Eva Sansavior & Richard Scholar (eds.)


In her polemical exchange with the Creolité writers, Annie Le Brun attacked a 1991 article by Milan Kundera, which praised the work of Patrick Chamoiseau, as part of a conspiracy by French intellectuals and publishers to launch a “new exoticism.” She warned that global creolization was merely the latest fad applied to the Caribbean in a “supermarket of changing tastes” (_Statue coup coupé_, 1996, p. 42). Despite the at-times vitriolic tone of her critique, she had a point: there has always been a risk of stereotyping the Caribbean in terms of sweeping theories to comply with the changing tastes of the West’s intellectual “supermarket.” The concrete and the specific invariably get swept aside as the region is turned into an ahistorical signifier for theories of resistance, carnival, magic, and métissage. _Caribbean Globalizations_ raises fears of a recurrence of Le Brun’s “new exoticism.” This time the region is the exemplary site in “a globally generalized Club Méditerranée.” Richard Scholar envisioned “a globe made up of a myriad Caribbeans all engaged in the cultural process characteristic of the region” (p. 33).

The collection starts unpromisingly with a now-familiar speech by Chamoiseau which argues for seeing the exemplary writer as a warrior of the imaginary. The talk, which includes the requisite nod to Milan Kundera, is made up of verbose and unilluminating riffs on Édouard Glissant’s ideas which sound particularly tortured and pretentious in English. This is not helped by the translator’s carelessness. Among the many infelicities, we read that “the author contrived a place for themself [sic] within their own imaginary and those of their place and time [sic],” and the “The Faulknerian text exorcizes without speech or ostensio [sic]” (p. 2).

Interdisciplinary in nature, the collection is divided into early and late globalization. The literary gets short shrift in a collection of essays whose selection seems arbitrary. However, the editors, neither of whom is a Caribbeanist, are essentially literary scholars. The Caribbean is apparently for them a means of globalizing the French canon. Scholar uses the trope of the archipelago to link Glissant’s late nonfiction with early modern European cartographic literature. He locates the point of departure of Glissant’s global vision “in his home island, Martinique, in the heart of the Caribbean archipelago” (p. 34). It is hard to imagine less appropriate terms for describing Glissant’s thought. If the archipelago has become Glissant’s quintessential concept of dwelling in the world, it is not because it is “home,” but because it is decentered and transgressive in nature, destabilizing categories of near and far, inside and outside. Scholar goes on...
to present Glissant as indebted to Deleuze for concepts of root and rhizome that Glissant attempted to “transplant” and “embed” in the “Caribbean ground” (p. 36), later “grafting” Utopia “from the soil of early modern Europe on to the vegetation of the Caribbean archipelago” (p. 41). Since he has read only the “late” Glissant he is unaware that well before Deleuze distinguished arborescent from rhizomatic thought, Glissant reflected, in *L’intention poetique*, on the question of arborescent imagery in terms of problematizing the One versus the Multiple. Ideas here are apparently commodities that still travel along imperial routes and Martinique is merely a passive space for “grafting” and “transplanting” concepts from the metropolitan “supermarket.”

Also in the first section, Eva Sansavior focuses on globalizing Montaigne via Maryse Condé. She makes the case for seeing Montaigne as bracingly modern, but Condé does not come off well in this encounter. The choice of Condé’s essay “O Brave New World,” which is essentially about the transatlantic artistic encounters in Paris, needs to be explained, particularly since Christy Wampole has used Montaigne much more interestingly in a 2013 essay in *Small Axe* (“Essayism and the Multiplication of Possibility in Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Biblique des derniers gestes*”) to discuss the essay form among French Caribbean writers.

The two literary chapters in the late globalization section of the book are Charles Forsdick’s essay on Glissant’s *Postcolonial Manifestoes*, which is not so much a treatment of the politics of Glissant’s philosophy as a thorough and informative survey of Glissant’s activism in his final years, and Martin Munro’s “Tropical Apocalypse,” which positions the region as a precursor to the apocalyptic abyss of globalization. Munro’s essay, which brings the volume to a thoughtful close, is both interdisciplinary and pan-Caribbean in scope in examining the close link between forced modernity and transformational catastrophe in the Caribbean imaginary. The book’s nonliterary essays, except for Christopher L. Miller’s oddly personal family history, generally sustain Munro’s somber tone in their foregrounding of the Caribbean’s fated involvement in global material histories. While there is much to be learned from individual essays, this ambitious collection is neither satisfying in the breadth of its coverage nor in its contribution to Caribbean studies. Ultimately, a volume such as this one seems to confirm Annie Le Brun’s worst fears.

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