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Reading Frantz Fanon: Two Plays on Melancholy and Freedom

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Abstract

This essay analyzes Frantz Fanon's two plays, *The Drowning Eye* (*L'Oeil se noie*) and *Parallel Hands* (*Les Mains parallèles*), collected in the recently published book, *Alienation and Freedom* (2018). Both plays were written in 1949, and these plays predate Fanon's other texts. Though Fanon is well known for his critique of colonial structures of oppression in texts, such as *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, his plays do not explicitly mention race and politics. *The Drowning Eye* and *Parallel Hands* present how characters who have lost their attachment to tradition, such as name, beliefs, and language, sustain themselves in relation to privation and attempt to make a change without being dominated by the death drive. The mood of melancholy is essential for exploring this subject. The characters' sense of loss resonates with Fanon's comment on the phenomenological experience of embodying blackness in *Black Skin, White Masks*. At the same time, the characters' tendency to vacillate between love and death drive and the enactment of the unknowable encourage us to read into Fanon's thought beyond the dialectic of exclusion and inclusion. If we are attentive to Fanon's aspiration for the anti-colonial world and consciousness of difference when reading his plays, we come to understand that the feelings of alienation and melancholy can free us from our former selves.

Key Words : Frantz Fanon, melancholy, death drive, *The Drowning Eye*, *Parallel Hands*

Ⅰ. Introduction

Little was known about Frantz Fanon's interest in theater until his two plays, *The Drowning Eye (L'Oeil se noie)* and *Parallel Hands (Les Mains parallèles)*, were published in *Alienation and Freedom* (2018). Edited by Jean Khalfa and literary critic Robert J.C. Young, *Alienation and Freedom* came out in French in 2015 (followed by the English edition in 2018) when the attention to race studies in the humanities was rising in reaction to ongoing racism in France. This volume consists of Fanon's previously unpublished plays and his other writings, including a dissertation, letters, and essays on politics and psychiatry.

Both written in 1949 while Fanon was studying medicine in Lyon (J. Fanon 2014:57, see also Young 2018:24, 52),[1] *The Drowning Eye* and *Parallel Hands* talk about a state of loss and seek a way to be in the world. The plays were never staged, and some scenes are missing from the original manuscript. Despite these limitations, the dramatic scenes in Fanon's plays help us better understand the threshold at which interactions between singular people can give rise to new relationships and its significance in his political thought. Though Fanon is well known for his critique of colonial structures of oppression in texts like *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, his plays do

1) *The Drowning Eye* and *Parallel Hands* were long thought to have been lost until they were published in French in 2015. Their English translation first appeared in *Alienation and Freedom* in 2018. According to Robert J.C. Young (2018:11), dating of the plays is informed by Joby Fanon (2014), Fanon's elder brother, who wrote *Frantz Fanon, My Brother: Doctor, Playwright, Revolutionary*. Though Fanon wrote three plays, the third, *The Conspiracy (La Conspiration)*, has been lost (Young 2018:11). While *Les Mains parallèles* is sometimes translated as the parallel hands with the definite article "the" (see Brennan 2018:11), in this essay I follow Khalfa and Young's translation.

not explicitly mention race and politics. *The Drowning Eye* and *Parallel Hands* present how characters who have lost their attachment to tradition, such as name, beliefs, and language, sustain themselves in relation to privation and attempt to make a change. The efforts made by young male characters to deal with loss and failure change over the course of both plays, for instance, changes from passivity to passion that factor centrally in the arc of each play. The characters' desire to transcend the givenness of what they are reminds us of the instrumental use of an objectified body and the limits of working within conventional institutions of meaning as Fanon addresses in his later work such as *Black Skin, White Masks*. I also suggest that the aspiration to break physical and epistemological boundaries that Fanon as a playwright wants to share with his readers connects with what Gayatri Spivak (2012:4) calls "the universalizability of the singular" in a post-neoliberal world, a phenomenon that leads us to speech and knowledge shared by a plurality of unique beings.

The first of the plays, *The Drowning Eye*, was originally written in a single act with five scenes, but the fourth is missing. *The Drowning Eye* is set inside a French house on a rainy night.[2] The play begins with a conversation between François and his lover Ginette,[3] but François remains silent after the first scene, until the end of the play when he has four lines. Another character in the play is Lucien, François' elder

2) A stage direction tells us, "A thick velvet curtain. A sofa. An armchair. A table. In a corner, a painting by Wifredo Lam" (Fanon 2018:81). Then the opening scene begins with a voice's words: "The rain that chaps the overly essential clarity of the night, yesterday, in full grip, surprised the confession-less rivers" (Fanon 2018:82).

3) In the play, it seems that Ginette represents a transgression of the limit of a being, as exemplified by her vacillating affections between the two brothers, François and Lucien.

brother. At the center of the conversations between the play's three characters is what François is like and the articulation of a difference between two brothers, Lucien and the younger François.[4] François is a withdrawn young man whose main sentiment is disappointment at others' behavior ("*I fought those who wanted me to believe in hate, in blood, in tears*. I preferred dogs to the boys of my age and their ball games") (83, emphasis in original).[5] Lucien, by contrast, emphasizes the importance of embracing life (88). While the cause for François' silence remains unknown, Lucien's conversation with Ginette reveals that the younger brother, who "wanted to live at the level of the fantastic" (94), was deeply discouraged by the abrupt disappearance of the object to which he was attached—the stars of the night sky (93). François' silence and physical absence from multiple scenes[6] express the despair derived from the loss of what he loves, but concern for François is central to the long conversations between Lucien and Ginette, who want to know what experiences have led François to "[ditch] everything" (88). By the time François delivers the play's closing lines, contrary to his earlier indifference to others, he comes forward to lead Ginette to the gates "where life is seized" (112).

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4) *The Drowning Eye* does not identify characters racially but begins with the stage direction describing them in terms of color resulting from the (metallic) lighting directed at each character's face. To be specific, Lucien is a person of "pewter colour," while François is described as being "new blotting paper colour." And Ginette is colored like a "rain-drop" (81). In his commentary, Young (2018:32-33) makes an interesting point that "when [pewter] is polished it can look both black and silver, in other words indistinguishably black and white."

5) In this essay, unless otherwise noted, page numbers in parentheses refer to the pages in *Alienation and Freedom* (2018) where Fanon's plays appear.

6) François leaves the stage at the end of scene 2 (91). Since scene 4 is missing from the original manuscript, we do not know for sure if he reappears on stage before the play's last scene.

Set in a fictional place called Lébos, *Parallel Hands* is a four-act tragedy, following the style of classical Greek drama. It features a young warrior named Épithalos who kills his father, King Polyxos, on the day he is to marry Audaline.[7] In act I, Polyxos recounts a dream in which he was threatened by Épithalos. Épithalos' murder of Polyxos, however, brings about unexpected chaos in the city of Lébos, and Dràhna (Polyxos' wife) sees her son's action as a failure. What really distinguishes *Parallel Hands*, though, is that after the patricide occurs off stage, Épithalos does not replace King Polyxos. When the stronghold's commander and others suggest that Épithalos should leave the city forever (152), he takes their advice. His acceptance of banishment is an acceptance of his limits, which he experiences especially when unable to vanquish "the hostility of death" (159).

Different from each other in their setting and the characters' relation to language, both plays explore how one might emancipate the self from the constraints of identity without being dominated by the death drive.[8] Fanon tries to figure out this dilemma (of having both a desire for transgression and a life anchored in the existing world) through the characters of François and Épithalos, who, Fanon's elder brother Joby Fanon says, resemble a young Fanon (Young 2018:30, 53). In the plays, François and Épithalos narrate what their feelings of loss are like. But

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7) Parts of the original manuscript—act II, scenes 3 and 4, and act III, scenes 1 and 2—are missing in *The Parallel Hands* that has survived. But Young (2018:55) also points out the possibility that "scenes were misnumbered."

8) Jacques Lacan (1959-1960/1997:211) points out in *Seminar VII* that the death drive is "to be situated in the historical domain; it is articulated at a level that can only be defined as a function of the signifying chain, that is to say, insofar as a reference point, that is a reference point of order, can be situated relative to the functioning of nature." He tells us that death drive is the "will to destruction. Will to make a fresh start. Will for an Other-thing" (Lacan 1959-1960/1997:212).

by the end of the plays, they begin to experience change in their behavior (from passivity to passion in the case of François, from a struggle for power to a retreat from the role of sovereign in the case of Épithalos), and these changes are accompanied by their assertion of subjecthood that they've long thought to have been taken away from them. Like 19-year-old Fanon, who enlisted in the military to fight against Nazi domination (J. Fanon 2014:27–28), François and Épithalos want to find themselves on "the relational horizon of human life" (Kottman 2008:105), even if they feel alienated from the language and community they belong to. With questions of "being" in mind, the essay focuses on how Fanon's characters deal with their lives of privation when they feel robbed of the chance to become more fully themselves. In the essay, I pay particular attention to the characters of François and Épithalos to argue that their closeness to death (in their own speech or through others' descriptions of them) is not "a form of intransitive speech" (Chow 2012:50), at least in the course of the play; on the contrary, it is folded into another space and time in which they are always in a web of relations.

II. Melancholy

In Fanon's plays, the characters such as François and Épithalos are similar to those of Greek tragedy. This essay focuses on how the characters are moved by their loss. Jonathan Flatley's understanding of melancholia is important in reading these plays. For Flatley (2008), melancholia may not always be a depressive mood state that causes us to lose interest in life. Rather, he suggests that melancholia is "a practice that might, in fact, produce its own kind of knowledge" (Flatley 2008:2)

and therefore it involves doing. Feeling alone in *The Drowning Eye*, François withdraws from daily life. Lucien tells Ginette that the younger brother is different from her, who "[likes] to cry, sing, run, dance" (92), and that "[François] must get up, shake [his] body, be a party to things" (88). In the play, the object of François' attachment is not clearly articulated, but he wants to know when something valuable began, as the dialogue from early in the play shows:

> François: Since when do you love me?
> Ginette: I don't know. I adore you.
> François: It happened just like that?
> Ginette: Yes! (…) I knew that I was soon bound to love you. (…)
> François: Why?
> Ginette: I don't know anymore. I love you!
> François: Yes, I know that you love me, or at least you say you do. But do you get it, I want to know.
> Ginette: What?
> François: The beginning. (82-83)

Suspending the fulfillment of their mutual love, François tells Ginette, "you really do not know what it's like not to understand. Not to understand what's happening to you!" (84)[9] The dialogue between the lovers reveals the time differential between François' questioning of how he became who he is and something that happened to him.[10] François' sense of loss arising from his lack of the knowledge about his surroundings

9) At the end of the first scene where Ginette assures François of her love, he says even more bluntly, "Then it's I who doesn't love you" (87).

10) For instance, François tells Ginette that "Some things happen to you and you know neither why nor how. (…) I refused to wear their ties, their big shoes that hurt your toes" (83).

resonates with Fanon's experience of being black he wrote about in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the book, Fanon introduces Jean-Paul Sartre's approach to negritude to explain what belatedness is like; according to Sartre (quoted in Fanon 1967:133), "the position of negritude as an antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is insufficient by itself, and the Negros who employ it know this very well (…) [N]egritude is the root of its own destruction, it is a transition and not a conclusion, a means and not an ultimate end." In response to this assessment, Fanon writes, "When I read that passage, I felt that I had been robbed of my last chance" (1967:133).

As if to expand on this remark, Fanon's plays invite readers to contemplate how those who are unable to depend solely on transitive speech for representation sustain themselves in self-formative activities, even though the language of his plays is not racially explicit. In the first scene of *The Drowning Eye*, Fanon leads his readers to imagine François' level of frustration at being assigned to certain stock roles ("I was proposed a certain kind of man. That man set fear into me ..." [83]). At the same time, the absence of any direct reference to a specific time and place in the play requires Fanon's readers to do additional work. Faced with a situation over which young François had little control, he was attached to the stars at night. François says: "When they [the stars] saw me, they smiled at me a long while. They were all there, young, new, armed with their first teeth. They just didn't stop playing around. One was rubbing its eyes still swollen with sleep, another hastened to get back its corner ..." (84). His description of the stars evokes an image of infants who look free as if they do not care how they appear to others. To François, such evocation seems to be compensation for the sense of loss.

A dramatic shift in the tone of François' speech in the play's final moment suggests that he has finally stopped waiting for an answer to what haunted him—to the question about the beginning. In the play's ending, to Ginette who says, "I await you my love, / and I no longer know how to be sad / I know only how to howl with pain, / and I no longer know how to be cheerful / I know only how to howl with joy" (111-12), François takes her hand and says, "O Return, exuberance not yet torn / My forming nudity takes you, broken with horror and I / want to lead you to the ABSOLUTE gates / where life is seized" (112). It remains up to the reader's imagination whether or not transgression occurs next, as the play ends there. What is important here is François' touch that exceeds language and the feeling of being alive.

In *Parallel Hands*, Épithalos admits the sovereign figure's dependence on "the applause of wild and weary crowds" (130), which is linked to his own existence. As the son of King Polyxos, Épithalos has been troubled by the fact that he is locked into his identity (129). But killing his father, whom Épithalos describes as a receptacle for "non-resounding, obese consciousness," does not make his melancholic mood disappear (134). Rather, Épithalos' inability to control the political situation of Lébos after his father's death leaves him feeling lost. Dràhna, Épithalos' mother and the wife of Polyxos, blames his son ("What have you done with your radical hands?" [157]), and her speech is punctuated by the word "death," but that alone causes Épithalos little suffering. Crucial to the source of his pain is that the revolutionary who got used to his title as the son of Polyxos now needs to redefine himself with no help from sovereign traditions. For Épithalos, melancholia arises from a need to name himself—that is, he needs to start all over again. Épithalos' speech to Audaline ("TO NAME! O impenetrable wound!") articulates a strong

connection between the practice of naming and pain (134). He even says, “The only tragedy [is that] language beats my thought” (154). Without the royal title, Épithalos would have difficulty conducting unsupported action, but the appearance of such trouble on the horizon does not compel him to take his dead father’s place. In act IV, Épithalos explains why he withdraws his privilege as the future king. That is, “[t]o see no more / To see death no more” (153−54). Épithalos adds, “Alone I want to go to the bold abyss into which consciousness sinks” (161).

On Épithalos’ conflict with his mother, and on the end of his violent act, editor Young writes that “the play ends with the hero’s tragic defeat” (2018:79), which suggests “a form of sacrificial death” (2018:77).[11] But what Épithalos is getting at, I think, is neither the realization of defeat nor death. Épithalos retreats to the point where he can forget all ties to the sovereign principle such as his name and rights to Lébos, and where he can be forgotten.[12] The (re)emergence of Épithalos as an anonymous person liberated from the royal lineage is foreshadowed in the opening scene of the final act (act IV) when he says: “Disappear you inventions of my new consciousness! / the holocaust specifies the sacrifice / Primordial spectacle I drink from inner riches / To see no

11) While Dràhna mentions “death” (“DEATH once again / Frightful speeds once again”) in response to the commander’s suggestion that “Épithalos must leave the city within two hours” (152), I suggest that linking death to Épithalos has more to do with the end of Épithalos’ consciousness as the sovereign figure than the state of being dead.

12) In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (2008:95) also mentions his desire to move to a common place: “I arrive slowly in the world (…) The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am *fixed*. (…) I slip into corners; I keep silent; all I want is to be anonymous, to be forgotten. Look, I’ll agree to everything, on condition I go unnoticed!”

more / To see death no more / the chasm" (153–54). By using the second person pronoun "you" to refer to "inventions," the warrior distances himself from what others may think Épithalos is. In this moment of transition, Épithalos moves from the subject of consciousness ("I, higher consciousness" [137]) to the world of primordial spectacle.[13] About the "primordial" world, Fanon (2008:107) writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* that "[B]etween the world and me there was a relation of coexistence."

The young male figures in Fanon's plays raise the question of how a person who feels lost devotes himself to sociality with interest and passion. I suggest that Fanon's own life offers an insightful explanation. In the 2004 biography of his younger brother, author Joby Fanon (2014:21–30) writes that Frantz enlisted in the French Free Forces to fight the German army, first briefly in 1943, and then from 1944 to 1945. Having heard from Joby about their Martinican teacher's concern that the war in Europe "did not call into question the domination exerted by the colonial powers like France and Great Britain," Frantz replied, "Whenever liberty is in question, I feel concerned. We're all concerned, whatever our color" (J. Fanon 2014:23). But when he returned from the war, as Joby (2014:38) recalls, Frantz, who had been "happy, open and talkative" as a boy, was ravaged by trauma and disappointment. Fanon's wartime experiences, says Joby (2014:37), were moments of coming to realize that "he was black." For Fanon (1967:112), such realization was an experience of being singled out, as his wish to be "a man among other men" was dismissed. What is more embarrassing is that his body became strange to himself, a phenomenon he calls "a third-person consciousness" (Fanon 1967:110). Fanon (1967:111) describes

13) Young's (2018:56) interpretation of Épithalos' transition to a "higher consciousness" is the opposite of mine.

this uncanniness in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "[I]f I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other side of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema." Fanon's writing about the uncanniness of his body—about his inner feeling that extends outward between the spectacle of his body and readers' perception—places what he says as being "overdetermined from without" (1967:116) as the theatrical experience.

Both *Black Skin, White Masks* and Fanon's plays deal with one's interaction with other people at its limit, but there is an important difference between them. Whereas consciousness of the body is overwhelmed by the dialectic of black and white in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in Fanon's plays a body is opened to transindividual possibilities. Above all, the haptic language in the plays[14] and a reference to water's formlessness in *The Drowning Eye* ("water is metamorphosing in all street corners" [105]) evince Fanon's desire that a being in relation to many and living at their own pace ("Swear to me that you will never be in a rush!" [2018:82]) be imaginable to the reader. In contrast to the militant rhetoric of Fanon's titles such as *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Toward the African Revolution*, as pointed out by Homi Bhabha (1994:112), Fanon strives for the condition in which a specific difference is not recognizable across his writings. If, in the white dominant

14) For example, in act II, scene 2, Épithalos says to Audaline, "Love's tears wound my feverish hands" (129). He also says, "The earth's lips inhaled the secrets" (130).

cultures, nothing, says Fanon (1967:135), "is more unwelcome than the commonplace," the antiheroic ending of both plays figures anonymous and invisible spaces—insignificant moments in which François and Épithalos each retreat. At the end of *The Drowning Eye*, François no longer considers enjoyment to be the language of the Other, nor does he yearn for an imaginary identification with others. Instead he assumes the role asked by Ginette ("I implore you François, / Fashion me frighteningly!" [112]) and is on the verge of making it his own. While François expresses his wish to lead Ginette to the absolute gates, at the same time, he is confronted with the irreducibility of his biological body ("my forming nudity takes you" [112]). The important point about the play's ending is that François abandons himself to the indeterminacy of what he is to become without confining his position to the us-versus-them opposition. *Parallel Hands* goes a step further: the rejection of Épithalos by the ruling class of Lébos leads to another scene in which the king's son retreats to a world where he is not recognized. Significantly, as both of Fanon's plays proceed, a shift occurs from solemnity to a melancholic yet ecstatic state. With this, the plays ask how one copes with loss without enacting the death drive.

Ⅲ. Between Love and the Death Drive

This section turns to the area of ambivalence between the state of being apart and the state of being with other people that is contradictory in Fanon's plays. It examines how the limits of being are revealed in that contradiction. Death spoken in the plays is another expression of François' and Épithalos' wish to escape the disparity between what they

aspire to become and what they are.

At first glance, the plot of *The Drowning Eye* seems underdeveloped. This is perhaps because one of the main characters, François, remains speechless for most of the play. François has long refused to follow the roles expected by others, and this refusal translates into his silence in scene 2. As a result, Lucien repeatedly speaks to his brother in vain. For François, the expectation that members of state apparatuses such as the school and the state comply with the status quo is not his own. It is the Other, and such expectations involve the use of language. Yet, like Fanon and Épithalos, François wants to be emancipated from the regime of meaning, and perhaps for this reason, he is after an unmediated relation to language. When Lucien recalls how his younger brother speaks, François' desire to express himself is effectively addressed to the reader: "From time to time we discussed things. I liked listening to him. He would speak as though his words were right before his eyes" (92).[15] This is a moment where tensions between the brothers momentarily dissolve. For François, language is indistinguishable from that to which it refers.

François' affection for language invites the question of how he appears to others when not speaking. Remarks by Ginette on Lucien and François' adversarial relationship in scene 3 delineate what the latter is like. While Lucien claims that François possesses a death impulse ("Death is what inhabits François. Death guides him" [98]), Ginette defends François and reverses Lucien's words. She asks Lucien, "Does

15) Lucien also says that when François uttered, he "wouldn't speak," but rather would "express himself" (94). According to Lucien, "[François] didn't say banal things, he wanted to live at the level of / the fantastic. / No expressions such as: / It's cold. / I'm hungry. / I'm sleepy" (94).

it not bother you to live swigging beside that dead but still warm man? (…) [D]o you not sometimes desire to see him dissolve like the wall of ice that imprisons the sap awaiting the spring? ... Sometimes, do you not want to kill him all of a sudden?" (99) By being asked these questions, Lucien is transformed by Ginette's words into someone who wants to kill his brother and who transgresses the law. Considering that Lucien is a person who believes that each object has its own role in the world ("A dog is meant to guard the house. And the house is meant to shelter the family" [101]), it may come as a surprise to some that Lucien is seen as a person who wants his brother to die. Ginette's situating Lucien in relation to the death drive makes François a person who lives with certain limits.

In scene 3 where François is absent, Lucien talks about acceptance of life, action, and belief, whereas Ginette says that night time is for François, that "humans have lost" (104), and that "Things, they're not for humans" (105). Lucien and Ginette exchange stories, sometimes not listening to each other. The sequence of conversations asserting their differences (and also differences between the brothers) pivots when Lucien tells Ginette that "I love you and I will protect you" (108). This moment of professing love for each other is something that François and Ginette do not have in the first scene because he repeatedly asks back her love for him and denies being desired by another. By contrast, the expressions such as "exhaust" and "fall" in the conversation between Lucien and Ginette imply that the two have entered into an erotic relationship (108). Toward the end of scene 3, Lucien even enacts the death drive to the extent that he says, "[To love] is to die in you" (108). Ultimately, Lucien making himself like a François without his knowledge—a version of François that Lucien describes in his own

speech—embodies the death drive in a way that he negates his finitude. It is Lucien who transgresses by equating love with death and becoming like François in his apprehension. What is important here is that Lucien's possession of the death drive gives us room to think anew about François as a man who lacks something.

At this point, one might ask what makes François suspend his pursuit of enjoyment (except for the last scene of the play)? In an effort to figure out why François keeps to himself, Lucien tells Ginette about the brothers' school days. According to Lucien, François once claimed that "[t]he eye must be worthy of the spectacle" (93). The remark reveals François' distrust in phenomenological perception, which results in his "[refusal] to see things as they are" (94). What François means, I believe, is that one who sees things is susceptible to the objects of his or her vision. According to Lucien, François wished that if a spectator was not right for spectacle, he himself "would like to be blind" (93). François' consciousness of being together with other things, when a spectator's position is assigned, locates him in a place broader than that shaped by the vision of a solitary thinker, which is at the center of Western episteme (see Cavarero 2002:506–7). The remark that François "would like to be blind" does not mean he is ashamed of himself. Rather, it expresses his inability, or refusal, to identify with the spectator's impersonal position. Paradoxically, this condition of being affected connects him to the world. The play's title *The Drowning Eye* reads similarly, evoking the image of a dying or weakened body with blurred vision. Young (2018:45–46) also refers to one of the Voice's lines ("Silence! Two captive stars commit suicide at the bottom of orbits" [96]) to highlight the disappearance of individuation implied by the play's title. Through the blur that it harbors, the drowning eye may dissolve the assurance

of the self as subject and the sense of ownership of objects that it sees. Ginette also describes her eyes held by something that escapes such assurance as "my eyes a back door that one has not closed" (100).

Parallel Hands, too, crafts disruptive moments in which the privilege of spectators over spectacle is undone, along with other conventions that reinforce sovereignty. At the start of act I, scene 1, Polyxos, who has just awakened, questions his vision. Polyxos is alone (except for the chorus) when he speaks of what he saw in his dream, and the chorus's reaction is "Beware, woe betide you!" (115).[16] Act II, scene 2 begins with Ménasha, the mother of Audaline, telling the king that she cannot find her daughter (117). Polyxos interrupts by asking, "Listen, do you hear?" (118). While Polyxos claims that "He's coming to life," Ménasha says she does not see what he is seeing (118).[17] Polyxos relays his dream to Ménasha—"merciless Épithalos absented me from this Earth"(121)—but Ménasha's failure to concur with the ears and eyes of Polyxos at present ("I don't see anything, Sire" [118]) makes the king distanced from her and, by extension, from all others. That Polyxos is alone with regard to what he sees is unusual, in that the king's existence as sovereign presumes the presence of others who confirm his power and authority. The questioning of I/eye by the king himself in the first

16) Another important part of the cast is the chorus, which narrates both what happens on stage and what is to come. Its role is explicit when the chorus warns Polyxos about his death, saying, "Polyxos, the spectacle is born from darkness" (117) and "The essential thing is to prevent the spectacle. Be careful Polyxos!" (126).

17) Polyxos – Listen, he's coming!
(Ménasha, a hand on the sword, hearkens.)
(Polyxos prey to an intense fright.) Come, look, over there: stop him!
Ménasha – (After a few steps in the direction indicated by Polyxos.) I don't see anything, Sire. (118)

scene serves as a prelude to Épithalos' refusal to inherit Polyxos' rule. Épithalos kills Polyxos off stage, and the chorus announces the king's death at the end of act I by saying "Polyxos, prince of / Lébos, / On the other side of the emaciated Word, / The initial Act is raised" (126).

Parallel Hands draws attention to Épithalos' emotions that vacillate after Polyxos is gone. In Épithalos' view, the king lacked the capacity to initiate action, and this lack is implied by the fact that Polyxos' narration of what he sees cannot be shared with others. About the irreducible difference between his father and himself, Épithalos says, "Polyxos, angular intimacy, the accepted syntheses abandon their scrawny horizons, arbitrary interpretations distort the purity of objectivity" (131). Épithalos refuses to be the king's subject. But Épithalos' attempt to "fragment" (131) the dominant order represented by Polyxos is challenged by his dispossession of the sovereign rule, which means that he lacks support for his action. Perhaps for this reason, Épithalos identifies with the ghost: "Yes Épithalos, fundamental apparition / Is braced by the unfinished" (131). This locates Épithalos in the condition of having no definitive narrative.

Épithalos' affinity with a ghost suggests that it is impossible for him to become like Polyxos. Then, who and what is Épithalos? In the play there is a moment where Épithalos is on the verge of emerging as a creator that represents the sovereign ("EVENT! Stamping about the other side of life, at the doors of the Gaze I raise myself Absolute!") (130). But once Épithalos recognizes the significance of Audaline in his life, this tendency to transcend the horizon of his being ultimately diminishes; as he puts it, "Audaline, astonished root of my being catch[s] the dazzling superhumanity of my Gaze!" (131). Neither a king nor an object of the gaze, Épithalos searches for something with which to

expose his existence—namely, his way of being in the world.[18]

Audaline, Épithalos' lover, is the one who makes him hesitate to become aggressive, as he admits that "my gold-strewn dreams stagger when, hailed, you appear to me" (131). But she dies in act III, scene 4, before Épithalos reenters in the following act. According to Joby (2014:60), while Fanon was completing *Parallel Hands*, he was not sure whether Audaline should survive Épithalos.[19] On the development of the plot, one possible interpretation is that Audaline's death is another way of changing Épithalos' role from radical figure into an exile, thus making his inheritance in Lébos meaningless. Indeed to Audaline, who, Épithalos says, was the "marvelous side of my polarity" (159), and who would have entered the institution of marriage with him, Épithalos existed as both a lover and Polyxos' son.[20]

In parallel to Audalin's death, the name Épithalos no longer conveys his uniqueness in the way it did before. The loss of Audaline made Épithalos regret what happened in Lébos and stop rationalizing his actions. After Épithalos learns of his fiancée's death, he "staggers for the first time" according to the stage direction (159).[21] And, "death" is

18) Épithalos reveals his sense of alienation by saying, "Shreds of darkness isolate me from myself, clouds entwined delay the inevitable becoming of my own creation, what sudden movements silently renew me? Low down, very low down, I looked for the cause of Worlds!" (130). His wondering about the source of regeneration suggests that his isolation is not completely a depressive feeling. More than that, Épithalos' inclination toward keeping a low profile recalls Lucien's relaying of what François' old friend Bussières said in *The Drowning Eye*: "When words scratch each other's eyes out, the only remaining resource is action. But when acts slip through one's fingers, all one can do is to lie down" (92).

19) This remark is also mentioned in Young's (2018:52) interpretation of the play.

20) Épithalos identifies himself as son of Polyxos when he first meets Audaline on stage: "Stay Audaline frightened source stay, it is I Épithalos, son of Polyxos" (129).

uttered several times between Épithalos and Dràhna. What Épithalos means by “death,” however, does not seem literal. Rather, he recognizes having been robbed of his love and vitality. Perhaps for this reason, Épithalos begs the night to return and accepts the failure of his action near the end of the play, “Night of the WHOLE come back to drown the flame of my consciousness / My body attracts me / This flesh / Me, Épithalos reality whipping the Cosmos into a fever / Night, I beseech you / Come back / To see no more /To see the VOID no more / Things, rediscover your texture ...” (163-64). These lines tell us that Épithalos is saddened and tired of being a bearer of the gaze.

The figuration of Épithalos’ corpo-reality in act IV, scene 2 highlights love that is not here. Throughout the play Épithalos only enters three times. First, before act I, scene 1, he is already on the scene as a mute and uncanny figure. The stage direction specifies: “Where Épithalos is concerned, furtive lightning bolts go to confirm the fears of the actors on stage. Épithalos haunts the stage. He burns to come on” (114). He is not present on stage when Polyxos begins to speak. Épithalos’ second appearance in act II, scene 2 unfolds several faces: a confident speaker, a melancholic thinker (“Privileged prisons, my aroused consciousness contemplates the fatal wound” [130]), and an actor who runs to the stage (“I climb flaying my sonorous hands / And I burst onto the stage” [136]). Finally, the dissolution of Épithalos’ identity as the sovereign subject begins to take shape in act IV, where his monologue is followed by conversations with Dràhna and Ménasha, the mother of Audaline.

21) Having found Audaline dead, Épithalos says in front of Dràhna, “Audaline, adventure of green enamel, I cry with my / vainglorious hands that refuse to touch each other! / O Melancholia!” (159). Here the hands refusing to touch remind us of the play’s title, *Parallel Hands*.

The change reflects Épithalos' desire to be in a specific time and place ("I want not to be of any centuries!" [133]) that has been denied to him. The world Épithalos wants to belong to is one where "[r]eiterated unifications, worried, are undone," in which "[t]he sentence returns to the gestural origins and disarms the prolixity of observation" (135), and in which he "could no longer mark out the world" (162). Like François at the close of *The Drowning Eye*, Épithalos opens himself to gates ("I will go to the gates opening onto impossible certainty"(161) that lead to a path where he is potentially indistinguishable from primordial spectacle ("Primordial spectacle I drink from inner riches" [153]). The spectacle described by Épithalos is not an object captured by the observing eye; rather, it involves the texture of things (164) and adapted things (156). Fanon (2008:107) also says of "primordial" spectacle in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "My 'speaking hands' tore at the hysterical throat of the world." Épithalos finds a way to himself by speaking with his body that is ready to take all possible forms.

Ⅳ. Conclusion

Running through both plays is Fanon's concern with the lack of freedom of expression for those who feel like latecomers in the circuit of cultural and political discourses, as he says elsewhere "Too late! But once again I want to understand" (Fanon 1967:121). This concern is based on the thought that visibility is at the center of captivation (see Foucault quoted in Chow 2012:45). Perhaps for this reason, in *The Drowning Eye* François is said to like the night sky and shadow, and his affinity to shadow is portrayed as a resistance to the mode of being that

exists for others.

In his second play, Fanon more confidently voices his thought on visibility, action, and being. Early in *Parallel Hands*, Dràhna describes her son Épithalos who appears in her hallucination: “I called him. He stared at me a while and taking my hands: ‘Mother’, he said, ‘my eyes are thirsty for light’” (123). But as Épithalos says firmly (“Fragments of sun in my hands!” [134]), the light he strives for is far from literal. This “light,” I argue, refers to a condition that reveals the potential of being—close to Martin Heidegger’s discussion of the forest clearing [*Lichtung*]. Heidegger’s idea of clearing deepens our understanding of how Fanon prepares for his words to be heard. In “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” Heidegger (1993:441) writes that “Only by virtue of some sort of brightness can what shines show itself, that is, radiate. But brightness in its turn rests upon something open, something free, which it might illuminate here and there, now and then. Brightness plays in the open and strives there with darkness.” The openness that “grants a possible letting appear and show” is what Heidegger (1993:441) calls the “clearing.” Épithalos who begins the play as a warrior threatening to kill the king in Polyxos’ dream, and who concludes as an exile, frees himself from his relation to the status quo by admitting that “Tough is the path that leads me to myself” (162). What Épithalos seeks, such as a performative use of language (“Roll barren sources!” [162]), a passion (“My fever!”), and a time-place where he “could no longer mark out the world” (162), is a means of letting himself move despite his situation of privation (namely, a condition in which he needs to start from nothing).

But Fanon is not recklessly optimistic about how language relates to action. In Fanon’s plays, characters, especially François and Épithalos,

understand themselves in relation to the limits of language. In *The Drowning Eye*, François makes himself unknowable by refusing to speak and by volunteering to go on the other side of the gate at the play's end. Épithalos is to become nobody by losing his attachment to his name, identity, and other kinds of affiliation. The enactment and displacement of the unknowable in *The Drowning Eye* and *Parallel Hands* resonates with the questions that hold our interest in a post-neoliberal world, such as with whom we share our losses, and when identification fails. In his foreword to the 1986 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Bhabha (1994:113) wrote that the "transgressive and transitional" aspect of Fanon's work did not receive enough attention in Britain at that time. It is only recently that Fanon's desire to be unnamed (rather than his resistance to the fact of blackness) attracts people's attention.

As the earliest texts written by Fanon (Young 2018:11), his plays provide us with an opportunity to look at what his interests and concerns were in his early 20s and how his thinking was reflected in his subsequent writing. Unlike in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon seems to suppress the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave in his plays. If the conflict in each play is primarily between individuals (between the two brothers, father and son, king/or queen and their subject), Fanon's remark in the introduction to *Black Skin White Masks* is notable. In the book, which was written in 1952, Fanon (1967:9) says, "This book should have been written three years ago. ... But these truths were a fire in me then. Now I can tell them without being burned. These truths do not have to be hurled in men's faces. They are not intended to ignite fervor. I do not trust fervor." But interestingly in *The Drowning Eye* and *Parallel Hands*, the main characters are portrayed as men who are not engrossed in emotions and believe in the power of reason.

The Drowning Eye and *Parallel Hands* begin and end with the question of what the sense of not-being-at-home is like. There is no racial identification at work in his plays, but the contestation between the status quo and the characters' desire to break away from it is inseparable from Fanon's aspiration for radical change throughout his career. In this line of thought, it seems not a coincidence that we (as the reader) find both François standing in front of the absolute gates and Épithalos on the verge of leaving Lébos, at the end of each play. When we read these last scenes with *Black Skin, White Masks*, it is not surprising to find that the book begins with the following sentences: "The explosion will not happen today. It is too soon ... or too late" (Fanon 1967:7). If Fanon's interest in the present is applied to his plays, the crossing and departure of the characters can be read as suspending the present moment. If we are attentive to Fanon's aspiration for the anti-colonial world and consciousness of difference when reading his plays, we come to understand that the feelings of alienation and melancholy can free us from our former selves.

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국문초록

프란츠 파농 읽기: 우울과 자유에 관한 두 편의 희곡

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이 논문은 2015년과 2018년에 각각 불어와 영어로 독자들에게 처음으로 소개된 프란츠 파농의 희곡 *The Drowning Eye*와 *Parallel Hands*에 대한 분석이다. 1949년에 쓰여진 이 두 작품은 파농의 가장 초기 작품들로 알려져 있으며, 식민지 억압 구조를 비판한 파농의 다른 작품들과 다르게 이 희곡들에서는 인종 정치에 대한 직접적인 언급이 없다. *The Drowning Eye*와 *Parallel Hands*는 이름, 언어, 믿음과 같은 전통에 대한 애착을 상실한 등장인물들이 어떻게 죽음 충동에 빠지지 않고 결핍의 상황에서 자신들을 지탱하고 변화를 시도하는지 보여준다. 논문은 멜랑콜리 주제를 중심으로 희곡들을 분석하는데, 등장인물들의 상실감은 *Black Skin, White Masks*에서 파농이 언급한 현상학적 낯설음과 연결되어 이해될 수 있다. 동시에 두 희곡은 주인공들이 사랑과 죽음 충동 사이에서의 방황으로부터 불확실성 또는 익명의 공간에 스스로를 내던지는 행위로 나아가는 과정을 보여주는데, 이를 통해 배척과 포용의 변증법을 넘어서는 파농의 사상을 이해하는 단초를 제공한다. 파농의 반식민화 세계에 대한 열망과 다양성에 대한 인식을 바탕으로 이 희곡들을 읽을 때, 소외와 멜랑콜리와 같은 감정들이 역설적으로 과거의 자신으로부터 우리를 해방시키는 동력이 될 수 있다는 것을 이해하게 된다.

주제어 : 프란츠 파농, 우울, 죽음 충동, *The Drowning Eye*, *Parallel Hands*

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