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Creolizing Narratives across Languages: Selvon and Chamoiseau

I have never thought of myself as an 'exile' [. . .].
I carried my little island with me, and far from assimilating
another culture or manner, I delved deeper into
an understanding of my roots and myself.
(Selvon, *Finding West Indian Identity* 38)

Mon souci dans un premier temps a été de porter l'écrit à réassumer
cet héritage oral tout en utilisant des stratégies de l'écriture.
Il faut que les écrivains récupèrent ce fond cultural oral de façon creative.
(Chamoiseau qtd. in Glaser and Pausch 154)

The cultural and linguistic creolization[1] that resulted from the colonial uprooting of African, European and Asian populations has imprinted itself on the history of the Caribbean. For the last fifty years, English and French Caribbean writers, linguists and philosophers such as Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, Edouard Glissant and Jean Bernabé, have proposed that this dynamic be approached as a constitutive feature of Caribbean identity, a feature that surfaces in cultural expressions such as written literature. In general terms, literary creolization could be defined as the textual expression of the syncretism and hybridity that is part of Caribbean societies. In a narrow sense, which I will adopt here, it refers to the literary use of Creole Caribbean vernacular languages and traditions.[2] As a textual representation, literary creolization is part of the semiotic framework of each narrative. As such, there are as many forms of creolization as there are books. However, as a literary activity, it is also constrained by underlying rules that have been determined, at least in part, by the school of thought or the literary movement to which the work belongs, and by the wider polysystem[3] that has produced it. In short, it is constructed by the interaction of literary, political and linguistic factors operating within a local/global dialectics.

While a number of studies have explored literary creolization in French

or English Caribbean fiction,[4] few comparative textual analyses have been undertaken so far. Drawing from my doctoral research in translation studies,[5] I offer a contribution to such analyses by contrasting the works of two Caribbean novelists belonging, respectively, to Anglophone and Francophone communities: Sam Selvon (Trinidad) and Patrick Chamoiseau (Martinique). These two writers were among the first to extend the use of Creole to narration and show that, beyond serving as a vehicle for literary realism, Creole and Creolization can be a way of shaping new narrative styles.

In line with Lane-Mercier's framework, this analysis is based on the assumption that creating, interpreting and rephrasing literary dialects and sociolects—such as Creole languages in French/English literature—is a strategic activity which engages literary, cultural, political and linguistic subjectivity. By taking this stance and following recent cross-cultural studies (see Maximin, *Littératures caribéennes comparées*; Torres-Saillant; Balutansky et al.; Lang), this paper analyzes the interaction between the many factors that come into play: What are Selvon's and Chamoiseau's explicit literary projects? How do they realize them? How do they formally creolize their narratives? To what extent is their literary work constrained by local political, literary and linguistic norms? And, conversely, how can their work contribute to changing these norms? Finally, what do these works reveal about the particular challenges of literary creolization in the French- and English-speaking worlds?

This paper will focus on the following texts: Sam Selvon's "London Trilogy" composed of *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975) (winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize), and *Moses Migrating* (1983); and three novels by Chamoiseau: *Chronique des sept misères* (1986), *Solibo magnifique* (1988) and *Texaco* (1992) (winner of the Prix Goncourt). I will start from the conclusions of previous studies in which Selvon's and Chamoiseau's fictions were treated separately and will refer to excerpts from the novels in order to illustrate, when necessary, particular points and features.

Different contexts: literary, political and linguistic background

Published in 1956 and 1986 respectively, *The Lonely Londoners* and *Chronique des sept misères* are among the first fully creolized Caribbean novels—by which I mean novels using Creole in narration—to capture an international audience. As such, they are both landmarks because they sig-

nal the arrival and recognition of an esthetics of creolization for a global readership. This is why, despite the thirty-year gap between them, these works can be compared. Indeed, since the sixties, and following Selvon, Anglo-Caribbean writers have explored the expressive potential of vernacular languages and traditions so that the current literary representation of English Creole, although not unproblematic, is by no means as subversive as it was in Selvon's time. The situation is quite different in the French-speaking world where attitudes toward the literary use of Creole are highly controversial and where, with the exception of Haiti, political independence has not yet been attained.[6]

Although political sovereignty is no longer an issue in most of the English-speaking Caribbean, it was a real concern for the writers of Selvon's generation, just as it is a major concern for the current novelists of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Selvon and Chamoiseau emerge from two different societies and historical moments in which, however, identity and literary issues are closely related. Indeed, in both cases, literature has contributed in a very direct way to the construction of collective identities largely defined in opposition to those imposed by the colonial powers. In this framework, critics of both authors' narratives have paid particular attention to the question of literary and linguistic authenticity. The authors have sometimes been acclaimed by their compatriots for contributing to the authentic expression of Creole language and culture, while, at other times, they have been criticized for remaining too conscious of the European public. Yet, they were also often perceived as serving two masters at the same time, as being trapped in a kind of double bind between the need to express their own language and culture (that is, to interpret them in the artistic sense), and their need to communicate them (that is, to interpret them in the heuristic sense) to a non-Caribbean audience (Akai, D'Costa, Confiant). In this particular case, far from being purely metaphorical, the double bind is also a linguistic one.

Indeed, as part of the Caribbean world, Selvon and Chamoiseau both belong to linguistic communities described as polydialectal: in these communities, different languages/speech forms are reserved for specific spheres of communication. They cohabit, so to speak, and tend to influence one another in the long run. Although the total number of languages/speech forms involved in each local context (Trinidad/Martinique) may exceed two, linguists tend to analyze and present the overall situation in binary terms, mainly through the concept of "continuum" in the English

Caribbean, or that of "diglossia" in the French territories. In both cases, a formerly colonial language with high prestige, reserved for formal and written communication, is opposed to the vernacular—English-based for Trinidad and French-based for Martinique—a language with lower sociolinguistic status used for informal and oral communication.[7] It is important to note that although they were published, distributed and read primarily outside of the Caribbean in French- or English-speaking areas respectively, Chamoiseau and Selvon could on no account assume any knowledge of Creole languages on the part of their readership, particularly since they were pioneers in creating a creolized narrative style for an international audience. In other words, they had to produce some kind of adaptation. Hence, the notion that such Caribbean novels might be regarded as translations, or at least as texts relying heavily on translation processes between French and English and their respective Creoles, has been frequently advanced by critics who deal with both the French texts (see Bernabé, *De la négritude*; Jonassaint, DeSouza, Hazaël-Massieux, *Écrire en créole*; Confiant, Jones) and the English ones (see Akai, Bandia, Lowry Weir, Ashcroft et al.).

While the Trinidadian English Creole that inspired Selvon could be defined, with respect to the theory of continuum, as a mesolectal variety (see note 6), the Creole used in Martinique has more basilectal elements which distinguish it from Standard French. To give a few examples, articles are usually placed after the nouns in French Creole, whereas they precede nouns in French, English and Trinidadian English Creole (TEC). Similarly, where Trinidadian Creole uses the English particles "does," "did" and "go" to express time and aspect, French Creole uses the forms "ka," "té" and "ké" that are further away from Standard French. Different constraints and opportunities in terms of literary creolization result from these linguistic differences. Since they draw on a more basilectal Creole, French Caribbean writers such as Chamoiseau also have a wider range to cover and more translation or adaptation to produce if they want to represent Creole for a non-Creole audience than a Trinidadian writer such as Selvon, who started with a more anglicized Creole.

The pre-text

Sam Selvon was born in Trinidad in 1923. He sailed to Great Britain in 1950, and remained in London for twenty-eight years before heading to Calgary where he spent the rest of his life. Despite these moves, Selvon

never considered himself an uprooted writer. Unlike Neil Bissoondath or V.S. Naipaul, he liked to define himself as a Caribbean writer, a writer who had built and nourished his West Indian identity through displacement. Indeed, whether in Port of Spain, London or Calgary, he explored, in writing, the expressive potential of his "little island's" (*Finding West Indian Identity*) oral languages and traditions: Trinidadian English Creole (TEC) and calypso. In *The Lonely Londoners*, a novel in which the experiences of the generation of West Indians who settled in London in the fifties are depicted with humour and compassion, he provides all his emigrant characters and the narrator with an in-group language, which he refers to as a "modified Trinidadian dialect" (Selvon in Nasta, *Critical Perspectives* 67). This language expresses not only the common fate, but also the mood, of these marginalized emigrants, as well as their need for a sense of place. In *Moses Ascending*, he pushes the experiment further, using a wider range of dialects and literary styles, parodying the language of the new generation of Black Britons and their Black Power ideology. Finally, in *Moses Migrating*, he takes up another challenge: that of writing landscape descriptions in dialectal style. Calypso is no doubt the main oral tradition that shaped Selvon's esthetics.[8] It originated in Trinidad and remains a major element of Trinidadian folk culture.[9] According to Donnell et al., it is in this cultural form "that we can finally locate a working-class uneducated voice representing its own perception of cultural and social issues, as opposed to the conscious downward gaze of the intellectual and writer" (125). Just like those of calypso singers—commonly called calypsonians—Selvon's narratives feature mainly working-class characters/narrators, settings and language. The favorite themes of calypso—satirical social, political, racial or sexual commentary—are usually developed through anecdotes that make extensive use of humorous devices such as puns, stereotyping and exaggeration. Although it is not about calypso, *The Lonely Londoners* uses calypso in many ways (see Fabre in Nasta, *Critical Perspectives*; Nasta, *Setting up*; Ramchand; Rohlehr; Warner). The narrative unfolds as a kind of ballad with a rhythm that seems to follow the meanderings of the boys in the capital. The structure is episodic, the tone anecdotal and comical, and the characters are colourful individuals—known only by their nicknames—whose main interests and concerns are similar to those found in calypso (social commentary, political topical issues, sex, economic problems, and so on). Parody and masquerade are omnipresent, particularly in *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating* (see Tiffin, Dickinson, Warner-Lewis), but also in *The Lonely Londoners*, which Thieme describes as a "West Indian Carnival Seminal text" (194).

Patrick Chamoiseau's work, which remains in progress, finds its explicit basis in an essay entitled *Éloge de la créolité*.[10] This manifesto, written in collaboration with the novelist Raphaël Confiant and linguist Jean Bernabé, lays out a Creolist philosophical, literary and political agenda. Its underlying philosophy is to a great extent influenced by Glissant's. In the same vein as Glissant's *Le discours antillais*, the manifesto recommends "annihilation de la fausse universalité, du monolinguisme et de la pureté" (28), and substitution of the concept of "root" by that of "rhizome." As far as literature is concerned, five guidelines are put forward: "l'enracinement dans l'oral" (34), meaning a desire to revive and promote vernacular traditions such as story-telling; "la mise à jour de la mémoire vraie" (37); "la thématique de l'existence" (39); "l'irruption dans la modernité" (42) as a way to transcend indigenist movements ; "le choix de la parole" (43), which refers to the literary use of Creole language. While refusing to "idolize Creole," Bernabé et al. regard this language as "une force expressive" and want the Creole novelist to be completely open to the whole linguistic "spectrum" offered by society. The aim is not necessarily to write in Creole, but to creolize French and to use as many registers and languages as possible in a creative way. Of this esthetic principle, Chamoiseau's novels provide the most successful illustration (Hazaël-Massieux, "À propos").

The five guidelines of the manifesto are all interrelated: while asserting its wish to be turned toward the future and modernity, the *créolité* movement shares an ontological approach to the search for identity with that of *Négritude*, an approach aimed at "la mise à jour de la mémoire vraie" (Bernabé et al. 37) and reaching "l'authenticité créole" (Ludwig 152). According to Confiant and Chamoiseau, this authenticity resides in the speech of the traditional Creole storyteller. Unlike the calypsonian who remains a popular figure—particularly during carnival—this traditional storyteller has begun to disappear in the wake of urbanization; hence, in the view of Bernabé et al., it is the writer's duty to revive this tradition. Though published three years before *Éloge de la créolité*, Chamoiseau's first novel expresses much of the essence of this manifesto. The novel presents itself as the story of the "'grandeurs et décadences' de sept djobeurs[11] de Fort-de-France," the recollection of bits and pieces of a History "en grande partie tronquée." It is an attempt to preserve "des échantillons de paroles perdues" (Phirmis 162). In *Solibo magnifique* and *Texaco*, the author recreates the discursive setting of traditional story-telling, featuring a narrator "qui s'inspire du style du conteur sans jamais l'épouser tout à fait" (Phirmis 163). As such,

the novels constantly revolve around issues of memory and social mutations (the transition from orality to literacy, from rural to urban society). The following excerpt from *Éloge de la créolité* gives an idea of the political issues and questions of identity that inform linguistic considerations:

> Le créole, notre langue première à nous Antillais, Guyanais, Mascarins, est le véhicule originel de notre moi profond, de notre inconscient collectif, de notre génie populaire, elle demeure la rivière de notre créolité alluviale. Avec elle nous rêvons. Avec elle nous résistons et nous acceptions. Elle est nos pleurs, nos cris, nos exaltations. Elle irrigue chacun de nos gestes. Son étiolement n'a pas été une seule ruine linguistique, la seule chute d'une branche, mais le carême total d'un feuillage, l'agenouillement d'une cathédrale. L'absence de considération pour la langue créole n'a pas été un simple silence de bouche mais une amputation culturelle [. . .]. Si bien qu'aujourd'hui, ce serait stérilisation que de ne pas réinvestir cette langue. Son usage est l'une des voies de la plongée en notre créolité. Aucun créateur créole, dans quelque domaine que ce soit, ne se verra jamais accompli sans une connaissance intuitive de la poétique de la langue créole. L'éducation artistique (la rééducation du regard, l'activation de la sensibilité créole) impose comme préalable une acquisition de la langue créole dans sa syntaxe, dans sa grammaire, dans son lexique le mieux basilectal, dans son écriture la plus appropriée (cette dernière fut-elle éloignée des habitudes françaises) dans ses intonations, dans ses rythmes, dans son âme, [. . .] dans sa poétique. (44-45)

In other words, Creole novelists must not only speak Creole, they must master its most basilectal (and traditional) form.

Selvon, on the other hand, did not really seem concerned about asserting the distinctiveness of TEC, and did not claim TEC legitimacy on the grounds of linguistic distinctiveness. In fact, he readily admitted having absolutely no theoretical knowledge of TEC (Selvon in Nasta, *Critical Perspectives* 79). Was the argument of Creole as a distinct language sustainable in his case? A few linguists such as Lise Winer would probably answer in the affirmative. Others would say the opposite, and a few, like Mervyn Morris, would even argue that such an issue may not be particularly relevant. Indeed, there is another way of approaching this question: to account for the difference in the literary use of Creole, one must consider not only the differences in the actual varieties spoken in the authors' society at the time they wrote, but also the speech forms which the authors used as a landmark and with which they identified. In this respect, it is clear that Chamoiseau looks for a past, very basilectal Creole, and works alongside linguists like Bernabé who contributed to its codification. Selvon, on the other hand, who left Trinidad for London in 1950, found his inspiration not only in Trinidadian English Creole, but also in the speech of the Caribbean emigrants who settled in London in the fifties.

Hence, as far as the explicit project is concerned, it is clear that by using

Caribbean oral languages and traditions, both Selvon and Chamoiseau wish to contribute to shaping and expressing a Caribbean identity. However, while the former does it by dealing extensively, though not exclusively, with issues arising from geographic migration, the latter is, above all, preoccupied with ongoing social and cultural mutations taking place within Martinique. In a very simplified way, one could say that with Selvon, identity appears as something that can be transplanted from one place to another (hence built through geographic migrations), while with the Créolité movement, at least for Chamoiseau, it is to be located in a particular space (hence, built through changes in time). This difference in focus appears clearly in the very first lines of their narratives: while *The Lonely Londoners* opens on a "tracking shot" of Moses, a Trinidadian Londoner who "hop on" a bus "to go" and fetch an emigrant "coming out of the boat-train," *Solibo Magnifique* starts with the description of a fixed scene that is localized in a particular place—Fort-de-France—but deliberately diffuse in time.

> One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet, Moses Aloetta hop on a number 46 bus at the corner of Chepstow Road and Westbourne Grove to go to Waterloo to meet a fellar who was coming from Trinidad on the boat-train. (*TLL* 7)

> Au cours d'une soirée de carnaval à Fort-de-France, entre dimanche Gras et mercredi des Cendres, le conteur Solibo Magnifique mourut d'une égorgette de la parole, en s'écriant: Patat' sa !... Son auditoire n'y voyant qu'un appel au vocal crut devoir répondre: Patat' si !... Cette récolte du destin que je vais vous conter eut lieu à une date sans importance puisque ici le temps ne signe aucun calendrier. (*Solibo magnifique* 25)

Selvon's first sentence is saturated with markers suggesting endless movements in space (image of London as "a strange place on another planet," action verbs, names of places, prepositions "from" and "to"). Chamoiseau's contains multiple time references (*soirée, dimanche, mercredi, destin, date, calendrier*).

How does one creolize, and to what extent?

How do Selvon's and Chamoiseau's Creole projects manifest themselves in literary form and practice? The texts need to be studied from both linguistic and narrative points of view. The former underscores questions about the kind of linguistic features (lexical, syntactic, phonological and prosodic) used by the authors while the latter focuses on the places in the narrative in

which these features occur (that is, description, narration of non-discursive events, narration of discursive events—or indirect speech—and dialogue).

Reading Chamoiseau's works, one realizes quickly that creolization starts above all at the lexical level, through the use of Creole words. Lexical creolisms can be divided into three groups: 1) semantic shifts, that is, terms of French form and origin having acquired a different meaning in Creole (for example, *virer*);[12] 2) neologisms built by processes of derivation (for example, *déparler* meaning "talking nonsense"), composition (for example, *son poser-rein*), or conversion (*le manger*); 3) literary neologisms that Chamoiseau has created using similar processes, but which do not necessarily exist beyond the text (for example, *instructionné, haillonné*).[13] While both authors rely on lexical features, they do not do so to quite the same extent, nor in the same way. These three categories are also present in Selvon's texts: one may find English words or expressions with a new meaning (*test* meaning a young "saga boy," *ignorant* meaning "aggressive") and, to a greater extent, neologisms by derivation (*stupidness* in constructions such as "it used to have pigeons like stupidness" [*TLL* 107],[14] conversion (*to dead*), or composition (*old-talk* meaning "to chat with friends") and, mostly in *Moses Ascending*, literary neologisms (for example, *salutatory, integrade, grudgedity, touchous* for "touchy").[15]

Lexical creolisms in Chamoiseau's narrratives are much more frequent and visible than in Selvon. The setting of the novels, Martinique and London respectively, might partly explain this difference. While Chamoiseau's characters are surrounded by the natural and cultural realities of the Caribbean, Selvon's Caribbean characters are also part of the British landscape and face British cultural realities on a daily basis. However, beyond that, it is worth mentioning that, in Selvon's narratives, most words that are probably formally and semantically opaque to the non-Creole reader—for example a *test, liming, to old talk*—are used in relatively explicit contexts and are so recurrent that, by and by, they become familiar. By contrast, Chamoiseau multiplies polysemy and ambiguities. As some commentators have noted (see DeSouza), they may sometimes make reading the text rather difficult for both non-creolophone and creolophone.

As far as syntax is concerned, Hazaël-Massieux (in *A propos*), and Deltel and N'Zengou-Tayo have pointed out a number of processes at work in Chamoiseau's fictions. The most recurrent are the following: article or preposition omission in particular contexts such as Verb/Noun+complement (*trous nez, danser calende*), choice of prepositions according to Creole rather than French usage, use of Creole determiners and nominal construc-

tions, borrowing of Creole serial verbs like *partir-courir,* and substitution of French pronominal verbs by the Creole reflexive *corps* giving rise to constructions like *poser son corps* for *se poser.* As diverse as they may be, these syntactic adaptations all share a common feature: for the non-creolophone reader they can all be interpreted as lexical creolisms, or idiomatic expressions. Indeed, as noted by Hazaël-Massieux, fixed verb or noun phrases involving the elision of the article are very frequent in French.[16] Hence, by analogy, one may also perceive the phrases quoted above as instances of semi-fixed or fixed expressions rather than syntactic borrowings. This observation also applies to the reflexive *corps.* In short, these features that originate in Creole grammar only appear in contexts in which they can be to some extent interpreted by non-Creole readers as lexical idioms, reinforcing the somewhat misleading impression that Chamoiseau's creolization occurs primarily at a lexical level and enters the French text and language without apparently transgressing French grammatical rules. By contrast, Selvon's texts draw heavily on the predication system, morphology and sentence structures peculiar to the speech of Trinidad. They display a number of morphosyntactic features, which appear fully as such for Creole as well as non-Creole readers: *does* is used to express habitual activity rather than for emphasis, *go* and *did* mark future and past tense respectively, modals such as *had is/was* or *must be* are frequent, and the replacement of the impersonal phrase *there was* by *it have* is systematic. Other markers such as the use of nouns, adverbs or adjectives as predicators, or the absence of the possessive marker as well as the third-person verbal morpheme *s,* which are common to other varieties of English-based Creole, are also present, though not systematically so.[17]

With regard to phonology—usually conveyed in written form through graphic devices such as *eye dialect*—we note the most striking difference between the two authors: unlike Selvon, who uses standard (English) spelling throughout his text, Chamoiseau sometimes represents Martinican Creole in the way it was codified by Groupe d'Études et de Recherches en Espace Créolophone (GEREC), that is, in its most basilectal form with a phonetic spelling system. Although they do represent a very limited part of the text, these passages are particularly visible. Sometimes detached from the main body by italics, they are generally translated right after the Creole passage or in an accompanying footnote. The whole technique amounts to a kind of metalinguistic digression, reminding the reader that the text at hand is truly bilingual, that is, composed of two mutually unintelligible languages

with distinct forms and structures. By contrast, in Selvon's novels, there is no diglossic representation or instance of over-translation. Generally speaking, Chamoiseau tends to reduce the number of translated passages (Creole to standard French) in his later works. Indeed, in *Texaco*, the numerous footnotes introduce not so much examples of cultural or linguistic translation as long discursive digressions and asides. Far from fulfilling a didactic function, these footnotes are part of the discursive architecture of this novel, the main body of which is invaded by an increasing number of subtexts. According to Ménager's analysis, in this novel, the linguistic conflict between French and Creole is still present, but it is expressed in a more covert and subtle way.

It is in the area of prosody, the catching of tone, accents and rhythms, that Selvon's and Chamoiseau's styles finally meet. Using similar strategies, both try to suggest many prosodic traits associated with Creole orality. Besides a few standard features such as fixed word-order in interrogations (compensated for with a rising intonation), or the preference of co-ordination over subordination in complex sentences, they both make extensive use of emphatic devices. Repetitions, onomatopoeia, processes of topicalization (for example: "c'est tuer que je ne veux pas le tuer, c'est tuer que je ne veux pas" [*Texaco* 58], "in truth is that what happen to Henry" [*TLL* 10]), insertion of oui/non at the beginning or end of a particular assertion, forms of address and exclamatory phrases from Creole lexicon ("Well, Papa" [*TLL* 61]; "compère," "Doudou," "ti-bonhomme") have a particularly high frequency. It is no surprise that, when commenting on their literary use of the vernacular, both authors constantly focus on their attempt to capture the musicality of the language (Selvon, *Finding West Indian Identity*; Chamoiseau in Glaser and Pausch).

Where does creolization occur in the text?

Is there any relationship between the forms of creolization and the places, that is the narrative segments, in which they occur? In other words, do changes in narrative passages (such as the move from description to narration to indirect discourse) lead to changes in the forms of linguistic creolization?

At first glance, critics do not seem to agree on which parts of Chamoiseau's texts are the most creolized. Hazaël-Massieux (*A propos, Écrire en créole*) points out that narration is more creolized than dialogue whereas, in Jermann's view, it seems to be the other way round. In fact, these apparent contradictions reflect less a divergence of opinion than the

ambiguity surrounding words like "standard" or "creolized" French, as well as the difficulties related to differentiating between the regional, social and situational overtones that vernacular linguistic varieties carry with them. Indeed, syntactic features of Creole, which are sometimes similar to features more generally associated with oral communication (for example, the absence of word-order inversion in interrogative sentences, in the case of French), may readily evoke a colloquial speech style and create, above all, situational overtones. If these syntactic features are particularly numerous, as in the case of Selvon's text, they might be perceived as "deviant," at least outside of a Caribbean context, and may therefore be taken as an indication of the social background of the speaker. For their part, lexical items may appear in a highly formal style characteristic of written language, thereby creating mostly regional overtones without any social or even situational connotations.

Through linguistic devices, Chamoiseau cultivates and even reinforces the difference between the narration of discourse and that of events (see *Solibo* 25, 203; *Texaco* 61; see Hazaël-Massieux, *A propos*). Indeed, *Texaco* features a creolized formal French in which lexical creolisms predominate, while *Solibo* displays more syntactic features which create a more informal style. Using linguistic features as well, Selvon, however, blurs this distinction between narration of discourse and narration of events in *The Lonely Londoners*. In this novel, the narrative voice displays the same morpho-syntactic traits as those appearing in dialogue, and creates both regional and sociolinguistic overtones throughout, except for landscape descriptions that tend to appear in a more lyrical and standard style. By contrast, anecdotes, the depiction of characters, and both discursive and non-discursive events are related in a very colloquial register. Needless to say, dialogues sound "vernacular" in the fullest sense, that is, they display at once the three situational (oral), sociolinguistic (popular) and regional (Caribbean) features.

These observations can be partly explained by differences in narrative structure. Indeed, in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, the narrator constantly appears and behaves as a kind of storyteller, a performer addressing an audience. Most of the time, this narrator acts as if his reader were a listener and as if both of them, narrator and reader, were part of the fictional world described (Maximin, *Littératures caribéennes*). Chamoiseau's narrators also endorse this persona of the storyteller, but not systematically so and definitely not to such an extent. In fact, in Chamoiseau's *Chronique des sept*

misères, the storyteller represents only one side of a multi-faceted narrative structure. In other words, the voice of this storyteller is embedded in a highly complex and tightly structured narrative framework. So, on the whole, although there are some clear modulations as the narrative shifts from description to story-telling, the creolized style of *The Lonely Londoners* is more homogeneous and colloquial than that of *Chronique des sept misères*, not only at the linguistic level (as seen in the previous section), but also at the narrative one.

This conclusion only applies to the first novels, however. In the second and third novels of his London trilogy, Selvon allows his main character, Moses, to tell his own story. This character, who entertained the desire to "write a book what everybody would buy" (*TLL* 125), reappears in *Moses Ascending* as a narrator committed to the project of writing his memoirs. Not quite certain about the tone and style he should/could use, Moses mixes a wide range of language registers, from archaic English to the Rastafarian code, and highbrow (utopian, romantic, Victorian and realistic) literary styles. The whole book is a farce in which not only Moses' aspirations, but the styles themselves—or rather the prestige attached to them—are parodied. To use Warner-Lewis's expression, the result is pure "linguistic extravaganza" (60). This adjective could also describe *Solibo magnifique* where, according to Prat, Chamoiseau mixes the most mundane and the most erudite words, where he combines French with Creole, and multiplies "l'enchaînement baroque de gratuites métaphores filées" (209) using neologisms and snatches of Latin and Spanish. Hence, Selvon and Chamoiseau seem to follow the same path, distancing themselves from realism and moving toward a more parodic, self-consciously sophisticated and, to some extent, postmodern style. However, one major difference remains between their texts: as eclectic as it may seem, Moses' narrative voice remains at once regionally and socially marked, thus retaining two features of vernacular languages. In *Texaco* and *Solibo magnifique*, on the other hand, the narrative voice remains highly literary. To cite Perret, "Solibo parle le plus souvent un français impeccable (sauf dans son dit)" (836). This applies all the more to the "marker of speech," "cham-oiseau." In other words, the Martinican novelist chooses to maintain the distinction between narrative (literary) style and discursive (oral) speech. By contrast, we could say that Moses, the main character, and then the narrator of Selvon's London trilogy, remains a Trinidadian emigrant who has great literary ambitions and a tremendous linguistic appetite and creativity, but who

never quite forgets that he belongs to the working class.

It is within the narration of discursive events—that is, in indirect speech—that Selvon's and Chamoiseau's styles tend to converge. This narrative space is particularly worthy of examination because not only does it involve large sections of the text but, in Chamoiseau's novels at least, it constitutes the only area where the narrator tends to "speak" like his characters. Although they refer to distinct oral traditions, the calypsonian and the traditional storyteller share various characteristics that surface in these novels. These performers, who belong to folk culture, act not only as entertainers, but also as social commentators who contest the established order; they are supposed to "give a voice" to the people and, unlike the "Author," they do not claim to own their statements. As performers, they are both omnipresent[18] and transparent, ever ready to play different roles, to change their voice and embody a new persona. Selvon's and Chamoiseau's novels show how these characteristics can be re-enacted in written form. Selvon writes in such a way that his narrator seems to modulate his voice according to that of the characters described (see Thieme). He takes up their voice without acknowledging it and without inserting any typographic sign. By doing so, he blurs the distinction between direct and indirect speech and, consequently, the distinction between two levels of communication: that of the narrator and that of the actors. Chamoiseau recreates a similar effect by other means. While in *The Lonely Londoners* Selvon stages a unique polymorph narrator whose identity is vague enough to be occasionally mapped on to different characters, Chamoiseau chooses to multiply the number of narrative instances. Among them are the storyteller: Cham-oiseau. Following the storyteller's strategy, Cham-oiseau will learn how to "speak the language of those he speaks about" rather than "the language of those he speaks to" (Perret 835). This split in narrative instances is brought to an extreme in *Texaco*. As Ménager has shown, this novel uses three levels of narration. Although they can be distinguished stylistically and graphically, these three voices are closely intertwined, responding to each other in a "boucle parfaite [qui] cimente l'édifice entrepris: érection de la parole dans la solidification du livre imprimé" (62).

Hence, although they use different strategies, Selvon and Chamoiseau both succeed in bringing a "Creole voice" into narration. From the hybrid indirect discourse of Selvon's unique but polymorph calypsonian-like narrators, to the structural organization of multiple narrators in Chamoiseau's novels, these strategies have the common effect of creating solidarity

between the voices of the narrator and those of the characters, and of abolishing the distance between the narrative and the narrated worlds.[19] In terms of reception, these strategies create narratives that, according to Maximin's *Littératures caribéennes comparées*, could be defined as particularly participative ones. These characteristics are not exclusive to Selvon's and Chamoiseau's novels, but they certainly represent one of the main features of these works.

On linguistic resistance

The above analysis has revealed two quite distinct forms of literary creolization. Selvon creates narrative voices that are more popular because situational and social markers appear in discursive as well as narrative segments of the text. Linguistically speaking, his creolization relies primarily on syntactic features and remains relatively more accessible to non-creolophone readers (see Ashcroft et al., 70). The creolization produced by Chamoiseau, on the other hand, contributes to an esthetics that is at once more sophisticated and formal (the oral and colloquial features of vernacular appearing in discursive segments alone). It is drawn from a much larger linguistic spectrum, which runs the gamut from the most basilectal Creole—with GEREC's spelling—to the most pedantic French.

These differences are amplified in translation. In *L'ascension de Moïse*, the only one of Selvon's novels to have been published in French so far, translator Hélène Devaux-Minie prepares her reader for a literary style that she describes as "guère orthodoxe": "Moses n'est pas allé longtemps à l'école, sa grammaire et son orthographe s'en ressentent. Il écrit comme il parle. Il truffe son récit d'expressions ou de tournures créoles" (in Selvon, *L'ascension* ii). In short, Moses' discourse indicates both his regional and social background: in translation, the second aspect tends to take precedence. In a short afterword, Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov, who translated *Texaco*, confess their fear of having over-translated, that is, of having clarified too much what was deliberately left opaque and ambiguous in the original, and that might have become twice as ambiguous in translation. Although Jones castigates these translators for having rather under-translated Chamoiseau's text, the fact remains that the translators multiplied all available para-textual artifacts: they added a glossary at the end of the text, produced their own footnotes—differentiated from Chamoiseau's by way of brackets—and even added their own (literal) translations of the passages in French Creole when they felt that Chamoiseau's translation was not "faithful" enough.

As most critics have pointed out (see Perret; Hazaël-Massieux [*Écrire en*

créole]; De Souza; Morel in Haigh), the opacity of Chamoiseau's literary style is deliberate. This poetics of opacity finds its philosophical rationale in refusing the "totalitarisme de la vision cartésienne" (Ludwig 19), and in adopting an attitude that not only refutes the possibility of complete translation, but also the ideal of complete translation: "Pour aucune raison, l'autre ne doit être totalement transparent pour que je le comprenne parfaitement" (Chamoiseau qtd. in Glaser and Pausch 157). Technically speaking, this poetics is enacted through formal devices creating polysemic effects: there are endless chains of metaphors, free associations, puns, double entendres, and so on. In that respect, lexical creolisms become particularly interesting as, beyond their metaphorical potential, they offer an endless source of ambiguities when reinserted into an apparently French text. However, this opacity can also be understood in relation to the first guideline of Bernabé et al.: the desire to revive and renew oral traditions. In *Lettres créoles,* Confiant and Chamoiseau explain how the traditional storyteller developed what they call a *poétique du détour*. Working both within and against the plantation system, he was unable to speak directly; he had to mask his message and create invisible traps in order to organize clandestine resistance. By analogy, Morel interprets Chamoiseau's strategies of creolization as a modern adaptation of this *technique du détour* (in Haigh 158). By locating the fundamentals of his literary practice in traditional *oraliture*, Chamoiseau gives a new political dimension to this aesthetic of opacity: far from serving a creative purpose only, this aesthetic also becomes the expression of a political resistance. Resistance constitutes one of the four functions of the traditional tale (Chamoiseau and Confiant). As mentioned in the second section of this paper, resistance is also one of the *raisons d'être* of the *créolité* movement. The attitude is similar, but the motives and stakes can hardly be compared. Whereas in the past the slave's symbolic and physical death was at stake, in the current context of Chamoiseau's manifesto, a much more metaphorical death is at stake: the death of a cultural heritage and that of Creole language.

While Selvon's London novels tend to emphasize the need to transcend loneliness and the need to initiate a dialogue between emigrants and non-emigrants, between Caribbean and non-Caribbean Londoners, one of the highest stakes of esthetic opacity is a philosophical resistance to complete translation. At a more cultural-specific and pragmatic level, the author wishes to resist assimilation. For the advocates of *créolité,* however, there is yet another aspect to linguistic resistance. Without oversimplifying, one

could sum up the differences in terms of perspective: whereas Selvon seems to start from a vernacular, which he tries to represent in a way that is comprehensible to the non-Trinidadian reader, Chamoiseau prefers to creolize the French language, but in no way does he attempt to "frenchify" Creole. Indeed, "frenchifying" Creole, that is, trying to produce a "mesolectal" representation, would run counter to the linguistic policy of reaffirming the distinctness of (Martinican) Creole. From that point of view, one cannot fail to perceive, in the "ironic pedantry" (Prat 207) of Chamoiseau's narratives and in the predominance of lexical features over syntactic ones, the refusal to take any step that might make the reader forget that Creole and French are not the same language, and associate creolization with some sort of linguistic "corruption" or "bad language."

To grasp the interaction of local (individual) trends and global (institutional and historical) factors that structure the authors' esthetic positions, it is useful to look back to the 1930s, when the first anti-colonial intellectual and literary movements began to emerge in both the English and French Caribbean. At that time, the Jamaican poet and novelist Claude McKay, father of the Harlem Renaissance, was traveling and living in France. There, he wrote *Banjo* and *Road to Harlem*, two novels that were largely composed in a vernacular style inspired by Jamaican Creole and Black American English. Both novels were translated and published in French before they even appeared in English. Research has revealed McKay's influence on his intellectual contemporaries in the French Caribbean. Following Fabre (*Black*) and Mouralis, Robert P. Smith established a close link between the French translation of *Banjo*, read by the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, among others, and the creation of *Négritude*. In his view, the revolutionary ideals expressed in McKay's novel contributed to the foundation of *Légitime Défense*,"whose manifesto is considered by some to have been the point of departure of the intellectual awakening of the French Antilles" (53). McKay's influence on Césaire was great, but it was mainly ideological and theoretical, never esthetic. Yet, McKay's style, which is "à la source de la grande tradition du roman antillais, [. . .] puise ses formes dans la culture populaire [et . . .] revendique pour le parler du peuple un statut littéraire" (Fabre, "Postface" 329), seemed, at least in theory, in tune with the esthetic independently advocated by Bernabé et al. some fifty years later. In fact, contrary to McKay, Césaire chose a language and a style that were respectively as distant from Creole orality and realism as one could have imagined: a "magnified" French (*supra*) and a surrealistic style. As fragmentary as it may be,

here is how Bernabé et al. account for this surprising choice:

> À Césaire, une instinctive méfiance de la bâtardise dicta souvent d'ailleurs l'usage du français le plus culte, symétrique magnifié d'un créole impossible parce que encore à inventer en sa facture littéraire. Glissant, quant à lui, jamais ne se commit avec l'interlecte-cliché [. . .] [N]otre éloge de la créolité ne sera jamais celui de l'accroupissement désœuvré et infécond à faire autre chose que parasiter le monde. Or, toute une série de productions verbales peuvent aisément, si on n'y prend garde, faire fortune à se comporter en plantes épiphytes, enclines, de surcroît, à détourner le fleuve-langage de son embouchure créole. (49-50)

In other words, Césaire would have found expressive tools in surrealism because, in the thirties, Creole had not yet acquired a distinct status and writing in Creole was still impossible. Particularly in literature, Creole was represented and perceived as a vulgar *français-banane*, an illegitimate, ridiculous and stereotypical interlect—that is intermediate Creole/French variety—that was used to provide a derogatory label. The comments by Bernabé et al. show how French Caribbean writers have had to endure a rather painful heritage: the so-called *français-banane*, more generally referred to as *petit nègre*, still defined in *Le Grand Robert* as "français incorrect et sommaire parlé par les noirs africains dans les anciennes colonies françaises. Syn: *petit français, français tirailleur*.—Par ext. Mauvais français, ou style embarrassé. *S'exprimer en petit nègre*" (tome 6, 724). If the definition indicates the linguistic status associated with the referent—a status equivalent to that conveyed by the expression "broken English"—the semantic extension indicates the wide popularity of signifier and signified. Indeed, *petit-nègre* appears in colonial literature but also extends beyond: as Lavoie's work has revealed, it was sometimes used to recreate Black American English in conservative translations. It was also extensively used in famous comic books (*Tintin au Congo*), and in perennial best-selling children's books like those of La Comtesse de Ségur.[20] With such a background, one can understand why Césaire might have preferred to turn to surrealism rather than to dialectal realism and why the normative status of (Martinican/Guadeloupean) Creole, that is the official recognition of its distinctiveness, is so important to writers such as Bernabé et al. From that point of view, the rules underlying the literary representation of Creole within the *Creolité* movement also become clearer: it is acceptable to creolize, as long as the characters do not sound as if they were speaking some kind of broken French. Of course, English-based Creoles also had their share of stigmatizing representations in colonial literature and discourse. However, in this context, the interaction of formal linguistic factors (the

existence of continuum rather than diglossia) along with a more liberal attitude towards colloquial varieties[21] and language planning, led to something that would have hardly been conceivable in the French areas: the use, by Creole writers, of a mesolectal Creole not only on an internal basis, but as a "public" badge of identity, outside the community.[22] Recent analyses also point toward the increasing presence of mesolectal varieties in the French Caribbean linguistic landscape. However, as Prudent's thesis has shown, these varieties which exist at the performance level do not yet permeate the level of consciousness within the community, let alone outside it.

To sum up, one could say that, in the French Caribbean, the official (linguistic) recognition of Creole was, to some extent, a prerequisite for its literary use, whereas in the English Caribbean, the literary use of Creole that started in the thirties with McKay and continued more successfully in the fifties with Selvon, was a factor that contributed to its official linguistic recognition.[23] The particular histories of Creole discourse and of discourse on Creole—by Creole as well as non-Creole speakers—are an important explanatory factor in understanding the differences between Chamoiseau's and Selvon's literary projects. However, the above quotation from Bernabé et al. also points toward another less structural aspect that might be worth considering: namely, each author's deliberate positioning in his literary polysystem.

Beyond the Caribbean: Defining highbrow cultural representations

Casting a critical eye on the essays by Bernabé et al. and Glissant, one may wonder whether the wish to reject derogatory representations of Creole does not lead the *créolité* movement to reject illegitimate languages themselves. Indeed, Glissant claims that:

> [. . .] il nous faut opacifier le créole par rapport au français ou déstructurer le français par rapport au créole pour pouvoir maîtriser les deux, pour pouvoir sortir du "petit nègre." Il faut donc bien constituer l'originalité du créole par rapport au français et l'originalité du français par rapport au créole (la créolisation n'est en rien un méli-mélo). (40)

Bernabé et al. maintain that an "instinctive fear" of "bâtardise" drove Césaire to use the "purest" kind of French, and that contemporary writers now have to "manage" linguistic space in a "responsible" way.[24]

This movement from rejecting the stigmatizing representation of the object to rejecting the object itself becomes blatant in the way Bernabé et al. and Glissant compare the linguistic situation in the French and English Caribbean, and particularly in their eagerness to point out differences rather

than common features. Hence, for Confiant, it is important to distinguish between "'créole jamaïcain' ou plus généralement 'broken English' caribéen," et "'créole martiniquais' ou plus généralement 'créole à base lexicale française'" since, for him, the former is only "un dialecte plus ou moins éloigné de l'anglais" while the latter "est une langue à part entière" (Raguet-Bouvart 81). Similarly, Glissant seems very confident that "chez les écrivains anglophones, la présence du créole est assez lointaine [. . .] parce que dans ces régions la langue créole a disparu assez tôt et parce qu'il y a très longtemps qu'elles sont anglophones" (89). Taking this "statement" as a postulate, Glissant comes to the rather curious—and dubious—conclusion that there is no such a thing as linguistic "creolization" in the English Caribbean:

> Leur "créole" pervertit de l'intérieur les normes de la langue anglaise, réformant celle-ci. Ce qu'ils vivent de la créolisation c'est ce qui dépasse les langues: la créolisation culturelle, sociale, de mœurs, de comportements, mais ce n'est pas la créolisation linguistique. (89-90)

Hence, in his view, *dub* poetry is only "une déformation agressive, culturelle, militante, volontaire à l'intérieur d'*une* langue et une mise en question de l'unicité normative de cette langue pratiquées par un groupe de personnes qu'on connaît, dont on sait à quel moment elles ont commencé cette pratique et dont on sait peut-être à quel moment elles vont la finir" (42), while creolization should be more diffuse and unpredictable.

It is tempting to see in these objections, as well as in the whole attempt to dissociate real creolization from "bâtardise" or "méli-mélo," and to dissociate "real Creole" from the "British dialect," a normative attitude and somewhat elitist concept of creolization. Like the writing of twenties surrealist authors and of Latin American authors who have become popular in French translation since the sixties, Chamoiseau's opaque, baroque and highly sophisticated style is, from the first to the last novel, in tune with the formal criteria of the contemporary French literary canon. Written in a highly vernacular and not so overtly sophisticated style, *The Lonely Londoners*, at the time of its publication, was a marginal novel in more than one respect. Unlike Chamoiseau's, Selvon's texts, which have also been adapted for radio drama and published in episodes in popular newspapers, have not been immediately accepted by highbrow literary spheres. Not surprisingly, Selvon had to wait until the publication of *Moses Ascending*, a novel written in a more baroque and postmodern style, to gain the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, that is, an official recognition by the

"European" literary elite.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, the comparison of Selvon's and Chamoiseau's narratives reveals two original forms of literary creolization. Although both authors creolize their texts in the narrowest possible sense, introducing Creole languages and traditions to a wide audience, their projects and the way they have formalized them show clear and major differences. Closely following the calypsonian's attitude and drawing from the mesolectal Trinidad Creole-English, Selvon's fiction expresses in a rather popular idiom issues that, at his time, were, one assumes, highly topical to any West Indian: postwar emigration to Britain, the social and economic problems faced by emigrants, their disillusionment, and the rise of popular ideological movements, such as Black Power. On the other hand, inspired as much by vernacular Martinican traditions as by Glissant's philosophy of opacity, Chamoiseau produces a much more sophisticated and baroque style which, at first sight, seems to have less similarity with Selvon's than with that favoured by the highbrow Latin American prose writers who have been extensively translated and popularized in France since the sixties.

In this paper, I have tried to show that these differences, resulting from a complex of literary, political and linguistic concerns, could tell us a great deal about the specific history of colonialism in the region. On the one hand, we see the "centralism" of France, the profound and long-lasting stigmatization of French Creole that accentuated the need to codify Creole before appropriating and introducing it in literary experiments; on the other hand, there is the history of emigration to the United Kingdom, the decolonization process in the sixties, the recognition of the West Indies as a literary entity, the decreolization process currently under way. There are many differences and yet, if we look very closely at the texts, we start to note common features. This analysis would suggest that, across languages, similarities tend to arise in small details: the use of particular images or metaphors (for example, *oldtalk / vieux-parler; to cry big water / pleurer gros de l'eau, etc.*), particular prosodic features, the way both writers subtly modify traditional linear narrative schemes, the attitude of their narrators toward characters and readers. These characteristics that all relate to linguistic, stylistic or narrative structures give support to the idea that, beyond these differences and beyond the language itself, there might indeed exist something like a "Caribbean poetics."

NOTES

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1 Caribbean creolization could be defended as a two-stage process referring first to the bringing together of African and European peoples, languages and cultures, to the region and, second, to the integration of Asian and Middle Eastern elements into this frame. From the point of view of an Indo-Caribbean writer such as Selvon, creolization would have primarily referred to the second process.

2 Defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the native speech or language of a particular country and district [and] the informal colloquial, or distinctive speech of a people or a group" (549), vernacular languages usually show regional, socio-linguistic and situational features. Although these three dimensions are interrelated, they are also partly distinct, as this analysis will show.

3 The "polysystem" refers to "the entire network of correlated systems—literary and extra literary—within society" (see Gentzler 114).

4 See Lowry Weir; Brown; Ashcroft et al.; D'Costa; Maximin (*La parole aux masques*); Akai; and Malena for the English Caribbean. See Hazaël-Massieux (*Écrire en créole*); Deltel; Bernabé (*De la négritude*); Jonassaint; DeSouza; and Haigh for the French Caribbean novels.

5 *Sur le terrain de la traduction: parcours traductologique au cœur d'un roman de Samuel Selvon*, Département de langue et littérature françaises, Université McGill, 2002.

6 Martinique does not yet enjoy the political independence that Trinidad and Tobago, and most English-Caribbean regions, obtained in 1962.

7 The concept of continuum was designed as the representation of two dividing (abstract) extremities—a "basilectal" (deep Creole) and an "acrolectal" (formal West Indian English)—and the possibility of intermediate (mesolectal) varieties. As such, the concept was to describe the existence of code-switching phenomena as well as the difficulty of drawing a clear line between the two languages involved. With time, as education and the hegemony of the English language have asserted themselves, there has been an overall process of decreolization which has led linguists to replace the concept of "Creole continuum" by that of a post-Creole continuum. By contrast, the concept of diglossia was to suggest the existence of a clear separation between the two languages. Without going into detail, it is worth mentioning that over the past forty years, along with the development of Creole linguistics, the sociolinguistic status and forms of both French- and English-based Creoles have changed significantly, making such a dichotomy less accurate.

8 Beyond calypso, Selvon's texts draw on another Trinidadian cultural "institution," that of "liming." Referring to the activity of getting together and passing time with friends, "liming," though not considered an oral *tradition* as such, appears to be a very popular cultural practice which usually involves verbal performances. In Selvon's narratives, characters "lime" a great deal and the actual expression, which has become a national icon of the Trinidadian "laid-back way of life," is used repeatedly.

9 Nowadays, though calypso is still extremely popular, it tends to be overtaken by soca, a blending of American and Latin rhythms, as a vehicle of social commentary in Trinidad.

10 The essay was translated in English in 1993 under the title *In Praise of Creoleness.*

11 Derived from "job" (travail), it refers to "une personne qui fait des petits travaux non déclarés" (Telchid 67).

12 Derived from a nautical vocabulary, the verb *virer* is defined in "standard" metropolitan dictionaries such as *Le Petit Robert* as meaning primarily "to transfer" or "to throw," while its most common meaning in Creole would be "to become" or "to turn."

13 These last two examples are taken from N'Zengou-Tayo (164).

14 In this particular context, the expression means "a lot." Hence it also includes, beyond derivation, a process of semantic shift.

15 Unlike Chamoiseau's, these neologisms are deliberately presented as such and detached from the text by use of italics. Acting as parodic examples of the active search for a literary style conducted by the narrator, they serve comic purposes.

16 Indeed, this is a highly productive process of word formation in French: for example, *ticket-repas, tourne-disque, attrape-nigaud,* and so on.

17 For a more extensive description see Wyke and Mair.

18 *The Lonely Londoners* and *Chronique des sept misères* provide two examples of what Confiant refers to as "récit étoilé," that is, a narrative which does not "unfold itself" but rather starts from a centre and develops in several directions without trying to follow, at least on the surface, a linear logic (qtd. in Ludwig 178).

19 To the recurring use of a polysemic "you" in Selvon's novels (Maximin, *Littératures caribéennes*) corresponds, in Chamoiseau, a "nous" that is equally recurrent and ambiguous (Perret). In both cases, the repetition of these pronouns whose referent is often vague tends to blur the distinction between the various discursive strata that usually compose the novel: that is, the actor-actor, narrator-narratee, fictional writer-fictional reader, empirical writer-empirical reader layers of communication.

20 I thank Judith Lavoie for this last example.

21 Indeed, as Sanders mentions, the attitudinal differences between formal and informal usage are not as sharp in English as they are in French.

22 As a matter of fact, it is no surprise that an expression such as "Black English," which refers to varieties that are now appropriated as part of Black identity constructions, should have absolutely no equivalent in French.

23 Indeed, during the seventies, Sam Selvon was often invited to present his work in British and Trinidadian grammar schools and to give his view on the use of English Creole in education.

24 In the same vein, Confiant has recently suggested the need to differentiate between "natural creolisms" and "literary creolisms" (51), while Pinalie proposes another distinction between "fautifs" and the "non-fautifs" (54) creolisms. On what grounds should such distinctions obtain if not on that of status: illegitimate in the first case (as it refers to creolisms which are banned by school teachers), and accepted by the literary institution,

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