

***A Regarded Self: Caribbean Womanhood and the Ethics of Disorderly Being*, by Kaiama L. Glover, Durham, Duke University Press, 2021, pp. xi + 296, \$27,00 (hardback), ISBN: 9781478010173.**

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In *A Regarded Self: Caribbean Womanhood and the Ethics of Disorderly Being*, Kaiama L. Glover explores questions of race and gender in the geo-cultural space of the Caribbean and its diasporas. She engages with works of Caribbean fiction within the canon of the marginal. She examines the work of Marie Chauvet, Maryse Condé, René Depestre, Marlon James, and Jamaica Kincaid, authors who have been relegated to the eccentric margins of a periphery, the periphery being the literature of French-speaking America. Glover is interested in the question of how centres and margins have been displaced inward even to those Haitian women that have been more marginal to more dominant centres. The main premises of the book are texts at the intersection of blackness, womanhood, and the community desire or desire of a given community.

There is an established literary tradition in the Caribbean, one that is dominated by the non-accurate contention that the community offers a counter of sorts to the exploitative and predatory forms of individualism that have been the bedrock of the North Atlantic empire. Glover is interested in unpacking the ways in which this premise is lighting the experiences of those for whom ostensibly liberatory communities can be coercive. *A Regarded Self* is about “communit[ies]—about assemblages of individual beings bound more or less comfortably together by a shared set of attitudes and interests, aims and imaginaries” (Glover 1). The women of the novels that Glover analyzes, Tituba, Hadriana, Lotus, Xuela and Lilith, are troublesome, non-sympathetic figures. These women embrace what Jack Halberstam calls “wild” in *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire*;

Perverse Modernities: A Series and also what Saidiya Hartman calls “waywardness” in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments; Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* as they are refusing integration or cooptation. In addition, Glover is in conversation with Édouard Glissant in her theorisation of opacity as praxis of resistance on a collective level. Thinking about the relationship between the self-regarding Caribbean woman and her community both textually, as in looking at how particular Caribbean characters are configured in respect to their narrative communities, and also extra-textually, as in how these texts disorder or disrupt our expectations as readers of literature is crucial. In the novels that Glover examines, women eschew models of political community that require a stance of self-sacrifice at their personal expense. The question that arises is how we value expressions of individual freedom that do not amount to anti-racist feminist political projects.

The book consists of five chapters that focus on women who aspire to an exclusive relationship with the self but are castigated in the periphery due to their stance by their so-called liberatory community. Each chapter focuses on a particular literary work through which each protagonist shares her personal story. The community has been centred as the frame within which the Caribbean subject must operate in contra distinction to the white Western subject. Glover engages with the literary tradition in which the adherence to the communal instead of the personal is evident. She asks how we might better care for those individuals who, in their refusal or incapacity to belong, demand more capacious notions of community. She leads the reader to ponder how self-regard might become an ethical practice, a practice of defending one’s self against the coercion of communal longing.

In the first chapter, “Self-Love | Tituba,” Glover uses Maryse Condé’s essay, “Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer,” as the organizing frame to expose the circumstances of the emergence of narcissistic self-regard, as an ethical choice in Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1986). This choice exposes the possibility of the emergence of an alternative to the given social order. Deviance and defence are central to the emergence of a new social order. In this chapter, Glover examines Puritanism in the context of American history and also metaphorically in the ways that it continues to affect the ways through which we read history. Sexual purity and sexual agency are central in Tituba’s self-realisation and are directly linked to Puritanism.

The second chapter, “Self-Possession | Hadriana,” centres around Hadriana’s self-regard and self-possession. In this chapter, Glover explores the practice of voodoo in the Caribbean and the subsequent fetishisation of whiteness. She subversively engages with the critical reception of René Depestre’s *Hadriana in All My Dreams* (1988) in order to dismantle the hyper-erotic or hyper-fetishistic whiteness in ways that reveal the white individual’s own anxieties about certain idiosyncrasies of the Caribbean around race and the erotic specificity, as those pertain to indigenous religious practices.

In the third chapter, “Self-Defense | Lotus,” Glover examines a lesser-known novel, Marie Chauvet’s *Fille d’Haïti* (1954), with respect to the question of self-defence. She delves upon the tension between colourism and radicalism in Haiti and the extent to which the 20th century politics of Haiti have turned around questions of colour. Glover specifically sheds light on the conflict between feminism and nation-building in the context of this critically ignored text. In addition, she thinks about this conflict through identifying Simone de Beauvoir as a Haitian woman, attempting to escape the strictures of her community through her writing.

In the fourth chapter, “Self-Preservation | Xuela,” Glover explores Xuela’s self-preservation and the anti-social behaviour she exposes in order to establish her existence in a safe space. In Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), Xuela is in constant danger due to her exposure to the various constituents of her community; therefore, her self-regard turns out to be a matter of life and death. What is innovative about this chapter is that Glover is in conversation with Shakespeare’s and Aimé Césaire’s *A Tempest* to illuminate the importance of Xuela’s self-preservation.

In the fifth chapter, “Self-Regard | Lilith,” Glover turns to the question of the erotics of the enslaved and also beyond the erotics in Marlon James’ *The Book of the Night Women* (2009). She believes that it is important to explore the romance that may or may not have been possible under the structure of Lilith’s total domination, her condition of enslavement.

In conclusion, *A Regarded Self* is about disorderly women who endlessly unsettle any given structure. The danger of resistance, or reaction to a particular order comprises with it the risk of setting a new order. This danger led Glover to put the individual self in the position of questioning. *A Regarded Self* is informed by what we can understand by the particular strands of each of the protagonists’ disorders; how they are disorderly and with respect to what. In addition, this book leads us to think about why these women are wild, and to what extent we might recognise their disorder as their last option in the face of a community that might purport to have their best interest at heart but endangers them in some way because it perceives them as intolerable or unacceptable. *A Regarded Self* offers a provocative inquiry into what is rendered as communal because it leads the reader to reflect on the “moral principles, politicized perspectives, and established critical frameworks” (Glover 6) that shape our reading practices around the community. The book considers so-called “disorderly” feminine Caribbean literary protagonists who “offend, disturb, and reorder the world around them,” challenging their narrative communities—and communities of readers—in ways that call for vigilance with respect to our scholarly codes of inclusion and exclusion (Glover 6). Glover’s book opens up conversations about how we think of women’s self-centredness in the most literal sense when that kind of self-focus does not attach to policing of desire. Other questions that the book addresses are: “what is the worth of individual freedom?” and “how much

do we value it if it does not attach to collective alliteration?" Glover invites us to think through what it would mean to endlessly unsettle ourselves and everything around us.

Work Cited

Glover, Kaiama L. *A Regarded Self: Caribbean Womanhood and the Ethics of Disorderly Being*. Duke University Press, 2021.