

Ancestral Occult Supernatural Conundrum in Chariandy's *Soucouyant*

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Abstract

Soucouyant is David Chariandy's poignant debut novel that deals with the nuances of the Caribbean diaspora experience. He uses memory as the prominent technique, and the supernatural realm of resistance and trauma. This mythological folk tales of 'Soucouyant' in the view of Adele's dementia, the novel spans a phantom tradition of generational resentment, cultural displacement, subjugation stories. The story projects the expedition of a boy, who is unnamed here, as he tries to make sense of his mother's fragmented stories. Through the narration the author brings out how forgetfulness becomes a curse of multifaceted part of survival. This 'Soucouyant' appears as a notable metaphor for cultural memory, which depicts the personal traumas and collective experiences of immigrants, a Caribbean spirit by shifting its shape. Chariandy skillfully develops the story by exploring how cultural memories persist across geographic boundaries, juxtaposing supernatural symbolism with intimate family dynamics, transforming individual suffering into a larger story of resilience and transformation. 'Ancestral Occult' reframes the history of migrants through a supernatural and profound emotional interpretation, expressing a thoughtful contemplation on identity, memory and the unseen blemish of immigration. A deep consideration of immigrant experience is reflected by the Caribbean-Canadian upbringing of Chariandy, where memory progresses into a supernatural landscape of cultural exchange and survival. In the depiction on Canadian diasporic literature, in the plot, the hardships to maintain their identities of the marginalized communities through fabled and supernatural narratives are taken into consideration. Meticulously, this specific research handles interdisciplinary approaches, integrating anthropological perceptions, sociological interpretations and auto ethnographic narratives. Thus 'The Occult Ancestor' grows as a progressive scholarly involvement, disclosing the complex ways in which diasporic residents renovate, recollect and conceptualize their cultural identities through influential narrative stratagems.

Keywords: Soucouyant, Epistemological, Occult, Mystical, Cultural Displacement

David Chariandy's debut novel *Soucouyant* is connected with the mythical story 'Soucouyant' – a vampire from Trinidadian mythology which entwines in the Caribbean folklore with diasporic experience. The vampire, *Soucouyant*, as an allegory to poignant inheritances of cultural memory, colonialism and migration. The *Soucouyant* is a vampire figure in Caribbean tradition, familiar as a shape-shifting elderly woman who exfoliates its skin, keep it in mortar. It transfigures into a fireball and fly in the night sky to look for victim. It enters into homes through small opening to suck the blood of victims, and leaving black or blue marks. The marks of the *Soucouyant* may refer to the racism and xenophobia (Cvetkovic 82) as well as to the trauma (Chivers 115) which the characters experience in the Canadian society. Chivers enlarges the figure of the *Soucouyant* is used in the novel "... To trace colonial legacies of trauma that pressure characters in contemporary Canada to force forgetting and to tolerate painful but less physical forms of racist violence" (Chivers 115).

"My mother would tell stories of Soucouyants, of witches who shed their skins at night..." (Chariandy 17).

In Caribbean tradition, this *Soucouyant* is embodied as an influential, mythological appearance that symbolizes the intricacies of Caribbean folklore. The above particular lines stresses the reputation of oral narration, where mythology and traditional stories are endowed through generations in Caribbean culture. When the protagonist recollects the stories of his mother, the mood of the novel shifts to nostalgic and reflective. The eminence of this work moves farther literary analysis, providing a critical perceptions on the psychological backdrops of transnational identity.

As Derek Walcott once said: “amnesia is the true history of the New World” (Burnett 81). The adaptation of ‘*Soucouyant*’ in the novel by Chariandy is to probe the disintegrated identity of Caribbean immigrants in Canada. This disintegrated identity is specifically depicted through Adele, a Trinidadian woman, who suffers with dementia. Forgetting the wider cultural experience of dislocated communities is replicated by her waning memory. These people are striving hard to preserve their ancestral tradition and adapting themselves into an antagonistic Canadian landscape.

“Adele would tell me, ‘The past is never really past... It’s always with us, haunting us.’” (Chariandy 101)

The anthropological thought of intergenerational trauma and memory are reflected in the words of Adele. Through her words, she affirms that historical trauma can be proceeded through generations, unending process of haunt and develop their experience. A synchronized sediment of confusion that can never be erased in the deep mind of the immigrant.

In the mid of 20th century in Scarborough, the novel is micro-fictionalized in a Canadian setting, replicating the alienation encountered by Caribbean immigrants. Adele’s recounting of the ‘*Soucouyant*’ folklore – a vampire “trafficked quietly through the touch of others” – refer to the unsettled disturbances of Trinidad’s past, inclusive of ethnic brutality and wartime dislocation. This plot attempts to act as a bridge between her ruptured existences in Canada, where universal discrimination and cultural eradication worsen her psychological degeneration, and her Caribbean roots. Challenging Canada’s

myth of multicultural harmony, the *Soucouyant* evolves from a folk antagonist to a representation of repressed histories that resurface over generations.

Chariandy’s elucidation highlights the way how migration restructures mythological beliefs. The dualism of *Soucouyant* as a literal mythical creature and allegory for innate trauma, reciprocating the immigrant experience “between nations and belonging to neither”.

“I felt like I was caught between two worlds... I didn’t know which world I belonged to.” (Chariandy 121)

The dialogue expressed the migration experience entrapped between diverse cultural worlds. The main character strives hard to reunite his Canadian upbringing with his Caribbean inheritance. It underlines the intricacies of dislodgment and belonging. This motivation may have created experiencing everyday life in Canada.

To the unnamed son of Adele, these fragmented memories of his mother and the folktale of *Soucouyant* supports to renovate his concealed history of his mother. It illuminates that the diasporic communities must oppose or selectively ‘forget’ their painful traditions to survive. This worldwide forgetting is critiqued by Kambourei as “dehistoricizes the social and political conditions that have discriminated against many Canadians, the same conditions that, through colonial history, contributed to the formation of the Canadian stage” (Kambourei 101). With the interconnected techniques of myth and memory, David Chariandy’s *Soucouyant* analyses the psychological charge of cultural displacement, placing folktale as a surviving, adaptable vigor the blends the Caribbean’s expatriate past to Canada’s challenged present.

“My parents had left Trinidad, seeking a better life... But what they found, instead, was a different kind of struggle.” (Chariandy 57)

This dialogue is delivered by Adele’s son, expressing the intricacies of diasporic experiences and the quest of native. The novel observes the process how immigrant families handle novel communal backgrounds and strive to uphold their cultural identities.

In David Chariandy’s *Soucouyant*, ancestral occults appear as an inherent scandal of unresolved

traumas agreed by immigrants in envisioning a bright future, which both causes psychological and physical pain. Retelling the folklore of *Soucouyant*, a vampire creature, the novel offers a poignant metaphor for the haunted tenacity of colonial ferocity, dislocation, and cultural destruction. Being a Trinidadian immigrant to Canada, Adele, expresses her pressure, sufferings and pain. Her dementia, representing the figurative act of ‘forgetting’, also discharged as simple biological weakening demanded by her living in an unfriendly Canadian backdrop. However, the recollection of *Soucouyant* myth by Adele – a vampire that “trafficked quietly through the touch of other” – does not support her to make a real escape from ancestral sufferings. After her death, the wound that appears on her son’s forehead precisely this inheritance, remarking the unavoidable entrapped removal of trauma over generations.

The narrative style of Chariandy represents the difference between the assurances of migration and its harsh realities. Adele, an immigrant, lands in Canada with the belongings of “elsewhere pasts” – accounts of racial traumas, wartime corruption, and cultural displacement. These accounts reemerge as hallucinations, subverting the mythology of multicultural accord. Adele’s fragmented memories of her mother being burned by American soldiers parallelizing the psychological unconsciousness faced by migrants who are in the position to subdue their identities to transit systemic racism and extermination. The suffocation of their present scenario on ancestral tradition clearly exhibits the failure of Canada to provide asylum to the immigrants and their limitations in their present. This limitations are echoed in Chariandy’s *Soucouyant* dualism – the creature of both soiled in Caribbean and forcefully in Canadian outskirts, reciprocating the unsettled tension between integration and cultural conservation.

The physical strangle of migration is visible. The unnamed son of Adele, prefigures the silencing of his mother’s narratives with Canadian identity. The reframing of his mother’s fragmented memories are a mixture of folktale, war period suffering, and diasporic desirous, disclosing the psychosomatic toll of cultural displacement. Shedding the skin and sucking the blood at the night time of *Soucouyant*

resembles the extraction of labour and self – worth from migrants and forced to lose their histories for living in the unwelcoming society. Chariandy highlights how this eradication is not inactive but activated. It is the colonial thinking that stresses immigrants’ acute bind to their ancestral place in order to ‘belonging’ in places that mark them as permanent strangers.

Conclusion

Soucouyant suggests familial hallucinations as both purgation and curse. At the same time they represent the disgusting clasp of unsettled trauma, they also function as deeds of resistance – a denial to allow colonial violence to bury them. A long distance from the diminishing past, Adele’s dementia, influences her son to challenge the repressed histories that frame his existence. In such a way, this novel reevaluates immigration as a nonlinear journey to wealth but as a recurring estimate with demons that transgress borders. The *Soucouyant*’s passion, once a representation of devastation, becomes a glowing torch that illuminates the need for memory – even when such memories are consumed. Chariandy’s conclusion is unambiguous. The optimistic views in future migrants are often overshadowed by the shadows of the past, nonetheless within those glooms lies the negative persistence of cultural identity that rejects to be quenched.

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