

Contxto

International network for the distribution of French-language dramatic texts

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Presentation file

And the Whole World Quakes (The Great Collapse): Chronicle of a Slaughter Foretold

(De toute la terre le grand effarement, Solitaires Intempestifs)

by Guy Régis Junior

translated by Judith G. Miller

Contxto is coordinated by ARTCENA, with the French Ministry of Culture, the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Institut Français and the SACD (French Society of Dramatic Writers and Composers)

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This file is part of a **full Contxto resource kit**, complete with a video interview with the author filmed by ARTCENA and available on our website.

I. The play

1. OVERVIEW

Two women sit on a hilltop in the aftermath of a catastrophe. They sit with their terror. Their collapse. Their contempt for the evil of mankind. Of men. The effort of having to live, existing in the aftermath of this unspeakable thing. The ritual of continuing on. Two women. They watch on as dozens of nations arrive on the island, bringing their support to the distraught locals. French and American planes flock to the runways, blocking the flow of international humanitarian aid. Two women sit on a hilltop. They never run out of things to say. They never run out of souls to count among the stars. They never run out of silence. They will never finish saying all there is to be said. Just as theatre never does. Reflecting on the human condition. The charm of desolation.

Synopsis provided by the playwright

2. INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT

"We live in times characterised by a fatigue of the mind."

Extracts from Guy Régis Junior's interview with Christine Tully-Sitchet, critic, journalist, and doctor in sociology in New York, for L'Humanité, published on 20 January 2012:

Christine Tully-Sitchet: You come from Port-au-Prince. How did you feel upon returning from this trip to Haiti, nearly two years after the earthquake?

Guy Régis Jr: How can I describe it? Our eyes are never cast downwards there. Quite the contrary. We keep a dignity about us. Perhaps it is because of the skies, the sea, the plants and birds there. Undoubtedly because of our past, our history. Perhaps because the greatness of our surroundings spreads out before our eyes, inviting us to aspire to greatness, too. How are things in Haiti? This question has so often been asked of us artists, we "reluctant ambassadors", even before this terrible event. It's still so hard to know how to answer it. I struggle to answer it, at least. Returning to the island always re-energises me, at every given moment. Even after 12 January 2010, when I went to see my loved ones. But what I can say is that I returned completely shocked, once again, to see such a caricature of power at the helm. A president buoyed by the populism he wholeheartedly embraces, delightedly dishing out cash, motorbikes, to the poor. The humiliation inherent to these gestures still offends me now as I tell you about it. Humiliating a people that asks for nothing more than that its country be elevated to the status of a nation worthy of the name, will always revolt me.

Christine Tully-Sitchet: Your approach is what we might call multifaceted, multi-disciplinary. How would you describe it?

Guy Régis Jr: Like a living being. Plunged into a daily void that I allow to throw me off balance. Because that is the way it is. I strive to capture this void in pictures. To lend meaning to my existence, I write, I create images, I stage stories. I create space, time, and place. I began to find meaning in the world once I started to create. That is my anchoring. Like a cloud that gradually takes shape to exist. I'm happy knowing I'm sensitive to the world around me. I'm happy knowing I'm not alone in feeling swallowed up by this vast emptiness. There are witnesses to it. And I myself am sometimes witness to it. That's what being an artist is about, I think.
(...)

Christine Tully-Sitchet: The earthquake that ravaged Haiti in January 2010 inspired you to write a play, *De Toute La Terre Le Grand Effarement*. In the aftermath of a major catastrophe, two women sit on a hilltop, and count the shooting stars. "To not forget the tragedy that has

occurred, to not count the dead. " And to attempt to soothe themselves, too. Sleeplessness hovers... All too aware of the meaninglessness of their actions, they continue their star-gazing. "Rather than lament our fate, let us count." What did you intend to examine with this play?

Guy Régis Jr: When the earthquake happened, I was staging a play in Ouagadougou, in Burkina Faso. I'm still obsessed by the idea that prompted me to write *De Toute La Terre Le Grand Effarement*. Naturally, words were needed to outline the facts, to attempt to piece together the memory. But there was some conscious part of me that quickly rose to the surface. Something was bothering me. And so the idea was born... The earthquake was obviously an uncontrollable catastrophe, but how can a government allow a country to slip into such ignorance, such negligence, such a lack of management, one generation after the next ? I remember seeing a seismologist on the television in November of the previous year, in 2009, who sounded a warning with respect to our situation. That shocked me. The nonchalant attitude taken by our country's despots, these catastrophes that were flagged up ahead of time, and the others that have yet to come: this is what infuriates me more than anything. I wrote this book spurred on by a deep sadness. A sadness that has yet to leave me.

Christine Tully-Sitchet: The afterword ends with this insight: "The theatre is my dream as a man. " Could you explain that line?

Guy Régis Jr: I'm an ardent believer in the idea that theatre can help spark massive change within a civilization. It can serve as a guide, as it is always on humanity's side. I think it can lead to humans becoming perfectible. This may be one of the rare few things I believe in. I also believe in the futility of this art form, of all art. Which is precisely what makes it so noble to me. And so indispensable.

3. EXTRACT FROM THE TEXT

« A cracking. That's what was first. Then our feet became unsteady. Our feet that stumbled, that never stumble, never. Our stumbling feet. That event that we'll never, ever, ever, forget -- ever. That event of a few seconds that will take years and years to erase. Even centuries. It will take longer than a person's life. A cracking comes along. Like this song at its beginnings. Yes, a cracking. A cracking that will bring on another, and another, in infinite repetition.

But even well before the big cracking, there was the leaving -- of parrots, lizards, woodpeckers, hummingbirds, red-throated hummers, geckos, toads -- all the animals. And more, more, more. The sea's snoring. The waves, the surf quieting down. The air as well. That cracking of just a few seconds. Infinitesimal time and a whole life. All those lives. Infinite sadness. But maybe at the end -- hope. Hope again. Belief. Yes. The dream of the sleeping child. In this Calvary, this black hole, at the end of this cataclysm, this apocalypse -- unrivaled hope. Perhaps, yes perhaps a new departure. Perhaps? Yes. A child waking up. Its becoming forever rewarded.

Extract from *And the whole world quakes* by Guy Régis Junior translated by Judith Miller

4. SELECTED PRESS REVIEWS

Une parole poétique

« Through a highly poetic style reminiscent of the Haitian Spiralists [...] and French pre-Symbolists and Symbolists [...] Régis's corpus is composed of fractured monologues and monologue-style texts emphasizing the daily condition of individual humans and their struggle with states of being such as desire and lack.

(...)

That same year, new audiences –including those attending the première at the Festival d'Avignon– were offered *De toute la terre le grand effarement* (2011), in French with brief moments of Kreyòl. Recalling the Theatre of the Absurd in the vein of Samuel Beckett's *En attendant Godot* (1952), with its two main characters as putative outsiders, Régis's text leaves the cataloging and remembering of human casualties from the 2010 earthquake in the hands of marginal characters, two sex workers »

(...)

The derisory tone finds further reinforcement, in a slightly different manner, in the two sex workers who are the only characters of *De toute la terre le grand effarement* : the reader and spectator are forced to hear and see them, to learn of their reality and thereby their humanity, especially in the wake of a natural disaster for which they catalogue the fatalities. By placing nontraditional, subaltern characters center stage and deriding both their circumstances and others' perceptions of them, Régis gives voice to the reality and the sentiment of individuals frustrated by, yet surviving, such experiences. Simultaneously, he decenters the narrative of mainstream, marginalizing theatre that eclipses them. »

Journal of Haitian Studies. Flaugh, Christian. « Engaging Reality and Popular Performance in the "Théâtre Humain" of Guy Régis ». *Journal of Haitian Studies* 22, n. 1 (2016) pp. 46–80

A symbolically political text

"The Young Woman and the Older Woman are the only survivors of the collapse. They count the shooting stars from their lookout in a tree. Absurd, or banal, at first glance maybe. But beyond the shooting stars, the play takes on symbolic power. As we know, nothing in theatre is ornament. The number of shooting stars reflects the exact number of those who lost their lives, buried under rubble. (...)

The infinite number of those fleeing the country. (...) It is also the number of planes that fly overhead, transporting international aid packages on the night of the earthquake, as the international community jostled to take control of the island (...). Deaths, emigrants, or the international community: the shooting stars are endlessly infinite. The characters themselves say so: 'It makes no sense to count all this. It would take too much time. Yes, it makes no sense to count all these brilliant streaks, these dying lights. These journeys, these bursts. There is no end to them.' (p. 16 in the original French).

The entire play rings out as a dirge, in which the acting (the counting of stars) serves as a chorus, repeated on loop and closing with a folk song, the short lines of which feel as if these are words to be spoken, to be chanted, rather than sung."

W. Charles, *Le Nouvelliste*, 29 September 2014

5. THE PLAY IN FRANCE

This play was commissioned by the Festival d'Avignon and the SACD as part of the 2011 Festival d'Avignon's Sujets à Vifs¹ segment.

Terre/Cri/Effarement (De Toute La Terre Le Grand Effarement) was staged at the Festival d'Avignon from 8 to 14 July 2011 at the Lycée Saint-Joseph school's Jardin de la Vierge by the playwright, performed by Ese Brume and Nanténé Traoré.

The play was written in the aftermath of the earthquake that ripped through Haiti on 12 January 2010, resulting in 300,000 deaths, and injuring 300,000 people, with another 1.2 million left homeless. When the earthquake erupted, the playwright was in Ouagadougou, in Burkina Faso.

The play was published in May 2011 by Les Solitaires Intempestifs (France).

¹Sujets à Vif pieces are co-produced by the Festival d'Avignon and the SACD, and showcased during the Festival. These plays and performances are the result of collaborations between guest artists in a range of different fields.

II. The playwright

GUY REGIS JUNIOR



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Guy Régis Jr is a writer, theater director and film director. Several of his texts, that includes poetry, prose and mostly theater, are translated into several languages. He was awarded the ETC Beaumarchais prize and the Jean-Brierre poetry prize. Translator into haitian creole of Albert Camus, Maurice Maeterlinck, Marcel Proust or Bernard-Marie Koltès, Guy Régis Jr has also created experimental short films. In 2001, he founded the drama company NOUS Théâtre. With his company and the creation of Service Violence Series in 2005, he shook up the codes of contemporary theater. This founding play was a real political and dramaturgical act. His work is represented in Haiti, in France and internationally (Belgium, Hungary, United States, Brazil, Italy, Togo, Congo, etc.).

Besides his role as an artist, he actively works for the development of living arts in Haiti. From

2012 to 2014, Guy Régis Jr directed the theater section of the National School of Arts of Haiti. And since January 2014 he has been the Artistic Director of the Association 4 Chemins which manages the Festival 4 Chemins, a key moment for living arts in Port-au-Prince's life.

OTHERS PLAYS AND WRITINGS FOR THEATRE

Quel dernier grand conflit pour satisfaire la haine entre les hommes, 2020

Goebbels, juif et footballeur, Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2020

Comme dans un film de Robert Bresson, Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2020

Reconstruction(s), Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2018

Mourir tendre, Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2013

De toute la terre le grand effarement, Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2011

Moi, fardeau inhérent, Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2011

Incessants, Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2011

Le Père, Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2011

Noire nuit, 2010

La Mort de soi dans sa longue robe de mariée, 2009

Bethsabée ou Experimental Betty, 2008-2011

Service Violence Série, 2001-2005

NOVELS

Les cinq fois où j'ai vu mon père, Gallimard, 2020 (Coll. Haute Enfance)

Le Trophée des capitaux, Editions Vents d'ailleurs, La Roque-d'Anthéron, 2011

POETRY

Powèm entèdi, Legs Editions, Port-au-Prince, 2016

Le Temps des Carnassiers, 2000

OTHERS TEXTS

Une enfance haïtienne, texte collectif, Gallimard, 2017

Ida, éditions Rivarticollecion, New York, 2006 ; éditions Vents d'Ailleurs, 2013 (traduit en espagnol, en hongrois, en allemand et en roumain)

Incessants (fiction), Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2007 (traduit en espagnol et en anglais)

SHORT FILMS

Monsieur le Président, 2011

Epi, 2010

Pays sauve qui peut, 2001

Black out, 2001

III. The play elsewhere

1. TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD: JUDITH MILLER

Judith Miller is Professor of French and Collegiate Professor at New York University, where she has also served as Chair of the French Department and Dean of Arts and Humanities at New York University Abu Dhabi. She has published numerous articles on French and Francophone theatre (text and production) and has translated some twenty-five plays (including works by Hélène Cixous, Werewere Liking, José Pliya, Koffi Kwahulé, Bernard-Marie Koltès, and Olivier Kemeid). Her latest books include an anthology of plays by Ivorian playwright Koffi Kwa-hulé (Seven plays by Koffi Kwahulé: In and Out of Africa, Michigan, 2017), a translation of Guadeloupian artist Gerty Dambury's novel *Les Rétifs* (The Rest-less) for the Feminist Press, 2018, an updated study of director Ariane Mnouchkine for Routledge, 2018; and a translation of Béatrice Picon-Vallin's prize-winning study of the Théâtre du Soleil, forthcoming, Routledge, 2020.

« This play is a lament and an accusation. In lyrical exchange in both French and Creole, Guy Régis Junior shows us two survivors of the devastating Haitian earthquake of 2010. Huddled under an ancient tree, perched in the hills overlooking Port-au-Prince, these two women count shooting stars as a way of remembering all the people who have died. They also try to find a way to go on, to rebuild their lives, at a moment when it is difficult to hold onto any notion of time or reality. The Young One and the Older One had been working in a brothel that fell in the quake, as did their vain and seedy "boss." Their past, then, has truly been wiped clean; this might be a moment to start over. Yet the new circumstances of their lives find them just as beholden to powerful others as they had been to *Bel Amou*, their pimp. For the USA, France, the United Nations, and other "first world" countries, have all shown up to occupy once again Haiti, to feign help while shoring up their own fiefdoms in the region. Indeed, the US and France are fighting over the airport, blocking its access to other efforts to bring aid. Attempting to exorcise these insidious and soul-destroying manoeuvres, the women finally stage a surreal combat, inscribing in their bodies how Haiti and Haitians have been violated by rich countries from the Global North. »

Judith Miller

2. AND THE WHOLE WORLD QUAKES AROUND THE WORLD

The English version of the play was translated by Judith Miller and was performed as a public reading at the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center in New York on 2 and 3 December 2019 as part of the ACT-Actions Caribéennes Théâtrales.

In December 2012, Guy Régis Junior drew on his play to create a bus tour through Port-au-Prince, interspersed with surprise performances. Audiences on the bus tour were treated to a soundtrack based on the play and eyewitness reports.

"Rather than presenting you with a fixed story, rather than performing in front of you, you will be taken through the city and a highly visual soundtrack landscape, listening to De Toute La Terre Le Grand Effarement like an audio exhibition that invites you to immerse yourself in the images in situ, exploring each one. Passing through these streets and neighbourhoods strikes us as the best way of giving you the opportunity to explore everything we hoped to share with the world. The journey is a meditation. You are free to choose your own route. It helps you listen more closely to what must be seen."

Ticket Magazine, 10 December 2012

IV. The Contxto network



In order to raise the international profile of francophone dramatic writing, ARTCENA joined with the **French Ministry of Culture**, the **French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs**, the **Institut Français** and the **SACD** (French Society of Dramatic Writers and Composers) to launch Contxto.

This network aims to support the translation, promotion and international staging of works by Francophone playwrights. Contxto enjoys international presence thanks to its partner members, Instituts Français branches around the world and embassy services, drawing on their expertise and networks of local operators.

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