

ASCALF BULLETIN

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF  
CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN LITERATURE  
IN FRENCH



Bulletin 9  
Autumn/Winter 1994

edited by Pat Little  
with the assistance of Roger Little

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## ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN LITERATURE IN FRENCH

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The *ASCALF Bulletin* appears twice a year and contains information on recent developments and on forthcoming meetings, talks, conferences, etc., likely to be of interest to members. It also presents reviews of books, films, conferences etc., as well as short scholarly articles. Contributions are most warmly invited from members.

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The Bulletin leaves authors of articles and reviews complete responsibility for opinions and judgements expressed by them.

This *ASCALF Bulletin* was typeset by Airelle and copied at the University of Southampton with the particular help of David Smith to whom go our sincere thanks.  
The publication is generously grant-aided by the Faculty of Arts at University College Dublin.

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## Whence and whither the French Caribbean 'créolité' movement?

by

Mary Gallagher

### 1. The contemporary ferment of Caribbean writing

In 1992, Derek Walcott was awarded the Nobel prize for literature. It was the second time that a Caribbean-born poet was distinguished by this honour. But, whereas Walcott's achievement secured a place for the tiny island of Saint Lucia on the world map of literature, where it now shines reflected glory on the culture of the Caribbean basin in general, Saint-John Perse's award was seen, on the contrary, and not just in 1960, but for at least two decades afterwards, as an honour conferred on France, highlighting the French language and French culture rather than the Caribbean, much less Guadeloupe. We must be wary, of course, of misinterpreting this discrepancy; such widespread reluctance to link Saint-John Perse with the Caribbean probably says as much about the apparent absence of Caribbean texture from the greater part of Saint-John Perse's poetry and about the poet's ambiguous, and perhaps ambivalent relation with the *pays natal*, as it does about the cultural profile of the Caribbean during the period in question. Clearly, however, it does also reflect a general evolution in the cultural status of former, but in certain cases retained jewels of European empire. More specifically, it illustrates the hearing which twentieth-century Caribbean voices have only recently begun to claim as such in the international literary consciousness. Certainly, the vigour and the volume of the literary output of the French-speaking Caribbean (that is, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane and Haiti) have been growing steadily over the past few decades. Indeed, if one considers the French Caribbean alone, that is the *départements d'outre-mer* (as opposed to the French-speaking Caribbean, which would include Haiti), one notes that two of them in particular, Martinique and Guadeloupe, can boast the prolific literary

achievement of a very long list of successful and esteemed contemporary writers, including Édouard Glissant, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Patrick Chamoiseau, Maryse Condé, Daniel Maximin, Xavier Orville, Myriam Warner-Vieyra, Raphaël Confiant and Vincent Placoly. International university literary programmes and the French publishing industry are but two of many gauges which have registered and indeed promoted this flood-tide in contemporary Caribbean literary inspiration. Not only was Patrick Chamoiseau's novel *Texaco* awarded the 1992 *Prix Goncourt*, but Raphaël Confiant's *L'Allée des soupirs* (Grasset, 1994) has been shortlisted for the 1994 prize.

The French Caribbean is exceptional, then, in the sheer volume of attention-commanding writing to emerge from it in the second half of the present century. We should also remember, however, that the Anglophone Caribbean has also contributed and in no small way to the literary assault made during that period on the high ground formerly held by metropolitan literatures. Writers such as Derek Walcott, Jean Rhys, the Naipaul brothers and Paule Marshall along with numerous Jamaican poets have played a significant part in shaping the rhythms and mixing the colours of English-language literature.

## 2. A tradition of speculative self-definition

It is both tempting and plausible to attribute this localised literary boom to the impacted complexity of Caribbean culture. Certainly, the literary impulse in question seems to be determined, indeed overdetermined, by the challenge of naming the density and complexity of the Caribbean condition. Most, if not all of the writers listed above write both about and against the scars engraved upon the collective psyche by a history of displacement and slavery, of cultural amnesia, of silencing and assimilation, and of gross economic and political dependency. The distress of slave-trade transportation, the deculturation and dehumanisation which were part of plantation slavery, added to the experience of layer upon layer of *métissage* would in themselves guarantee a legacy of complications and complexes; but when the empires in question were several, not just French and British, but also Dutch and Spanish, the intricacies of the scar tissue were guaranteed to be compounded by the residual

and anachronistic cultural heterogeneity of the Caribbean Basin. Culturally, the balkanised Caribbean is thus extremely rich or excessively fragmented, depending on one's perspective; in many cases, the educated elites of neighbouring islands literally don't speak the same language. As for the political and economic profiles of the islands, these vary considerably even within archipelagos and are in many cases highly unstable, as for example are Cuba and Haiti in late 1994.

Significantly, at regular intervals from the 1950s onwards, there have been three successive attempts on the part of Martinicans, the most frenchified of the French-speaking Caribbeans, to define a theoretical framework of rehabilitation for post-colonial Caribbean culture in general. That is, to name the specificity and exemplarity of the Caribbean condition. Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant and, to a certain extent, Frantz Fanon, are the renowned elders of this tradition of speculative self-situation. If Césaire's polemical pamphlet, *Discours sur le colonialisme*<sup>1</sup> stands out against his predominantly literary *œuvre*, that body of writing which constitutes the foremost articulation of Caribbean *négritude*, a more equal counterpoint of cultural theory and literary practice can be found in the work of his intellectual heir, the Martinican novelist, poet, playwright and essayist, Édouard Glissant. Glissant's essays, in particular those collected in *Le Discours antillais* (Seuil, 1981) and in *Poétique de la relation* (Gallimard, 1990), constitute an impressively lucid and convincing *dépassement* of *négritude*; first of all by what the younger Martinican writer chooses to term *antillanité*, or Caribbeanness, and then, later on, by a rather more internationally-focused 'poetics of relation'. More recently still, however, a younger generation of Martinican writers has adopted *créolité* as its slogan, challenging the terms both of *négritude* and of *antillanité* in the name of a more authentic vision of what it means to come from and to write out of the French Caribbean.

It is interesting to note that this theoretical, self-situating tropism is far more predominant in the French (that is, the French-administered) than in the merely French-speaking

<sup>1</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Paris: Présence africaine, 1955.

Caribbean; and within the French Caribbean itself, it is more predominant in Martinique than in Guadeloupe or Guyane. One possible explanation of this phenomenon could be the particularly acute nature of Martinican cultural assimilation by France; in other words, the anxiety of the intelligentsia might be directly related to the degree of political and economic emasculation of the *pays natal*. In this sense, the self-situating impulse could be seen as a compensatory strategy of identification and solidarity with the Caribbean.

With the exception of Jean Bernabé, the proponents of *antillanité* and *créolité* are literary writers, whose literary output, implicitly enacting and often explicitly elaborating their theoretical agenda, is, if anything, more extensive than that of their less speculatively inclined *confrères*. For one would have to number Césaire, Glissant, Chamoiseau, and Confiant amongst the most prolific contributors to the effervescence of Caribbean literature in French. Patrick Chamoiseau, for example, having published two other novels and various other literary texts, including the award-winning *Antan d'enfance* (Hatier, 1990) (its sequel, *Chemin d'école* (Gallimard) appeared in 1994) went on to win the *Prix Goncourt* for his recently published and highly acclaimed novel *Texaco* (Gallimard, 1992). Undoubtedly, Chamoiseau, just like his contemporary Confiant and indeed Glissant and Césaire before them, had to face the question of how he might endorse or reinforce Caribbean cultural cohesiveness and specificity while writing in French and publishing with French publishers. And in that context, the theoretical impulse clearly represents an attempt not just to locate the specificity of Caribbean culture, but also to legitimise one's own writing by strategically relating it to a politico-cultural vision or ideal, whether it be *antillanité* or *créolité*.

What I should like to explore in this paper is the agenda of the *créolité* movement. I propose to look, in particular, at where it comes from and where it might be headed, by outlining briefly the main thrust of this polemical new discourse, its mobilisation of the problematic term 'Creole', and its place within a consistent and pronounced French-Caribbean tradition of speculative self-definition.

### 3. Two texts: *Lettres créoles* and *Éloge de la créolité*

The inaugural text of the *créolité* movement is entitled *Éloge de la créolité*; it is a cultural manifesto published by Gallimard in 1989 and co-authored by two prominent Martinican novelists, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant along with Creole linguist Jean Bernabé.

The authors of *Éloge de la créolité* identify Creole culture as the product of the process of creolisation initiated and promoted by the plantation system operative in the American South, Central America, Brazil, the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. However, they further claim that the entire world is entering into a state of Creolity in that everything — every people, every culture — is increasingly entering into relation with others.

In 1991, Chamoiseau and Confiant expanded on this pamphlet in a study of Caribbean writing (both creolophone and francophone). Published by Hatier, *Lettres créoles* is less a history of Caribbean writing in French and in Creole, than an unashamedly lyrical sounding and mapping of Caribbean voices and traces. Just like the literary writing of Chamoiseau and Confiant, this survey presents a further elaboration of their vision of *créolité*. Much more explicitly than the manifesto itself, *Lettres créoles* presents a nostalgic and revealing *éloge* of plantation culture. More especially, it idealises the distinctiveness of the *habitation* system which was the smaller-scale version of plantation culture that reigned in the *Petites Antilles*. The relatively small scale of the *habitation* is justifiably held to explain the peculiar intensity of the cultural interaction or creolisation which occurred in the Caribbean basin and which encouraged cultural as well as racial *métissage*. The *habitation* system flourished in the French Caribbean for almost three centuries (from 1685 to the 1950s); its collapse is regarded by the authors of *Lettres créoles* as a gigantic cultural *débâcle* since it brought about the decline of that Creole culture which they define as 'l'agrégat interactionnel ou transactionnel des éléments culturels caraïbes, européens, africains, asiatiques, et levantins, que le joug de l'Histoire a réunis sur le même sol.'<sup>1</sup> After the

<sup>1</sup> *Éloge de la créolité*, Paris: Gallimard, 1989, p.26. (Abbreviated hereinafter as *ÉC.*)

demise of the plantation system, the cultural magic of *créolisation* or *métissage* was, according to Chamoiseau and Confiant, gradually replaced by a 'système de consommation globale de la chose extérieure [...] Et nous nous mêmes — mulâtres en tête — à confondre liberté et assimilation, urbanité et civilisation, liberté et francisation.'<sup>1</sup>

In the second section of *Éloge de la créolité*, the elusive concept of *créolité*, both a lost horizon and a paradise which just might be regained, is elliptically referred to as a 'spécificité ouverte' (*ÉC*, p.27), or, more mysteriously, as 'notre soupe primitive' and 'notre mangrove de virtualités' (*ÉC*, p.28). These images seem to stress the open, inchoate and complex or dense nature of Creolity. Only complete internalisation of these three dimensions can, they claim, put an end to the self-mutilation regarded as synonymous with the triumph of frenchification. Self-regard is thus not to be confused with transparency; that is, with the reduction of the Creole to an impoverished self-identity. On the contrary, Creoles must learn to look at the complexity ('Nous accepter complexes', *ÉC*, p.28), the opacity and the virtuality of their Creolity. To this end, the epistemological approach to *créolité* favoured by the *créolité* visionaries is artistic: 'Explorer notre créolité doit s'effectuer dans une pensée aussi complexe que la Créolité elle-même. [...] C'est pourquoi il semble que, pour l'instant, la pleine connaissance de la Créolité sera réservée à l'Art' (*ÉC*, p.29). Only art, it is suggested, allows for an unreductive acknowledgement of the dense, relational, unstable and dynamic complexity of *créolité*.

### Orality

On a less abstract note, five key elements of the *créolité* aesthetic are outlined in the main body of the pamphlet: firstly, the critically important oral tradition. Orality is not just the chief medium of popular culture and of the Creole language, but it is also the principal vector of continuity with the past and in particular with the culture of the plantation. Hence, in order to be authentic, the writing of *créolité* must be inseminated by *la parole créole*. And indeed, even a cursory glance at the literary writing of Chamoiseau and Confiant illustrates this self-

conscious inscription or transcription into French of Creole constructions, vocabulary and rhythms.

### Filling in the blanks of history

The second factor of Creole authenticity to be highlighted is termed *la mémoire vraie* or a certain attentiveness to the voices of the past even when their scream has been swallowed into the gaps of the colonial version of history. Chamoiseau's *Texaco* has evoked this other form of memory:

Le papa de mon papa était empoisonneur. Ce n'était pas un métier mais un combat contre l'esclavage sur les habitations. Je ne vais pas te refaire l'Histoire, mais le vieux nègre de la Doum révèle dessous l'Histoire, des histoires dont aucun livre ne parle, et qui pour nous comprendre sont les plus essentielles. Donc, parmi ceux qui roulaient pour planter au béké ses cannes ou son café, régnaient des hommes de force. Ceux-là savaient des choses que l'on ne doit pas savoir. Et ils faisaient vraiment ce que l'on ne peut pas faire. Ils avaient mémoire des merveilles oubliées: pays d'Avant, le grand Pays, la parole du grand pays, les dieux du grand pays...<sup>1</sup>

### Inclusiveness

After orality and a certain counter-history, the third essential element of the Creole aesthetic is defined as a willingness to embrace the Creolity of every single aspect of Caribbean reality: 'Nous voulons, en vraie créolité, y nommer chaque chose et dire qu'elle est belle' (*ÉC*, p.40). This revisionist version of Caribbean reality involves, amongst other inclusions, the rehabilitation of the whole plantation system and of various aspects of *béké* culture.

### Openness

The fourth element named is an openness to the outside world, a permeability necessary in order to avoid isolation, regression and stagnation.

<sup>1</sup> *Lettres créoles*, Paris: Hatier, 1991, p.67. (Abbreviated hereinafter as *LC*.)

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, p.45.



### *Linguistic plurality*

Fifthly and finally, the Creole aesthetic is to be founded on linguistic plurality: both Creole and French are to be embraced but neither is to be idolised; rather both languages are to be respected and created anew by individual artists.

### *Politics in a coda*

Following a final section entitled 'Une dynamique constante', which underlines the open and ongoing formation of Creole culture, the manifesto ends with a coda, a few words relegated to an annexe, entitled 'Créolité et politique'. In this section, to all appearances an afterthought required by some notion of political correctness, the proponents of *la créolité* claim that their agenda is in sympathy with the *indépendantiste* movement which demands sovereignty for the Caribbean DOM. However, the authors explicitly distance themselves from the ideologies which have up until now supported this claim. They reject, for example, the Marxist tendency to subordinate questions of cultural identity to the Political Struggle. Instead, they propose a somewhat leisurely series of non-controversial stages in an ideal political evolution. Clearly, they are anxious not to dwell on the thorny and real issue of independence, preferring to stress instead utopian vistas of federation. More specifically, they envisage a preliminary association between the creolophone islands (that is, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Dominica and Saint Lucia), as a prelude to a larger Caribbean federation with the anglophone and hispanophone islands. In this way monolingual sovereignty would simply be a means to the end of federation and later confederation.

### **4. The term 'Creole' and the *créolité* movement**

One of the principal contributions of the *créolité* programme lies in its reclaiming of the term 'Creole' along with the confusion afflicting all of its meanings except the most transparent ones (by which it refers to the Creole language or to Creole cuisine, for example). Reactivating and renewing the term's polyvalency, the authors of the manifesto state that they use the word *créolité* to refer to the broad principle of Creole culture, namely the process of creolisation which affected the population, language,

mythology, literature, cuisine, etc. of those ethnic groups (principally European, Native Indian, African, Indian from the Asian sub-continent, Chinese and Near- or Middle-Eastern) forced into relation in the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean basin, and in the plantations of certain parts of North, South and Central America. The broad sweep of this definition restores to the term at least some of the meanings which it held in the past. The Creolity movement rejects, of course, the negative definition which Édouard Glissant had visited upon the term *créolité* in the glossary appended to *Le Discours antillais*, by defining it as an obsessive movement intent on establishing monoglot, Creole linguistic supremacy. In fact, one detects nowhere in the manifesto, nor indeed in any other writings by Chamoiseau or Confiant, the slightest will to impose or even to promote Creole monolingualism in any context whatsoever. On the contrary, for all the pious words in praise of the Creole language, the subtext of *Éloge de la créolité* suggests mere lip service or at the very least reluctant realism in relation to the language (although the dedication is bilingual, the body of the text and the epigraph are monolingual). In any case, the term *créolité* is mobilised by its disciples in a much broader sense than simply the one referring to the Creole language.

It is not insignificant that the term *créole* has always been a source of quite considerable semantic confusion, even if it seems certain that it referred, even initially, both to racial identity and/or to place of birth. To begin with, however, its etymology is problematic. In a footnote, the authors of *Éloge de la créolité* state that 'Le mot créole viendrait de l'espagnol "criollo", lui-même découlant du verbe latin "criare" qui signifie "élever, éduquer". Le Créole est celui qui est né et a été élevé aux Amériques sans en être originaire, comme les Amérindiens' (*ÉC*, p.63). We note here, along with the absence of racial reference, the revealing use of the conditional tense; this tentativeness is reinforced by the rather dismissive, even flippant tone of the remainder of the same footnote according to which: 'l'étymologie est, comme chacun sait, un terrain miné et donc peu sûr. Il n'est donc nul besoin de s'y référer pour aborder l'idée de Créolité' (*ÉC*, p.63).

However, most lexicologists agree that the term was originally a Portuguese one, *crioulo*, meaning a slave born in his master's house, deriving from the Portuguese verb *criar* (to

breed but also to bring up), itself derived from the Latin verb *creare* (meaning to create or beget). The Spanish *criollo* is said to be derived in turn from the Portuguese. However, between the Portuguese and the Spanish usage, a significant shift in meaning had occurred.

As used in Spanish from the 16th to the 18th centuries the term 'criollo' referred to any person of Spanish origin born in the New World as distinct from a Spaniard residing in so-called Spanish America but who had been born in Spain.

Clearly, as a term of identification, neither the Portuguese *crioulo* nor the Spanish *criollo* refers exclusively or even principally to racial or genetic considerations. Certainly they refer as terms of identification to continuity of race or ancestry (white European in the case of the Spanish term and black African in the case of the Portuguese; however, insofar as they function as terms of differentiation, they refer principally to the country of birth. The point is that both in the case of the Portuguese *crioulos* (African slaves) and in the case of the Spanish *criollos* (Spanish colons) the land of birth is not that of one's ancestors. As such, the notion of the *criollo* was the basis of considerable social discrimination in the Americas, particularly in the 18th century; *peninsulares* and *criollos* were regarded as two very distinct and even opposed categories of person.

Robert Chaudenson, in his recent book entitled *Des îles, des hommes, des langues: langues créoles*, confirms that French lexicographers, following the Spanish rather than the Portuguese sense of the term, fixed the meaning of the term 'Créole' as being 'Européen né aux Isles' (for example, Richelet (1680) and Furetière (1690)). Thus Furetière at the close of the 17th century had limited the meaning of *criole* to the name that the Spanish give to their children 'nés aux Indes'.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, far from the *Métropole*, from the late 17th to the mid 18th centuries, usage in the colonies themselves suggests that the term was used to designate both Europeans and Africans, both whites and blacks, the only significant criterion being that the persons in question were born *sur place* in the colonies. This

<sup>1</sup> Robert Chaudenson, *Des îles, des hommes, des langues: langues créoles*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992, p.8.

applies as much to usage in the Indian Ocean (Réunion/Bourbon, Maurice/Île de France) as in the French Caribbean. According to Chaudenson (p.9):

Aux Antilles comme aux Mascareignes, dans la première moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, le qualificatif "créole" s'applique donc à des blancs, des métis ou des noirs. Quoique la tradition lexicographique française ait limité aux blancs, jusqu'à une date très récente, l'application de cette désignation, selon les lieux et les temps, le sens du terme a subi de considérables évolutions dans les différents créoles, mais aussi dans les français régionaux qui coexistent avec eux. Il en est résulté bien entendu des malentendus constants et des polémiques infinies quand on s'est avisé, sans une connaissance suffisante de ces données, de disputer sur le sens du terme, en prenant comme référence ultime et définitive la signification donnée au mot par les dictionnaires français.

Further on in the same study, Chaudenson confirms that in the *Petites Antilles*, the present *Antilles françaises*, the tendency from the middle of the 18th century onwards was, however, to follow French usage and to reserve therefore for the unqualified noun or adjective 'créole' the meaning of white, European born in the colonies.

More recently, however, and *Éloge de la créolité* is part of this trend, there has been a return in the *Petites Antilles* to a usage where the term refers to all people sharing a common Caribbean culture, whatever their class or ancestry, European, African, Asian, Indian etc. This is not in fact an absolutely new generalisation of the term in the French-speaking Caribbean; in French Guiana, for example, the term was used not just recently, but from a very early time to refer to those who, whatever the colour of their skin, had adopted a European way of life. As the authors of *Éloge de la créolité* point out, the Guyanais called themselves *Créoles* in contrast to the linguistic practice of Martinique or Guadeloupe, where the Békés claimed this title for themselves. Hence in Guiana, the race-specific criterion had completely given way even very early on to a classification operated on the basis of degree of cultural assimilation into European ways; thus, reference to acculturation had superseded reference to nature/race. If we look at neighbouring Surinam (Dutch Guiana), on the other hand, we find that the term Creole referred exclusively to the descendants



of African slaves, that is, to the original Portuguese definition of the term.

Without listing all of the numerous and sometimes contradictory meanings of the term 'créole', I think that two points are clear. Firstly, that it has an extremely complex history, and that its meaning has fluctuated widely, and even antithetically, both synchronically and diachronically. Secondly, that a certain consistency is nonetheless evident. What remains constant is firstly, the definition of the Creole with respect to the plantation culture of the New World, with a definite emphasis on the differential factor of place of birth; and secondly, the constant although variable reference to race. However, the emphasis is not, or not always, directly on identification by race and where it is, what counts is descentance from transplanted races, white or black. Yet there are precedents for interpreting the term as referring to racial mixture more than to racial displacement and to acculturation more than to racial continuity. What French-Caribbean discourse on *créolité* does, is to sidestep much of the term's problematic historical and geographico-cultural variability, by declaring that to be 'Créole' is simply to belong to a creolised culture. Consequently, the term 'créolité', as used by Chamoiseau and Confiant, is freighted with undeclared and short-circuited meanings, which are often contradictory and usually historically as well as culturally and geographically specific. It is either ingenious or disingenuous to expect this confusion to constitute by sleight of hand the new meaning of the term. And yet it is in this manner that Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant seem to mobilise it. Perhaps they feel that the choice of a term which both refers to and enacts in its semantic complexity and confusion a lack of clarity and above all an absence of singularity, would distinguish *créolité* from previous visions of caribbeanness. And that this very confusion would protect them from the (much-feared) charge of intellectual assimilation into the Cartesian clarity of French thought and theory.

## 5. The antecedents of the *créolité* movement

Predictably, the authors of the Creolity manifesto are at pains to situate their vision as evolving out of the prior movements of

*négritude*, largely identified with Aimé Césaire, and *antillanité*, largely synonymous with the figure of Édouard Glissant, but also as superseding both. The first section of the manifesto recounts the gradual 20th-century movement of the Caribbean psyche towards self-discovery and self-acceptance, a progression leading via Césaire's *négritude* and Glissant's *antillanité* to the ultimate authenticity promised by *créolité*.

The authors of *Éloge de la créolité* claim, as did Édouard Glissant before them, that while *négritude* was a necessary stage on the road to self-recovery and indeed self-discovery, it nonetheless aggravated what they term 'notre instabilité identitaire' (*ÉC*, p.20). This is because *négritude* was founded on an illusion, the illusion of a possible return to the dark, sustaining womb of Africa. Both generations would also agree that the overly universalising tendencies of *négritude* collapsed the past and present problems specific to the Caribbean within those of black alienation in general. *Négritude* is also viewed, however, as paradoxical and self-defeating in that it challenged colonisation and racism in the name of a characteristically Western universalising concept, thus reinforcing the success of the whole process of assimilation or frenchification.

This point leads me to address an important question concerning the non-theoretical status claimed for the discourse on *créolité*. At the outset, I should repeat the point that, apart from its sheer volume and vibrancy, French Caribbean writing is remarkable for the vigour and the continuity of its highly developed and well-promoted cultural self-consciousness and that the *créolité* project is but the latest manifestation of this theoretical tropism. Given this tradition, it is surely interesting that Glissant and his intellectual heirs should so explicitly and so frequently deny the theoretical status of their essays or manifestos. Glissant, for example, offers us in the glossary to *Le Discours antillais* the following definition of *antillanité*: 'Plus qu'une théorie, une vision. La force en est telle qu'on en dit n'importe quoi. J'ai entendu en deux ou trois occasions proposer l'antillanité (sans autre précision) comme solution globale à des problèmes vrais ou fantasmés. Quand un mot devient ainsi passe-partout, on préjuge qu'il a rejoint le réel.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, Paris: Seuil, 1981, p.495.

Similarly, on the very first page of the *Créolité* manifesto, the authors announce: 'ces paroles que nous vous transmettons ne relèvent pas de la théorie, ni de principes savants' (*ÉC*, p.13).

Clearly, both *Le Discours antillais* and *Éloge de la créolité* are concerned with the propositional elaboration of cultural diagnoses and prescriptions. And if theory can be defined as an organised body of ideas as to the truth of something, ideas derived from the study of a number of facts relating to it, or from the speculative imagination, then it is difficult to see the conceptualising, speculative perspective which these writers adopt as anything other than theoretical. How then should we interpret the apparently paradoxical disavowal? It seems to me that this question may provide an important key to the specificity of the francophone Caribbean condition. Glissant's view is that there cannot be a theory of *antillanité* because the reality to which it would refer is as yet virtual. It is the projective status of *antillanité* which leads him to prefer the more prophetic term 'vision'. The provisional nature of the *antillanité* heralded by Glissant is echoed in the *créolité* movement's insistence on openness and virtuality. We might also note however in Glissant's disclaimer an implicit rejection of conceptual generalisation or universalisation, a phobia which is echoed again and quite explicitly, by the authors of *Éloge de la créolité*.

But where does the notion of *créolité* differ from Glissant's vision of *antillanité*? The structure of the manifesto is revealing in this respect, since it is for the most part determined by Glissant's agenda for *antillanité*; the vast majority of the footnotes spanning the final eight pages of the pamphlet consist in quotations from Glissant's essays. The pamphlet is thus more a quasi-Œdipal expansion on the theme of *antillanité* than a change of theme; more a gloss on Glissant's vision than a real challenge to it. And yet there has been an interesting shift of emphasis, a shift which seems to be three-pronged, as it were. Clearly, the feature which most clearly demarcates *créolité* from *antillanité* is the whole *arrière-pays* of connotation surrounding the two terms themselves. We have seen that both movements distance themselves from the *mot d'ordre* of *négritude* in insisting on the particular rather than the general. However, the notion of *créolité*, as the very choice of *signifiant* suggests, locates its opposition to *négritude* and to Césaire, firstly in a defence and occasional illustration of the Creole language, and

secondly, in its exaltation of the ethnic complexity which is both the requirement for and the result of creolisation. Glissant's choice of the less suggestive term *antillanité*, implies a rather more simple and singular geo-political countering of the geographico-cultural generality of the term 'négritude'. His antidote to the universalising alibi offered by *négritude* is concentration on specificity of place, that is, the Caribbean basin. In comparison, the reference of the term 'Creolity' is much broader in that it explicitly includes all places of Creole culture: the geographical area referred to would include much of South America and the American South, particularly Louisiana, for example, but also the islands of La Réunion and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. The term Creolity thus makes explicit the aspiration towards that broad Creole alliance which Glissant took to be conditional on the prior establishment of a sense of cultural and economico-political unity and solidarity in the Caribbean basin. Referring more, then, to cultural than to geographical or political *lignes de force*, discourse on *créolité* relegates the geo-political specificity and unity of the Caribbean basin and indeed the geo-political interplay of sea, insularity and continental forces to a second level of importance.

The second difference between Glissant's *Discours antillais* and the discourse of the *créolité* movement is one of orientation. Glissant's vision is more future-orientated. Indeed, it is criticised in the *créolité* manifesto for its sybilline remoteness: Glissant is said to be 'pris par son propre travail, éloigné par son rythme, persuadé d'écrire pour des lecteurs futurs' (*ÉC*, p.23). The *créolité* movement, on the other hand, is presented less as a vision than as an immediate and pragmatic cultural celebration of the present, based on a re-evaluation and rehabilitation of the past. Its proponents claim that it is anchored more in praise of what is attainable in the present than in promise or prophecy of what the future could bring. Glissant's *Poétique de la relation* is much closer to the vision of the *créolité* movement, although its focus is much broader. Indeed, both *Poétique de la relation* and the texts of the *Créolité* movement seem to see the present as the future. That is, they claim that Caribbean culture, in its Creolity or relationality, represents the future of all culture:

Le terme "Créole" est donc éminemment moderne, et non passéiste et colonial comme d'aucuns pourraient le croire, et même

post-moderne dans le sens où il signale l'émergence d'un nouveau modèle d'identité qu'on pourrait appeler "multiple" ou "mosaïque", en train de s'élaborer sous nos yeux partout à travers le monde, notamment dans les mégaloïles occidentales. La créolisation a été en quelque sorte la préfiguration, au cours des trois derniers siècles, de ce phénomène irréversible.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, a third important difference between the tenor of Glissant's *Discours antillais* and that of *Éloge de la créolité* is obvious from the predominance within Glissant's work of a discourse of pathology, that is, of the tropes of diagnosis and cure, madness and other forms of dysfunction, on the one hand and on the other hand, therapy. *Le Discours antillais* sees the Caribbean situation if not as a disease in search of a cure then at least as essentially problematic, and thereby instructive, radically productive and virtually rich. Whereas the younger generation of Caribbean intellectuals as represented by Confiant, Chamoiseau and Bernabé have tended to concentrate far more on celebration. Their essentially aesthetic response to the question of Caribbean-ness is certainly appealing, stimulating, energetic and hopeful; it is also, however, rash and intellectually somewhat quixotic.

First of all, it speaks rather impetuously for all Creole cultures. Secondly, it rather recklessly jettisons the politico-economic edge which might root it in the specific ambivalences of the French-Caribbean. Thirdly, content to regard itself as post-modern and to allow the future simply to grow out of a rehabilitated past and a self-accepting present, hasn't it rather too rashly distanced itself from the horizon of change?

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<sup>1</sup> Raphaël Confiant, *Aimé Césaire: une traversée paradoxale du siècle*, Paris: Stock, 1993, p.266.

# A TALE OF TWO ODYSSEYS: CÉSAIRE'S *CAHIER D'UN RETOUR AU PAYS* NATAL AND DEREK WALCOTT'S *OMEROS* <sup>1</sup>

by

Peter Hawkins

## Introduction

This is a somewhat tentative comparison: it may well not be the first, and I suspect it will by no means be the last, between these two works. Here we have two major poets, of world-wide reputation, and their two major poems, both with epic resonances. They belong to two contrasting linguistic and poetic traditions, French and English, yet they originate from two Caribbean islands less than twenty miles apart, Martinique and Saint Lucia. It is a perfect opportunity to reflect on the effects of two different European colonisations, and the way they have left a legacy of cross-channel rivalry and incomprehension all across the globe. The Homeric reference, although that alludes to a *bataille de clochers* of epic proportions, is probably in the end a pretext, for myself as for the two poets: it is a useful way of situating the comparison, a possible common ground, a starting point for a discussion that will probably go beyond the Homeric analogy to encompass a rather different Odyssey, that of the 'triangular trade'.

## The Homeric parallels

Beginning with the explicit references to Homer, the title of his poem, 'Omeros', the Greek form of Homer, leads us to look first at Derek Walcott. To anyone familiar with the poem, my chosen topic might seem a little odd: the references in *Omeros*

<sup>1</sup> This paper was given at the ASCALF conference held at the Institut français in London, November 1993.

seem ostensibly to refer more to the *Iliad* than the *Odyssey*. One of the main narrative threads running through the poem is the rivalry between Achilles, here a Saint-Lucian fisherman, and Hector, a mini-bus driver, for the favours of the voluptuous Helen, sometime waitress and future single parent. This is the only Trojan war in the book, although there are many echoes of the epic battles of the late 18th century between Admiral Rodney's British fleet and the French for control of the island of St Lucia, and the tantalising presence of a sunken French ship, the *Ville de Paris*.

The theme of the *Odyssey* is much less obvious, but present nonetheless, I would argue. In the long dream sequence in which Achilles, asleep in his fishing boat, is transported back to the Africa of his ancestors and relives the trauma of capture and enslavement. It is also hinted at in the evocation of the wanderings of the poet-narrator, to North America and Europe; and his eventual return to his native St Lucia. The notion of the *Odyssey* is not made very explicit, even though there are references to Odysseus (*Omeros*, p.202) and to Ithaca (p.130); it rather constitutes a persistent allusion that arises spontaneously by association in a poem called *Omeros*; and it is in this way perhaps more significant than the omnipresent references to the *Iliad* mentioned earlier, which seem playful and mock-heroic.

The same could perhaps be said of Césaire's *Cahier*. I am not aware of any explicit Homeric references in the *Cahier*, but the title of the poem suggests the idea of wandering and return. The difficulties raised along the way by the protagonist's journey are mostly moral and psychological ones in Césaire's poem, just as they are for Walcott's hero Achilles, and for the poet-figure himself in the lyrical passages on the middle of his poem. Césaire's poet-protagonist goes on a heroic journey of self-discovery, back to the origins of his identity, just like the hero of Walcott's poem, Achilles, and his own poetic persona embodied in the poem. In both poems the Odyssean theme can be seen as an allegory of the familiar Caribbean theme of the quest for identity.

### *Similarities*

So there are profound, underlying similarities between the two poems, which seem to crystallise around the notion of the epic

journey of self-discovery symbolised by the *Odyssey*. Both poems are evocations of the ambiguous identity of the Caribbean; and both poems trace the quest for self-definition which takes the protagonist away from the island, only to return with a new wisdom and a richness of experience, and an openness to other cultures, even an identification with them, an assimilation of them.

Both poems explicitly refer both to European culture and African culture in their circular voyage. The importance of the ancestral heritage of Africa is common to both:

À force de penser au Congo  
je suis devenu un Congo bruissant de forêts et de fleuves  
(*Cahier*, p.75)

writes Césaire. But his lucidity will not allow him to indulge in self-aggrandising fantasies about his origins:

Non, nous n'avons jamais été amazones du roi de Dahomey, ni  
princes de Ghana avec huit cents chameaux...  
(*Cahier*, p.97).

Walcott's Achilles realises

... our only inheritance that elemental noise  
of the windward, unbroken breakers. Ithaca's  
or Africa's, all joining the Ocean's voice,

because this is the Atlantic now, this great design  
of the triangular trade.

(*Omeros*, p.130)

But as he drifts off into a fantasy of an ancestral Africa, he too mocks it:

... It was like the African movies  
he had yelped at in childhood. The endless river unreeled  
those images that flickered into real mirages...

(*Omeros*, p.133).

For both poets the return to Africa is an essential point of reference, a persistent dream, but at the same time an illusion, a mirage.

The European experience for Césaire is a negative one, full of late-30s foreboding of the cataclysm to come, the Second World War:

Au sortir de l'Europe toute révoltée de cris  
les courants silencieux de la désespérance  
au sortir de l'Europe peureuse qui se reprend et fière se surestime...  
(*Cahier*, pp.89-90).

In Walcott's poem a similar sense of imperial disillusion is attributed to the old colonial figure, Major Plunkett:

... Egypt delivered  
back unto itself. India crumpling on its knees  
like a howdah'd elephant, all of the empowered  
tide and panoply of lances, Ghurkas, Anzacs, Mounties  
drained like a bath from the bung-hole of Eden's Suez,  
or a back-yard canal.  
(*Omeros*, pp. 112-13)

Interestingly and typically, Césaire's formulation is lyrical and abstract, whereas Walcott's is concrete and factual, but dramatised, attributed to a character rather than to the poet himself. Both poets nonetheless share a sense of Europe's overweening imperial pretensions, and their inevitable demise.

The colonial heritage in the Caribbean is extensively evoked in both poems, but with considerable differences of tone and treatment. Césaire's allusions are usually inspired by the bitterest of ironies:

J'accepte. J'accepte.  
et le nègre fustigé qui dit: «Pardon mon maître»  
et les vingt-neuf coups de fouet légal  
et le cachot de quatre pieds de haut...  
(*Cahier*, p.129).

Walcott's references are more subdued, but quietly vehement. He alludes subtly but constantly to the folk-memory of chains and leg-irons that is still present for his Saint-Lucian characters,

such as the constantly limping Philoctete. The poet-narrator, whilst visiting London, the historic imperial capital, pointedly asks:

Who will teach us a history of which we too are capable?  
(*Omeros*, p.197)

and Walcott also alludes to the history of his island in a more detached way, referring to the 18th-century naval battles for control of the island, and the rich spoils of submerged wrecks. Césaire on the other hand includes little of Martinique's history beyond that of the slaves and plantation-owners. He comments on the indifference and passivity of the crowd in Fort de France in relation to the statues of their history, such as Joséphine de Beauharnais or Schœlcher (*Cahier*, p.35). He himself is more concerned with the history of the Haitian revolt and Toussaint Louverture (*Cahier*, p.69), which for him constitutes precisely 'a history of which we are capable'.

There is some similarity in the depiction of their home environment by the two poets. Both poets give an unflinching account of the squalor of their Caribbean villages, Césaire in the description of the *Rue Paille* in his home village of Basse-Pointe in the north of Martinique, with its shacks and dirty black sand beach (*Cahier*, pp.55-56). Walcott describes how 'black piglets root in the midden of Gros Islet' (*Omeros*, p.34), the village where most of the action takes place. Yet the two poets' attitudes are very different: Césaire's is one of shame and disgust, whereas Walcott seems to take a delight in describing the earthy, no-nonsense lifestyle of his Saint-Lucians. Both poets detail with affection the features of black popular culture of their day: in *Omeros*, the leopard-skin seats and thudding stereo of Hector's minibus *Comet* (pp.224-25), or the debris of the morning after the Friday night 'blockorama' in Gros Islet (p.109). In the *Cahier*, Césaire declares 'je sais le tracking, le Lindy Hop et les claquettes', but with an underlying resentment that is absent from Walcott's poem: 'Ma dignité se vautre dans des dégoûlements' (p.93). Césaire's anger, the militancy of his revolt is evident in both these illustrations, fuelled perhaps by the influence of Surrealist political commitment; whereas Walcott's enjoyment, although perhaps a little condescending, seems to arise from a more generous liberal humanism.

Both poets celebrate in their different ways the exotic flora and fauna of their native islands. There are considerable differences of emphasis, however: Césaire seems to prefer the bird-life and the vegetation of the tropical forest that flourishes in the north and centre of Martinique. Derek Walcott on the other hand shows a marked preference for the marine decor of the shore-line and the sea-birds, in keeping with his fisherman hero and his maritime theme.

### *Differences*

In the play of similarities and differences, one major difference cannot be avoided. The poets are a whole generation apart, and the political and social changes that have intervened between the composition of the two poems are momentous. Césaire's *Cahier* was written between 1935 and 1939, contemporaneous with the rise of Fascism and racism in Europe, and the collapse of the ideals of the Popular Front in France; this political context adds an extra, prophetic dimension to the poem's rejection of European values and colonialism. Walcott himself grew up during the period of decolonisation, and his poem is contemporary with the collapse of Communism and the creation of a New World Order of world-wide recession. As contemporaries, it is less easy for us to pin down the implications of this, but there is no shortage of echoes and allusions to it in Walcott's poem: his two rivals, Achilles and Hector, are both forced to abandon their trade of fishing because it is no longer an economically viable activity. Césaire virulently attacks colonialism, but in an ideological and abstract way: 'L'Europe nous a pendant des siècles gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences' (*Cahier*, p.139). Walcott more discreetly and practically pinpoints the effects of neo-colonialism:

She was gossiping with two women  
about finding work as a waitress, but both said

The tables was full. What the white manager mean  
to say was she was too rude, 'cause she dint take no shit  
from white people and some of them tourist — the men  
only out to touch local girls — (Omeros, p.33).

Nonetheless, there is a contrast between Césaire's virulence and the more nuanced, detached view of Walcott, who is capable of presenting an old expatriate couple like the Plunketts in a sympathetic light. This is not just a difference of generation, perhaps, but a difference of age: Césaire's poem is a work of youthful anger and revolt, whereas Walcott's is the product of maturity and a certain serenity, an acceptance of human diversity.

What the two poets share, however, is a need to situate the political and social problems of their islands in a wider frame of reference. Césaire does this through his identification with other oppressed groups: '... je serai un homme-juif, un homme-cafre, un homme-hindou-de-Calcutta, un homme-de-Harlem-qui-ne-vote-pas' (*Cahier*, p.57). Walcott takes on the persona of a wide range of characters through a dramatised narrative which takes us to Africa, North America and Europe, seen through the eyes of different narrators.

There are differences of emphasis in the treatment by the two poets of the indigenous local culture of their native islands. It is striking, for instance, that Walcott makes extensive use of the French-based Creole of St Lucia in a poem which is in many ways rooted in an Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition. This effectively highlights the contradictions left behind by past colonial rivalries, but at the same time gives his Saint-Lucians considerable vitality of expression and a specific linguistic identity. He does nonetheless feel obliged to incorporate English translations of the Creole into the text of his poem, which makes the references seem a little like exotic local colour. Césaire on the other hand makes no reference to Creole (which he seems to regard as inappropriate for written expression<sup>1</sup>), but nonetheless subverts the French language by peppering his text with obscure neologisms and references to local flora and fauna. He does however allude to the African heritage of animism:

voum rooh oh  
à charmer les serpents à conjurer les morts

(*Cahier*, p.79)

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Jacqueline Leiner (1992).



and evokes the legendary history of slaves such as Grandvorka and Siméon Piquine (pp.131-33). In general his poetic practice does reveal the particularity of his Caribbean origins, but it also affirms the necessary underpinning of French as a medium of expression.

The principal difference between the two poems lies in the way they situate themselves in relation to their respective poetic traditions in French and English, as several of my examples have already hinted. Césaire's poem carries all the hallmarks of the French tradition of Romantic revolt, from Rimbaud and Lautréamont to Surrealism and beyond, moving in the direction of its author's subsequent political commitment. It is written in free verse, some of which appears to be inspired by the Surrealist idea of automatic writing. It is lyrical and deeply personal, attempting to tap the resources of the poet's unconscious, and finding there not some abstract conception of Surreality, but a collective unconscious of alienated racial identity, that of Negritude. At the same time as defining this new concept, the poem nonetheless situates itself in the French post-Romantic tradition by its allusions to Baudelaire's 'L'Albatros' — 'il était comique et laid' (*Cahier*, p.105), and to Lautréamont — 'beau comme la face de stupeur d'une dame anglaise qui trouverait dans sa soupière un crâne de Hottentot' (p.59), which cannibalises, so to speak, Lautréamont's 'beau comme la rencontre fortuite, sur une table de dissection, d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie'.

In contrast to Césaire's uncompromising modernism, Walcott's poem, on the other hand, appears as a post-modern reworking of the classical literary heritage. He seems to revel in the erudite classical references as Milton might have done, but simultaneously debunks them in a playful way, by making his heroes humble Saint-Lucian fishermen and by not respecting the Homeric narrative thread. There is perhaps a certain parallel to be drawn between the wandering, elliptical narrative structure of the poem and the spontaneous, 'automatic' lyricism of Césaire; but Walcott's verse form is very different — regular metre and rhymes, and a three-line stanza. So is the conception of poetry: Césaire's aims are lyrical, moral and ideological, whereas Walcott's seem to be dramatic, narrative and descriptive, at least in the first instance. It is hard not to see in this a reflection of the differences between the French and the English intellectual

traditions: Césaire is idealistic, philosophical and abstract, tending towards the universal: 'c'est pour la faim universelle, pour la soif universelle' (*Cahier*, p.125). Walcott is detached, pragmatic and concrete, enjoying the savour of the particular moment: 'I lived there with every sense. I smelt with my eyes. I could see with my nostrils' (*Omeros*, p.224).

### Conclusion

To bring together the multiple threads of my comparison, it is clear that there are underlying similarities of theme in the two poems which the references to the *Odyssey* seem to underline. The motif of Odyssean wandering and ultimate return seems to imply for both poets the necessity of leaving the native island, of undertaking extensive travelling, both literal and figurative, physical and psychological, in a quest for the deeper significance of their Caribbean experience. A necessary part of this involves coming to terms with the cruel heritage of the triangular trade, of the enforced exile from Africa, which figures centrally in both poems: this is a ghost that has to be confronted through the medium of poetry. Equally, the poet-hero has to confront the ambivalence of his relation to Europe and its cultural traditions, which in both cases has provided the language and the artistic matrix for their poetic conceptions. Both poets broaden the scope of their psychological journey to include North America, more significantly for Walcott, but the resonances are in each case wide enough to be considered global in their implications. But in the end, what is also affirmed very clearly by both poets is the necessity of the return to confront the problems of their home communities, to do battle, metaphorically speaking, with the suitors of Penelope: to confront the false solutions and alienations, whether they be colonial or neo-colonial, which distort the process of formulation of a truly Caribbean identity.

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## MOVING SYMBOLS: TCHICAYA U TAM'SI'S *FEU DE BROUSSE*<sup>1</sup>

by  
Sarah Ryder

*Feu de brousse* marks a transition from the self-conscious reflections of Tchicaya U Tam'si's first collection, *Le Mauvais Sang*, to the broader concerns of his Black literary predecessors manifest in *Epitomé* and subsequent collections. Like the rainbow which connects the banks of the Congo, the poetry is rooted in the personal as well as the political, for here Tchicaya confronts his own situation in relation to that of his native land. The collection is innovative in form, too, since, as the poet indicates in his subtitle, 'Poème parlé en dix-sept visions', it takes the shape of one sustained poem which is split into seventeen sub-poems or — because of its surreal nature — visions. It is a dense, powerful piece of writing in which the poet presents a vision of the future of his native land and stretches out his hand to the people and country from which he has been exiled.

The collection opens with the explosive 'À travers temps et fleuve' in which Tchicaya moves sharply away from *Le Mauvais Sang* in terms of theme and style. The reader is immediately struck by the freshness of the poetry and, in this vision, some of the poetic devices which are to characterise *Feu de brousse* are anticipated. In the first place, the poem seems to shape itself as it spills out on to the page, unhindered by punctuation or specific poetic form. The apparent looseness of the style, however,

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a slightly modified version of a chapter in my undergraduate dissertation "L'Orphée noir": a critical evaluation of *Le Mauvais Sang*, *Feu de brousse* and *À triche-cœur* by Tchicaya U Tam'si', completed under the supervision of Professor Roger Little in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the B.A. Moderatorship (Hons.) degree at Trinity College Dublin and submitted in 1992.

masks a poetry that is as controlled as that of the earlier volume, and we shall see how Tchicaya carefully manipulates language, symbolism, rhythm and form to enhance meaning. This multilinear approach to writing, somewhat stifled in the first collection by the restricting sonnet form, blossoms here as Tchicaya shifts the focus of his poetry and allows the seedling poetic techniques of *Le Mauvais Sang* to flourish.

To begin with, the language is in marked contrast to that of the previous collection; sentences are brief and the syntax refreshingly simple. There is no punctuation, but Tchicaya demarcates areas of reference and controls pace by splitting the vision into smaller, uneven units and by carefully manipulating phrase-length within each unit.

Furthermore, the new, oral nature of the poetry is apparent in the repetition of key words and phrases and in the poet's frequent use of alliteration ('les caïmans cassaient l'eau / avec leurs queues'<sup>1</sup>); at times, one has the impression of reading a transcribed speech. From the outset, Tchicaya employs many of the conventions of oration, a technique exemplified here in the repetition of the word 'nous' to signify solidarity, and in the use of rhetorical questions:

gare à la soif  
gare à l'amour  
gare au temps

nous avons vu le sable  
nous avons vu l'écueil  
qui ignore  
nous avons les fleuves et les arbres  
qui le dira

nous avons cru  
nous avons cru

<sup>1</sup> 'À travers temps et fleuve', in *Feu de brousse*, first published 1957 and collected in *Le Mauvais Sang suivi de Feu de brousse et À triche-cœur*, Coll. Poésie/prose africaine, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1978, p.54. Hereafter, page references to this edition will be indicated in the text.

qui le niera

('À travers temps et fleuve', p.51).

For *Feu de brousse* is a public address in which the poet reaches out to his African brothers, urging them to unite and revolt against the tyranny of colonialism. The reader of pre-independence Irish as well as African literature will be familiar with some of the themes of *Feu de brousse*. The personification of the colonised country as a woman who has been violated, for example, is an international image at which Tchicaya hints in lines such as: 'il ne suffit pas de recréer le viol...' (p.55), while the militant, evangelical nature of the opening lines and the urgency and impatience for revolt exemplified in

... n'attendez la nuit  
car il ne suffit pas de crier au viol (pp.54-55)

give further evidence of a departure from the introspective ruminations of the first collection, and a movement towards the literature of the poet's African precursors. The collection is not, however, a monument to the crimes of colonialism; rather, it is an apocalyptic vision of the future of the Congo in which Tchicaya uses symbols to represent his vision of the way forward for his country. In terms of style, too, the vision exemplifies the innovative use of symbolism which is the most distinctive feature of this work.

In *Feu de brousse*, the poet manipulates nuances of language to create symbols which are multifaceted in their nature; in this way, the symbolism takes on a new versatility here as Tchicaya exploits different facets of a limited set of symbols to underline different ideas within the work. It is a technique which, initially, disorients and confuses the reader because the meaning of a symbol is not static but varies according to the context in which that word or image appears — a difficulty which is especially manifest in the image of the fire. However, once the reader has understood the erratic nature of the symbolism, the collection opens up to him and he sees how the symbols emerge and intermingle, refract and reflect one another creating myriad ever-changing patterns in a veritable kaleidoscope of imagery and meaning.

An example of the poet's new approach to symbolism is the image of the river. A symbol for the Congo in the first collection, it takes on a host of new significances in *Feu de brousse*. In the first place, Tchicaya links the river with blood; like 'bad blood', the river is an inescapable fact of the African inheritance, for it stems from the selfsame elements that make up the African people:

son fleuve était l'écuelle la plus sûre  
parce qu'elle était de bronze  
parce qu'elle était sa chair vivante

(*'Natte à tisser'*, p.56)

It is therefore an integral part of the African — hence the poet's references to 'ce fleuve qui m'habite' — and the source to which he will return at death: in this way, as the poet simulates his own death in 'Présence', he opens his body to the 'cold and surging billows' of his life's source:

j'ai joué avec mon corps  
l'ardent poème de la mort  
j'ai suivi mon fleuve  
vers des houles froides et courantes (p.69)

The link with blood is further cemented in another facet of this symbol in which the river is portrayed as the vessel which carries the blood essential to life. Like Conrad and Gide before him, Tchicaya sees the river Congo as the principal artery — or heart — of the Congo, the seat of all life in his country:

sur ses deux rives  
d'autres fleuves  
... les veines  
au cœur humide

(*'La Joie manquée'*, p.86)

The principal facets of the symbol of the river, therefore, are as a source of life and that which maintains life in the Congo. Throughout the collection, as the image comes into contact with other symbols, it takes on new meanings and these will become apparent in the course of the discussion.

Similarly, the poet's vision of the Congo present and future revolves around the idea of death and rebirth, a concept he illustrates throughout the collection using contrasting aspects or facets of the symbol of the bush-fire. The first part of the poem is a hellish vision of colonial Africa in which Tchicaya exploits the destructive connotations of fire to represent the fundamentally destructive nature of colonialism. The two ideas are bound together in the image of sweat which, on a literal level, is a consequence of heat and which, throughout the collection, is a metaphor representing the enslavement of the Black race at the hands of the colonisers. This facet of the symbol is introduced in 'Le Vertige' where the poet juggles the image of the bush-fire and that of the approaching foreign presence until they merge and the inferno of colonialism engulfs everything:

ils passent  
très chauds  
qui  
les gens qui  
ne sont des nôtres  
nous reculons  
tout sueurs tout puants  
feu des langues feu des mains  
feu des pierres  
nous sommes trahis (p.60)

Death, too, is portrayed as a negative, menacing force and a threat to new life:

cachez vos sexes à la mort  
elle sait par où l'ouvrage  
elle le sait

(*'Chant ininterrompu'*, p.74)

And so, as the effects of the disaster reverberate throughout the ecosystem, nature is plunged into chaos, and death usurps life, hence 'le griot montre son sexe'. Flowers become deadly weapons and life-giving pollen is transformed into lethal poison:

la fleur du caféier  
devient un couteau

l'abeille y boit des cyanures

(*'Le Vertige'*, p.60)

Even the act of giving birth takes on horrific qualities as a mother brings a hideously deformed child into the holocaust:

voici une mère accoucha  
d'un enfant à deux têtes

...

l'enfant avait une seule jambe

(*'Le Vol des vampires'*, p.66)

The child's deformity reflects the unnaturalness of the scene, the result of the coupling of two incompatible, irreconcilable elements. The marriage of Europe and Africa portrayed in *'Vive la mariée'* has distorted the natural order and sapped the foundations of society; the poet wonders if anything more abominable will come of this disastrous union:

en attendant  
qu'une autre mère  
mette au monde  
un enfant  
à trois têtes  
et sans jambes peut-être  
pour continuer la désolation  
sur la savane (p.67)

The savanna has been transformed by the fire into a wasteland where death reigns supreme; for this is the Apocalypse, a fact asserted by the poet in the revelational

un matin  
un clair matin  
plus de totems et leurs perroquets  
un matin  
un clair matin  
plus de feuilles nulle part

(*'À travers temps et fleuve'*, p.55)

In this part of the vision, therefore, the poet exploits the negative connotations of fire and death to highlight the destructiveness of

colonialism. Paradoxically, these elements represent the key to liberation, too, and in his vision for the future, then, the poet focuses on the purifying, generative aspects of the two symbols.

For death, according to the poet, is not final; rather, he portrays it as part of the natural cycle in which elements fall to the earth and mingle with it to form the life-sap of subsequent growth. We have seen how, in *'Présence'*, Tchicaya portrays his own death as a return to the river at the essence of the being. The image is one of rebirth, not total disappearance, however, as he is transformed by the river's life-giving sperm into the 'yeast of leaves and storms':

je me suis ouvert au monde  
des algues

...

Au soleil  
ouvrez la chair  
Au sang mûr des révoltes  
le sperme réel par des souffles m'assimile  
aux levures des feuilles et des tornades

(*'Présence'*, p.69)

Here, Tchicaya rejects the Christian concept of death where reincarnation is the privilege of the soul alone, favouring instead a pagan, organic death where body and soul form 'un cadavre utile vert' which mingles with its source to become the fertiliser of future generations. Thus, he asks:

comment secouer mon corps  
sans disloquer mon âme

(*'Ma tête est parfumée'*, p.80)

It is a concept which is reflected in the symbol of the fire and, throughout his vision, Tchicaya exploits another aspect of death — or fire — to symbolise his prophecy of the way forward for his country. In the Congo, bush-fires form part of a natural cycle of death and regeneration since they are used in 'slash-and-burn agriculture' to clear areas of forest or scrubland to prepare them for cultivation. The ashes of the burnt vegetation form a rich, natural fertiliser and, consequently, crop yields, at least in the first instance, are high. Tchicaya applies the idea to the situation in his homeland. Here, the Congolese people are

portrayed as blades of grass struggling for life among the thorn bushes of the colonial powers. The scene is one of disorder and stagnation as new life is stunted and stifled in this almost impenetrable jungle of thorns:

congo...  
son milieu était une herbe juste  
parmi les ronces  
son ciel était son regard  
pour ceux qui vivaient  
ils vivaient nombreux  
les lianes liant leurs cœurs

(‘La Joie manquée’, pp.87-88)

Furthermore, the poet links this collection to *Le Mauvais Sang* in the image of blood, and in ‘Le Vertige’, the ‘badness’ of his African blood is represented by the repeated image of the thorn-bush:

venez les vierges  
parmi les ronces de notre sang (p.62)

In this way, the blood of the Congo has been weakened by the holocaust (‘mais quel carnage dans mon pauvre sang’) and now it is time to move on, since ‘vivre parmi les ronces c’est mourir’.

And so, the poet stresses the need to purify his blood and rid it of the thorns which stultify it, to set fire to the thorn-bushes of colonialism which are stifling his native Congo and make way for a new generation. He calls on his African brothers:

brûlez vos réserves de sèves sanguines  
la plante mûrit ainsi sa fleur

(‘La Joie manquée’, p.88)

We see, therefore, how Tchicaya manipulates different facets of the images of fire and death to illustrate the message at the heart of this collection, using the destructive connotations of the symbols to represent the contemporary situation in the Congo and the purifying, generative aspects of each to represent his vision of the future.

This vision, in its apocalyptic, surreal nature, is reminiscent of Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* and, indeed, as we

have seen, some of the themes and images of *Feu de brousse* reflect those of Tchicaya’s African literary precursors. The work is deeply rooted in the personal, however, a factor which sets it apart from contemporary African poetry. For while European-based African poets like Senghor gloss over the idea of their exile, Tchicaya chooses to explore the problems imposed upon him by his, and like his symbols therefore, *Feu de brousse* takes on another dimension.

The identity crisis at the heart of the collection is manifest from the beginning. In ‘Natte à tisser’, one of the more autobiographical visions in the work, the poet recounts with clever use of rhythm how he was jolted into considering the notion of his identity. Two brilliantly balanced couplets set the scene:

Il venait de livrer le secret du soleil  
et voulut écrire le poème de sa vie

pourquoi les cristaux dans son sang  
pourquoi les globules dans son rire (p.56)

The illusion of stability created by the delicate pacing of the opening lines is shattered, however, by the following tercet, and the sudden fracturing of the rhythm anticipates the shock-effect of the insult:

il avait l’âme mûre  
quand quelqu’un lui cria  
sale tête de nègre (p.56)

The reversion to assonanced lines, in the final quatrain of the first section, which flirt with alexandrine and decasyllable, emphasises once more the rhythmic rupture that precedes it, further underlining the shock-effect of the insult:

depuis il lui reste l’acte suave de son rire  
et l’arbre géant d’une déchirure vive  
qu’était ce pays qu’il habite en fauve  
derrière des fauves devant derrière des fauves (p.56)

The tercet, therefore, stands out as a ‘déchirure’ in the ingeniously constructed opening movement and in this way it is



symbolic of the 'déchirure' that the words 'sale tête de nègre' were to create in the poet's life.

Indeed, the equation of race and filth inherent in the phrase is one that the poet sustains throughout the work; the initial, negative connotations of the words fall away in the course of the collection as Tchicaya begins to view them not as an insult but as an assertion of the negro identity that he craves:

j'ai donc bercé  
ma crasse à moi  
ma crasse de nègre-juif  
ma race de juif-nègre errant  
dans le désert au cœur de mon pays  
(*'Les Lignes de la main'*, p.83)

However, this identification with the oppressed peoples of the world is superficial, a fact the poet recognises in 'Le Forçat' as he takes account of the fundamental, irrevocable difference between himself and his African or West Indian brothers:

mon père sut être frère forçat  
...  
j'ai bien le goût de la luxure  
mais celui de la servitude  
me manque et c'est dommage (p.89)

The insertion of a full-stop after the words 'sans contrainte' — almost the first in a collection largely unrestricted by punctuation — alerts the reader to the irony of the poet's dissociation from his kinsmen, an irony which is further underlined in the new equation of 'filth' — or 'race' — with European-ness, represented here in the unit around which Christian civilisation revolves — the family:

ma crasse à moi c'est ma situation  
de famille heureuse (p.89)

The words

n'ayant plus de patrie sur aucun  
planisphère  
depuis l'abolition de l'esclavage (p.90)

therefore encapsulate the identity crisis at the core of this collection. For, while Tchicaya has chosen to follow, and in the eyes of his fellow-tribesmen has been tarnished by 'des chemins plantés de sphinx', the elusive title of 'nègre' coveted by the poet renders him an outcast in European society too. And so the wheel turns its full, ironic circle in 'Debout' as the 'filth' which excludes him from European society now renders him a reject in African society too, something he no doubt senses all the more keenly because of his illegitimacy, the early death of his mother, and his physical disability:

tu es trop sale  
pour être nègre échantillon  
...  
tu ne prends pas tes boyaux  
pour une peau de tam-tam  
et ta tête n'est pas de la bonne ébonite (p.95)

Tchicaya's rejection by his native land gives rise to one of the most poignant sequences in the collection in which the river takes on the shape of an outstretched hand:

sur ses deux rives  
d'autres fleuves viennent  
ainsi tiennent les doigts  
à la main tendue  
(*'La Joie manquée'*, p. 86)

The poet stretches out his own hand in return, but it is too late:

mais eux ils n'ont pas su attendre  
que je leur tende moi-même la main  
de moi-même j'aurais su verser mon sang  
pour qu'ils vivent heureux chez eux (p.86)

He goes on to say:

depuis le jour est lacis de lianes  
où je lis ma tristesse liante

and the repetition of the image of the lianas links his own situation with his vision of the overgrown, stifled Congo. In the

final line of the poem, therefore, as he says 'allumez ce feu qui lave l'opprobre', the fire becomes a symbol not only for the regeneration of the Congo portrayed in Tchicaya's vision, but also for the process of self-realisation through which the poet must go in order to purge himself of the thorns of his (self-) rejection.

*Feu de brousse* is an apocalyptic vision of Tchicaya's native Congo in which the poet uses the device of the multifaceted symbol to illustrate his prophecy of the way forward for his country. In this way the fire, for example, becomes a symbol not only for colonisation but also for the metaphorical 'death' through which the country must go in order to achieve rebirth. Initially, the paradoxical nature of this and other symbols disorients and confuses the reader but once he has understood the erratic nature of the symbolism, the collection opens up to reveal a kaleidoscope of ever-changing patterns of imagery and meaning.

The themes and ideas at the heart of the collection indicate a movement away from the deeply personal *Le Mauvais Sang* towards the literature of the poet's African and Afro-Caribbean predecessors. They pre-empt, too, the direction that Tchicaya's poetry was to take in later collections. However, the poet's exploration of the identity crisis born of his exile anchors *Feu de brousse* firmly in the waters of the early works and, in this way, the collection becomes a bridge between the personal and the political.

Here I have focused on the principal themes, symbols and patterns of metaphor that make up *Feu de brousse*. The discussion is but an indication of Tchicaya's poetic technique, however, for the collection is extensive enough to merit a thesis in itself. It is a powerful, passionate piece of writing and one which warrants more than the scant references made to it in critical texts, for its innovative use of symbolism and the freshness of the author's approach to the problems of colonialism mark *Feu de brousse* as one of the most original and exciting works in the history of the Negritude movement.

Sarah Ryder

Trinity College Dublin

## BOOK REVIEWS

Beverley Ormerod et Jean-Marie Volet, *Romancières africaines d'expression française: le sud du Sahara*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994. ISBN 2.7384.2205.5. 159pp.

*Romancières africaines d'expression française* presents portraits of seventy-three women writers, Africans for the most part, although some of the authors included have simply had experience of Africa. They have all written (often *entre autres*) novels in French. None of the portraits exceeds two pages, and most are accompanied by photographs of the novelist and of the covers of her book(s). The major part of each portrait consists of a biographical account, comments on the author's approach to writing and a short analysis of the author's text(s). The accounts of the actual works are of necessity superficial and limit themselves to plot skeletons. However, in a reference work, even this kind of rudimentary information will be very useful, although it is perhaps worth pointing out that an index of titles would have been a welcome addition. Most of the portraits are accompanied (in a separate column printed in italics) by some of the answers provided by the author to a brief questionnaire on the major influences on her life and work. For particularly well-known writers, the portrait is completed by some bibliographical information on the interviews, autobiographies, press-cuttings etc. which have been used by Ormerod and Volet to establish their biographical or critical comments.

While it will clearly prove to be a most useful reference work, this book also provides cover to cover a most enjoyable and informative read. The questions asked of each author are searching enough and the answers provided honest enough to throw very interesting light on the diversity of the interface between the authors' lives and their writing.

The six-page preface to the book raises a number of thought-provoking questions; essentially, it provides an apologia for the book's existence and methodology. To begin with, the authors present a brief historical review of writing in French by women

from Sub-Saharan Africa. They trace the earliest such writing back to the 1950s and identify 1975 (International Women's Year) as a watershed. If women published only intermittently between the 1950s and the 1970s, from 1975 onwards a clearly identifiable flowering took place. Ormerod and Volet do not hesitate, however, to point out that if sociocultural circumstances had for too long prevented women from communicating through literature, economic circumstances now threaten the availability of their texts.

The co-authors of this very useful survey both work at the University of Western Australia (Beverley Ormerod being particularly well known for her very important study of the Caribbean novel in French) and they recount the genesis of their book by explaining how funding acquired by their university for the African literature component of the degree course in French enabled them to undertake a bibliographical search in 1990 for works by Francophone women writers from Sub-Saharan Africa. However, it quickly emerged that disproportionate numbers of the texts identified by this search were either out of print or otherwise unavailable. In 1991, the authors issued questionnaires to as many of the authors as possible and attempted to locate copies of as many of the texts as they could. Since three years elapsed between this information search and the book's publication, there are some omissions. One of the more (unnecessarily!) obvious ones concerns the very beautiful face which graces the book's front cover and which belongs to the Senegalese writer Khady Sylla, author of a novel published in 1993 — too late for the text, or indeed the author herself to be profiled in the book.

However, apart from the material question of the accessibility of the actual works themselves, Ormerod and Volet mention two further problems which arose in their compiling of the book: firstly, the diversity of the material, not only in terms of genre, but also of quality. Adopting a justifiably flexible approach to the issue of genre (for example, they do not exclude short stories or plays from their account of a given author's *œuvre*), they handle the question of value by avoiding it altogether. That is, they mention and review all of the texts which they were able to locate and read, and abstain from '*tout jugement péremptoire*'. That said, it seemed to this reviewer that, taking the biographical sketch, the author's responses to

questions about her literary background and approach, and then reading between the lines of the plot synopsis of her text(s), one can build up a clear indication of what to expect of a given piece of writing. The second problem, which the authors neatly surmounted by asking (through their questionnaire) individual writers to define themselves, was whether to include in their survey writers of non-African parents but who may have married Africans, lived for some time in Africa, or have otherwise identified with this continent. And whether to include writers of African descent who have spent their entire lives elsewhere, for example Marie Ndiaye. Or writers with African roots, for example Caribbean writers such as Maryse Condé or Myriam Warner-Vieyra, and so on. Again Ormerod and Volet, if they have erred, would seem to have done so on the side of inclusiveness (indeed, some of the writers whom they include strenuously deny being African). However, the problem of inclusiveness as a strategy is that one does leave oneself open to charges of arbitrary exclusions. Why, for example, include Guadeloupeans such as Condé and Warner-Vieyra if one is going to exclude Simone Schwarz-Bart? Is it simply because Schwarz-Bart's husband is Swiss rather than African? After all, Schwarz-Bart's roots are African too, her *Ti-Jean l'Horizon* does treat of Africa, and furthermore the author, like her included compatriots, has also lived on that continent.

However, this kind of quibble is doubtlessly inevitable and should not detract in any way from the welcome which must be extended to this most useful and highly attractive book.

Mary Gallagher

University College Dublin

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Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Edited, with Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Abiola Irele. Ibadan: New Horn Press Ltd (P.O.Box 4138, University Post Office, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria), 1994. Distributed by African Books Collective Ltd, 27 Park End Street, Oxford OX1 1HU, England. ISBN 978-2266-25-6. lxix + 157 pp. Hb £16.75, \$30.00.

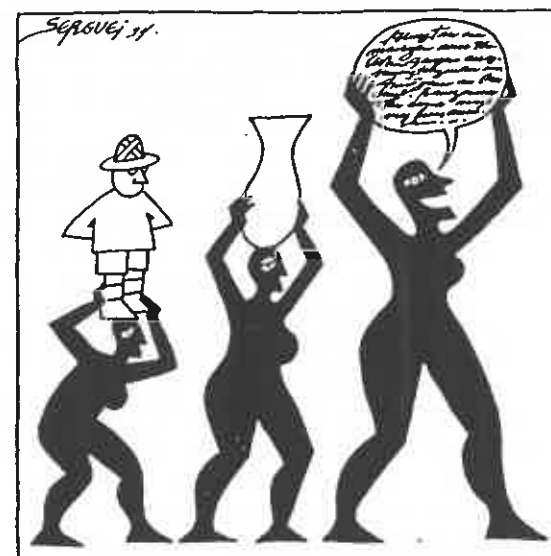
Césaire's eightieth birthday in 1993 prompted a spate of studies and a welcome new edition of his complete poems (Paris: Seuil, 1994). *La Poésie*, presented as a companion volume to Senghor's *Poèmes*, regrettably lacks the latter's glossary, and Professor Irele makes good that gap for English readers of Césaire's major, seminal poem, in which the word *Négritude* was launched for the first time in its modern sense. His aim is 'to provide a guide for a *meaningful* reading of the poem, in every sense of the word' (p.ix), and this he does with admirable straightforwardness, dividing the volume into an introduction covering Césaire's life and West Indian background, the history of the poem's publication, and a broad analysis of its manner, themes and significance (pp.xiii-lxix), the 1956 text slightly modified in the light of that overseen by Césaire for the bilingual German edition of 1962 (pp.1-33), and explanatory notes (pp.35-150). The seven-page bibliography which closes the volume would have been even more useful if it had highlighted valuable studies of the *Cahier* which appear in periodicals and collective volumes. Dominique Combe's excellent monograph (Paris: PUF, 1993) evidently appeared too late for inclusion. In general, however, the clarity and range of information will prove invaluable to students of a poem 'noted as much for its formidable difficulty as for its rare power of poetic expression' (p.ix). Irele's format allows less scope for handling the latter feature than the former, however. His notes are a mine of information on semantic obscurities, with only the rarest lapses in accuracy; and if he spells out in detail what might be considered common knowledge, we have to recognise that little knowledge is common in the multicultural modern world of accelerated communications and questioned canons. Discussion of poetic signifiers tends to remain at the level of generalities, yet the verbal texture makes the *Cahier* the poem it is. Irele rightly stresses the need to remember the poem's vibrant orality, but neglects to comment on such written features as repeated hyphenation. Even so, this book should be available wherever Césaire is studied, and an adaptation into French would be welcomed by those preparing the *baccalauréat* syllabus, on which the *Cahier* figures for the first time this academic year.

Trinity College Dublin

Roger Little

Virginie Coulon, *Bibliographie francophone de littérature africaine* (Coll. Actualités bibliographiques, AUPELF/UREF, ISSN 0993-3948), Vanves: EDICEF/AUPELF, 1994. ISBN 2-85-069885-7. 80 F (Europe & N. America); 40 F. (UREF network incl. Africa).

Virginie Coulon, for a long time treasurer of our invaluable French counterpart APELA always protested that she was not a bibliographer by vocation, despite her collaboration with Hans Zell on the well-known *New Reader's Guide to African Literature*. For all her protestations, she has nonetheless come up with the kind of volume we all desperately need: a reliable checklist of African literary output in French, to complement the precious bibliographical issues of *Notre Librairie* such as the hitherto indispensable *2500 titres de littérature africaine* (n° 98). The Lord be praised for persuading Virginie to depart from her true calling as a literary critic and produce such an invaluable reference book!



The volume is essentially a printed version of the LITAF database being compiled in Bordeaux by the CNRS research group under the direction of Alain Ricard. This material will

shortly be available in CD format on a disc called 'Orphée', distributed through the 'Littératures francophones' network of AUPELF/UREF: those with well-endowed libraries please note! For the rest of us lesser mortals, this volume will probably be more useful, being cheap and portable. It lists the literary production by country, which is probably sensible if at times a bit arbitrary: Werewere Liking is listed under Cameroun, even though most of her work has been done at Abidjan. A complete alphabetical list of authors at the end would have compensated for this, as well as helping the beginners who don't necessarily know the countries of origin of particular authors, as in Rouch and Clavreuil's *Littératures nationales d'expression française*. This latter volume, in my experience the best general reference volume on Francophone literature, is inexplicably missing from the bibliography of 'Littérature secondaire', as is Dorothy Blair's pioneering *African Literature in French*, recently — and scandalously! — deleted from the catalogue of Cambridge University Press. Virginie Coulon invites comments and suggestions, and it seems to me that this section is paradoxically the least thorough, although I learned in it of many volumes I had up till now never come across, mostly those, predictably, by African writers. A sincere vote of thanks even so to Virginie Coulon, and may she be persuaded to continue.

Peter Hawkins

University of Bristol/Université de la Réunion

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## CONFERENCE REPORT

'L'Insécurité linguistique', Université de la Réunion,  
23-25 September 1994

This 'round table' mostly composed of linguists, but with some literary input, was organised by the 'Unité de recherche associée de linguistique et d'anthropologie des aires créolophones et francophones' attached to the Université de la Réunion, and took place in their well-equipped premises half a mile from the main university campus in Saint-Denis. The theme of 'linguistic insecurity' derives from the work of the American linguist William Labov; it describes a situation where two or more languages are in a position of rivalry, with one of them most often dominant and authoritative and another subordinate and repressed. The phenomenon occurs among social groups who are normally speakers of the subordinate tongue when they are obliged to conform to the dominant linguistic norm; it generates features such as hypercorrection and interference of the two tongues. The relevance of this to the Creole-speaking cultures of Réunion and Maurice is obvious.

The first morning's papers centred on the concept of 'linguistic insecurity' as first formulated by Labov in studies of the interaction of different communities in New York in 1967. The notion was formulated almost as a by-product of a very pragmatic, statistical body of research, and this emerged from the paper by Daniel Baggioni of the Université de Provence, one of the main organisers of the conference. The theme of the unsatisfactory theorisation of the concept was taken up by Didier de Robillard, the other leading member of the organising group, who offered some explanations for Labov's theoretical diffidence and commented on the different ways the concept had been used. Jacky Simonin, based in Réunion, proposed an interactive approach to the question, illustrating it with examples from the local media; and Aude Bretegnier, a research student about to complete her DEA, developed some of the theoretical possibilities of Labov's notion from the actual situations he himself analysed.

The afternoon session looked at different examples of linguistic insecurity: Jean-Michel Kasbarian in Corsica, Michel Francard on Belgium, where local variations in Belgian French attracted the criticism of the Académie française (in a paper read in his absence by Marie-Louise Moreau); Marie-Louise Moreau herself on the use of French in Africa, and the tensions that surround it. Claudine Bavoux, the efficient conference secretary and administrator, discussed a possible antidote to the insecurity in an exuberant integration of creolisms in the local Réunion press; and Paul Soupe presented a fascinating study of the hierarchy of social status in Mauritius, which is signalled by phonetic differences in vowel sounds.

The following morning's papers all centred on the problematic relationship between Creole and French in schools. The session was chaired by a pioneer in the field, Pierre Cellier, and included papers by Rada Tirvassen from Madagascar, Clifford Pavaday from Mauritius, Paule Fioux and Leila Caid, the last two being research students of the unit. The final afternoon papers looked at the possible application of the concept to literary study, through the fascinating case-history of the Malagasy poet Rabéarivelo, examined by Serge Meitinger, highlighting the ambiguity sustained by the poet about which language he originally used to write his poems: Hova or French. Didier de Robillard took a recent prize-winning Mauritian novel, *Le Sang de l'Anglais* by Carl de Souza, to illustrate the use of a literary work as evidence of linguistic insecurity; but Maurice Carayol, a former president of the university, responded by raising the question of the identification of an author's own linguistic practice in a text which shows considerable sophistication in its deployment of different discourses.

The conference had opened with a well-attended drinks party to honour the retirement of Pierre Cellier, with the customary generous provision of punch *goyavier*, *samoussas* and *bouchons*; and it ended with an excellent meal of Creole cuisine in a restaurant called *Le Rogatons* (*sic*), which prompted much linguistic speculation about its apparent grammatical insecurity. In the end the 'punch maison', *Ti-Jacque au boucané* and *Gâteau de chouchou* overcame any residual linguistic uncertainty and concluded the conference on an appropriately convivial note.

Peter Hawkins

University of Bristol/Université de la Réunion

## NOTICES

### ASCALF CONFERENCE, LONDON, NOV. 1994

The ASCALF conference to be held on 25-27 November at the Institut français, 17 Queensberry Place, South Kensington, SW7 2DT, is being organised by Denise Ganderton (University of North London, School of Languages and European Studies, 1 Prince of Wales Road, London NW5 3LB). Members have been circulated with details, but the following will act as a reminder to them and as an invitation to non-members to attend.

Registration will take place for an hour prior to the showing at 7.30 p.m. on Friday 25th November of Sembene's *Ceddo*, a powerful historical film which depicts resistance to the inroads of Islam, Christianity and the slave trade. A further chance to register and meet other participants precedes a discussion of *Ceddo* led by James Keahy and Fírinne Ní Chréacháin at 11 a.m. on Saturday 26th. Two guest speakers follow either side of lunch: Marie-Clotilde Jacquey, the editor of *Notre Librairie*, and Pius Ngandu Nkashama, the Zairean novelist and critic. A Caribbean session ends the afternoon, Mireille Rosello speaking (with video illustrations) on Christiane Succab-Goldman's film *Contes de cyclone en septembre*, and Christine Chivallon on Patrick Chamoiseau.

On Sunday morning at 10.30, Peter Dunwoodie will speak on Algerian writers of the 1920s-30s forging an identity, and the closing paper will be by Catherine Wendeler on Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière*. After lunch, members are encouraged to attend the AGM: nomination forms for new committee members will be available at registration.

All enquiries to Denise Ganderton at the above address.

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## ASCALF CONFERENCE, DUBLIN, APRIL 1995

As announced in the last *Bulletin*, a residential ASCALF conference will be held at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9, Ireland from Saturday 8th to Monday 10th April 1995. Offers of papers should be made to Dr Pat Little at that address before 9th January 1995, giving title and summary in either English or French. Tel. (+353-1) 8376191; Fax (+353-1) 8376197. At the time of going to press, proposals had been received from Angela Chambers (Limerick), John Conteh-Morgan (Ohio State), Jean Derive (Chambéry, CNRS), Bruno Maurer (Montpellier), Michaëla Mongeland (Roehampton) and János Riesz (Bayreuth).

A form for completion in respect of attendance accompanies the present *Bulletin*. Please feel free to copy it for interested colleagues and friends. It should be returned to Pat Little with a cheque (or Eurocheque, or International Money Order, made out in Irish *punt*) for the appropriate fee made payable to ASCALF Dublin Conference as soon as possible and no later than Friday 10th February 1995. Participants are welcome to spend additional days following the conference at the special rate of IR£35 *per diem*. Requests for this facility, which depends on availability, should accompany the form.

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The annual *Cahiers francophones d'Europe centre-orientale*, edited by Fritz Peter Kirsch and Árpád Vigh, are at their third issue, entitled *L'Enseignement de la francophonie*. Its scope is wide, and includes a presentation of 'L'enseignement de la littérature africaine en Afrique' by Mohamadou Kane alongside general considerations and studies on teaching it in France. Orders should be addressed to Wilhelm Braumüller Verlagsbuchhandlung, Servitengasse 5, 1092 Vienna. The Association responsible for the journal is also mounting a wide-ranging conference on *La Francophonie* in Vienna, 18-23 April 1995. For further details, contact Professor Kirsch, Universität Wien, Institut für Romanistik, Universitätstraße 7, A 1010 Vienna.

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John Conteh-Morgan's major study of *Theatre and Drama in Francophone Africa* has just been published by Cambridge U.P. ISBN 0-521-43453-X. xii + 240 pp. Hb. \$59.95.

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Congratulations to Nicki Hitchcott, our Membership Secretary, on the completion for the University of London of her Ph.D. thesis on 'The Unspoken Self: Feminism and Cultural Identity in African Women's Writing in French'.

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Our faithful Minutes Secretary, Dorothy Blair, has recently published a translation of the Lebanese novelist Amin Maalouf's *Le Rocher de Tanios* (Prix Goncourt 1993): *The Rock of Tanios*. London: Quartet, 1994. ISBN 0-7043-7077-8. 275 pp. Hb. £15.

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Roger Little's new edition of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's undeservedly forgotten play *Empsaël et Zoraïde, ou les Blancs esclaves des Noirs à Maroc* has just appeared as n° XCII in Exeter U.P.'s collection 'Textes littéraires'. ISBN 0-85989-464-9. xxvi + 133 pp. Pb. £8.95.

Among its 'Grands Prix de l'année 1994', the Académie française has awarded Roger Little a 'médaille de vermeil du rayonnement de la langue française'. Pat and he will attend the public ceremony 'sous la coupole' on 1st December thanks to the generosity of the Dublin director of Air France, M. Gérard Petit (no relation!).

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M.A./ POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA CERTIFICATE  
IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN STUDIES AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

The course is designed to provide students with an overview and critical analysis of the general discursive framework applicable to literary, cultural and socio-political aspects of area studies. All the modules aim to provide high level foundation training for people wishing to engage in research in the fields covered.

The main focus of the taught modules will be provided by the core, *Discourses of Post-Colonialism*. Students will then choose options from a number of modules, based in either literary, socio-political or cultural studies. In the first instance, the MA will be offered on a part-time basis and the modules on offer will treat topics relating to the Francophone Maghreb countries; it is envisaged to extend the programme of studies to Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa in the near future. For the MA, students choose to write a thesis in a subject area where they have developed a special interest.

Entrance requirements:

All applicants are required to hold a first degree/degree equivalent in an appropriate discipline. In addition, all applicants are required to demonstrate language competence in French. Non-native speakers of French may be required to sit a language test; applicants who hold an honours degree/degree equivalent in French will be exempt from the language test. Subject to satisfying these preliminary requirements, all applicants are invited to attend for interview.

For further information and application form, please contact: Nikki Roberts, School of Languages, University of Westminster, 9-18 Euston Square, London NW1 3ET. Tel. (+44-71) 911 5000 ext. 4364; Fax (+44-71) 911 5001.

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