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FRANCOPHONE CONJUNCTURES

Decolonizing the Text: Glissantian Readings in Caribbean and African-American Literatures. DEBRA L. ANDERSON. New York: Peter Lang, 1995. 118 pp. (Cloth US\$ 46.95)

L'Eau: Source d'une écriture dans les littératures féminines francophones. YOLANDE HELM (ed.). New York: Peter Lang, 1995. x + 295 pp. (Cloth US\$ 65.95)

Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers. MARY JEAN GREEN, KAREN GOULD, MICHELINE RICE-MAXIMIN, KEITH L. WALKER & JACK A. YEAGER (eds.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. xxii + 359 pp. (Paper US\$ 19.95)

Statue cou coupé. ANNIE LE BRUN. Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1996. 177 pp. (Paper FF 85.00)

Although best remembered as a founding father of the Negritude movement along with Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor was from the very outset of his career equally committed – as both a poet and a politician – to what he felt were the inseparable concepts of *la francophonie* and *métissage*. Senghor's has been an unabashedly paradoxical vision, consistently addressing the unanswerable question of how one can be essentially a "black African" and at the same time (in Homi Bhabha's words) "something else besides" (1994:28). In his "Eloge du métissage," written in 1950, Senghor ably described the contradictions involved in assuming the hybrid identity of a *métis* (an identity that offers none of the comforting biological and/or cultural certainties – about "rhythm," "intuition," and such like – upon which the project of Negritude was founded): "too

assimilated and yet not assimilated enough? Such is exactly our destiny as cultural *métis*. It's an unattractive role, difficult to take hold of; it's a necessary role if the conjuncture of the 'Union française' is to have any meaning. In the face of nationalisms, racisms, academicisms, it's the struggle for the *freedom of the Soul* – the freedom of Man" (1964:103). At first glance, this definition of the *métis* appears as dated as the crude essentialism with which Senghor's Negritude is now commonly identified: in linking the fate of the *métis* to that of the "Union française," that imperial federation of states created in the years following upon the end of the Second World War with the intention of putting a "new" face on the old French Empire, Senghor would seem to have doomed the *métis* and his "rôle ingrat" to obsolescence. By the end of the decade, the decolonization of French Africa had deprived the "Union française" of whatever "meaning" it might once have had. The uncompromisingly manichean rhetoric of opposition that flourished in the decolonization years (and that was most famously manipulated by Fanon in his 1961 *Wretched of the Earth*) had rendered especially unpalatable the complicities to which Senghor's (un)assimilated *métis* was subject and to which he also subjected himself in the name of a "humanism" that was around this same time itself becoming the object of an all-out assault in France at the hands of intellectuals like Foucault.

A rendezvous with the dustbin of history would thus appear to be the only logical fate for the compromised vision that Senghor put forward in his 1950 "Eloge." And yet, notwithstanding the undoing of the "Union française," Senghor's *éloge* has, it can be argued, assumed a new relevance in our own age – a post-revolutionary age in which the apocalyptic dreams of decolonization and the manichean assertions of Fanon (or at least the Fanon who wrote *Wretched of the Earth*) have been exposed as empty "meta-narratives" that cannot adequately come to terms with the complexities of our postmodern and ambiguously postcolonial condition. Far from ushering in a new age and (in Fanon's words) a "new man," decolonization merely aggravated the problematic state of affairs to which Senghor was responding in his *éloge*: neocolonial institutions, multinational corporations, and transglobal media have taken up the relay of colonial power, promoting an ever greater mixing of cultures that, viewed from one angle, can be thought of as ("good") postcolonial creolization and, viewed from another, as ("bad") postmodern homogenization. In our fin de siècle world of entangled "relations" (to recall the central term of Edouard Glissant's cross-cultural poetics – see Glissant 1990), in which it is quite simply not possible – at least in good faith – to draw Fanonesque lines in the sand between the (neo)colonial and the truly decolonized, the

ambivalent stance of a Senghor has recovered its “meaning.” On the one hand, the identitarian arguments that underwrote his concept of Negritude are once again fashionable, be it in the ludicrous form of pseudo-scientific appeals to the power of melanin or in the apparently more “reasonable” but equally essentialist guise of a multiculturalism that (re)actively promotes (racial, ethnic, national) “differences.” On the other, in contradiction with this renewed emphasis on discrete identities, we are also witnessing a revival of interest in the *métis* and the translational process of creolization through which this “impure” subjectivity is constituted – as witness, say, a work like the *Eloge de la créolité* by the Martiniquan writers Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant (1989).

What is the connection between this simultaneous turn (back) to identity politics and to *métissage*, and what, if anything, binds these two *éloges* together? The most obvious, and superficially attractive, response is that the connection is quite simply one of absolute difference: between the identitarian and the creolizing, between the assimilating colonial and the subversive postcolonial, there can be no common ground. Thus, for many a critic, *métissage* as argued for by the likes of Glissant and the advocates of Créolité offers a radical challenge to essentialist thinking; it becomes a way of salvaging, in a minor key, the “transcendental” arguments of a revolutionary thinker like Fanon. Françoise Lionnet, for instance, has argued along these lines that a thinking of *métissage*, which allows us to “demystif[y] all essentialist glorifications of unitary origins, be they racial, sexual, geographic, or cultural” (1989:9), prepares the way for a rupture with the “hegemonic” colonial legacy and an articulation of “new visions of ourselves, new concepts that allow us to think *otherwise*, to bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies that have governed the ground and the very condition of possibility of thought, of ‘clarity,’ in all of Western philosophy” (1989:5-6). Seductive as this argument might be, I would suggest that the ambivalence of Senghor’s praise of *métissage* – its inseparability from “old” identitarian claims and its self-conscious emplacement *within* a colonial world that cannot be simply “bypassed” – points toward a more realistic if less flattering understanding of the limits, and possibilities, of the creolizing perspective embraced in the more recent *Eloge*.

To assert the genealogical complicity of the two essays is not (simply) to argue that the 1989 version is as regrettably flawed as its 1950 prototype, that neither approach is sufficiently “transcendental”: as we will see toward the end of this review article, the 1989 *Eloge* has indeed been subject, and increasingly so, to the charge that it remains disappointingly indebted to the identitarian (and masculinist) arguments it is supposedly

contesting in the name of a post-identitarian *métissage*, and that it has escaped neither the “clarity” of “Western philosophy” nor the “hegemony” of the French language and the metropolitan perspectives that attach to it. Rather, over and above such arguments, it is to venture that the problematic “conjuncture” with which Senghor, to his credit (or his discredit, depending on one’s point of view), grappled in his “Eloge” and that are equally on display in Bernabé *et compagnie*’s postmodern revision of it are not anomalies that can and must be “transcended” but the very “essence,” as it were, of the *métis*’s identity – an (un)assimilated identity that is contradictory and compromised, and that can only be understood in the context of its negotiations with(in) political and cultural structures (such as, to take but one example, the neocolonial governmental and linguistic complex known as *la francophonie*) that substantially limit its possibilities. As Senghor’s comments about the *métis* suggest, moreover, it may well be an acknowledgment of these limits, rather than a belief in their transcendence, that prepares the way for a freedom that is truly *human* because never absolute, always relative.

The cultural “conjuncture” that made Senghor’s francophone *métis* possible hardly lends itself to a conventionally heroic description, and this certainly poses a problem for critics in search not of ambivalence and complicity but of straightforward “resistance” and “subversion.” In this respect, the title of *Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers* is extremely revealing. What, we might well ask, is the relation between the words “postcolonial” and “francophone” being posited here? Rather than openly address the question, the introduction to this collection of essays treats the word “postcolonial” as self-explanatory, and with good reason: although the term has recently come under fire from certain “radical” quarters (see, for instance, Shohat 1992 and, for a response to her objections and those of similar-minded critics, Hall 1996), its connotations remain strongly “oppositional,” and in privileging (without interrogating) this word, and attaching “francophone” to it, the five editors of *Postcolonial Subjects* attempt to insinuate the equivalence of the one with the other. In highlighting the (apparent) transparency of the oppositional term “postcolonial” and downplaying the existential and political complicities that have historically attached to the word “francophone,” the editors are trying to redeem the latter from its rather checkered past. Depending upon one’s point of view, this redemptive gesture may be an essential one that takes us “beyond hexagonocentrism” (p. ix) or simply an act of bad faith that allows U.S. academics to assert the special relevance of their chosen discipline.

What is certain, however, is that this redemptive move can only be attempted by stringently limiting the meaning of *la francophonie*: for the editors of this collection “it is not a shifting alliance of political states that constitutes the meaning of the word francophone but rather a common literary project of engaging, and often resisting, the language, culture, and history of France from perspectives that are culturally, ethnically, and ideologically distinct” (p. xiii). As far as these editors are concerned, the admirable “resistance” of the francophone writers under consideration, who all “participate in the subversion of European literary traditions and in various forms of cultural and linguistic *métissage*” (p. ix), has nothing to do with a patently compromised “alliance” of political states. In promoting this limited definition of the word, and the doubtful logic that simply equates “subversion” and “*métissage*” (rather than reading them as always being in potential contradiction with one another), the editors of *Postcolonial Subjects* are able to preserve something of the “transcendent” project that once engaged the likes of Fanon; just how the (supposed) discursive radicalism of these “subversive” writers can be translated back into the realm of a radical politics remains, to be sure, a question that goes unanswered in the pages of this book’s introduction and, echoing Marx, one might well suggest that the “decanonical impulses” (p. xv) privileged in that introduction, as in so much contemporary theory, amount to little more than the “farcical” repetition of a revolutionary decolonization that has, in being thus imitated, lost much, and indeed perhaps all, of its original “meaning.”

Subordinated to and equated with the “postcolonial” in the book’s title(s), the word “francophone” is further redeemed there through its attachment to the phrase “women writers”: these writers are “doubly” marginalized (p. xv), at an even further remove from a “French literary canon” that has made room, if grudgingly, for at least a handful of male writers, who have themselves (as the abstract nature of Senghor’s humanism suggests) not always shown enough awareness of and sensitivity to the differences that constitute francophone women’s varied subjectivities. Adamant that they are “not interested in promoting a reductionist, composite, female francophone ‘Other’ that would deny distinctions among these writers and their various cultural, historical, ethnic, and racial identities” (p. xv), the editors of *Postcolonial Subjects* have nonetheless, perforce, made some attempt at thematically organizing the “texts of an intriguing heterogeneity” (p. xiii) discussed in the collection’s nineteen essays: the book is thus (in what could either be described as a productively subtle or a frustratingly loose manner) divided into three parts, entitled “Situating the Self: History, Rememory, Story,” “Border Cross-

ings,” and “Engendering the Postcolonial Subject.” Preferable as this thematic organization might have seemed to the geographical one adopted, say, in Belinda Jack’s recent and very useful survey of francophone literatures (1996), the relative arbitrariness (to say nothing of the predictability) of these categories nonetheless prevents readers from taking them too seriously.

In the context of the present review, it must suffice to list only those articles dealing with Caribbean material: a sturdy overview of Simone Schwarz-Bart’s oeuvre (by Kitzie McKinney); an evocative account of the voodoo *loa* Erzulie’s role in Haitian culture and literature (by Joan Dayan); a comparative account of the changing role of Africa in Maryse Condé’s first two novels (by Christopher Miller); and, worthy of special mention, a thoughtful analysis of how the novelist Marie Chauvet, in *Amour colère folie*, gives expression to a textual violence that mimics and deconstructs the (racial, social, sexual, religious) violence of Duvalier’s Haiti (by Ronnie Scharfman). Most of the other essays in the collection are likewise limited to particular locations (predominantly, Québec and sub-Saharan Africa), although a few rather desultory attempts are made at comparative francophone studies: Québec’s Anne Hébert and Guadeloupe’s Myriam Warner-Vieyra are, for instance, yoked together in one essay on the grounds that “the referential *hors-texte* of both novels is shaped by the social matrix of a patriarchal society in which women’s lives are ruled by preestablished gender roles and definitions of womanhood” (pp. 124-25). Bland claims such as this exemplify the dangers of the comparative perspective that is championed, in theory, by the editors of *Postcolonial Subjects* but that, in practice, is markedly absent from the majority of these essays and (if the unproductive comparison of Hébert and Warner-Vieyra is anything to judge by) with good reason. After reading through this heteroclit collection of often competent although seldom enthralling essays (several of which have already been published elsewhere), one is not left with the sense of thematic cohesion, historical comprehensiveness, and intellectual purpose that characterized, say, a groundbreaking work like *Out of the Kumbla* (Davies & Fido 1990), which succeeded in doing for Caribbean women writers what *Postcolonial Subjects* aspires to do for francophone women but, in a failure of editorial vision that can be only in part attributed to the greater diffuseness of the field, signally fails to achieve.

It is a decidedly different version of francophone literature by women that gets explored in *L’eau*. Less fascinated by the subversive potential of her field, Yolande Helm has seen fit to include discussion of a number of Swiss, Belgian, and even French writers in her book. Despite some overlap

in the authors treated (notably, Cameroon's Werewere Liking, Québec's Anne Hébert, Algeria's Assia Djebar), the thematic approach of this book sharply differentiates it from the "political" considerations generating the ostensibly trendier *Postcolonial Subjects*. Supplementing the familiar Bachelardian approach to water symbolism and its connections to the literary imagination with an attention to Hélène Cixous's (French) feminist insistence on this fluid "maternal metaphor," Helm's sturdy and sincere collection will be of little or no interest to the readers of the *NWIG*, since it contains only one essay on a Caribbean subject, Maryse Condé's novel *Traversée de la mangrove*, which according to Ellen Munley establishes a contrast between "waters that spring from the source and those that are deadened, stagnant" (p. 115). The reader who appreciates critical distinctions of this sort will not find a perusal of *L'eau's* eighteen essays unrewarding; however, given its rather dated Bachelardian emphasis, one can be certain that this in some ways charmingly unpretentious collection of essays will make nary a ripple on the surface of francophone studies.

L'eau is the fourth volume published in Peter Lang's Francophone Cultures and Literatures series, and it is certainly an improvement over the sad effort that inaugurated this series: Anderson's *Decolonizing the Text* is, both in terms of physical volume and intellectual content, about as slim an offering as one can imagine and damning evidence of this publishing house's at times irresponsible (lack of) editorial policies. Larded with an appalling number of typos, carelessly and at times ungrammatically written, badly structured, *Decolonizing the Text* also features a number of egregious errors that one can only hope are simply the result of scandalously inadequate proofreading: discussing two books on African literature, for instance, Anderson notes at the outset of her own that they do not limit themselves to works written by Africans but "include certain writers from the Caribbean in their analyses, in particular Césaire (Martinique), Senghor (Sénégal) and Damas (French Guiana)" (p. 5) – an unexpected assertion of Senghor's Caribbean identity that takes the ethos of cultural displacement and *métissage* to which he was committed a little too far! What follows upon this less than auspicious beginning is a series of predictable, plot summary-ish accounts of francophone Caribbean works like Glissant's *La Lézarde*, Confiant's *Le nègre et l'amiral* and the *Eloge de la créolité* (which she reads as simply reiterating Glissant's poetics rather than, as much recent criticism has convincingly pointed out, adapting and distorting his views), as well as a plausible but poorly executed comparison of Chamoiseau's *Solibo magnifique* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. For Anderson, francophone writers like Glissant "decolonize the text," whereas a French writer like Sartre in his "Orphée

noir” exoticizes and colonizes black poetry: although (as we will see) there are times when it may be necessary to remind ourselves that a “revolutionary” writer like the surrealist André Breton has “unconsciously colonize[d]” the Caribbean in his writings (p. 19), this simplistic binary opposition between “colonizing” and “decolonizing” texts, which informs all of Anderson’s readings, can lead only to the most reductionist of interpretations. Shoddily written, uninterestingly argued, *Decolonizing the Text* is a book that should never have been published in its present form.

It is to another one of Anderson’s glaring errors that we can turn as a way of leading into a discussion of the last book under review here. In one of her footnotes, she identifies Gilbert Gratiant as a “Martinican poet who wrote exclusively in creole and whose works were attacked as being folklorist by the writers of *Légitime Défense*,” and refers us to Chapter 2 of Lilyan Kesteloot’s seminal *Les écrivains noirs d’expression française* for corroboration (p. 64). Gratiant, of course, did not write exclusively in Creole, and it was precisely his early (1931) work in French, *Poèmes en vers faux*, that was attacked by Etienne Léro in 1932 in the pages of *Légitime défense* – not for being “folklorist” but for exhibiting a prudish, Parnassian “lyricism” that was, according to Léro, exemplary of the mulatto bourgeoisie’s desire “to imitate a white man properly” (1996:55). Kesteloot is, moreover, very clear on the bilingual nature of Gratiant’s poetic enterprise (“his French translations of his Creole poems are more lively, more vivid, in a word more poetic than the works written directly in French, and it is in these poems that Gratiant reveals his real personality” [1963:313]).

Kesteloot’s distinction between a “real” Creole and a presumably “inauthentic” French personality is, to be sure, a heavily ideologized one. Nevertheless, the critical consensus has indeed been that Gratiant was, in Kesteloot’s words, a more “inspired” writer in Creole than in French; it is wrong, however, to characterize (as Anderson does) his work in Creole as “pre-Négritude” (p. 62). To speak of Gratiant as being “overshadowed by the works of those who would follow – the *Négritude* poets” (p. 48) is to gloss over the entanglements of a much more complex chronology, for Gratiant’s Creole poetry is produced in the very same decades as that of his compatriot Césaire’s most influential works. Gratiant and Césaire can and must be read not only in terms of diachronic progression (as part of a direct line that leads from a regionalist *doudouisme* to Négritude, and thence from Glissant’s Antillanité to Chamoiseau and Confiant’s Créolité) but of a synchronic mirroring in which all of these apparently contradictory positions are conjoined to, and readable in, one another. It is a version of this same unlikely mirroring that Gratiant gestured toward

within his own oeuvre when in the late 1940s he published a number of his Creole poems, under the title *Fab' Compè Zicaque*, as the second half of a book that began with a “poème en français,” the *Credo des sang-mêlé, ou Je veux chanter la France*, an assimilationist *éloge* of his own hybrid identity and the “conjugation” of Europe, Africa, and America that made him possible (“Je conjugue, métis / La fierté d’être homme de France ... Et [la] fierté d’être Nègre ... Oh! double appartenance que la France harmonise ...” [n.d.:13; *Métis*, I unite: the pride of being a French man ... and the pride of being a Black ... a double belonging that France harmonizes]).

Complicitous pairings of this sort (Gratiant/Césaire, Creole/French) constitute the difficult territory identified at the beginning of this essay as the (im)proper place of Senghor’s (un)assimilated *métis*. Senghor’s own double, and contradictory, allegiance to Negritude and *métissage* would, as it turns out, find expression in the account of Gratiant that he offered in his influential 1948 anthology of “black poetry.” In his headnote to the selection of Gratiant’s Creole poetry that he included in this anthology (accompanied by translations of it into French), Senghor not only problematizes the already canonical literary history that would insist upon *Légitime défense* as the first truly original Franco-Caribbean cultural movement – on the basis of the admittedly “timid” journal *Lucioles* (1927), which for “perhaps the first time affirmed the cultural originality of the Antilles,” Gratiant is referred to as “the spiritual father of the first literary movement worthy of this name” on the French islands – but also identifies Gratiant’s work as in some respects a more apt expression of Caribbean realities than, say, Césaire’s (who, along with Léro, is the other Martiniquan represented in the anthology): “he has produced several poems in the Martiniquan patois,” Senghor notes, “that are the most authentic expression of the Caribbean’s hybrid soul [*l’âme métisse des Antilles*]” (1948:29). Authenticity here proves for Senghor not merely or even primarily a function of some essential blackness but of a productive *métissage* that with Gratiant makes its brief and anomalous appearance in an anthology that otherwise valorizes a seemingly purer – and altogether more virile – vision of blackness. (Significantly, Gratiant is not mentioned once in Sartre’s preface to the anthology, “Orphée noir,” where “the Black” is revealingly identified as “the great male of the earth, the sperm of the world” [1948:xxxii].) What can one learn from this hybrid “authenticity” that puts into question the authenticity of Negritude and that, as Senghor recognizes, is absent from the poetry of his friend Césaire? What can one make of this *âme métisse* whose presence can only be accounted for through a coming to terms with, rather than a simple expulsion of, the

“parasitic hybrid caste” and the “aborted fruits of a decrepit culture” against which Léro (1996:58) raged in the name of a “legitimacy” that, one might suggest, has become rather less defensible, if no less seductive, in our ever more creolized, ever more bastardized, post-revolutionary age?

For the authors of the *Eloge*, who have excoriated what they see as the anti-creole Negritude of modernist predecessors like Senghor and Césaire, there is much to be learned from the example of Gratiant: because of his valorization of both the Creole language and the identity of the *métis*, he is a writer who, as Chamoiseau and Confiant put it in their *Lettres créoles*, “opened up potentially one of the richest veins of our Creole literature” (1991:111). While stressing the ultimately identitarian nature of his conception of *métissage* (as Confiant points out in his recent book on Césaire, implicitly commenting on the lines from the *Credo* cited above, “in the end, his conception leads once again back to the One, to a new Caribbean being, the harmonious product of a double or a triple *métissage*” [1993: 116]), Chamoiseau and Confiant are more than willing to acknowledge their debts to this indubitably minor and assimilationist literary predecessor, and this willingness – coupled with Confiant’s oedipal attacks on a major “revolutionary” figure like Césaire – might well be construed as evidence of their own compromised position as writers. Certainly, as the critical tone of some of the essays in the recent collection *Penser la créolité* attests (see Condé & Cottenet-Hage 1995), the *Eloge* is a more problematic, and less “transcendent,” document than it might have appeared upon first publication, and its authors have come under a certain amount of fire for, among other things, their covert investment in identitarian politics, their supposed masculinism, their insufficiently “revolutionary” outlook, and their close links to metropolitan publishing houses. No one has voiced such criticism with more passion than the French poet and literary theorist Annie Le Brun, author of a good many books written in praise of “subversives” like the Marquis de Sade. I would like to close this review article with a brief survey of her acrimonious pamphlet *Statue cou coupé*, in order to gesture one last time toward the complexities and complicities of the francophone “conjuncture” for which I have been arguing here.

Incited by Confiant’s less than respectful book on Césaire, “the demolition of a man whom I considered one of the greatest poets of this age” (p. 11), Le Brun first made her views on the ideology of Créolité and its “ideologues” known in her 1994 *Pour Aimé Césaire*. If she devotes most of her energies in that first work to an impassioned reading of and plea for Césaire’s poetry, this second intervention greatly expands upon her

critique of the authors of the *Eloge*: the first two-thirds of *Statue coupée* is taken up by a conference paper that Le Brun gave in Fort-de-France in early 1995 as well as by her comments on Confiant and Chamoiseau's vitriolic "mind-your-own-business-French-lady" reactions to this paper and an elaboration of her objections to them. Gracefully admitting to her Martiniquan audience in the middle of her paper that "it's not for me to tell you what's Creole and what isn't" (p. 31), and restricting her comments on Césaire to his work as a poet (a rather significant omission, given that Confiant's book was written in reaction against what he feels have been the disastrous consequences for Martinique of Césaire's ambivalent politics, and that his discussion of Césaire's poetry was in large part simply a foil for condemning policies that certainly do not exhibit the "force of insubordination" [p. 18] that she so cherishes in Césaire), Le Brun repeatedly chides those who would dare to take the "wrong" side by criticizing a "revolutionary" artist like Césaire, and offers a critique of Confiant *et compagnie* that can be broken down into three main points.

First, in an offensive manner that reminds one of nothing so much as Léro's aggressive attacks on Gratiant, Le Brun questions both the intellect and the literary talents of her adversaries, speaking of "the insignificance of their arguments and, to say the least, the mediocrity of their novelistic production" (p. 12). If the likes of Confiant and Chamoiseau have gained a readership and won literary prizes (a real badge of dishonor in Le Brun's eyes!), this can only be, she argues, because their ideas and novels serve the interests of the powers-that-be. Citing Milan Kundera's influential 1991 article on Caribbean literature, which paid special tribute to Chamoiseau (paving the way, in Le Brun's account, for the positive reception of the Martiniquan's soon-to-be-published and eventually Prix Goncourt-winning *Texaco*), Le Brun identifies it as part of a conspiracy of French publishers in the early 1990s to launch a "new exoticism" (p. 84). The success of this media conspiracy, the consecration of "mediocre" writers, and the consequent occlusion of Césaire's purportedly less complacent francophone vision, cause Le Brun to throw up her arms in despair: "what is one to think of a certain Europe that, along with all of those whose taste it has managed to colonize, is in such a state as to prefer the sham goods of this new exoticism to the greatness of Césaire – and even worse, to no longer know how to tell the difference between them?" (p. 126). Telling the difference between Césaire and these "Caribbean epigones" of Milan Kundera (p. 115), she asserts, is not "a question of taste, it's a question of heart" (p. 126), and clearly, Le Brun's heart is in the right place! Stripped of the insults and the paranoia, Le Brun's point about the theory and practice of Créolité being inseparable from a new

and media-constructed exoticism is not, however, without merit. Are Chamoiseau and Confiant not playing to and entrapped by the French literary market, and to what extent can any francophone writer escape this trap and still gain some measure of success? Might not the work of these two prolific authors be a little less “mediocre” if rather than blasting out product at the rate of a book a year they spent somewhat more time crafting their oeuvre (a question that could itself be turned against Le Brun, who has written many a tome, as she puts it in a book on Sade, “quickly, very quickly,” spurred on by “a strange interior haste” [1986:322], and who in *Statue* proudly claims to have written the pamphlet *Pour Aimé Césaire* in ten days [p. 11]).

Equally valid, up to a point, is her second main criticism of Confiant and the authors of the *Eloge*: despite their rhetoric of hybridity and inclusiveness, they are in practice very dogmatic and exclusionary when it comes to their “likes and dislikes” and their “dos and don’ts.” This authoritarian tone can be at least in part accounted for by the fact that, as she put it in *Pour Aimé Césaire*, “the inventors of Créolité are imitating ... those who champion a new American moral order” (1994:20). Le Brun elaborates upon this claim at length in *Statue*: in accusing Césaire of not being “créolement correct” (p. 39), Confiant and the other “followers of this new sect” have transformed themselves into “witch hunters” who are “thus imitating the rabble who are behind America’s moral revival, tracking down everything that’s not ‘politically correct’” (p. 38). The long-standing *ressentiment* of French radicals with regard to the United States gets metonymically transferred onto the shoulders of these *Français d’outre-mer*, whose repeated calls for her to mind her own (white woman’s) business are cited as evidence not only of their mimetic attachment to the “lies of multiculturalism” (p. 15), which ultimately promote mindless conformity rather than true diversity (p. 121), but quite simply of their racism and sexism, which find expression not only in their counter-attacks on her (pp. 59-60) but in the anti-semitic (pp. 62-68) and anti-mulatto (pp. 68-70) sentiments that have occasionally surfaced in interviews with Confiant and in his journalistic writings and that cause Le Brun to speak at several points of his “*national-créolisme*” (pp. 40, 63). Notwithstanding Le Brun’s simplistic scapegoating of “political correctness,” there can be no question that Confiant and Chamoiseau have not taken kindly to any criticisms of their work or their ideas and that they have shown a penchant for anathematizing their opponents that has perhaps more to do with the sort of strong-man tactics that have long dogged Caribbean political life than with the current obsessions of moralizing U.S. academics. Be that as it may, if it is legitimate to ask, as

Confiant and Chamoiseau do, what right the white, French, non-creole-speaking Le Brun has to comment on their “family” quarrel with “Papa” Césaire, to “colonize their text,” it is equally legitimate to point out that denying her this right (“it’s a black, Caribbean, Creole thing, you wouldn’t understand”) not only testifies to a “stalinist” intolerance (p. 171), but is in obvious contradiction with their post-identitarian rhetoric – a conjunction of identity politics and *métissage* that is thus as basic to Chamoiseau and Confiant as it was to Senghor. (How) can one *legitimately* choose between these two positions? Such is the (unanswerable but inescapable) question that the Le Brun-Confiant debate raises with a clarity and intensity that will make this exchange one of the obligatory points of reference in both francophone and postcolonial studies.

The authoritarian conduct of the anti-authoritarian advocates of Créolité is symptomatic of a larger contradiction at work in the poetics of creolization that the authors of the *Eloge* are, in the wake of Glissant, promoting – a contradiction that Le Brun sums up (and this is the third main point of her critique) in the phrase “*totalitarisme soft*” (p. 41). Glissant’s enthusiastic advocacy of diversity – his emphasis on creolization, relationality, and chaos – serves only to mask, according to Le Brun, the spread of a “globally generalized Club Méditerranée” (p. 43): the author of *Poétique de la Relation*, in a more subtle and productive but no less dangerous way than disciples like Chamoiseau and Confiant, is fiddling while Rome does not so much burn as transfigure itself into a seductively “soft” gulag. Asserting that “it is difficult to see in this patchwork ideology, in each of these different phrases ‘creolization of the world,’ ‘chaos-world,’ or *tout-monde*, to cite Glissant’s terms, anything more than an elaborate cover that serves to camouflage the [negative] realities we are living” (p. 41), Le Brun aligns these Caribbean advocates of *métissage* with “reactionary” thinkers in France: “it’s illuminating that their arguments about the creolization of the world coincide with those of the ‘dominant thinking,’ which, from Julia Kristeva to Michel Serres and all the rest of what’s chic in Paris, without even mentioning America and its penchant for correctness, is aiming through their apologies of diversity towards a standardization of the world that could not be more catastrophic” (p. 42). For Le Brun, the thinking of “diversity” and cross-cultural “relations” ultimately amounts to a renunciation of real difference, a capitulation to “la pensée dominante,” and the consecration “of a world reduced to a supermarket of changing tastes, where everyone can choose the cultural gadget appropriate for the whim of the moment” (p. 42). This vision of a compromised and compromising global supermarket, and the threat of cultural homogenization that it poses, is one with a long history: a

commonplace since at least the time of the French Revolution in both conservative and revolutionary critiques of modernity, it has been equally prevalent in the countless objections that have been made over the past several decades against a leveling postmodernity. If Le Brun's invocation of this vision in her attack on what some might want to interpret as a "transcendent" postcolonial alternative to modernity is salutary, this is not because it directs us back to the subversive radicalism that she wants to privilege in opposition to Glissant's complicitous "chaos-monde," but because it reminds us that this creolized and creolizing world, in all its relational complexity, is one that simply cannot be read unilaterally (be it positively, as with Lionnet, or negatively, as with Le Brun).

In making this critique of creolization as a concept that colludes with global homogenization, Le Brun not only identifies parallels between "diversifying" Caribbean thinkers and "reactionary" European ones but emphasizes – in a move that is reminiscent not only of Léro but also of V.S. Naipaul – the extent to which the authors of the *Eloge* are mimic men, enslaved by (the wrong) European ideas: "it's hardly astonishing that these manufacturers have as their intellectual point of reference the fashionable European values of the likes of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, whereas by contrast Césaire – whom they never stop denouncing for his attachment to Western values – relied on those who, from Rimbaud to Breton, by way of Schœlcher, Frobenius, Leiris, or Lautréamont ... have the most radically questioned these values. That's to say," she adds, in case there might be any doubt as to the identity of these heroic Europeans, "those who have shown us that freedom cannot be manufactured but only invented, dangerously, and that there is no other path that can be taken if a point of view is to become a vision" (p. 45). Once again, Le Brun's sarcastic emphasis on the hypocrisy of Westernized thinkers accusing a writer like Césaire of being Westernized is extremely well taken (as is her frequently repeated assertion that in order to be logically and morally consistent the authors of the *Eloge* ought to have published it in Creole), but the inadequacies, and the totalitarianism, of her own thinking is equally in evidence in a passage such as this. Be like Rimbaud or else! There is no other way to transform your point of view into a vision! Le Brun's disdainful references to "the manufacturers of ideology, their flatterers and their adherents, eager to stuff themselves with certitudes," as she put it in the first pamphlet (1994:22), are all very well and fine but when push comes to shove she is as filled with certitudes as the next man or woman and, in her own small way, as "homogenizing" as the dominant system she so sanctimoniously rejects: Schœlcher, Rimbaud, Frobenius (!) – all engaged in one and the same struggle! These are the good guys, who

have truth on their side: men (always men!) like André Breton, whose embarrassingly romanticized *Martinique charmeuse de serpents* (1948) is lovingly and naively offered up over the course of twenty pages (pp. 129-49) as an example of “his refusal of exoticism” (p. 132), without even the slightest nod to the possibility that it might also be infused – as it most certainly is – with risible and objectionable exoticizing and colonial stereotypes; but most of all, men like the Marquis de Sade, virtually indistinguishable as far as Le Brun is concerned from Toussaint Louverture, whose “intellectual integrity” he shares (p. 161) and who, like the divine Marquis, was committed to “denouncing the snares of humanism” (p. 158) and combating “the lie of Enlightenment” (p. 163). Taking up the last third of *Statue*, the chapters on Breton and “the strange objectivity whereby the Sadian exception and the black revolution of Saint-Domingue link up with one another” (pp. 151-64) are a distressing, if unintentionally humorous, example of the lengths to which (French) intellectuals will go in the attempt at establishing their “subversive” credentials, and readers with the slightest sensitivity to postcolonial issues will doubtless find the credibility of Le Brun’s pamphlet badly damaged by their inclusion.

Self-important, paranoid, hyperbolic, ridiculous, patronizing ... all of these adjectives could be applied to various patches of *Statue cou coupé*; on the other hand, the authors of the *Eloge*, and Confiant in particular, do not come out of this trans-Atlantic encounter smelling particularly rosy either. This vitriolic struggle between a certain France and a certain Martinique, which itself re-plays (as I argue in my forthcoming *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* [Stanford UP]) the debates that pitted the “compromised” mulatto abolitionist Cyrille Bissette and the “radical” French politician Victor Schœlcher against one another in the 1840s, will not result in the moral victory of one or the other. There can be no definitive choice between these two sides, between the (self-)righteous violence of the French critic’s “pure,” revolutionary, and yet also (neo)colonial discourse, and that of her francophone opponents who, as Le Brun has convincingly demonstrated, and as their own critical practice has so often (if not always intentionally) revealed, occupy the same resolutely “impure” middle ground of conjuncture and conjugation envisioned by the (un)assimilated likes of Senghor and Gratiant half a century ago. As I have attempted to suggest here, it is on this ambivalent (lack of a) ground that the difficult but necessary enterprise of francophone literature(s) situates us, in opposition to and in dialogue with the various subversive and transcendent “academicisms” that would

betray the uncertain liberty of the *métis* in the name of their inhuman, all-too-human certitudes.

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