragmatic deeds, they successfully restore their dignity. Some of the moral values advocated by *Praisesong* are hard work, dedication, and perseverance. By acquiring those values, the black characters succeed in constructing a society of justice. Indeed, *Praisesong* depicts the "out-islanders" as role models. The latter are aware that economic power is decisive in their emancipatory struggle. Thus, they are actively involved in gainful employment as exemplified in the utterances below:

"All the out-islanders is like that. Serious people. Hardworking. They come to live here and before you know it they're doing better than those like myself that's born in the place. Is a fact. In no time they're pulling down a good job, building themselves a house –nothing big and out landish: they don't go in for a lot of show; buying themselves a car : you never see them overdoing things; starting up a business mind, you know, same as white people. And they looks out for one another just like white people. No crab critics with them... The elongated fingers described a clawing motion in the air. You know what that is? [...] Oh, so you has it among the black people in America too! He laughed, shook his head sadly. Well, the out-islanders is different to that. They's a people sticks together and helps out the one another. Which is why they gets ahead. If you was to stay on the island anytime you'd hear a lot talk against them. That they're proud. That they're playing white. But not me! I hasn't a word against them. The out-islanders has my respect. Is only." (Marshall, 1983)

Clearly, these black characters are true paragons. In terms of socio-economic commitment, they are determined and resolute. They do not get involved in deviant practices. Their actions are peaceful and oriented towards self-determination. They have a positive vision of diversity and solidarity. In *Praisesong*, their pragmatism reveals certain characteristics of postmodernity. According to Gilbert Hottois's analysis,

"Postmodern values are tolerance, pluralism, freedom, pacifism; affective tonality, non-passion and 'cool' detachment; politically, postmodernism is linked to democracy, to the philosophy of human rights in a broad sense, and to cosmopolitanism; it is in favor of an

economy, if not of the market, at least of abundance and managed pragmatically.^{xxiv}
(Translation mine)

Praisesong appropriates the above values and advocates them to the black characters. Through tolerance, the victims of colonization create the conditions for a peaceful society. In this sense, Marshall's work provides the necessary textual rudiments or ingredients. Indeed, the incorporation of both Christian and ancestral values in the same novel contributes to the dynamic of hyper-culturalism and tolerance. The concern is to create a society in which different cultural and religious sensibilities cohabit without violence and rejection. Marshall's novelistic universe is exemplary in this respect. Here, the black characters born in American society reconcile their received civilizational values with those of their Caribbean and African ancestors. This acceptance ensures a certain inner peace, unity, or wholeness.

Further, through tolerance, the black characters affirm their humanity and their ability to construct a society where justice reigns. Indeed, nowhere in Marshall's fictional universe is there a call for extremism or revenge. On the contrary, through Christian pragmatism, *Praisesong* teaches pure, and sincere love, tolerance, patience, resilience and perseverance to the black characters:

"Well, I hate to be the one to break the bad news to you beloved, but some of you are sitting up here this morning dressed back in your fancy new hats and your souls walled up in a darkness deeper than midnight. Giant stones have done buried your spirit, your heart, your minds, shutting you off from the precious light of salvation. [...] But there's a way beloved to remove those great boulders from the temple of your life. Lemme tell you about it. It's simple. Simplest thing in the world. You just go to do like Jesus in His final hour on the cross. Remember how He cried out at the end, oh God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Called on the Lord to deliver Him from the pain." (Marshall, 1983)

This biblical universe has a double dimension. First, it provides the black characters with educational and informative values. Secondly, it encourages them to act to be pragmatic. These utterances have a pragmatic-informational significance. Basically, they praise Jesus Christ (one of the Bible's emblematic figures) and urge the black characters to be humble and honest. Those teachings aim at shaping the latter. As we can see, the above utterances expose the materialist conception of history. Indeed, if the black characters have to construct their history or model of society, they have to be active. This requires a tool or plan of action. In *Praisesong*, Christian values symbolize the instruments, which can enable them to follow Jesus Christ's path and achieve their desired goals. To be successful, the latter do not need to blame their ex-executioners. They

^{xxiv} « Les valeurs postmodernes sont la tolérance, le pluralisme, la liberté, le pacifisme ; la tonalité affective, le non-passionnel et le détachement 'cool' ; politiquement, le postmodernisme est lié à la démocratie, à la philosophie des droits de l'homme en un sens large et au cosmopolitisme ; il est pour une économie sinon de marché, en tous cas d'abondance et gérée d'une manière pragmatique. » (Hottois, 1997)

have to avoid the trap of imperialism. This means they manage to transcend the Western homogenous conception of equality by creating their own –the one, which enables them to assert their identity and experience fair dignity, humanity, and independence. For that purpose, they need to appropriate Yves Boisvert's postmodernist vision:

"Equality ceases to be seen as an interesting instrument of distribution but remains an essential object to be achieved. This marks the beginning of a flexible era of unequal redistribution, which must henceforth target only those people who really need specific services."^{xxv} (Translation mine)

To achieve that state, Marshall's text urges the black characters to appropriate values, such as spiritual tolerance and justice, which are reserved for all. In essence, Marshall's novel exhorts a spiritual evaluation by which prejudices are ignored. Black characters, such as Avey Johnson, Lebert Joseph, and various other out-islanders are postmodern individuals. A thorough reading of their respective trajectories corroborates that hypothesis.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of narrative devices in Paule Marshall's fiction was a substantial and economical adventure. The use of postmodernism *critique* as a methodological tool helped to demonstrate how *Praisesong for the Widow* appropriates postmodernist ideals.

To conduct the current study, a double area of interest was identified, namely intergeneric devices and hybrid/pacifist practices. Referring to the principles provided by the above approach, extratextual values, such as myths, tales, legends, proverbs, traditional songs (folklores), and biblical narratives were thoroughly deciphered. Besides, particular attention was paid to the co-occurrence of English and black dialect in the text under investigation. The interpretation of that textual co-occurrence contributed to disclosing the significance of linguistic hybridity. In essence, the technique of "renarrativation" advocated by Marshall's literary project was considered as an expression of postmodernity. If the stake of such a discursive strategy is plural, it should be noted that the one addressed here was profoundly elucidated. The postmodern subjects depicted in Marshall's novel succeed in freeing themselves from the grip of absolutism. The latter are henceforth embarked on the promotion of a social renewal characterized by tolerance –a new logic in which they expect nothing from the executioners. They affirm their dignity through the reappropriation of their ancestral heritage.

Without being pretentious, the postmodernist *critique* was useful in this analysis. It made easier the analysis of the aforementioned areas of interest. The results obtained are substantial and confirm the rigor imposed by such an approach. Beyond that

^{xxv} « L'égalité cesse d'être considérée comme un instrument de distribution intéressant, mais demeure un objet essentiel à atteindre. C'est donc le début d'une ère flexible des redistributions inégalitaires, qui doit dorénavant uniquement viser les gens qui ont réellement besoin de services précis. » (Boisvert, 1995)

remarkable contribution, it should be underscored that the novel under consideration embodies countless values.

Despite the critical works already achieved on Marshall's creative art, her literary vision deserves to be re-interrogated; textual clues, such as hypertextual, metatextual, and trans-poetic devices are innovative areas, which need to be scrutinized.

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Conflicts of Interest Statement

The author of the current article declares no conflict of interest.

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Daniel Tia graduated from University of Felix Houphouët-Boigny in 2016; he conducted a dissertation on Paule Marshall's fictional works. His research focuses on identity construction, gender issue, immigration, subjective space, and pragmatics. He teaches the American literature at the foresaid Institution. He is a member of *Laboratoire de Littératures et Écritures des Civilisations/Laboratory of Literatures and Writings of Civilizations (LLITEC)*. He is a reviewer of the following Journals: *International Journal of Culture and History*, *International Journal of Social Science Studies (IJSSS)*, *International Journal of European Studies (IJES)*, and *International Society for Development and Sustainability (ISDS)*. He has published several significant scientific articles and a book, inter alia: *From Sin to Redemption: A Cultural Critique of Paule Marshall's Praisesong for the Widow* (2020), *Discursive Heterogeneity in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (2021), *Contrast of Visions in Paule Marshall and Laurent Gaudé's Novels* (2021), *La Mobilité dans Praisesong for the Widow* (2020), *Geographic Space and Its Semantic Heterogeneity: an Ecocritical Reading of To Da-Duh, in Memoriam by Paule Marshall* (2022), *Female Leadership through the Prism of Hypermodernity* (2022), *Reading Deuteronomic Vision in Literature* (2022), *Re/flux migratoire : une lecture sémiotique de How the García Girls Lost Their Accents de Julia Alvarez* (2023), and *Migration, Identity and Proleptic Dynamism* (2023).

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