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Decolonizing the text: Glissantian readings in Caribbean and African-American literatures

Anderson, Debra Lynn, Ph.D.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1992

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DECOLONIZING THE TEXT: GLISSANTIAN READINGS IN CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of French and Italian

by
Debra Lynn Anderson
B.A., University of Central Arkansas, 1981
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1985
December 1992

To my mother, Margaret Jean

In memory of my grandmothers,

Jimmie Jewel Dickinson

Rosa Weaver Anderson

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Abstract

This dissertation proposes to derive a critical reading from the writings of the Martinican poet, novelist, and theorist, Edouard Glissant. This reading would most directly involve, but not limit itself to, literatures written by black writers from the Caribbean and the United States. As critics such as Christopher Miller and Anthony Appiah suggest, these literatures have become the ground upon which colonization is symbolically re-enacted. Criticism colonizes these literatures by its textual appropriation, its imposition of Western critical models, and by bringing its own assumptions to the text. The critically acclaimed prefaces of Jean-Paul Sartre ("Orphée noir") and André Breton ("Un grand poète noir") exemplify critical readings which *colonize the text*. In response to Sartre and Breton's readings and the critical precedent they set, Glissant's theoretical works provide the critical base for a *reading that decolonizes the text*. The primary purpose of a *glissantian* reading is to locate the literary work in its historical, social and cultural context. Glissant's conception of history, literature, and his model for a Caribbean cultural identity, *antillantité* ("caribbeanness"), as exposed in his seminal work, Le Discours Antillais, and as illustrated by his novel La Lézarde (The Ripening), will provide the critical underpinnings of the literary analyses throughout this study. Glissant's influence manifests itself in the works of a new generation of Martinican

writers -- Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, and Patrick Chamoiseau -- who engage the models and concepts he has set forth -- *antillanité* and *la poétique de la relation* -- as the point of departure for their theoretical and literary conceptualization of *créolité*. However, Glissant's *poetics of the relation* also provides a crucial base which enables criticism to cross Dubois' "color line" and envision a *dépassement* of racial barriers as the analyses of the intertextual relationships manifest in the novels of Toni Morrison (Song of Solomon), Patrick Chamoiseau (Chronique des sept misères, Solibo Magnifique), and William Faulkner (Go Down, Moses) prove.

Chapter 1

Introduction

> *L'Occident n'est pas à l'ouest. Ce n'est pas un lieu. C'est un projet.*
> (Edouard Glissant, Le Discours Antillais, 12)

> *Du bruit, ces jours derniers: il semble que ce pays est à décoloniser. (Que l'histoire ne marche pas au même rythme pour nous.) (Que nous ne faisions pas notre histoire au rythme même du monde.)*
> (Edouard Glissant, L'Intention Poétique, 246)

In his work, A Theory of Literary Production, Pierre Macherey examines at length the critical process, which comes into being when the literary work, "the writer's work" becomes the "object of a certain knowledge", or in other words, the object of literary criticism. At the outset, the text was not written as an object for criticism: to believe so would be to dismiss the writer's aesthetic or literary intentions. The text is, in a sense, appropriated by criticism for its own scrutiny. For criticism, the text is a product which is to be consumed, interpreted and described. Criticism consumes the text according to its own procedures -- not necessarily those of the writer -- and in the process of consuming the text, judges the text and establishes its [criticism's] own set of underlying values: "Behind the critical attitude there is an implicit but decisive affirmation: 'It could or ought to be different.'"

Implicit in Macherey's description of criticism is the wish or desire that the text be "other" than it is:

> Because it is powerless to examine the work on its own terms, unable to exert an influence on it, criticism resorts to a corroding resentment. In this sense, all criticism can be summed up as a value judgement in the margin of the book: 'could do better'. (16)

Unable to deal with the text "on its own terms", criticism looks beyond the text to what Macherey calls "the dream image" (17) -- an ideal text that is in essence what the critic desires the text to be. This "dream image" also refers to the model that the text itself strives to be or achieve but which remains out of its reach since the very nature of the text is to remain in a state of incompleteness. (Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism, 35) The never-happy, forever unsatisfied critic therefore reduces his own work to finding the gaps or faults within the text since the text in front of him can never be the dream-image which he has in mind. The critic/criticism *refuses* the text as it presents itself in favor of what he thinks it should or ought to be: "Criticism first appears as a denial; its basic gesture is refusal." (Macherey, 16)

While this idea of *critical refusal* has repercussions for all literature and criticism, it reveals itself as crucial in this comparative study of African American and Caribbean literatures. For *refusal* describes not only how criticism has dealt with these literatures but how the areas in question have been dealt with historically. Criticism,

as Macherey describes it, bears alarming resemblances to colonization and the slave trade. Criticism *colonizes* the text, attempts to reduce it to an object, and like the colonizer described by Aimé Césaire in his work Discours sur le Colonialisme (1955), refuses reality in favor of the "dream image". The irony is that literary criticism, like colonization, inherently attempts to reduce that which it depends upon for its very existence and survival.

The principles upon which colonization is founded constitute a systematic refusal of the colonized cultures and societies. The colonizer, like Macherey's critic, perceives only the gaps and voids of the colonized societies and these voids are determined by Western values. This *colonizing refusal* of African historical and cultural pasts includes the denial of the cultural components which make up African societies, one of which is the oral tradition. This tradition has long been viewed or valued for its sociological or ethnological worth as a reflection of society. The oral "text" is therefore denied its intrinsic fictional or literary value eventhough it manifests itself as a literary genre with its own models, narrative structures and intertextuality.[1]

The colonizing refusal of history can also be tied to certain critical schools of thought which reject the referential aspect of language and seek to autonomize literature by freeing it of societal and historical restraints.[2] Therefore any literature which reveals itself

as *engagé*[3] is essentially left out in the cold. This basic distrust in language as a means of expressing reality does not allow for a reading which locates African and Caribbean texts in their cultural, social and historical contexts.

This colonizing refusal may also reveal itself as a blind and often insidiously condescending acceptance, as exemplified by the writings of Sartre and Breton. I will discuss in chapter two how these two prominent and politically active French writers, the *fathers* of two influential literary movements, Existentialism and Surrealism, essentially *colonize* the works of French African and Caribbean poetry they read and thereby set a sort of critical precedent. Their readings exemplify what I consider a *colonizing reading*.

Christopher Miller seems to suggest that African literature -- as well as other non-European literatures -- have become yet another "territory" to be "colonized" and governed by the West:

> Approaching African literatures written in French or other European languages, one is struck by both the insistence and the inadequacy of Western interpretive models. The proprietary struggles for control of African literatures tend to become more important than either the texts themselves or their African contexts; Western literary and social criticism has established interpretive patterns that are difficult to call into question, patterns which impose themselves on reality. Nevertheless, a Westerner must confront such patterns of discourse rather than ignore them, if only to bring to the foreground one's own biases and prejudices; failing some measure of self-reflexivity, chances of fairness are slim. ("Ethnicity and Ethics in the Criticism of Black African Literature", 76)

For Miller and other critics of African and non-European literatures, the imposition of Western critical models is at the heart of the "colonization" of African literature. In his critique of Sunday O. Anozie's structuralist analysis of Léopold Senghor's poem, "Totem", Anthony Appiah observes that European models do not necessarily bring any more insight into the workings of a non-European text than a thorough and sensitive reading would. For Appiah, the critic who deals with texts from Africa must first "locate" the text. According to Appiah, Anozie repeatedly

> ...asks the reader to understand Africa by embedding it in European culture [...]. But what, save a post-colonial inferiority complex, would lead anyone into the assumption that this embedding is either necessary or desirable? It is obvious that, if any reader outside of Africa is to come to understand our writers, our literature will need locating. [...] It is because Europe is ignorant of Africa (and not because Africa is ignorant of Europe) that Africa needs explaining to Europeans. African novels do not need justication; they need, as do all novels, analysis, understanding -- in short, reading. (Appiah, 146)

This *location* of the text is diametrically opposed to a *colonization* of the text: rather than imposing foreign (Western) structures and values upon the text (thereby colonizing the text), location situates or embeds the text within its own social, cultural, historical and political realities. And given the social, cultural, historical and political diversities and specificities of the African continent, location, however basic this task might seem to the critical act, is not a simple one.

Implicit in the colonization of African literature is the act of "naming": in his reading, the critic attempts to define the text by attributing a name to it. In my opinion, the very terms proliferated by criticism to classify and identify literatures from Africa and the Caribbean bear witness to its difficulty in *locating* the texts. In his preface to Senghor's Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malgache, "Orphée Noir"[4] Jean-Paul Sartre uses the term "la poésie nègre" to identify the poetry of writers from Africa, Madagascar and the Caribbean. Lilyane Kesteloot (Les Ecrivains Noirs d'expression française) and Bernard Mouralis (Littérature et Développement) consistently use the term "la littérature négro-africaine" to define the body of texts with which they work. Kesteloot includes Black writers from the Caribbean, the United States and Africa in her anthology while Mouralis refers almost exclusively to writers from Africa. The most basic research tool for the literary scholar and/or critic, the MLA Bibliography classifies literature(s) from Africa and the Caribbean under numerous, and sometimes confusing, categories: African Literature, West Indian Literature, French literature outside of France. These listings are often cross-listed under the category of Third World literature -- a category which reflects the political and economic situations of certain countries in the world today in relation to the West and which immediately conjures up the idea of something inferior or "third-rate".

In his exhaustive and rigorous study of African literature, Littérature et Développement, Bernard Mouralis attempts to define this body of literature and seeks to establish a set of criteria by which the specificities of these literatures may be determined. In the introduction, he gives a basic definition of African literature written in French:

> ... cette littérature pourra être définie en première approximation comme un ensemble de textes écrits en français par des Africains depuis un demi-siècle et que l'on s'accorde apparemment sans problèmes à reconnaitre comme des textes 'littéraires'. (7)

The criteria which determine the specificity of African literature in French are socio-cultural, historical, ideological, and linguistic. Perhaps the most important factor to be taken into consideration in the analyses of these texts, according to Mouralis, is the colonial fact: "On ne peut procéder à l'analyse de celles-ci [les conditions de création littéraire en Afrique Noire] sans se référer à la situation spécifique qu'a instaurée dans le domaine culturel le fait colonial lui-même." (143)

In his collection of essays, L'Odeur du Père, Y.V. Mudimbé defines African literature in general as a body of literature which encompasses three distinct domains: the oral literary tradition, literature written in African languages and literature 'written in a foreign language', ie., a European language. (142-143) Locha Mateso establishes the same three categories of African texts,

however he emphasizes the intertextual aspect of these categories by referring to them as a "network of texts". (Littérature Africaine, 130)

While Mateso deals exclusively with literature written by Africans, both Mouralis and Mudimbé include certain writers from the Caribbean in their analyses, in particular Césaire (Martinique), Senghor (Sénégal) and Damas (Guyana) -- the leaders of the Négritude movement. Négritude brought together writers from Africa, the Caribbean and the South American Continent under the flag of a common cause -- the cultural, psychological and political liberation of Black people from the oppressive white/western system. Dorothy Blair attributes the tendency of anthologies to clump French-speaking writers from Africa, the Caribbean and Madagascar into one all-encompassing category --often designated by the term *négro-africain* -- to the common goal the Négritude writers shared. (Blair, ix) She apologetically defends her exclusion of certain Caribbean writers -- those instrumental in the birth of the Négritude movement -- and describes their role in French African literature as "complex and ambiguous."

Mudimbé's description of African literature as literature written in a foreign language indicates the cultural alienation that is often a theme in both African and Caribbean literatures. His use of the word foreign is all the more significant in light of the current usage of the term Francophone to designate all literatures of French

expression from areas outside of France.[5] From Québec literature to North African literature, the term Francophone defies geographical boundaries and unites these diverse literatures through the linguistic criteria and tends to ignore historical and cultural differences. Under the guise of *Francophonie*, the French language becomes a unifying force stripped of the alienating qualities of an imposed language. However, in the case of Moroccan literature in French, for example, the classification of "Francophone" evokes a reaction of *mépris* or contempt since the French language -- the language of the colonizer -- recalls the French colonial domination and cultural alienation. Whereas in Quebec, where the French language struggled for survival, it is embraced as an instrument of liberation. (Gontard, 11)

G. R. Coulthard questions the use of global terms such as "Latin American literature" and "Caribbean literature" to cover such a large and diverse body of literature:

> Can one meaningfully speak of a Caribbean literature? Some writers do not like the term "West Indian" as applied to the literature of the English-speaking West Indies. And the term Caribbean, of course, applies to countries which speak Spanish, English and French, and the literatures stem from three distinct cultural traditions. (53)

Yet, he readily admits that when reading writers from the various parts of the Caribbean, he is struck by what he calls the *air de famille* that these writers share due to the tropical setting and their common themes (man's relation to the landscape and problems of multi-racial societies). He

briefly discusses a "sub-theme which is characteristically Caribbean": "the theme of Africa."

The Martinican writers Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant reject all attempts to qualify Francophone literature from the French Antilles:

> ...littérature afro-antillaise, négro-antillaise, franco-antillaise, antillaise d'expression française, francophone des Antilles..., etc., tous qualificatifs que nous déclarons inopérants. (Eloge de la Créolité, 36)

These writers proclaim that "la littérature antillaise" does not yet exist and that Martinique is in a state of pre-literature: a literary production whose readers are elsewhere.[6] As writers, theirs is the task of "building a literature," creating a literary language that expresses their lived experience not only as Martinicans but as "Creoles."[7]

The numerous definitions used to define and categorize literatures from Africa and the Caribbean are in essence attempts to draw literary borders and to name these literatures. The use of more general or global terms such as Francophone can be interpreted as an effort to transcend these geographical designations while ignoring the historical fact that French was the language imposed by the colonizer. However, most of the terms used to denote these texts are based on political, social, racial or historical criteria and contexts: la littérature négro-africaine, la poésie nègre, Black literature, West Indian literature, Caribbean literature, Third World literature, etc. The

danger of such a categorization is the tendency, as Mouralis states, to place more emphasis on the adjective used to describe these literatures than on the works themselves:

> "Littérature négro-africaine", "littérature africaine", "littérature noire", "littérature nègre": ces formules sont devenues aujourd'hui usuelles mais leur pertinence n'est peut-être pas aussi évidente qu'on pourrait le penser de prime abord. Et cela, pour deux raisons. En effet, on peut légitimement d'une part s'interroger sur la validité d'une opération intellectuelle qui associe, ainsi que le révèlent les formules en question, une activité artistique et une donnée qui renvoie à la fois à la géographie et à la culture. D'autre part, lorsque l'on examine de nombreux travaux consacrés à la littérature africaine, on ne manque pas de relever une tendance assez générale qui consiste à mettre l'accent sur l'adjectif et à négliger le substantif. (Mouralis, "Quelle Critique", 27)

V. V. Mudimbé also questions the emphasis placed on the race of the writer (140) and in so doing stresses the fact that race alone cannot define these literatures, especially in light of the recent work of Edouard Glissant[8], whose concept of "la poétique de la relation" allows us to envisage an eventual *dépassement* or transcendence of the racial element through a recognition and acceptance of a shared history.

As I have tried to show, these literatures resist being named by the means the academic or critical establishment avails itself of. Born of a common French literary tradition, Francophone literatures from Africa and the Caribbean share the same influences and beginnings. However, Kesteloot states that to simply integrate these literatures into the body of French literature does not

acknowledge that they are "the representatives of a cultural renaissance." (18) She further indicates that these writers all speak the same politically committed language of the oppressed and colonized. These *engagé* writers also share the desire to "name themselves to the world" as Glissant states in Le Discours Antillais:

> J'appelle littérature nationale cette urgence pour chacun à se *nommer* au monde, c'est-à-dire cette nécessité de ne pas disparaitre de la scène du monde et de courir au contraire à son élargissement. (192)

No matter what criteria we use to describe these literatures or what terms we use to define them, these literatures and writers share a common tradition of literary *engagement*. As Mohamadou Kane states in his work, Roman Africain et Tradition, politically committed writing is an inseparable part of African literature: "Le militantisme condamné par les structuralistes européens se développe dans la littérature africaine comme un héritage indéracinable." (21) Henry Louis Gates, Jr. also points out in his essay "Criticism in the Jungle" that "for all sorts of complex historical reasons, the very act of writing has been a 'political' act for the black author." (5) Likewise, Mudimbé states that in the beginning of its development African literature revealed itself as a literature of violence and revolt (143) and that the writers themselves characterized their writings as having both aesthetic and political intentions. Aimé Césaire qualified this literature of violence and revolt as "le grand cri nègre" -

a literature of revendication and rehabilitation of an oppressed, colonized race. Francis Anani Joppa ties this political commitment to the historical event, and the birth of awareness or consciousness of a people: "Cet engagement s'inscrit dans une situation de fait et dans une prise de conscience des implications de cette situation." (L'Engagement, 15) And Kesteloot states that "La révolte y était la cause même de la poésie, la médiation entre le Réel insupportable et l'expression-explosion littéraire". (CIEF, 1989)

The *engagement* of African and Caribbean writers is born of the trauma of colonization and the slave trade. Furthermore, this literary committedness is also bound to the quest for self or search for identity. In the novels analyzed in this study, the quest takes form on two levels: 1) within the texts themselves in the protagonist's search for a cultural and historical identity; 2) within the act of writing itself which becomes the means through which the author symbolically reclaims, names and returns to the community the cultural past and identity of which it has been deprived. These texts and authors share above all else their refusal to be named (or colonized) by the critical establishment by naming (or identifying) themselves -- an act which essentially *decolonizes* their literatures and through which they seek to affirm and assert their communities' identities.

I will address the point of *engagement* in the second chapter by drawing upon the opposing views of Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Paul Sartre concerning the relationship between history and literature. To illustrate and support Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s statement on the political element of Black literature, I will examine the politically committed aspects of the works of Elaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass and Aimé Césaire as writers who seek to forge, within their own specific historical and cultural contexts, a new identity for their people through the revolutionary power of language and the literary imagination. My discussion will then return to the question of criticism and its perception of Black literature in my analysis of the critically acclaimed prefaces of Jean-Paul Sartre and André Breton, which I perceive as *readings that colonize the text.* In response to Sartre's and Breton's readings and the critical precedent they set, I propose that the theoretical works of the Martinican poet, novelist, and theoretician, Edouard Glissant provide the critical base for a *reading that decolonizes the text* and whose primary purpose is to locate the literary work in its historical, social and cultural context. Glissant's theoretical conception of history, literature and his model for a Caribbean cultural identity, *antillantité*, as exposed in his seminal work, Le Discours Antillais, and as illustrated by his novel La Lézarde -- to which the third chapter is devoted -- will provide the critical underpinnings of my readings throughout

this study. The fourth chapter will deal with Glissant's influence on a new generation of Martinican writers who engage the models and concepts he has set forth -- *antillanité* and *la poétique de la relation* -- as the point of departure for their theoretical and literary conceptualization of *créolité*. Chapter five deals specifically with Glissant's concept of *la poétique de la relation* as the foundation for a comparative reading of novels by the African American and Martinican novelists Toni Morrison and Patrick Chamoiseau. In chapter six, I examine Glissant's *poetics of the relation* as a crucial base which enables criticism to cross Dubois' "color line" and envision a *dépassement* of racial barriers. The intertextuality manifest in the novels of Toni Morrison, Patrick Chamoiseau, and William Faulkner is the locus of *la poétique de la relation*.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Locha Mateso, La Littérature Africaine et sa Critique, Paris, Khartala, 1985, 30.
Mateso states that literary criticism "renvoie avant tout à la tradition occidentale" (35).

2. The work of French writer Maurice Blanchot is perhaps the most significant and interesting example of the desire to liberate literature from any social or political function. His works and ideas will be discussed in chapter two.

3. *Engagé* is the past participle of the French verb *engager* which means to be engaged or to participate in. The expression became part of the critical lexicon with the publication of Jean-Paul Sartre's essay Qu'est-ce que la littérature? and is used to describe any politically committed literary work or writer.

4. Senghor's Anthologie was the first published collection of Black poetry in French and featured the work of Aimé Césaire, Jacques Roumains and Senghor himself. Senghor is considered one the founders, along with Césaire and Léon Damas, of the Negritude movement.

5. The term Francophonie appeared for the first time in 1880 when used by the French geographer Onésime Reclus as a means of classifying the ensemble of regions where French was spoken. In the 1960's Senghor reintroduced the notion of Francophonie, not as a tool of alienation but rather as a unifying force bringing together diverse peoples of different political, economic and cultural backgrounds. Today the movement has taken form and summits, conferences and festivals as well as publications centered around the francophone theme abound: the French government has taken notice and even the Académie Française includes among its members a "ministre délégué chargé de la Francophonie". (La Francophonie de A à Z, Published by the Ministère de la Francophonie, 1990)

6. Literatures from Africa and the Caribbean have long been plagued by the lack of readers in their countries of origin. The audience for whom the African or Caribbean writer writes is an often asked question. Would one ask the same question of a French, English or American writer? In the introduction to the glossary of the novel Malemort, Glissant states the audience in Martinque exists in the future and Jacques André points out that Glissant's works are more appreciated in France than in his native Martinique.

7. Chapter 3 will be devoted to Eloge de la créolité.

8. Edouard Glissant, Le Discours Antillais, (Paris: Seuil, 1981). (In particular, the chapter dealing with la poétique de la relation.)

Chapter 2

History and Literature: A Critical Crisis

> *Ce n'est pas du côté littéraire que les affres me sont venues, comme on eût pu s'y attendre chez tout écrivain soucieux d'accorder son travail à son discours, c'est du côté de l'Histoire...* (Edouard Glissant, Le Discours antillais, 136)

Edouard Glissant's preoccupation with the relationship between literature and history is manifest throughout his poetry, novels and essays. For Glissant, the only possible response for the writer lies in the questionning -- *questionnement* -- of history. For the French writer and critic Maurice Blanchot, the relationship between literature and history is also a troubling one to which he sees no possible solution. The relationship is an impossible one: the question for Blanchot is how can literature express or account for the past. In his work L'Ecriture du désastre Blanchot is especially preoccupied with history. Auschwitz embodies both history and disaster -- an impossible and unthinkable Other:

> Penser le désastre (si c'est possible, et ce n'est pas possible dans la mesure où nous pressentons que le désastre est la pensée), c'est n'avoir plus d'avenir pour le penser. Le désastre est séparé, ce qu'il y a de plus séparé. (7)

Unthinkable, yet, in the case of Auschwitz, we know what happened and the knowledge of the event has become part of our Western collective consciousness:

> Et comment, en effet, accepter de ne pas connaitre? Nous lisons les livres sur Auschwitz. Le voeu de tous là-bas, le dernier voeu: Sachez ce qui s'est passé, n'oubliez pas, et en même temps jamais vous ne saurez. (131)

Impossible Other, for although we have knowledge of the event, we can never "know" its horrors and writing/*écriture* can never fully express this disaster. Yet the writer is called upon to do exactly that: to somehow bear witness to the horrors in order to keep the memory of the event alive in the collective consciousness. For Blanchot the writer, and Blanchot the theorist and critic, this inability to locate the place of history in writing reveals itself as a critical conflict. And we must ask the question: does history indeed have a place in literature and if it does what is its place.

Blanchot's primary concern is the relationship between the writer and his work, and to attribute any other role or function -- social or political -- to literature diminishes its literary value or integrity. Moreover, Blanchot seems to imply that literature can do little vis à vis the *désastre* wrought by history:

> Il y a une limite où l'exercice de l'art, quel qu'il soit, devient une insulte au malheur. Ne l'oublions pas. (131)

This troubling inability to "right" the wrongs of "History" revealed in Blanchot's theoretical works manifests itself in his fiction as an impossibility and resistance or refusal to "write" either history or story. In his novel, L'arrêt de Mort, the narrator alludes to "les événements publics,"

> Je voudrais maintenant noter autre chose - je parle des faits qui semblent infimes et je laisse à côté les événements publics...ils [les événements publics] pourrissent...leur histoire est morte. (7)

"Leur histoire est morte" -- their history or story is dead. But what is their history or story? The narrator/writer never discloses the real nature of these public events: they remain vague and obscure. However, these events are not dead for the narrator, for, as he reveals later on in the novel:

> Il faut toujours penser aux événements. Ils devenaient toujours plus graves; penser et vivre n'allaient plus de pair. (98)

They are indeed not dead since they affect life and thought: "penser et vivre n'allaient plus de pair."

Blanchot, the theoritician and critic, suggests that any relationship between history and literature is impossible and his novels attest to his own personal crisis as a writer: he refuses to write history, "les événements publics" but history is all the same present in his fiction by the very allusion to the events and his silence as to their nature. His apparent desire as critic and theorist is to refuse history, since to attribute any historical or social role to literature relegates and reduces it to a social, political or historical tool. This desire reveals itself as resistance, tension and deliberate silence. The critic's desire to maintain literature's autonomy by liberating it from the past, from history, -- "Que les mots cessent d'être des armes, des moyens d'action, des

possibilités de salut...." (ED, 25) -- is itself an impossible one for literature can never be completely neutral, totally detached from reality -- past or present.[1] Blanchot's deliberate silence "speaks louder than words": it becomes what Todorov would consider a "comportement verbal."[2] Put into an existentialist perspective, the very act of not speaking (silence) "speaks"; the question for Sartre is not "to speak or not to speak" but rather "to not speak is to speak":

> ...le silence même se définit par rapport aux mots, comme la pause, en musique, reçoit son sens des groupes de notes qui l'entourent. Ce silence est un moment du langage; se taire n'est pas être muet, c'est refuser de parler, donc parler encore. (Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, 74-75)[3]

Blanchot's work is but one example, perhaps one of the most important and significant to date, of how the impossibility of the relation between literature and history manifests itself in literary, theoretical and critical works. What reveals itself as a resistance to or a refusal of any telling/writing of History in Blanchot's works, is for certain writers a necessary responsibility. A case in point would be the works of French writer, critic, and philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre whose theory of committed literature -- *la littérature engagée* -- is elaborated in his work Qu'est-ce que la littérature (1948).

For Leon Trotsky, in Literature and Revolution, true art is tendentious, that is to say, politically committed (engagé) to bring about some change in society:

> From an objective historical process, art is always a social servant and historically utilitarian. It finds the necessary rhythm of words for both dark and vague moods, it brings thought and feeling closer or contrasts them with one another...it educates the individual, the social group, the class and the nation. And it does this quite independently of whether it appears under the flag of 'pure' or frankly tendentious art. (168)

In his work Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, Sartre defines *engagement* and the role of the *écrivain engagé*. For Sartre, whose views on writing are diametrically opposed to Blanchot's, the role of the writer is to "dévoiler le monde" -- "to reveal the world" -- in order to bring about change:

> ...l'écrivain engagé sait que la parole est action: il sait que dévoiler c'est changer et qu'on ne peut dévoiler qu'en projetant de changer. (73)

In The Politics of Prose, Denis Hollier elaborates on Sartre's idea of committed writing which is deeply rooted in his existential view of man and the world:

> Committed literature demands of the writer that through his texts he act within and upon his time. [...] Writing for Sartre is [...] the means for a man, for any man, to belong to his own time. The verb *écrire* must be conjugated in the present. (45)

For Sartre, writing necessarily engages the writer: the act of writing is a choice and by choosing to write, the writer takes a stand and acts, as Hollier suggests, "within and upon his time". We might go so far as to say that

Blanchot "engages" or "commits" himself through his deliberate silence.

Blanchot's and Sartre's theories of literature represent two currents of thought, two extremes concerning the relationship between history and literature. The former refuses to relegate literature to the rank of social tool, where literature takes a back seat to political or social committedness. And the latter, not only seeks to expand the domain of literature into the social and political realms, it makes *engagement* part of the very definition of literature.

As I indicated in the introduction, this literary *engagement* is a common trait which unites literature written by Black authors. This tradition of literary *engagement* transcends both temporal and geographical boundaries as the works of Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass and Aimé Césaire prove.

The eighteenth-century African writer Olaudah Equiano learned to read and write while still a slave. He used his privileged position to persuade his European audience of the evils of slavery. His Narrative, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas Vassa, the African Slave (1789)[4] is also an excellent example of the therapeutic function of writing as the re-membering and the re-establishment of order to a shattered existence and psyche. In the beginning of his Narrative, Equiano recalls the African village of his childhood. He begins by

geographically situating his native land, the kingdom of Benin, and thus establishes a sort of order and framework. Within this framework, he reconstructs his childhood memories, the political, social, and cultural components of his particular African village (8-18). His vision/version of Africa is diametrically opposed to the myth perpetuated by colonization. His Africa is one where order and civility prevail. His tone in the first chapter is essentially didactic in that he takes great pains to explain various customs and ceremonies. He attempts to educate the white, European reader to the fact that social, political and cultural order did exist before the colonists' and slave traders' arrival.

Equiano's account of his first encounter with the white slave traders illustrates how adeptly and innocently, through the eyes of a child, he inverts and subverts the myth of the cannibalistic African:

> I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who had brought me on board, and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces and long hair. (43)

Equiano was being symbolically consumed by the white slave traders for whom he was little more than a product to be sold and traded. He was symbolically devoured by the ship that would tear him away from his native land to be sold into slavery in the New World. The process of

dehumanization is complete: the African stripped of all dignity and liberty is reduced to a commodity to be sold, exchanged or disposed of as the white slave owners saw fit. The image of the "white cannibal" represents the consumption of Africans and the African continent itself, devoured, consumed, and exploited by the white colonial system.

Equiano undermines one economic justification for slavery (i.e., the need for cheap labor) by arguing that it would be much more profitable for Britain to abolish slavery.[5] The abolition of slavery would create a new and inexhaustible market for British products: "The manufactures of this country must and will, in the nature and reason of things, have a full and constant employ, by supplying the African markets." (291) This argument should not overshadow Equiano's moral appeal to his white audience for the abolition of slavery as a savage and barbaric institution.[6]

If Equiano's literary undoing of the colonial myth of Africa the dark, savage and uncivilized continent is subversive for his time, his undermining of the financial justification of slavery is even more radical. His inversion of the financial gains of slavery forces the European reader to envision Africans as as possible consumers and places the colonized in the same position as the colonizer thus symbolically empowering those without power.

The nineteenth-century African American writer Frederick Douglass provides us with another example of committed writing and yields a more fundamental explanation as to why Black writing has always been considered a political act. In his Narrative of the Life of an American Slave, Douglass describes the beginning of his education:

> Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. [...] she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters. [...] Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her ... that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe to teach a slave to read. [...] he said, '[...] A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master -- to do what he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. [...] if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. [...] it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy. (48)

The very act of learning to write was forbidden for it completely undermined the colonial myth of the "ignorant savage" upon which the system of slavery was based and by which it was justified. No one act could have been more political or subversive for a slave. Reading and writing, as Douglass so eloquently expressed it were "the pathway from slavery to freedom." And while his mistress' assistance along this difficult pathway was invaluable, his master unwittingly disclosed a more precious knowledge -- "the white's man power to enslave the black man" lay in the denial of knowledge. From the beginning, in the case of the black writer, "la parole était action" -- for it not only

revealed the world -- in this case the reality of slave's condition, it also lead to freedom and identity. As Henry Louis Gates states, in the case of Frederick Douglass, "the will to power" was epitomized by the "will to write" and the "act of writing for the slave constituted the act of creating a public, historical self [...] of the race." (Gates, Figures, 108)

Mastering the language of the master, as Douglass discovered, was the most subversive and liberating act the enslaved black man could commit.[7] For both Equiano and Douglass, language was a tool of resistance, and its persuasive power represented the means to political change and freedom. For Aimé Césaire language was an "arme miraculeuse" to revolt against the continued colonization of the twentieth-century black man.

Césaire indicts Europe and all the Occidental world in his Discours sur le colonialisme (1955). He proclaims Europe *indéfendable* for the acts of cultural and political violation committed in the name of colonization. According to Césaire, the primary thesis and justification for colonization and the slave trade was that Europe, the colonizer, possessed "civilization", and that the colonized did not, and for that matter, never had. The "great lie" -- *mensonge principal* -- was that colonization equalled civilization, when in fact it destroyed or irreparably damaged the societies of the colonized regions. Moreover,

according to Césaire, the effect upon the colonizer was far from civilizing:

> Il faudrait d'abord étudier comment la colonisation travaille à déciviliser le colonisateur, à l'abrutir au sens propre du mot, à le dégrader, à le réveiller aux instincts enfouis, à la convoitise, à la violence, à la haine raciale, au relativisme moral... (11)

Colonization negates civilization:

> Colonisation: tête de pont dans une civilisation de la barberie d'où, à n'importe quel moment, peut déboucher la négation pure et simple de la civilisation. (16)

Césaire subverts and negates the myth of a benevolent and "civilized" Europe. For Césaire, colonization was an act of self-decivilization on the part of the West as well as the systematic decivilization of the regions colonized. The *mise en contact* with the Other was crucial: for the colonized it meant the total negation of histories, cultures and societies that existed prior to colonization. It denied the humanity of colonized peoples by reducing them to the status of property and alienated them from any historical and cultural past or identity: "Qui et quels sommes-nous? Admirable question!" (Cahier, Césaire) was the urgent question to which the Négritude writers sought an answer.

Equiano's version of African reality prior to colonization may seem too idyllic to the reader just as Césaire's indictment of Europe too harsh or militant. Whether too idyllic or too harsh, both writers use a different rhetoric to expose the atrocities of the same

colonial system. In their interpretations and descriptions of colonization, both writers characterize colonization as: 1) the systematic negation or refusal of African social, political, cultural realities; 2) a process of dehumanization, reification/objectivification -- reduction from the status of human being to that of chattel; 3) a process of appropriation and consumption of people, land and natural resources.

The very principles upon which colonization is founded are based upon refusal: the systematic refusal of the cultural, social, and political pasts that existed on the African continent prior to colonization. The colonizer sees only what he wants to see in these cultures. What he perceives as a "lack" or "gap" is his own desire to find the "dream-image" Africa: the dark, mysterious, exotic and mythical continent. His point of reference is his own European or Western system of values and his desire for economic gain and progress.

The historical implications of this refusal are crucial for Africa and the Caribbean in terms of lost lives, cultures and lands.[8] The denial of history resulted in the destruction of cultural identity and dealt a devastating blow to the psyche of those colonized. Literary movements such as Négritude sought to rehabilitate and heal the denied colonized self by a return to and a glorification of, African pasts, origins and values:

> Whether it was called negritude, black power, negrismo, or indigenismo, and however distinct from the others each poetic school held itself, the impulse to create a mythical self betrayed the need to run away from a pain so profound that denial was preferable. (Zimra, 228)

Although the need to heal the broken self -- to express the pain so deeply engrained in the psyche that certain writers embraced the psychologically and politically liberating tenets of French Surrealism which simply provided an outlet for them to explore, reach into their "moi profond" -- explains in part the African and Caribbean writers' obsession with history, this psychological need alone does not suffice to explain the diversity of these bodies of literature. As Janheinz Jahn states:

> All purely psychological, political or sociological interpretations, therefore, must always remain inadequate, for they neglect the aspects which make literature what it is. (History of Neo-African Literature, 228)

The rejection of history on the part of criticism may be interpreted as an attempt to give full importance to the literary text and not concentrate on the historical context in which it was written, and rightfully so, since the object of literary criticism should be literature and not the historical context.[9] But when the historical context is inextricably bound to a body of literature, criticism must take the textual manifestations into consideration in its reading of these texts. The critic cannot ignore the historical context but has yet to reconcile this incapability to deal with history. While this problem is

not unique to criticism of African and Caribbean literatures, it is a sensitive issue where they are concerned, for criticism, as Anthony Appiah and Terry Eagleton suggest, must avoid repeating the wrongs of colonization by re-enacting or sustaining, unconsciously, the mechanisms by which the system advanced itself. Terry Eagleton states in his work Literary Theory:

> I do not believe that many, perhaps most, literary theorists and critics are not disturbed by a world in which some economies, left stagnant and lopsided by generations of colonial exploitation, are still in fee to Western capitalism through their crippling repayment of debts.... My own view, as I have commented, is that literary theory has a most particular relevance to this political system: it has helped willing or not to sustain and reinforce its assumptions. (195-196)

History cannot be ignored despite the arguments presented by certain schools of critical thought. And militant or committed literature should be considered one of the manifestations of history in literature. The most important question for criticism is not just how to formulate this relationship but also how to "locate" these literatures, give, as Appiah indicates, what they deserve -- reading.

André Breton's preface to the bilingual edition (English/French) of Aimé Césaire's Cahier d'un retour au pays natal, "Un grand poète noir" (1944)[10] and Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Senghor's Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache, "Orphée Noir" (1948), exemplify criticism's difficulty in dealing with Francophone

literatures from Africa and the Caribbean. The importance of these two prefaces is undeniable: important because both Senghor's Anthologie and Césaire's Cahier are seminal texts in the literary corpus defined as Francophone literatures from Africa and the Caribbean. For the critic, a close reading of these prefaces will illuminate fundamental problems still encountered in the reading and criticism of these literatures. Both Breton and Sartre proceed by a process of refusal, reduction and consumption or appropriation of these texts: in essence they unconsciously colonize these texts and authors.

The simililarities between the two texts are striking: both Sartre and Breton bear the burden of the collective white guilt, evidenced by the systematic dichotomy both establish: black/white; black literature/white literature. In establishing this dichotomy, they also systematically deny the white man while rehabilitating the black man. They shower with praise those black writers who speak for all men and who, through their poetic articulation of their own experience of oppression, bring to light the problems of all downtrodden communities in the world. In short, what Breton and Sartre value most in these writers and works is their political *engagement*: the literary expression of their historical situation as a persecuted race. They find in these black writers what they feel is lacking in the "bourgeois" European poetry of the time. Breton sums this up in the last line -- a paraphrasing of a quote on

Lautréamont -- of his essay on Césaire: "La parole d'Aimé Césaire, belle comme l'oxygène naissant." (126)

Breton finds in Césaire a sort of literary son: he is completely astonished by Césaire's surrealism and by the "conception commune de la vie" that they share. He finds in his reading of Césaire "ce dont le surréalisme a toujours fait le premier article de son programme." (126) Moreover, Breton's seemingly by chance "discovery"[11] of Césaire's journal, Tropiques, adds to his astonishment and fascination:

> C'est dans ces conditions, qu'il advint, au hasard de l'achat d'un ruban pour ma fille, de feuilleter une publication exposée dans la mercerie. Sous une présentation des plus modestes, c'était le premier numéro...qui venait d'apparaitre à Fort de France, d'une revue intitulée Tropiques. [...] Je ne m'en crus pas les yeux... (119)

Furthermore, Breton unwittingly appropriates not only the text but also the land -- Martinique -- by proclaiming it his land:

> Cette terre qu'il montrait et qu'aidaient à reconnaitre ses amis, mais oui, c'était aussi ma terre, c'était notre terre...(120)

This inadequate reading is even more pronounced in Sartre's preface, "Orphée noir", because of a fundamental contradiction in his work. In Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, Sartre defines *engagement*: a literature committed to revealing the world in order to bring about change. This basic contradiction is acknowledged by

Sartrean scholars such as Joseph Halpern, who states in Critical Fictions:

> What the critics have considered important in "Orphée noir" are the changes in Sartre's theories of literature, notably changes concerning the theoretical irresponsibility of poetry ... (75)

In Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, prose alone can reveal the world through its *transparence;* poetry by nature is opaque, obscure and abstract and therefore hides rather than reveals the world.

> A mesure que le prosateur expose des sentiments, il les éclaircit: pour le poète, au contraire, s'il coule ses passions dans son poème, il cesse de les reconnaître: les mots les prennent, s'en pénètrent et les métamorphosent: ils ne les signifient pas, même pas à ses yeux. (69)

Considering Sartre's views on the nature and role of poetry and prose, it is most intriguing that he would write a preface to a collection of poetry that he deems "committed." He obviously makes an exception in the case of "la poésie nègre". Why this change of heart and more importantly what should we read into it?

With reference to the historical situation of the black writer, Sartre claims that only poetry can express the negated African pasts and the shattered self (*le moi atomisé*) resulting from the colonial system. For Sartre, it is only through poetry that the black writer can reach into the depths of his soul in order to reveal that which is hidden, suppressed and negated.

> ...c'est nécessairement à travers une expérience poétique que le noir, dans sa situation présente, doit d'abord prendre conscience de lui-même et, inversement, pourquoi la poésie noire de langue française est, de nos jours, la seule grande poésie révolutionnaire. ("Orphée Noir", xii)

Thus, Sartre assigns to black poetry the role he normally would reserve for prose; and, insomuch that Sartre reverses his definitions of prose and poetry for black writers, poetry is now "utilitarian": a Marxist vision of art that echoes Trotsky's view of the "tendentious" nature of "true art". Contrary to the views expressed in Qu'est-ce la littérature?, it is only through poetry that the black man can describe or depict his condition in the world, and hence, as Hollier states, act within and upon his time: "le propos que le noir a eu de se peindre ... me parait poétique" ("Orphée Noir", xxi). Furthermore, Sartre, like Breton, defines this poetry by its "blackness" -- "la poésie nègre". This poetry is *cri* and it is *nègre*; Sartre supposes a total transparency of this poetic use of language, and thus reduces poetry to the color of the writer's skin and to the degree of committedness it exhibits.

In the same manner that Breton proclaims Martinique his land, Sartre also lays claim to the texts and writers he reads and about which he writes. This colonization of the text is manifested by Sartre's unconscious textual appropriation of these poems and his inconsistency in

attributing to the rightful author the excerpts of the texts he directly quotes in "Orphée Noir". At times Sartre names the author, Césaire, Roumains, Laleau, for example; at times the only reference made to the author is "un noir" or "un nègre écrit." The poets he praises are once again left with one identity: color or race.

As the title of Sartre's preface implies, Sartre's desire was to describe "cette poésie orphique" through which the black writer expresses "l'inlassable descente du nègre en soi-même." Unfortunately, it seems that Sartre himself cannot escape his descent into his exotic vision/version of Africa the "dark continent." He unconsciously loses himself in his stereotyped vision of the black man and "l'essence noire" which is, in reality, according to Stanilas Adotevi, the objective relationship that the poet has with his own history: "En réalité, ce que Sartre appelle <<essence noire>>, c'est le rapport objectif que le poète entretient avec sa propre histoire." (Adotevi, Négritudes et Négrologues, 68) Sartre's exhuberant portrayal of the primitive sexuality of the black man is actually his own desire for "potent" or non-effeminate European literatures:

> The constructive, revolutionary potency of black poetry is transposed by Sartre into his metaphysical scheme of sexuality. In comparison with effeminate European literatures, the black is the male of the earth, the sperm of nature... (Halpern, 82)

In Mythologies, Roland Barthes states that "dans la critque sartrienne...le signifié est constitué par la crise

originelle du sujet..." (221). In "Orphée Noir," Sartre's critical crisis reveals itself as twofold and is characterized by his assumption of collective white guilt coupled with his dismay at the state of European literature.

Both Sartre and Breton lose all critical distance vis à vis the texts they read. They see these poets as the vital new force and voice in poetry of French expression that they were, but they fail to give these texts and writers the "reading" and location they deserve. Sartre, carried away in his emotional portrayal of these texts and writers, makes an all-too-obvious exception for them: their *poésie engagée*. According to Halpern, Sartre claims that "the black poets using the surrealist method, have recuperated the meaning and function of surrealism; they have completed it and made it work." (76) Césaire himself, questioned Sartre and Breton's assumption that he simply appropriated the surrealist model. When Breton first read Tropiques, he saw himself and his surrealism reflected there: "Quand il [Breton] a lu les trois premiers numéros de Tropiques, il a cru que j'étais un surréaliste... (Entretien avec Aimé Césaire, Tropiques, Tome I, vi). Césaire does credit Breton for bringing to him what he calls "la hardiesse" and aid in shortening his search and hesitations (Cesaire, vi). Surrealism provided these writers with "a literary aesthetic which responded to their specific artistic as well as political needs. (Dash, Literature and Ideology in Haiti, 157) Césaire suggests that he was already surrealist and

that Breton's contribution was nothing more than a confirmation or acknowledgement of his literary and political projects already in progress.

Sartre's and Breton's influence on the Négritude poets really is not the question here: my primary concern is their reading of the texts and the process by which they proceed, which is one of appropriation, reduction and denial. Theirs is a critical reading that persists today: one which seeks the *engagement transparent* of the black writer, and that supposes, as Henry Louis Gates says, that literature by black writers is always political. This critical reading often places more importance on the adjectives used to qualify these diverse literatures -- black literature, *la littérature négro-africaine, la poésie nègre* -- than the texts themselves. It seems very often that the western critic still seeks only the literary cry manifest in these literatures rather than the analysis of how this cry articulates itself to the reader.

As the actual literary production of Africa and the Caribbean prove, these literatures have passed the stage of the literary cry as exemplified by the Négritude movement. Edouard Glissant affirms the necessity of this transcendence in the Discours Antillais: it is essential for these writers to "dépasser le cri" in order to "forger la parole." (DA, 19) In turn, criticism must find possible solutions to its reading of these literatures, for, as Appiah clearly states, location and reading is what these texts are in need

of. It is perhaps time, to re-phrase Glissant, that criticism forge "une 'autre' lecture": a reading that locates the texts culturally, geographically, and historically while recognizing the writer's use of language as tool which he uses to reclaim or decolonize.

For Edouard Glissant, the question of history is posed neither in terms of *impossibility* (Blanchot) nor *engagement* (Sartre), but rather in terms of a *questionnement* of history:

> Savoir ce qui s'est passé [...] est la question qu'**on** [...] ne peut se dispenser de poser. Une question qui ne comportera pas de réponse agie. L'important n'est pas dans la réponse mais dans le questionnement. (DA, 149)

"The important is not in the response but in the questionning": for Glissant the role of the writer is to question history from the points of reference found in the lived experience -- *le vécu*. For the Caribbean writer in particular, it is a question of digging down deep into the collective historical memory in an attempt to re-establish order and chronology to what Glissant describes as the *non-histoire* of the Caribbean. Glissant describes the Caribbean in terms of non-history because of the complete break or rupture brought about by the uprooting of the African peoples by colonization and the Slave Trade. Glissant's writer is a *decolonizer* who, through his symbolic reclaiming of history, revalidation of suppressed cultures and repossession of the land, restores to his people a

historical and cultural identity and possibilities for the future.

In chapter three, I will discuss Glissant's pivotal concept of *antillanité* as presented in Le Discours Antillais in relation to *négritude*. I will then examine the Discours as a text which illustrates Glissant's own desire to locate and identify for the reader the problematics of Caribbean history, identity and literature. The last section of the chapter consists of an analysis of Glissant's first novel, La Lézarde, as the articulation of his concept of *antillanité* and his search for a literary *langage* that transcends the poetic cry of Négritude.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Terry Eagleton states in Literary Theory that politics is naturally a part of literature:

> There is, in fact, no need to drag politics into literary theory ... it has been there from the beginning. I mean by political no more than the way we organize our social life together and the power relations which this involves... (194)

2. In his essay on the Benjamin Constant's novel, Adolphe, Todorov discusses the role of language and its effects upon the two protagonists, Adolphe and Ellénore. Todorov determines that in Adolphe "toutes les qualités" -- including silence -- constitute "une façon de discourir". (Todorov, "La parole selon Constant" in Poétique de la Prose, 100.)

3. Blanchot echoes Sartre's existentialist stance on silence and its impossibility: "Et se taire, c'est encore parler. Le silence est impossible." (ED, 23) (All quotes from Sartre's Qu'est que la littérature are taken from it reprinting in the collection Situations, volume 2.)

4. All quotes are from the following edition: The Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas Vassa, the African (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1837).

5. "As the inhuman traffic of slavery is to be taken into the consideration of the British legislature, I doubt not, if a system of commerce was established in Africa, the demand for manufactures will most rapidly augment, as the native inhabitants will insensibly adopt the British fashins, manners, custom, &c." (Equiano, 290)

6. For a more detailed description of Equiano's work as a writer and an abolitionist, see Keith A. Sandiford's work, Measuring the Moment, chapter 5, "Olaudah Equiano: The Appeal to Humanity and the Political Self."

7. For Henry Louis Gates, Jr. it is clearly Douglass' mastery of language that sets his work apart, as he states in Figures in Black: Words, Signs and the "Racial" Self:

> Long after the issues for which he struggled so ardently have become primarily the concern of the historian, Frederick Douglass will continue to be read and reread. And surely this must be the literary critic's final judgement of Frederick Douglass: that he was representative man because he was Rhetorical Man, black master of the verbal arts. (108)

8. Chinua Achebe's novel Things Fall Apart depicts the devastating effects of colonization on an African community. Todorov describes the violent Spanish colonization of the New World in his book La Conquête de l'Amérique.

9. Eagleton attributes this "extremism" of criticism's refusal of history as a reaction to "the antiquarian, historically reductionist criticism which held sway in the nineteenth-century..." (Literary Theory, 196)

10. This preface was also published in the Martinican journal directed by Césaire Tropiques, under the title: "Martinique, charmeuse de serpents: un grand poète noir". All references will be taken from this edition of the text.

11. It is interesting to note that the backdrop for Breton's discovery of Césaire's work is the oppressive atmosphere of wartime Martinique. Breton describes the feeling of confinement that reigned on the island in the beginning of the essay:

> Avril 1941. Bloquant la vue une carcasse de navire, scellée de madrépores au sol de la plage et visitée par les vagues -- du moins les petits enfants n'avaient pas rêvé mieux pour s'ébattre tout le long du jour -- par sa fixité même ne laissait aucun répit à l'exaspération de ne pouvoir se déplacer qu'à pas comptés, dans l'intervalle de deux baïonnettes [...]. (119)

Chapter 3

Du Cri à la Parole: *Négritude* and *Antillanité*

> *Le passé, notre passé subi, qui n'est pas encore histoire pour nous, est pourtant là (ici) qui nous lancine. La tâche de l'écrivain est d'explorer ce lancinement, de le "révéler" de manière continue dans le présent et l'actuel.* (Edouard Glissant, Le discours antillais, 132)

The first part of this chapter will examine the concepts of Négritude and Antillanité focusing on how the two movements relate to each other as quests for self identity and definition and, in particular, how Glissant's notion of Antillanité transcends the limits imposed by Négritude through the search for a uniquely Caribbean identity. Glissant's seminal work Le Discours Antillais reflects the complexities of this search in which the Caribbean writer plays a pivotal role as the decipherer of history. In the latter part of this chapter, I will examine Glissant's first novel La Lézarde as the literary expression of his concept of *antillanité*.

For the poets of Négritude (Césaire, Damas, Senghor), the poetic *cri* was a way of rehabilitating the oppressed self of the colonized through a symbolic and poetic return to Africa, the motherland. This return involved the systematic revalorization of African civilizations, cultures, histories and values. The concept of Négritude and process of rehabilitation implied the systematic denial

of an imposed "white" or occidental system of values and Sartre and Breton's prefaces reflect their appropriation of Negritude's tenets: they found in these texts not only the embodiment of their theories but also a vivacity and force they did not find in European poetry.[1] Thomas Melone, in his text De La Négritude, explains the Négritude movement in terms of Sartrean existentialism:

> La Négritude se présente donc tout d'abord comme une prise de position, à la fois négation et une affirmation. Elle a toutes les caractéristiques d'une "situation existentialiste." Le négro-africain, "se situe" par rapport à la durée et à l'espace, il prend conscience de ce qu'il est ou mieux de ce qu'il n'est pas, c'est-à-dire, de ce qu'il veut devenir. Il refuse sa situation d'être chose, d'être néant, et, s'affirme "être existant". "Je veux être donc je suis". Un véritable cri d'espérance. (25)

Césaire stated that Breton and surrealism brought his generation "la hardiesse" to their literary projects already in existence. Like Négritude, Surrealism sought, through the liberation of the unconscious, liberation from the dominating culture: "it [surrealism] provided a tempting solution to the problems of political and most importantly psychological liberation from the metropolitan culture." (Dash, Literature and Ideology, 157) Furthermore, as Dash states, Surrealism

> shunned the fatigued rationality and inhibiting materialism of the West and actively promoted the search for spontaneity and originality in Non-Western traditions [...] and responded to their specific artistic as well as political needs. (Dash, Literature and Ideology, 157)

And while the impact of both existentialism and surrealism on the Negritude writers is undeniable, we see in Sartre and Breton's prefaces the reciprocity of this impact: Segalen's reverberating *choc*[2] of Sartre's and Breton's encounter with the Other.

Négritude's symbolic return to African origins through a refusal of Western values gave birth to this first poetic cry: the black poet's affirmation of his existence and his eruption into modernity. Glissant explains Négritude's importance for Martinican intellectuals as a means of rediscovering a unity or equilibrium beyond the shattered psyche and suppressed identity: "retrouver l'unité (équilibre) par-delà l'éparpillement." (DA, 16) However, the necessity to go beyond this poetic cry is underscored by Glissant in his work Le Discours Antillais: "quitter le cri, forger la parole" is the difficult task that Glissant bestows upon the Caribbean writer and more specifically the Martinican writer today. As Sylvia Wynter suggests, Négritude's "cri" was an expression of the Black writer's "être" (his being, his situation in time) and Glissant's concept of *antillanité* is the expression of his "étant" -- his "essence" but also his "becoming". ("The Discourse of Man", 646) Michael Dash, in his introduction to his translation of the Discours Antillais (Caribbean Discourse), states that "One could say that Glissant's 'discourse' is a thoroughgoing expression of Césaire's cry." (xxxvi)

The word *Antillanité* was pronounced for the first time at a lecture given by Edouard Glissant for the Association Générale des Etudiants Martiniquais in 1957.[3] Antillanité has always been a part of Edouard Glissant's literary project as his poetic, fictional and theoretical works bear witness. Glissant's concept of Antillanité is deeply rooted in the *vécu antillais* -- the reality of the Caribbean lived experience. The fact that the Caribbean community has embraced the word "Antillanité" and that it has become a part of the current lexicon is an indicator of its importance to the Caribbean community. For the literary critic or scholar engaged in the analysis and research of the literary production of the Caribbean, a grasp of the term and concept *Antillanité* is indispensable. One can no longer study the literary production of the Caribbean in general, and Martinique in particular, without referring to Glissant. The recent recognition bestowed upon Glissant's work by the international intellectual community is further proof of his important contribution to literature. The translation of Le Discours Antillais and the entry of the word "Antilleanity" are also indications of the wide credibility given Glissant's works.[4] Antillanité perhaps reveals itself with an obvious transparency but this is a deceptive transparency. The many complexities of the concept have given birth to so many critical studies and intellectual debates.

> Antillanité: Plus qu'une théorie, une vision. [...] J'ai entendu en deux ou trois occasions proposer l'antillanité (sans autre précision) comme solution globale à des problèmes vrais ou fantasmés. Quand un mot devient ainsi passe-partout, on préjuge qu'il rejoint le réel. (DA, 495)

This "definition" of Antillanité is found in the glossary of the Discours Antillais: the reader is mislead if he expects to find a "clear" or transparent definition of the concept; Glissant "defines" the concept of Antillanité without truly defining -- Sartre would say he "designates" or describes the concept -- and this opacity or lack of transparency is at the very heart of the concept of Antillanité.

The concept of Antillanité is, as Dash states, the ongoing search for a "Caribbean identity" -- a search rooted in Caribbean reality, or rather in the questionning (Interrogation) of this reality:

> La notion d'antillanité surgit d'une réalité que nous aurons à interroger, mais correspond aussi à un voeu dont il nous faudra préciser ou fonder la légitimité. [...] Cette réalité est virtuelle: dense (inscrite dans les faits) mais menacée (non inscrite dans les consciences). Ce voeu est nécessaire, mais non évident. (DA, 422)

If it is difficult to define Antillanité, this difficulty arises from the "undeniable reality" of the complex historical, cultural, geographic and linguistic specificities of the Caribbean:

> Le réel est indéniable: cultures issues du système des Plantations; civilisation insulaire (où la mer Caraïbe diffracte, là où on estimera qu'une mer elle aussi civilisatrice, la Méditerranée, avait d'abord puissance d'attraction et de concentration); peuplement pyramidal avec une origine

> africaine ou hindoue à la base, européenne au sommet; vocation de la rencontre et de la synthèse; persistance du fait africain; cultures de la canne, du maïs et du piment; lieu de combinaisons des rythmes; peuples de l'oralité. (DA, 422)

The Antillean or Caribbean universe is one born of the Plantation System, a common historical and cultural base, which "is 'exploded' and 'tormented' from the geographic standpoint and which consists of a people made up of Africans, French, Hindus, Chinese, Lebanese, and others who share some four centuries of history." (Racine, "The Antilleanity of Edouard Glissant", 625) The Caribbean universe is tormented by the geographic unity of the Antillean archepelago, and the Caribbean sea which paradoxically disperses and separates these islands and cultures. The diverse origins of the people of the Caribbean and the contact between these cultures give birth to what Glissant calls "un métissage culturel" -- a cultural mixing. The Caribbean universe is not composed of the simplifying oppositions of a black/dominated culture or white/dominating culture but reveals itself as the result of the bringing together of different and diverse peoples, cultures, and languages, all of which contribute to its identity and reality.

According to Glissant, Antillanité is not only a complex ensemble of historic, geographic, ethnic, cultural and linguistic specificities -- common or shared components

which in his vision unite the Caribbean -- it is also defined by that which threatens it:

> Nous savons ce qui menace l'antillanité: la balkanisation historique des îles, l'apprentissage de langues véhiculaires différentes et souvent opposées (la querelle du français et de l'anglo américain), les cordons ombilicaux qui maintiennent ferme ou souple beaucoup de ces îles dans la réserve d'une métropole donnée, la présence d'inquiétants et puissants voisins, le Canada et surtout les Etats-Unis. L'isolement diffère pour chaque île la prise de conscience de l'antillanité, en même temps qu'il éloigne chaque communauté de sa vérité propre. (DA, 423)

For Glissant the greatest threat for the Caribbean resides in the balkanization of these islands when, in fact, they share a common history as well as common economic, social and cultural realities: the slave trade, the plantation system and the creole language. One very important aspect of the concept of Antillanité, which also is encompassed in Glissant's *poétique de la relation*, is that it takes into account these shared realities while accepting the possible diversities.[5] Diversity is the foundation upon which both Glissant's concepts of *antillanité* and *poétique de la relation* are elaborated. In the diversity of the Caribbean, Glissant sees the birth of new possibilities and a new civilization as he states in the glossary to the Discours Antillais:

> Antilles: Peut-être vivons-nous à la conjonction de leurs cultures, l'annonce d'une civilisation. Je crois que la mer des Antilles ne resserre pas, qu'elle diffracte. Elle n'impose pas l'Un, elle rayonne du Divers. (495)

The isolation of the Caribbean islands that impedes the awakening of a collective consciousness is inextricably embedded in Caribbean history, or rather, as Glissant describes it, the "non-history" of the Caribbean.

> Les Antilles sont le lieu d'une histoire faite de ruptures et dont le commencement est un arrachement brutal, la Traite. Notre conscience historique ne pouvait pas <<sédimenter>>, si on peut ainsi dire, de manière progressive et continue, comme chez les peuples qui ont engendré une philosophie souvent totalitaire de l'histoire [...]. Ce discontinu dans le continu, et l'impossibilité pour la conscience collective d'en faire le tour, caractérisent ce que j'appelle une non-histoire. (130-131)

Glissant's vision of the nonhistory of the Caribbean is opposed to what he calls the "often totalitarian philosophy of history" espoused by the West. This same totalitarian philosophy of history underlies the "civilizing" mission by which colonization justified itself and which constituted for Césaire the "mensonge fondamental" of colonization since it actually decivilized the peoples colonized as well as those colonizing.

For Glissant "Là où se joignent les histoires des peuples, hier réputés sans histoire, finit l'Histoire." (*DA*, 132) In *Le Discours Antillais* Glissant posits that *H*istory -- with a capital H -- is "un fantasme fortement opératoire" of the West (132) that in reality casts aside the many untold histories of those peoples colonized and enslaved. From Columbus' arrival in the New World and, consequently, the annihilation of the indigenous Indian

populations and their replacement with African slaves to the psychologically and culturally debilitating effects of colonization and departmentalization, Glissant characterizes Martinique as a prime example of a land and a people robbed of its true history through a series of ruptures. Martinique suffers from an imposed "nonhistory" that "wiped out" the collective memory. And because the imposed nonhistory of the Caribbean has left a void in the historical consciousness of its people, it is the task of the writer, through what Glissant calls a "prophetic vision of the past," to "contribute to reconstituting its tormented chronology." History -- the idea of one history encompassing all -- excludes the possibility of Other histories. This conception of History is, according to Glissant, "contemporain précisément du temps où il [l'Occident] était seul à <<faire>> l'histoire du monde." (*DA*, 132)

The Western idea of History, as Dash describes it, is "the dream of total absorption of all events into a neat chronological pattern" which "is at the heart of any attempt to write history." ("The Word and the World", 112) In Livre I of *Le Discours Antillais*, Glissant demonstrates the inadequacy of a chronological or linear view of history in the Caribbean. He begins this section with a "skeleton of 'facts'" which could constitute a linear view of Martinican history beginning with the "discovery" of the island by Christopher Columbus in 1502 and ending with the doctrine of

economic assimilation in 1975. He concludes this introductory "skeleton of facts" with the remark: "Une fois ce tableau chronologique dressé, complété, tout reste à débrouiller de l'histoire martiniquaise. Tout reste à découvrir de l'histoire antillaise de la Martinique" (DA, 29). To render a "true" account of Martinican history, and discover the submerged or obscured Caribbean history of Martinique, the events underlying the historic facts must be disentangled, unraveled and sorted out of the chaos of their "nonhistory." Any linear view of the progression of history cannot render a true account or chronicle of the Martinican people and, according to Glissant, constitutes the trap of any "generalizing theory of history" (DA, 139).

Historian Hayden White, in his article, "The Burden of History" in which he explores the relationship between literature, history and modern sciences in historical method, shares Glissant's views on the danger of falling into the simplifying trap of attempting to classify with dates and facts thereby establishing a false (linear) historical continuity:

> Since the second half of the nineteenth century, history has become increasingly the refuge of all those 'sane' men who excel at finding the simple in the complex and the familiar in the strange. [...] The historian serves no one well by constructing a specious continuity between the present world and that which preceeded it. On the contrary, we require a history that will educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity, disruption, and chaos is our lot. (134)

Discontinuity, disruption, and chaos: this is precisely the case of the Caribbean and Glissant's native Martinique. White and Glissant see the reading of history as a journey into uncertainty and the exploration of discontinuity and chaos, where traditional Western historical method -- "the dream of neatly placing events in a chronological order" -- becomes the real trap that must be avoided at all costs. The question is no longer what is the relationship between literature and history, but rather, as Terry Eagleton affirms, "a question of different readings of history itself." (Literary Theory, 209)

Antillanité can also be defined by that which it lacks, by that which it not yet "is" -- by its "becoming" part of the collective consciousness:

> Il manque à l'antillanité: de passer du vécu commun à la conscience exprimée; de dépasser la postulation intellectuelle prise en compte par les élites du savoir et de s'ancrer dans l'affirmation collective appuyée sur l'acte des peuples.

This lack of a collective consciousness and the nonhistory of Martinique has serious implications for the literary production of Martinique and the Caribbean and for all national literatures[6]:

> C'est que ces littératures n'ont pas le temps d'évoluer harmonieusement, du lyrisme collectif d'Homère aux discussions rêches de Beckett. Il leur faut tout assumer tout d'un coup, le combat, le militantisme, l'enracinement, la lucidité, la méfiance envers soi, l'absolu d'amour, la forme du paysage, le nu des villes, les dépassements et les entêtements. C'est ce que j'appelle notre éruption dans la modernité. (DA, 192)

This eruption into modernity is the struggle for identity and presence in the world which places Diversity in combat with the never-ceasing assault of Sameness.

Because of the non-history of the Caribbean, time and space are not and cannot be expressed in the same way as in Western literatures. For Glissant, the sea and land/landscape are inseparable from Caribbean history. Man's relationship to the land becomes so important in his discourse that "le paysage dans l'oeuvre cesse d'être décor...":

> Décrire le paysage ne suffira pas. L'individu, la communauté, le pays sont indissociables dans l'épisode constitutif de leur histoire. Le paysage est un personnage de cette histoire. If faut le comprendre dans ses profondeurs. (DA, 199)

In order to understand the depth and importance of the land/landscape, one must "passionately live the landscape" as Glissant explains in his earlier work L'Intention Poétique : "Passionnément vivre le paysage. Le dégager de l'indistinct, le fouiller, l'allumer parmi nous. Savoir ce qu'en nous il signifie. Porter à la terre ce clair savoir. (245) For Glissant, it is a question of bringing back to the community a consciousness of their history which is inextricably linked to the land through an understanding and knowledge of that land.[7]

The role of the writer or intellectual is paramount in this passage "from a common lived experience to an expressed consciousness." Glissant's role in leading Martinican

writers down the difficult path to a *conscience exprimée* is evident in the works of the Martinican intellectuals and writers Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant.[8] As Patrice Hourbette states,

> Les écrivains d'aujourd'hui se reconnaissent plus dans le concept d'Antillanité, concept qui tient compte de la profonde originalité de la situation antillaise. ("Propos sur l'Antillanité", 350)

Glissant's project of Antillanité -- embedded in the lived experience, the creole language, and the hidden history of the Caribbean -- is the process of giving a voice to the Caribbean people by awakening them to their unique position in the planetary scheme of "histories." It represents as Diva Damato implies, "an opportunity for his people to come before the world, to participate in the relations between peoples." (Damato, "Poetics of the Dispossessed", 608)

Edouard Glissant's concept of antillanité is inseparably tied to Caribbean culture, landscape and most importantly, history. His work is permeated with his anguish or his obsession with history or rather the "non-history" of the Antilles and Martinique. The relationship between literature and history is not an impossible one for Glissant. In what Blanchot would call the "disaster" of history, i.e, colonization and the Slave Trade, Glissant sees the birth of a new civilization in which diversity reigns. However, Glissant does not consider the writer's *engagement* as either immediate or transparent as does Sartre. Glissant's literary *engagement* reveals itself

neither as transparent -- "Nous réclamons le droit à l'opacité" (DA, 11) -- nor immediate. His engagement involves the arduous task of "forging a voice" ("forger la parole") for a disjointed and diffracted collectivity and community: foraging the obscurity of Martinican realities and pasts in order to bring to the community the voice (*parole*) rightfully theirs. As both Daniel Racine and Maryse Condé point out, his ultimate goal is the healing of a community (Racine, Daniel, "The Antilleanity of Edouard Glissant", 620).[9] The search for origins is a recurring theme in Glissant's novels and his literary return to these "uncertain sources" by bringing to light the history/histories of the Caribbean people is one of the slow paths to health:

> En même temps qu'il tente d'éclaircir l'histoire du peuple antillais, de remonter les sources incertaines de sa mémoire, Edouard Glissant, depuis son premier roman La Lézarde, publié en 1958, jusqu'à Mahagony, paru en 1987, dit cet incessant tourment de ceux dont l'Histoire véritable a été occultée et qui, ne sachant d'où ils viennent ne savent qui ils sont. (Degras, "Edouard Glissant: les traces du "temps d'avant", 38)

Glissant's writing of this nonhistory -- not only a quest for the past, present and future histories of Martinique, but also the search for a *langage* -- does not reveal itself transparent and is indeed opaque. Could this be the reason for the lack of a positive reception in his native Martinique?[10] Two novelists profoundly influenced by his work, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant

reproach Glissant with being too involved with his own literary projects to help them in their efforts to continue his quest of a Caribbean identity (<u>Eloge</u>, 23). Or is it, as Henry Louis Gates ascertains, that literature by black writers has always been expected, for all kinds of complicated historical and political reasons, to be committed? But literature by Black writers is not expected to be merely committed or *engagée*: it must manifest an *engagement transparent*.[11] It would appear that perhaps the expectations of criticism (Sartre is a prime example) are different for black writers than for white writers.

The following critique of Glissant's first novel taken from Selwyn Cudjoe's book <u>Resistance and Caribbean Literature</u> demonstrates the critic's expectation of an *engagement transparent*:

> In Glissant we find a ponderous prose style with a highly contrived artistic presence that tends to diminish the urgency of the content of the work. While this tortuousness seems to inhere in the language itself, it makes it difficult to convince one of the evils of colonization if it is couched in language and inundated with the symbols which seem to speak more to an artistic game than to the "revelation" of reality. Neither seems to be more allusive and exhortative. Because the author poetizes his prose, the critical capacity of his endeavor is lessened tremendously. (177)

This "critical" reading of <u>La Lézarde</u> is an example of a critic in search of a "transparent engagement": a reading which is in essence colonizing. Cudjoe refuses or denies Glissant his right to a free literary expression by his expectation, or rather his demand, that the revelation of

reality be done through immediately understandable unpoetized prose. His assumption that Glissant's novel exists only to "convince one of the evils of colonization" is naive, to put it lightly. Glissant's goal as a writer is not simply to convince the reader of the evils of colonization: his mission as a Martinican writer is to decipher the complexities of diffracted and disrupted martinican and Caribbean histories and realities -- past and present -- and to bring to light the overshadowing yet underlying mechanisms that threaten the community (non-history, lack of a collective historical memory, uncertain origins, the loss of creole oral tradition, loss of a landscape) Most importantly, as a writer, Glissant actively seeks to bring an identity to his people through a complex process of location.[12]

For Glissant, this quest involves the invention of "a new language, beyond and despite the unnamable and multiple impossibilities that oppose creation" (Degras, "Name of the Fathers", 613). Glissant's prose style is not transparent. His novels do not unfold themselves to the reader in a balzacian fashion and perhaps discourage the reader in search of exposition, description and linear development. He gives the reader some help in deciphering the complexities of his novels by providing glossaries of creole words or expressions, chronologies, genealogies, as well as names of plants and animals native to Martinique and unfamiliar to the reader. Because of this "distance"

between the reader and text, Glissant's works have a deeply disturbing effect on the reader. Even the Discours Antillais, which locates the Caribbean discourse for the reader "frightens as much as it fascinates", as Diva Barbaro Damato explains:

> Western intellectuals, especially the French, have a need to organize, classify, and order the world. Glissant's multiplicity of themes, at times dealt with in a systematic fashion, at other times in a fragmentary fashion, his series of blank spaces, his theoretical texts, his poetic texts, his accounts of experiences, and his other texts, give the reader the sensation of being dragged over a precipice. (Damato, 606)

It is interesting to note that in the English translation of the Discours Antillais, Caribbean Discourse, many of the original textual devices that "give the reader the sensation of being dragged over a precipice" have been omitted. The reader in English is spared the precipice: gone are the empty spaces in the text; the introductory pages to each "book" -- pages left deliberately blank except for the titles, subtitles and "repères" (landmarks, points of reference) all of which serve as guides to the reader -- have been collapsed into one page. The *repères* are omitted more often than not. Minor cosmetic changes, perhaps. A value judgement on the part of the translator and editor, perhaps. Nonetheless these changes detract from the reader's reaction to the text. These blank or empty spaces weigh heavy with meaning, as Glissant points out at the beginning of Livre IV - Un Discours Eclaté: the subtitle page is entitled "inconscient, identité, méthodes" and the

following page contains only the word and footnote "repères[1]". The footnote reads: "Seule une page blanche en peut ici tenir lieu." Other indications or "landmarks" Glissant gives the reader such as the chronological numbering of the topics discussed -- the deliberate creation of a sort of order -- have been omitted because the English translation has left out certain sections of the Discours. The few landmarks given the reader to locate the *discours antillais* have been taken away. The Blank pages indicative of the Blank pages of history have been wiped away. These omissions function in the same way as the use of sound in the editing of films to detract the viewers attention from a change in scene in order to create a false sense of narrative continuity. The omitted landmarks ultimately undermine Glissant's desire to communicate to the reader the sense of discontinuity and chaos that is part of the Caribbean experience.

Glissant not only conveys this sense of discontinuity and chaos in the Discours, he also indicates and *locates* the complexities of Martinican history, society and identity for the reader and literary critic, but it is a difficult location. Glissant demands that his reader delve into the dizzying complexities of the Caribbean universe along with him; he challenges the reader to join him in this journey -- these wanderings -- into the uncertain. What does Glissant expect of his reader? The reader of Glissant's

works must follow a procedure similar to that of the writer: he must "dig deep" into the text to find its order.

In the novels of Edouard Glissant, the reader is witness to how his critical discourse articulates itself in his fiction -- how as a writer, he plunders and "digs deep into" the hidden history and the historical memory of his country in order to re-establish a chronology and more importantly a continuity between the past, present and future. As Richard D.E. Burton states,

> Glissant has sought not merely to relive or reconstruct the history of the Martinican people from the beginnings of French colonization to the present day but, in a very real sense, to create that history, to deliver the island-department's past -- and hence, perhaps, its presence and future -- from the layers of repression and oblivion in which nearly three and a half centuries of metropolitan dominance have enshrouded it. ("Comment peut-on être martiniquais", 301)

In the following section of this study, I will attempt a *glissantian reading* of Glissant's first novel La Lézarde. I will examine La Lézarde as the novel which best illustrates his concept of antillanité as the collective search for identity and explore the role of the writer in that quest as it is specified in the following passage of the Discours Antillais:

> Parce que la mémoire historique fut trop souvent raturée, l'écrivain doit "fouiller" cette mémoire, à partir des traces parfois latentes qu'il a repérées dans le réel.
>
> Parce que la conscience antillaise fut balisée de barrières stérilisantes, l'écrivain doit pouvoir exprimer toutes les occasions où ces barrières furent partiellement brisées.

> Parce que le temps antillais fut stabilisé dans le néant d'une non-histoire imposée, l'écrivain doit contribuer à rétablir sa chronologie tourmentée, c'est-à-dire à dévoiler la vivacité féconde d'une dialectique réamorcée entre nature et culture antillaises. (133)

La Lézarde[13] begins Glissant's series of novels in which he explores Martinican history, landscape and people. To call them a series of novels is perhaps deceptive for, as Richard E. Burton points out, "series" presupposes a serial or linear sort of development[14] which is not to be found in Glissant's novels: the very nature of his literary project defies this kind of ordering. The main thrust of the plot is centered around a group of young political activists campaigning for a progressive candidate. Garin, a reactionary government official poses a threat not only to the election but to the land and community through his plans to build a house at the source of the Lézarde river: "His desire to control the spring where the river rises explicitly indicates his determination to restrict the people's activities." (Dash, intro, The Ripening, 10) The group decides that the only solution is his assasination and they recruit Thaël, the resolute, young mountain shepherd who has lived his entire life in the isolation of the hills to carry out the task. The novel begins with his departure from his sanctuary in the hills -- the legendary hiding place of the maroons -- to join Mathieu, the intellectual leader of the group.

Their meeting begins their journey toward self-awareness and understanding -- each needing what the other possessed. Thaël possessed a knowlege of the land and was "nourished by stories and legends" (Lézarde, 12). The learned Mathieu seeks Thaël's spiritual ties to legend and land, likewise Thaël needs the logic and order that Mathieu has to offer: "...ils cherchent la légende; moi je [Thaël] cherche l'ordre et la lucidité." (Lézarde, 21) Beverly Ormerod compares Thaël to the classical hero and describes his journey as being "built upon traditional, archetypal motifs":

> ...the departure from a known region into the unknown; the encounter with an alluring woman; the questing journey through a mysterious forest; the descent, in darkness, to a magic spring; the tests of skill and endurance; the killing which frees imprisoned waters and lifts a curse from a community; the final difficult return of the hero enriched and matured by his initiatory experiences... ("Freeing of the Waters", 39)

Thaël's journey is similar to that of the classical hero, however Thaël's quest begins with the hero's archetypal descent into the underworld of the "land below" -- *le pays d'en bas* -- where the unknown reality of his country will be revealed to him, giving him the strength and knowledge necessary to carry out his deed. The novel begins with his departure to join Mathieu, the intellectual leader of the group. Mathieu acts as Thael's guide on his symbolic journey to the underworld -- the unknown Land below. Their meeting begins their journey toward self-awareness and understanding driven by a force they do not yet understand.

The novel itself is divided into four "books" (livres): I. La flamme; II. L'acte; III. L'élection; VI. L'éclat. The books seem to reflect Glissant's main concern in the novel: the emotional and intellectual development of the group of protagonists. *La flamme* (Livre I) is perhaps the birth of their quest but *L'éclat* (Livre IV) is yet another beginning. Unlike Glissant's other novels, which, at times must be deciphered with the author's help (glossaries and genealogies), La Lézarde unfolds more or less chronologically from one "book" to the next. And because the author is most concerned with the intellectual development of the protagonists, the novel is almost devoid of "everyday domestic detail" and "few concrete events are described" (Ormerod, "Freeing of the Waters", 39). The depiction of the tropical landscape lacks the exoticism one might expect and is always described in relation to the characters' emotional state of being and development. The four "livres" of the novel correspond to and textually reinforce the divisions of Le Discours Antillais and Glissant's second novel Le quatrième siècle. These four divisions correspond to Glissant's vision of the four centuries of Caribbean history found in Le quatrième siècle.

> La mer qu'on traverse, c'est un siècle....Et la côte où tu débarques, aveuglé, sans âme ni voix, est un siècle. Et la forêt, entretenue dans sa force jusqu'à ce jour de ton marronnage..est un siècle. Et la terre, peu à peu aplatie, dénudée ...est un siècle. (268-269)

The chapters or divisions of each book are relatively short when compared to Glissant's other novels. Some of the narrative techniques that mark Glissant's later novels -- such as the disquieting empty spaces (textual manifestation and reflection of the histories left untold by History?) and changes in the spelling of words (the conflictual relationship between the French and Creole languages?) -- are not yet present in La Lézarde. Also absent are the glossaries and genealogies typical of Glissant's later novels -- necessary tools in order to understand the interventions in creole and to disentagle the histories (genealogies) of the protagonists. One might assume that these glossaries are there exclusively for the foreign reader, but they exist as well for the "future readers" that will emerge in his homeland, Martinique:

> Glossaire: pour les lecteurs d'ailleurs, qui ne s'accommodent pas de mots inconnus ou qui veulent tout comprendre. Mais peut-être pour nous, pour nous aussi, établir la liste de tant de mots en nous dont le sens échappe, ou plus loins fixer la syntaxe de ce langage que nous balbutions. Les lecteurs d'ici sont futurs. (Malemort, 231)

La Lézarde takes place during the elections of 1945 "in the immediate aftermath of the 'Vichy interlude'" (Burton, 306)[15] -- 1940-1943-- during which the island and Martinican people were in a state of multiple colonization: Martinique, then French colony, was under the control of Vichy régime-appointed High Commissioner, Vice Admiral Georges Joseph Robert; it was virtually under a state of

siege by the American blockade surrounding the island which prevented importation of much needed food and supplies from France. In addition to the hardships of basic survival, thousands of French soldiers were stranded on the island "exacerbating the problem of supplies and, by displays of prejudice, creating grave racial animosities." (Ormerod, "The Freeing of the Waters", 49.) Interestingly enough, it was during this same period that Breton wrote his preface to Césaire's Retour au pays natal, which begins with a description of the enclosed and suffocating atmosphere in the island. The following year, 1946, the island-colony became officially a *département* of France, thus solidifying the island's political, economic and cultural ties -- and its identity -- with the distant *métropole*.

It is significant that Glissant chose this historical setting for his first novel -- "already, in 1958, a historical novel." ("Freeing of the Waters", 50) In the Discours Antillais, Glissant calls upon the writer to explore the periods in Martinican history when the "sterilizing barriers" that impede the formation of a historical consciousness are partially torn down. This postwar period is one such period: the confinement and isolation of the war gave birth to a spirit of anticipation and hope for a new social order (Ormerod, "Freeing of the Waters" 46) among the group of young protagonists: "Le long isolement imposé par la guerre...avait mûri ces jeunes gens". (Lézarde, 17) Theirs was a generation which "had

abandonned the naive credulity of the ancients" in search of a "new domain of dignity" (Lézarde, 17) -- politics. Thaël and Mathieu were part of this new generation which abandonned the old ways and tore away the "vêtement de l'illusoire ressemblance, pour affirmer enfin que l'homme d'ici n'était qu'à sa propre semblance." (17) Through political action they begin their journey towards a new identity and being. Only by rebelling against the imposed political system, are they able to move from a state of *ressemblance*, in which their identity is tied to that of the *Métropole* (France) to a state of *semblance* deeply embedded in their (real) lived experience as Martinicans. However, and ironically so, the new social order anticipated by the island's people was the continuation of the colonial system that preceded it.

Through their collective political act, young people from diverse groups and parts of the island (the city, the mountain or morne, the plain) act as one and take it upon themselves to change the course of events -- to act upon the island's history -- by freeing Lambrianne from the threat posed by Garin and by liberating the waters and the land. This attempt to write/right history coincides with and is inextricably bound to their search for identity since, for Glissant, history is central to identity. However, "plus ça change, plus ça reste le même": the anticipation and hope dissolves as the group disperses after the election. Thaël and Valérie leave to begin their lives together in the

shelter of the hills. Her brutal death -- forseen by Papa Longoué -- close the novel. Thaël's calculated response -- the assassination of his trusted canine companions -- is the acting out of the words he uttered as he descended the mountain: "Je vous tuerai." (12)

The quest for self-knowledge involves not only the individual but the community: "For Glissant, the full understanding of self is not possible in isolation." (Dash, intro, The Ripening, 12) The collective effort is necessary for each character possesses what the others lack: Thaël -- legend and land; Mathieu -- "book knowledge"; Mycéa -- her fervent committedness. These three characters -- Thaël, Mathieu and Mycéa -- form a trinity in their collective search. According to Dash, "the characters in Glissant's novel are not recognizable in a conventional sense. Each character is the sum of a complex network of relationships". (Dash, Intro., The Ripening, 15) Thaël conjures up the memory of the maroons and is associated with the hills, the land above. He possesses a knowlege of the land and was nourished by "contes et légendes" (Lézarde, 12). The learned Mathieu is associated with the Land Below and the city -- the locus of alienation from the landscape. "Nous sommes des gens de la ville, marqués par les trottoirs, le vide, les murs..." (Lézarde, 22) explains Mathieu during his first discussion with Thaël. Mathieu obsessively seeks to research his country's past and longs for the complementary spiritual knowlege Thaël possesses. And, it is Mathieu "qui

semblait déjà plus qu'un ancêtre" (65) as the intellectual leader of the group, who brings to them an awareness of their history:

> Détachons-nous, dit-il, des forces de chaque jour! Ne craignons pas de nous tenir sur le rivage, face au large, et de peser notre histoire. Nous venons de l'autre côté de la mer, rappelle-toi. (29)

Mycéa is a strong feminine voice in Glissant's novels and is the most politically aware of the group: Thaël looks to Mathieu for logic and order but it is Mycéa who inspires his political awareness. Mycéa binds the group together by reminding them of the misery and suffering of the people. At one point, she leaves the group and undertakes her own journey into the unknown. (Lézarde, 56) She is taken in by a peasant family, Alcide Lomé and his wife, and becomes a witness to the island's poverty. She teaches the children how to read and write "avec des batons, sur la terre, sur les écorces des arbres, partout". (Lézarde, 76) She singlehandedly debunks the false history imposed on school children in French colonies: "Et surtout, disait Mycéa, reprenant la plaisanterie traditionnelle, rappelez-vous ceci: nos ancêtres ne portaient pas de longues moustaches." (Lézarde, 76)[16] Alcide is amazed at her knowledge of a world he has never known and asks her: "Jeune fille, comment as-tu vécu, pour connaître tout cela?" (Lézarde, 76) Mycéa lives in the present but directs her vision forward to the future of the people.

In La Lézarde, Glissant introduces a pivotal recurring character, Papa Longoué, the last descendant of the first maroon, who embodies the ancestral homeland -- Land Before (*le pays d'avant*) -- Africa. Papa Longoué, like Pilate in Toni Morrison's novels, is the "ancêtre qui sans crier se brise" who links the past to the present, carries with him the unwritten history of the people and the wisdom of the landscape which for Glissant is the true repository and witness of New World histories. Landscape and history are inextricably bound together in Glissant's poetic vision of the Caribbean and New World and are embodied in the character of Papa Longoué.

At first, the protagonists seem to begin this search with an outward movement of turning away from the confinement of the island through what Glissant calls "diversion" (*détour*) (DA, 28)[17]:

> Ils lisaient tout ce qui venait d'ailleurs [my emphasis], du monde. Ayant appris à ouvrir les yeux sur l'inconcevable misère de ce pays (car ils n'avaient guère souffert, eux, dans leur chair), ils croyaient de plus en plus que la vraie vie est aux royaumes de l'esprit, où se débrouillent les problèmes essentiels de la faim et du bonheur. (Lézarde, 18)

Through their readings of the great western poets and epics and "all other sorts of follies" (18) -- they were able to confront the misery of their situation, of the island's, and to combat against it and find a sort of harmony -- perhaps similar to the equilibrium the Négritude poets found in their symbolic "retour" to a mythical Africa: "Ainsi

pouvaient-ils confronter la misère, vouloir la combattre, sans s'étonner, sans se lamenter --avec puissance et raison, et un éclat naïf dont ils n'étaient pas maîtres." (18)

Their search for knowledge and means to intellectually confront their situation begin in the literature from "elsewhere", however the unconscious influence of the "pays" -- the land -- becomes evident as the novel progresses and the landscape plays an important role in the formation of their awakening identities:

> Le pays ajoutait, sans qu'ils en eussent conscience, à leur exaltation. [...] Car c'est d'un pays qu'il s'agit là, et non pas d'hommes sans raisons. Histoire de la terre qui s'éveille et s'élargit. Voici la fécondation mystérieuse, la douleur nue. Mais peut-on nommer la terre, avant que l'homme qui l'habite se soit levé?... (Lézarde, 18)

These two different directions -- one consciously turning towards the outside world and the other unconsciously turning inward towards the land itself -- converge at the river, la Lézarde. The title of the novel La Lézarde is derived from the river of the same name which once flowed forcefully across the landscape, but which will wither to a mere stream in the novel Malemort. La Lézarde links the interior of the island to the sea, to the outside world. But more importantly, within the river, the history of Martinique is contained: it links not only the island to the sea, and hence to the outside world, but also the past to the present as well as to the uncertain future thereby establishing a continuity between time and space, past and

present. The "four centuries" of Martinican history converge symbolically in the Lézarde's currents.

As Elinor Miller states "the four centuries are not so much years as cataclysms: crossing the ocean, slavery, escape as maroons, and finally survival in today's depleted land." (224) The four centuries are inseparable from the land and the sea: ocean, coast, morne and forest. And the Lézarde brings land, forest, and sea, as well as the past, present and future together. Significantly, the Lézarde is central to the action of the novel: Garin is determined to build a house at the source of the river, damming the waters; the act that will free the waters -- his assassination -- takes place at the end of their journey down the river, in the sea.

The land/landscape plays an important role in the novel: through their search for an identity the characters discover themselves through their discovery of the land and its people. The effects of the land is most pronounced in the character of Thaël who discovers for the first time his country and its diverse landscapes -- first the city, and then the plain: "Thaël connaissait enfin la plaine, ses ébouissements lourds, l'inoccupation fertile des chauds." (Lézarde, 24) It is Thaël's discovery of the sea -- which Pablo describes as "toute une politique" (42) -- that leads him to a more complete knowledge and awareness of the landscape and its unseen power:

> Et Thaël avançait à la rencontre des vagues avec une timidité franche, l'espoir de la libération, de la plénitude, du plaisir. [...] Au frisson qui le tenait, lorsque les bracelets d'écume serraient enfin contre ses chevilles leur douceur fragile, il comprenait qu'à jamais (déjà, déjà) il était prisonnier de cette force. (Lézarde, 44)

The Lézarde becomes a character "qui s'humanise" (31) and whose tormented current foretells its demise as well as the possible future of the island:

> A l'ouest, la boucle tourmentée de la Lézarde: elle veut emprisonner la cité, mais soudain elle se reprend, elle refuse ce gardiennage, et vers l'est, passé les cannes sinistres, elle se perd dans son delta. Sa goulée est parcourue de courants sales; la Lézarde n'a pas une belle mort. (Lézarde, 30)

Furthermore, in La Lézarde, each character is associated with an aspect of Martinican landscape: Papa Longoué and Thaël -- the hills; Mathieu, Mycéa and Valérie -- the plains. "Ceux d'en haut": the descendants of the first *marron*, the first *Négateur* who rebelled against the master through whom the memory of the "pays d'avant" -- Africa is passed down. Thaël is descended from the family Targin -- Edmée leaves the plantation to live with Papa Longoué in 1890. Mathieu is descended from the Béluse line --from the slave who remained "en bas" and who did not flee for freedom in the mornes. He becomes the adopted son of Papa Longoué whose own lignage ended with the death of his son Ti René. Mycéa/Marie Célat is a descendant of the African ancestor who persists in the collective memory only as a "trace": the haunting name "Odono" whose meaning is unknown.

The story/stories of this group of young activists is/are told through the eyes of a nameless first person narrator who grows up as the plot unfolds (Miller, 224). He has not yet understood the importance of unfolding events nor of the river, la Lézarde, as he explains:

> Et moi, enfant de cette histoire, je ne sais pas encore que la Lézarde continue vers le soir et la mer noire... Je ne sais pas (je vais grandir en cette histoire) qu'en la rivière est signifié le vrai travail du jour. (Lézarde, 31)

His encounter with the group of young radicals begins his awakening:

> J'étais près d'eux sur la place, ne comprenant pas encore tout cet assaut de mots. Je les ai vus sur la place, et je ne savais pas encore que ma vie à ce moment était prise, décidée, contaminée déjà par ce jeu. (Lézarde, 20)

As "witness" to the unfolding events, he, like the writer, seeks to establish a certain order and chronology to the events as they unfold. The narrator is aware of the power of the words and events to which he is a witness.

> J'ai entendu ces mots, pourtant je n'étais encore qu'un enfant, et ils résonnèrent en moi. Je fus le témoin, et l'objet: celui qui voit et qui subit, qu'on appelle et qu'on façonne. (16)

Like Glissant's writer, this narrator is part of the community, and he strives to decipher and make sense out of the events that take place. His relating of the events as he sees them can be interpreted as an allegory of writing and re-reading. This is best illustrated in Chapter XVI of Livre I which consists of a dialogue between the members of

the group: "un étrange dialogue, sec, intrépide, fou; avec des alluvions et des courants qui sous les mots charriaient leur fureurs secrètes." (Lézarde, 62) At the end of the chapter, the narrator intervenes with a "rapport de la dernière réunion" (65) in which he attempts to re-establish order to the din of voices by interpreting and commenting on what was said.

It is upon the nameless narrator that Mathieu bestows the task of writing at the end of the novel. After the assasination of Garin and the elections have taken place the group reunites a last time. As they discuss their future plans, Mathieu speaks to the youngest in the group:

> Fais une histoire, dit Mathieu. Tu es le plus jeune, tu te rappelleras. Pas l'histoire avec nous, ce n'est pas intéresant. Pas les détails [...]. Fais un livre avec la chaleur, toute la chaleur. Celle qui te fait saoul, celle qui te rend nostalgique. (224)

Luc continues the description of this book yet to be written:

> Fais-le comme un témoignage, dit Luc. Qu'on voie nos sottises. Qu'on comprenne notre chemin. Et n'oublie pas, n'oublie pas de dire que nous n'avions pas raison. C'est le pays qui a raison. Fais-le sec et droit au but. (224)

As the conversation continues the others add their suggestions: "Fais-le comme une rivière. Lent. Comme la Lézarde. Avec des bonds et des détours, des pauses, des coulées [...] Comme une rivière avec ses secrets..." (224) And as we, the readers, read this passage we realize that this is the book we are reading.

After Mathieu declares that he will leave with Mycéa for France, the others also admonish him to tell their story: not simply the story of their island, Martinique, but their story as it relates to the other Caribbean islands: "Tu leur diras toutes les îles, non? Pas une seule, pas seulement celle-ci où nous sommes, mais toutes ensemble. [...] Mets que les Antilles c'est tout compliqué." (226) The protagonists have, through their political involvement and discovery of the land, become aware of their *antillanité*. They further implore Mathieu to tell of their reality and their land and that their *centre* is within them.

> Dis-leur que nous aimons le monde entier. Que nous aimons ce qu'ils ont de meilleur, de vrai. Que nous connaissons leurs grandes oeuvres, que nous les apprenons. Mais qu'ils ont un bien mauvais visage par ici. Dis que nous disions: là-bas le Centre, pour dire la France. Mais que nous voulons d'abord être en paix avec nous-mêmes. Que notre centre il est en nous, et que c'est là que nous l'avons cherché. (227)

The characters write their story as they tell it to the narrator and to Mathieu and what they desire most is that it be heard and understood. This same desire is present in the Discours Antillais which ends with the following words:

> Si le lecteur a suivi cet ouvrage jusqu'à ce point, je souhaiterais qu'à travers l'enchevêtrement de mes approches du réel antillais il ait surpris ce ton qui monte en tant de lieux inaperçus: oui, qu'il ait entendu. (DA, 466)

The role which Glissant bestows upon the Caribbean writer takes on the epic proportions of a mission for the writer must possess a "vision prophétique du passé" in order

to carry it out. The Caribbean writer lives not only in his "time" but also -- because of the imposed non-history of the Caribbean -- that which preceeds - the traces of a "time and country before" -- and that which will follow.

Glissant's Discours Antillais gives the reader the tools with which to locate and read his texts as well as those of other Caribbean writers. The works of Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant reveal his profound influence: they are permeated with the weight and importance of Glissant's "prophetic vision of the past", present and future of Martinique. They have taken seriously their role in bringing a voice to the Caribbean and Martinican people, as evidenced by the recent publication of Eloge de la Créolité and the novels of Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. This point is discussed by Joseph Halpern in his study of Sartre, Critical Fictions. As for Breton, his comment on Césaire's poetry as being "belle comme l'oxygène naissante" seems to prove this point.

2. In his essay "Beyond Babel", Glissant describes Segalen's idea of the *choc* as "the emotion engendered by the encounter with the other." (WLT, 561)

3. This information is from a discussion with Edouard Glissant that took place in the Spring of 1989.

4. In his translation of Le Discours Antillais (Caribbean Discourse, 1989), Michael Dash translates *Antillanité* as Caribbeanness.

5. One might better understand this aspect by comparing *Antillanité* to the concept of *Africanité*: both were born of the Négritude movement but diverge completely. Negritude reclaims the humanity and wholeness of the oppressed and shattered black self through a return to a mythical unified Africa (values, cultures and traditions) and a rejection of the dominant system of white/Occidental values. Likewise, Africanité attempts to unify the many African cultures, languages, histories and peoples by negating their diversity. Antillanité, however, unites the Caribbean islands through their shared history while recognizing their diversities. Antillanité does not, and cannot, exclude, deny or reject the different ethnic components -- African, European, Indian or Lebanese -- of Caribbean realities.

6. "J'appelle littérature nationale cette urgence pour chacun de se nommer au monde, c'est-à-dire cette nécessité de ne pas disparaître de la scène du monde et de courir au contraire à son élargissement." (Glissant, DA, 192)

7. Alain Baudot treats this topic in his article "Edouard Glissant: A Poet in Search of His Landscape" in World Literature Today, vol. 63, no. 4, 1989, pp. 583.

8. Bernabé, Confiant and Chamoiseau collaborated on Eloge de la Créolité (Paris: Gallimard, 1989). Confiant has published several fictional works in Creole and one novel in French, Le Nègre et L'Amiral (Paris: Editions Grasset, 1989). Chamoiseau's works include two novels written in French: Chronique des sept misères (Paris: Gallimard, 1986) and Solibo Magnifique (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).

9. Racine quotes Condé's short work La poésie antillaise, Paris, Nathan, 1977, p. 70.

10. André, Jacques, *Caraïbales: études sur la littérature antillaise*, Paris, Eds. Caribéennes, 1981. In this study, Jacques André examines the works of three Caribbean novelists: Jacques Roumains, Joseph Zobel, and Edouard Glissant. He opens the chapter on Glissant, "Les lambeaux du territoire", with the following remarks:

> L'oeuvre littéraire d'Edouard Glissant connaît un sort singulier. Lue et appréciée Ailleurs, elle est, aux Antilles, en butte à l'hostilité. [...] A son égard, on parle moins d'hermétisme que d'illisibilité. Nuance précieuse, qui semble moins viser la langue de l'écrivain que l'écriture comme geste personnel. Non pas une oeuvre difficile à lire our incompréhensible mais un gribouillis que l'on se *refuse* à lire. Déni péremptoire du magistre peu enclin à se laisser entraîner en dehors des <<vérités établies>> (fussent-elles révolutionnaires). C'est qu'il n'est pas facile de lire Glissant à qui conserve encore quelques assurances et un peu de rêve. (111)

11. It is interesting to note in passing that this was one of the criticisms made of Camara Laye's *L'enfant noir*: it lacked an overt or militant "engagement". See Achiriga's work *La révolte des romanciers noirs*, chapitre IV.

12. Location is diametrically opposed to the dislocation suffered by the Caribbean and is intimately linked to the quest for identity in Caribbean literature: "Self-formation or self-appropriation is a basic impulse in the Caribbean. It is seen as the only valid response to the cultural dislocation and daunting void of the New World." (Dash, "Re-membering", *World Literature Today*, 63.4 (1989): 609)

13. Glissant, Edouard. *La Lézarde*, Paris, Seuil, 1958. (Most recent and authoritative translation: *The Ripening* by Michael Dash.)

14. "... a series of a highly non-serial and non sequential kind." (Burton, 303)

15. While Glissant's first novel takes place in the "aftermath" of the 'Vichy interlude', Chamoiseau's and Confiant's novels take place during this period of confinement and multiple colonization and they explore the misery of the people that is touched upon, but not treated, in *La Lézarde*.

16. The joke alludes to the Gauls and the line French school children are taught to recite: "Nos ancêtres les Gaulois..." -- "Our ancestors the Gauls..."

17. "Le détour est le recours ultime d'une population dont la domination par un Autre est occultée: il faut chercher ailleurs le principe de domination n'est pas évident dans le pays même..." (DA, 33). (In his translation of Le Discours Antillais, Michael Dash translates this word as "diversion".)

Chapter 4

From *Antillanité* to *Créolité*: Eloge de la Créolité

> *Naître au monde est d'une épuisante splendeur. Et pour qui veut garder témoignage de cette naissance, il est un temps d'ouverture chaotique, de pressentiment anarchique de l'histoire, de mâchage furieux des mots, de saisie vertigineuse des clartés qui, cependant qu'on naît à soi, vous balancent au bel avant du monde.* (Edouard Glissant, Soleil de la conscience, 15)

> *La parole de l'artiste antillais ne provient donc pas de l'obsession de chanter son être intime; cet intime est inséparable du devenir de la communauté.* (Edouard Glissant, Le discours antillais, 439)

In Soleil de la conscience Edouard Glissant meditates on the unique situation of the Antilles whose volcanic emergence into modernity bursts forth in chaos and anarchy but where "un peuple positivement se construit" (Soleil, 16). The works of Martinican writers Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant bring to light the vitality with which the Martinican writer confronts his situation and illustrate the role of the writer in the formation of a collective consciousness. This chapter will concentrate on their essay, Eloge de la Créolité (1989) and three novels by two of the authors: Chronique des sept misères (1986) and Solibo Magnifique (1988) by Patrick Chamoiseau, and Le Nègre et l'Amiral by Raphaël Confiant. Eloge de la Créolité will be examined as a re-reading of Glissant's Discours antillais

and as an implementation of his concept *la poétique de la relation*. Chamoiseau's and Confiant's use of the creole language and the historical context will be scrutinized in terms of both Glissant's work and Eloge de la Créolité.

Both a cultural and literary manifesto, Eloge de la Créolité[1] represents the collective effort of a new generation of Martinican intellectuals and writers whose aesthetic and philosophical roots are deeply embedded in *Négritude* and *Antillanité*. Eloge de la Créolité was first presented at the Festival Caraïbe de la Seine-Saint-Denis in 1988 and published in 1989 by the French publisher Gallimard. Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant speak not only "in praise" or "in defense" of *Créolité* but also in praise and defense of those writers instrumental in clearing the difficult path to their "redefined" *creole* identity.

The authors attempt to bring a cultural and historical awareness and identity directly to a people: "Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous déclarons Créoles." Rejecting a racially-defined identity, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant glorify the cultural diversity of peoples born of a complex process of *métissage* and creolization. Profoundly influenced by Glissant's vision of Martinican history and the role of the writer, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant actively engage themselves in what they -- like Glissant -- consider Martinique's most urgent task: the development of a collective consciousness.

In the prologue, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant situate themselves in a literary continuum with Césaire (Négritude) and Glissant (Antillanité), their literary fathers. They also renew the literary, cultural and linguistic importance of the works of less-reknowned writers such as Gilbert Gratiant[2], who were accused of imitation and folklorism, as "preservers" of elements of their culture that would have otherwise been lost:

> Nous nommons Gilbert Gratiant et bien des écrivains de cette époque précieux conservateurs des pierres, des statues brisées, des poteries défaites, des dessins égarés, des silhouettes déformées: de cette ville ruinée qu'est notre fondement. (Eloge, 16-17)

Gratiant and his contemporaries were "eclipsed by those who were to follow: Négritude" -- whose influence would be felt across continental divides. The authors state that Négritude was a first step, a rite of initiation: "Césairian Negritude is a baptism, the primal act of our restored dignity. We are forever the sons of Aimé Césaire." (Eloge, 18) Césaire's *Négritude* -- his "grand cri nègre" -- was engaged in the anti-racist and anti-colonialist battle. Words were arms and the battle was fought with cries and denunciations (Eloge, 20). Although Negritude restored Africa as a cultural motherland (as opposed to the colonial mother -- France) and rehabilitated "black civilization" (Eloge, 17), it did not respond to the question of specific cultural realities[3] and fell into the generalizing trap of universality:

> Car si, dans cette révolte négriste, nous contestions la colonisation française, ce fut toujours au nom de généralités universelles pensées à l'occidentale et sans nul arc-boutement à notre réalité culturelle. (Eloge, 21)

The plight of the Black race thus came to represent the situation of all oppressed peoples, regardless of race or culture.[4] Moreover, Negritude "in the first waves of its deployment" proceeded through a process of détour -- much like the young protagonists in La Lézarde[5] -- through an outward movement to that which was external to Caribbean reality in its search for identity: it was marked, as the authors state, by its *extériorité*.

> extériorité d'aspirations (l'Afrique mère, Afrique mythique, Afrique impossible), extériorité de l'expression de la révolte (le Nègre avec majuscule, tous les opprimés de la terre), extériorité d'affirmation de soi (nous sommes des Africains) (Eloge, 20)

The focus of Negritude turned towards a distant and phantom Africa while, in the words of René Ménil, "nous sommes aveugles à la Caraïbe dont les îles s'effacent sous nos yeux au commandement des impérialismes" (Tracées, 48). Glissant's concept of Antillanité turned not outward towards an impossible mythical Africa but inward toward Caribbean cultural and historical realities. "Comprendre ce qu'est l'Antillais" is the question posed by René Ménil and addressed by Glissant in his concept of Antillanité. Beyond the outcries and universalities of Négritude, Antillanité involves the patient and meticulous exploration of Caribbean realities and the articulation of these realities. Only by

exposing the hidden mechanisms of alienation wrought by colonization and by revealing the Caribbean histories left untold by History can that reality be expressed. (Eloge, 22) However, according to Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, Antillanité is not as readily accessible as Negritude and the task of understanding "ce qu'est l'Antillais" is easier said than done.

According to Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant two texts, both published in 1975, marked a turning point in this tormented search for a cultural identity and a literary aesthetic: Malemort by Edouard Glissant[6] and Dézafi by the Haitian writer Frankétienne. In Malemort, considered to be his most *Caribbean* novel, Glissant unveiled Caribbean reality and history in all its tormented complexities. Frankétienne "re-created" the Creole language by and for writing, more precisely, for literature. For the authors of Eloge de la Créolité, these two texts unleashed the key to self-knowlege: "le premier outil de cette démarche de se connaître: la vision intérieure". (Eloge, 23)

Only through this "internal vision" -- insight -- is *Créolité* viable, however the authors hesitate to define just what constitutes this internal vision and how the community is to acquire it. Internal vision or insight remains impossible without self-acceptance: "...il ne pouvait y avoir de vision intérieure sans une préalable acceptation de soi. On pourrait même dire que la vision intérieure en est la résultante." (Eloge, 24) Any self-acceptance was

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obliterated under the colonization which imposed cultural and aesthetic values upon colonized peoples by forcing them to see themselves as exotic, as Other. René Ménil describes in *Tracées* this phenomenon as a form of "cultural oppression" which suppressed the usual means through which the collective identity (*l'âme nationale*) continues -- history, religion, traditions -- and replaced them with "the-soul-of-the-metropolitan-other".

> La caractéristique fondamentale de l'existence humaine dans la société coloniale, c'est d'être séparée d'elle-même, d'être exilée d'elle-même, d'être étrangère pour elle-même. Le phénomène de l'oppression culturelle va déterminer dans chaque pays colonisé un refoulement de l'âme nationale propre (histoire, religion, coutumes), pour introduire dans cette collectivité ce que nous appellerons <<l'âme-de-l'autre-métropolitaine>>. D'où la dépersonnalisation et l'aliénation. Je me vois étranger, je me vois exotique, pourquoi? Parce que <<je>>, c'est la conscience; <<l'autre>>, c'est moi. Je suis <<exotique-pour-moi>> parce que mon regard sur moi c'est le regard du blanc devenu mien après trois siècles de conditionnement colonial. (19)

Self-acceptance entails refusing to view oneself as other or exotic and the authors' use of a new terminology -- *la vision intérieure* -- reveals itself as an attempt to transcend the "vision *extérieure*" of Négritude and realize an identity free of imposed colonial values. In the vision of *Créolité*, self-acceptance involves seeing oneself as a unique entity born of the encounter of two different peoples, two different cultures. The acceptance of a Creole identity involves the rejection of the imposed aesthetic: that which is noble or beautiful resides not Elsewhere,

grounded in the values of a distant *métropole* or a phantom Africa but in the realities of "creole" culture and in the Creole language.

If "comprendre ce qu'est l'Antillais" is at the heart of Antillanité, "comprendre ce qu'est le Créole" is at the heart of Créolité. The noun or adjective *antillais* creates its own geo-political boundaries (from the Antilles or the Caribbean) and perhaps simplifies the task of defining, but by no means renders it simple. The definition of *creole* remains controversial: originally used to identify Europeans born in the New World, it was later used to designate "toutes les races humaines, tous les animaux et toutes les plantes qui ont été transportés en Amérique à partir de 1492" (Eloge, 68). In widely accepted current usage, *creole* identifies people of racially-mixed, African and European descent in the New World. In Louisiana, creole took on a very specific meaning during the nineteenth century and referred to an elite social class of mixed French and African backgrounds concentrated in New Orleans and South Louisiana.

Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant do not directly address the etymology of the word and dismiss completely the need to do so: "...l'étymologie est, comme chacun sait, un terrain miné et donc peu sûr. Il n'est donc nul besoin de s'y référer pour aborder l'idée de la Créolité." (Eloge, 63, note) The authors implicitly reject all prior definitions and etymologies by defining it by what it is not: "Ni

Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous déclarons Créoles..." The authors reiterate the need to transcend any racially-derived definition of their cultures or literatures and reclaim and redefine créole as the word that best describes and by which they name their multiracial societies:

> Dans les sociétés multiraciales telles que les nôtres, il apparaît urgent que l'on sorte des habituelles distinctions raciologiques et que l'on reprenne l'habitude de désigner l'homme de nos pays sous le seul vocable qui lui convienne, quelle que soit sa complexion: Créole. (Eloge, 29)

Confiant gives the following definition of creole in his novel Le Nègre et L'Amiral:

> Etre créole...c'est être une manière de compromis entre le Blanc et le Noir, entre le Noir et l'Indien, entre l'Indien et le bâtard-Chinois ou le Syrien. Au fond que sommes-nous d'autre que des bâtards? Eh bien, revendiquons-nous notre bâtardise comme un honneur et ne recherchons pas à l'instar des békés, des ancêtres héroïques dans une Guinée de chimère ou dans l'Inde éternelle. Voyez-vous, mon cher Amédée, tout ce mélange a produit une race nouvelle, une langue neuve, souple, serpentine, tout en étant conviviale et charnelle. Je suis trop vieux pour espérer voir le jour où notre peuple se dressera face au monde dans notre créolité. (128)

This quote illustrates just how the concept of *Créolité* draws liberally upon Glissant's concept of Antillanité and cultural *métissage*. And like Antillanité, Créolité involves an ongoing search for identity with at its center the *questionnement* of reality and suppressed histories: "...nous disons qu'il faut l'aborder comme une question à

vivre, à vivre obstinément dans chaque lumière et chaque ombre de notre esprit." (Eloge, 27)

For Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, *Créolité* describes the state of societies where various cultural elements have been brought together under the "joug de l'Histoire" (Eloge, 26). However, Créolité strives to transcend the Caribbean universe by declaring as its domain all those regions where a process of creolization took place, in general, regions where a plantation-based economy reigned:

> ...le processus de créolisation, qui n'est pas propre au seul continent américain (ce n'est donc pas un concept géographique) et qui désigne la mise en contact brutale, sur des territoires soit insulaires, soit enclavés...de populations culturellement différentes... (Eloge, 30-31)[7]

The end result of the process of creolization is "une entité humaine originale" of seemingly endless possibilities in keeping with Glissant's definition of creolization as "métissage without limits": "la créolisation nous apparaît comme le métissage sans limites, dont les éléments sont démultipliés, les résultantes imprévisibles."[8] According to the authors, Créolité simply designates belonging to this new human entity. Antillanité, in the authors' view, does not address the *human condition* of these various socio-cultural groups: "Dire <<antillais>> ne révèle rien de la situation humaine des Martiniquais, des Guadeloupéens, ou des Haïtiens." (Eloge, 32) *Créolité* therefore encompasses *Antillanité* while attempting to establish a solidarity with

the diverse cultures where creolization took place. Because the process of creolization engenders diversity, there is not one Créolité but a multiplicity of "*créolités*": "il existe donc une créolité antillaise, une créolité guyanaise, une créolité brésilienne, une créolité africaine, une créolité asiatique et une créolité polynésienne...." (Eloge, 31)

The authors present Créolité in a continuum with Négritude and Antillanité, and, more importantly as an outgrowth of Antillanité. However, it is difficult to separate the two concepts since the authors define Créolité in the same terms as Antillanité by drawing upon and relying on Glissant's theories. Créolité reveals itself as a *mise en relation* not limited to the Caribbean but encompassing the world. And the authors -- like the Négritude poets -- seem to function by a process of *détour* and *retour*: once given "insight" into the nature of *Créolité* in general, in a world view, the authors return to their own specific *créolité antillaise* which, in my opinion, is Antillanité. The movement of the authors' discourse seems to indicate this as well. In Eloge de la Créolité, the Caribbean is the center of the universe of Créolité -- most references pertain to Martinican or Caribbean texts or authors. The authors go so far as to schematize this Caribbean center in an illustration in the text (Eloge, 33). Moreover they refer to themselves as "antillais créoles" -- qualifying themselves as Creole but naming themselves "antillais" or

Caribbean. Furthermore, as for the literary expression of Créolité, the authors *return* to Glissant's literary theory of Antillanité.

The passage from the poetic *cri* of Negritude to a literary *parole* capable of expressing the uniqueness of the Caribbean situation is Glissant's literary project "already accomplished yet continually being extended" (Degras, "Name of the Fathers", 613), and, as the work of Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant proves, continually being passed on.

> Dans ce pays de Martinique, ceux qui cherchent relaient ceux qui disent, lesquels les ont nommés sans les reconnaître. Ainsi avançons au bord du monde. (Glissant, Mahogany, 17)

Perhaps one of the most compelling aspects of Eloge de la Créolité is that it embodies on one level how this parole is being forged and more importantly being relayed to a new generation of writers. Eloge de la Créolité describes a literature in the process of forging itself, a literature that not only *asserts* itself by *naming* itself to the world but which also *inserts* itself in its own world or reality: "nous faisons corps avec notre monde." (Eloge, 40)

In Eloge de la Créolité, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant implement Glissant's concept of *la poétique de la relation* as it applies to the present day situation in Martinique. Confiant's and Chamoiseau's novels are the literary manifestation of their attempts to "forger la parole," the creation of a literary language embedded in Martinican reality and oralité. Though their fiction does

not reflect the mere implementation of Glissant's theory, it is emblematic of the act of *passing on.* Confiant and Chamoiseau have recuperated Glissant's ideas and their novels illustrate his vision of the role of the Carribbean writer as "chronicler of histories" and give new meaning and weight to Glissant's theoretical works.

Despite the authors desire to separate or differenciate their ideas from Glissant's -- "L'Antillanité ne nous est pas accessible sans vision intérieure.[...] Nous nous déclarons Créoles" -- the literary expression of *Créolité* manifests itself as *Antillanité* generalized to an urban setting[9] which more accurately reflects the separation from the land/landscape and cultural alienation in present-day Martinican society. Créolité finds a literary voice following the "transitory demands defined by Glissant for the literary expression of Antillanité" which Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant derive from the Discours antillais and enumerate in Eloge de la Créolité (34-47). These transitory demands are all intimately linked to Glissant's vision of history and the Caribbean universe.

1. l'enracinement dans l'oral
2. la mise à jour de la mémoire vraie
3. la thématique de l'existence
4. l'irruption dans la modernité
5. le choix de sa parole

Because creole culture is embedded in the orality of the creole language, literature must reflect, nurture and sustain the importance of the spoken word. Creole culture's privileged mode of expression is oralité: "contes,

<<titims>>, comptines, chansons..., etc., l'oralité est notre intelligence, elle est notre lecture de ce monde, le tâtonnement, aveugle encore, de notre complexité." (Eloge, 34)

In order to renew the esthetic importance of creole orality, the writer must return to the oral tradition: he must explore and interrogate it in order to integrate it into the body of written literature. Only through this integration of the oral tradition can the writer arrive at an authentic literary expression. The integration of the oral and written traditions also serves to re-establish a literary and cultural continuity closely associated with Glissant's idea of a restored historical continuity.

As a language (and culture) born out of the trauma of slavery and colonization, the creole language embodies resistance much like the Negro spirituals whose seemingly joyous tones and rhythms shrouded the hidden messages of freedom in the North, revolt, and the treacheries of life as a slave. Creole is a language of resistance and survival: "elle porte témoignage du génie ordinaire appliqué à la résistance, dévoué à la survie." (Eloge, 34) Ironically, this language of survival is threatened with extinction in its conflictual relationship with the French language.

In the section of the essay entitled "La mise à jour de la mémoire vraie" the authors turn their attention to the historical events which gave birth to the Creole language. The authors essentially rephrase Glissant's discourse on

histories/History and the role of the writer in the writing of a more authentic or true history:

> Notre Histoire (ou plus exactement nos histoires) est naufragée dans l'histoire coloniale. Ce que nous croyons être l'histoire antillaise n'est que l'Histoire de la colonisation des Antilles. (Eloge, 37)

Like Glissant, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant depict their history as one that is neither recorded or written nor readily accessible to historians:

> Leur méthodologie ne leur donne accès qu'à la Chronique coloniale. Notre Chronique est dessous les dates, dessous les faits répertoriés: *nous sommes Paroles sous l'écriture*. (Eloge, 38)

The only acces to this unrecorded history is through the imagination: "Seule la connaissance poétique, la connaissance romanesque, la connaissance littéraire, bref, la connaissance artistique, pourra nous déceler." (38) As discussed in chapter three, the writer is instrumental in the reconstitution of the broken chronology and development of the collective consciousness. This point is best illustrated in Chamoiseau and Confiant's novels by the historical setting (1939-1946) which will be discussed in the last part of this chapter.

Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant reformulate and elaborate on Glissant's concept of the *vécu* in the section "La thématique de l'existence." Through the insight gained from the full understanding of Créolité as an open system of diversity, the writer (and literature) is liberated from the "militantisme anti-colonialiste" of Négritude and is

therefore free to explore his own unique cultural and historical situation. The literary expression of Créolité (or Antillanité) necessarily entails the close examination of ways of living, of reality:

> Voir notre existence, c'est nous voir en situation avec notre histoire, dans notre quotidien, dans notre réel ... En nous éjactant du confortable regard de l'Autre, la vision intérieure nous renvoie à la sollicitaion de notre originel chaos." (Eloge, 39)

The writer reclaims the once rejected and denigrated aspects of creole culture (folklore, legends and magic) as integral parts of existence and reality and glorifies the ways of life of the "petit peuple".

> Voir la grandeur humaine des djobeurs. Saisir l'épaisseur de la vie du Morne Pichevin. Comprendre les marchés des légumes. Elucidier le fonctionnement des conteurs. Réadmettre sans jugement nos "dorlis", nos "zombis", nos "choual-twa-pat"... (Eloge, 40)

The writer joyously savors the beauty and delights of everyday life -- "Ecouter notre musique et gouter à notre cuisine" (Eloge, 40) -- and delves into how life is lived: "chercher comment nous vivons l'amour, la haine, la mort..." (41)

Concerning their *éruption dans la modernité* the authors' echo Glissant's discourse on national in the Discours Antillais (192). Because, as Glissant states, these literatures have not had the time to evolve gradually, they must take on all at once: le combat, le militantisme, etc. Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, aware of the urgent task at hand, express their concern as writers at not

having the time to evolve gradually and their desire to "tout assumer,"

> ...écrire au difficile, s'exprimer à contre-courant des usures, des lieux communs et des déformations, et que c'est au difficile que pourra se pister - par nous - l'éloignement en nous-mêmes de notre authenticité. (Eloge, 43)

An integral part of their authenticity is bound to the creole language. Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, unlike Glissant, do not define Créolité as monolingual or ignorant of the diverse histories of the regions involved.

> CREOLITE. Théorie selon laquelle il s'agit de réunir les peuples créolophones (y compris de la Réunion) et de développer l'usage exclusif de la langue. La créolité adopte ce dont notre langue a souffert (le monolinguisme discriminant) et ignore les histoires antillaises: ce qui nous unit aux Jamaïcains et aux Portoricains, par-delà les barrières des langues. (DA, glossary)

Rather, they glorify the bilingualism of Créolité, especially for the writer who has at his/her disposal two languages, Creole and French (or English, or Spanish) (Eloge, 43-44). Creole has a privileged status as a language that survived despite innumerable obstacles. French is also privileged in that it is the language that was conquered by those on whom it was imposed: the language of the Master mastered by the enslaved and colonized. (Eloge,46-47) The authors' vision of creole literature seems just as multiple and diverse as their vision of creole culture(s): they envision creole literature written in creole as well as creole literature written in French or one of the other imperial languages.

The problems encountered in defining "Creole literature" are perhaps more complex since the domain of the Creole language is orality. Glissant states in his most recent collection of essays, Poétique de la Relation, that "une autre économie de la parole s'y dessine" in the encounter of the orality and literature and that "les pratiques de l'écriture s'en retrouveront peut-être renouvelées" (231). Confiant's first works were in Creole and both Chamoiseau and Confiant have published novels in French. However, in their novels written in French, Creole is a vital creative force and its presence reflects their call for "l'usage libre, responsable, créateur" (Eloge, 47) of the historically and culturally discredited language. The interventions in Creole do not hinder the unfamiliar reader's understanding of the text as the writers adeptly incorporate them into the text through translation, explanation or paraphrasing in French. The French language resonates with the orality of the creole language ("eh oui mon fils pièce bijoux") and is often punctuated with creole exclamations ("Manmaye Ho!"). Chamoiseau and Confiant both write in French[10] but their universe is a Creole universe.

Both novels, Chronique des sept misères and Le Nègre et l'Amiral are set during roughly the same period: before, during and after World War II. Both works welcome readings as historical novels and political allegories. The authors explore in depth the war's effect on the island and its people through an exploration of both history and lived

reality. Chamoiseau and Confiant offer the reader protagonists in search of identities: existentialist maroons to whom we can relate on the most intimate human level. However each author presents his own unique vision of Martinique -- past, present and future -- and each novel should be read as an *Eloge* to the diversity of the island's literary production.

By setting their novels during this particular moment in history, Chamoiseau and Confiant recuperate and bring to light one of those periods in Martinican history when, according to Glissant, the "sterilizing barriers" that impede the formation of the collective historical memory have been brought down. Franz Fanon speaks of Martinique before 1939 and after 1945 ("West Indians and Africans," 267) and Glissant explores this period in several of his novels. In the Discours Antillais he explains that cut off from France and shipments of goods and forced to depend on its own resources and the ingenuity of its people (compared to today's "passive irresponsibility"), Martinique had perhaps never been more independent or creative than during the Occupation:

> ...les Martiniquais apprirent, en même temps que les pratiques du marché noir, les ressources de l'auto-production. Il fabriquèrent du sel à partir des salines du Sud ou à partir de l'eau de mer desséchée en bassines [...]. Je ne chante pas ici un hymne au misérabilisme, car il est vrai que ces mêmes enfants mouraient de sous-nutrition, qu'on pansait les plaies avec l'eau bouillie, et que les vieilles personnes s'en allaient

> silencieusement. Mais le peuple martiniquais résista et connut à l'époque une unanimité qu'il a sans doute perdue. (40)

Chamoiseau and Confiant symbolically return to the period of isolation, multiple colonization and poverty which made day to day survival difficult, but which brought the dispersed collectivity together in a creative spirit of resistance.

Ironically, in the forced isolation of the war, the Martinican people were literally confronted with the presence of the world at their very doorstep: the British blockade, the American blockade (the overpowering presence of the United States), French soldiers (confrontation with prejudice), the German presence through the Vichy appointed, Admiral Georges Robert. One might say that they were forced to "discover" the world through its all too troubling presence. At the same time, the islanders became acutely more aware of their precarious place not only in the world but in the Caribbean as many of them left Martinique for neighboring islands such as Dominica: the expression "partir en dissidence" entered the popular vocabulary. Glissant describes Martinique's discovery of the world "not as we were made to dream it, but as it rocks between its poles" in the following excerpt from Malemort:

> Nous entendons peut-être le monde, non plus tel qu'on nous le fait rêver, mais tel qu'il balance entre ses pôles, griffer toute terre qui se laisse agripper, beaucoup plus que cyclone ou tremblement ravager à douceur toute verdure qui se laisse tarir, à tant que voici au monde maintenant le drame du monde: cataclysmes, sauvages grandeurs de ceux qui se battent meurent et ressuscitent dans les yeux de leurs enfants, mais aussi agonies

> inconnues et s'il se trouve confortables de combien de peuples tassés dans le déni, de combien d'îles prises dans la molécule monde en quête de sa masse et comme argile douce pétries de renoncement. (166)

For Chamoiseau and Confiant, as with Glissant, the revelation of a true historical memory involves the rejection of any totalitarian view of history (History) so that the true histories of a people can be revealed. Both authors set their novels in an urban setting which more accurately describes the state of Martinican society today and man's alienation from the land, resulting in part from the disintegration of the Plantation System. Chamoiseau and Confiant tell the story of "le petit peuple" living on the margins of society and more likely than not unemployed or engaged in jobs that simply allow them to survive. And, finally, both Chamoiseau and Confiant sing the praises of an endangered creole language and culture which, like the characters in their novels, must struggle for survival in today's world.

Significantly, Chronique des sept misères begins with the following quote from Glissant: "les histoires lézardent l'Histoire, elles rejettent sur les bords irrémédiables ceux qui n'ont pas eu le temps de se voir au travers des lianes amassées." Chamoiseau's preoccupation as a writer is not History as the recounting of facts but the revelation of histories or stories. As the novel progresses, as we follow Pipi's life as related by the community of djobeurs, the stories of other characters are revealed and returned to:

Man Elo, Anatole, Man Joge, Elmire, Bidjoule and the legendary African slave Afoukal. Yet all these *histoires* are linked to Pipi's life story. As the narrators tell Pipi's, they meander through the stories of the other characters: the search for identity cannot be undertaken in isolation but must be a collective effort as the first-person plural narration of Chronique des sept misères illustrates.

Chronique des sept misères is clearly an example of what Glissant calls *roman de nous*:

> L'histoire et la littérature, désencombrées de leurs majuscules et contées dans nos gestes, se rencontrent à nouveau pour proposer, par-delà le désiré historique, le roman de l'implication du Je au Nous, du Je à l'Autre, du Nous au Nous. La Relation dessine en connaissance le cadre de ce nouvel épisode. On me dit que le roman de Nous est impossible à faire, qu'il y faudra toujours incarnation des devenirs particuliers. C'est un beau risque à courir. (Intention Poétique, 153)

"Une tragédie de tant de Nous, de tant de Je, impliqués dans un seul, ou donnés par tous." (Lézarde, 153) A *roman de nous* in which all destinies are intertwined and a tragedy which, as the title indicates, records or chronicles those destinies. Chronique des sept misères follows the life of the protagonist, Pierre Philomène Soleil (dubbed Pipi), *maitre-djobeur* of the markets of Fort de France. His story (histoire) and history (histoire) is related by the community of djobeurs in a first-person plural "nous" narration. By telling the protagonist's story they also tell their own story and history.

> Or le meilleur de tous fut de tout temps Pipi, maitre-djobeur, roi de la brouette, coqueluche des jeunes marchandes et fils de toutes les vieilles. Calebasse majeure, il recueillit en lui les bourgeons et la pulpe, et comme une seule mangue dit les essences de l'arbre, ce qu'il fut nous le fumes. Donc, manmaye ho! parler de nous rend inévitable et juste de vous parler de lui... (Chronique, 14)

The "nous" narrateur chronicles the events in Pipi's life: his supernatural conception as the offspring of Anatole, a *dorliss*[11] and Héloïse; his unrequited love for the beautiful Indian métisse Anastase; his thirst for gold and riches; his ensuing encounter with the legendary zombi-slave Afoukal; his transformation from mere man to quimboiseur; the tragedy of his death or disappearance at the end of the novel.

The novel is divided into two parts which significantly correspond to specific historical periods. The first section of the novel "Inspiration" takes place during the war and blockade of the island and depicts the vivacity and life force with which Pipi and the community confront their poverty. The second half, "Expiration", deals with the period following the war and the departmentalization of Martinique -- the final stages of colonization. During the second half of the novel Pipi becomes devoured by his thirst for riches and embarks on a journey to discover the treasure of the zombi-slave Afoukal who was betrayed and killed by his master who buried him with the gold he was to guard. His quest for gold becomes a journey into his past as Afoukal's ghost teaches him the secrets of his African

origins. In his seclusion in the forest, Pipi learns the secrets of the land and the healing power of the island's flora and undergoes a mystical transformation from djobeur to quimboiseur only to disappear after his encounter with the evil Man Zabyme.

In Chronique des sept misères Chamoiseau brings to life the world of the *djobeurs* of the markets of Fort-de-France who eke out a meager day to day existence with their cart or wheel barrow by carrying and transporting goods at the market. The *djob* -- borrowed from English -- is full of vital creative force, and reflects, as Glissant states the "painful and joyful talent" of underdeveloped peoples: the art of survival. (Intro., Chronique, 4)

The djobeurs' universe is embedded in oralité, in the creole language. The market produces and speaks its own language understood only by those involved. Each djobeur has his own identifying "cri" and each movement of the cart is indicated with a specific shout. The market is where "on venait s'acheter le manger du jour, mais, surtout, s'aiguiser la langue sur disputes et paroles inutiles... (Chronique, 49). Chamoiseau's setting the novel in the markets of Fort-de-France, in the universe of the djobeurs, places the creole language in a productive and creative milieu in which it can thrive and produce. Glissant states that one of the problems facing the Creole language today in Martinique is that it is now a language in which nothing is produced; all productive, economic activity is conducted in

French, relegating creole to position of a language of leisure which unconsciously causes the speaker to associate Creole with irresponsibility. To emphasize the precarious position of the creole language, Chamoiseau sadly points out with a newspaper clipping and a note at the end of the novel that the djobeurs no longer animate the markets of the capital city, driven out of existence by more efficient modern economic structures (supermarkets and department stores). The djobeurs -- who now exist only in the collective memory -- represent an endangered way of life but also a threatened language, Creole, whose future is still uncertain. Chronique des sept misères is the chronicle of untold histories, of threatened diversity and a menaced language.

Chamoiseau's fictional universe is centered around the markets of Fort-de-France and the djobeurs; in Le Nègre et l'Amiral, Confiant introduces the reader to yet another extinct "profession" deeply rooted in language and orality, the "crieurs".

> Les crieurs étaient les hommes liges des Syriens qui tenaient tous magasin de toile. Ils se mettaient sur le pas de leurs portes et formaient la simple popeline en un duvet soyeux digne des reines d'Ethiopie ou le méchant kaki des chemises de nègres d'habitation en un robuste drap d'écru. (15)

The same productive force of language is embodied in the protagonist, Rigobert ("le nègre"), for whom the creative power of the creole language represents a spontaneous form of positive resistance to the realities of poverty in the

Fort-de-France ghetto Morne Pichevin. Rigobert, as his name implies, confronts the misery of his situation with curses and laughter, bitter laughter -- the same "rire amer" of which Ménil writes in "L'Humour : Introduction à 1945" (Tracées: Identité, Négritude, Esthétique aux Antilles) and to which Chamoiseau alludes in his second novel, Solibo Magnifique. Uneducated and illiterate, Rigobert takes great pride in the fact that he does not know how to speak French: "C'est ainsi qu'il avait gagné le droit inouï de ne pas savoir prononcer un traître mot de français et poussait même le culot jusqu'à s'en vanter." (14) So great is his mastery of the creole language, Rigobert garners the respect and admiration of the old men of the neighborhood:

> Alors, il se mettait à injurier Dieu, à dire toutes sortes de cochonneries innommables de la Vierge Marie, sur sa mère Idoménée, dans un créole de son cru qui forçait l'admiration des vieux du quartier. Car Rigobert avait le don d'inventer des mots et dans ses moments d'intense excitation, il les accolait les uns aux autres et créait des images fulgurantes qui vous clouaient sur place nettement et proprement. (14)

Confiant's exploration of the conflictual relationship between Creole and French is intensified by his juxtaposition of the characters Rigobert and Amédée. Amédée Mauville, a mulatto intellectual, becomes acquainted with Rigobert on one of his Saturday evening outings to the ghetto, Morne Pichevin. The mulatto class is traditionally the educated class in Martinique, alienated from the creole language and culture. Disillusioned with his job teaching latin and unhappy in his marriage to Blandine, the daughter

of a well-to-do béké, Amédée takes to occasional "promenades" in the Morne Pichevin. There, he frequents the prostitutes and in search of the lost "black" part of himself he inevitably chooses women of the color "bleue", that is, the women who have the darkest skin, who are "plus que noir". As he leaves the home of Ginette on one of these occasions he perceives from a distance the prostitute Philomène -- "la femme au corps féerique qui s'habille en soie bleue" (Nègre, 52) -- with whom he is immediately infatuated. He becomes obsessed with the elusive woman and solicits Rigobert's assistance in identifying and finding her. The destinies of these three characters thus become intertwined as each one seeks to survive in the misery of the war-time period.

The narrative structure of Le Nègre et L'Amiral reflects Confiant's obsession with history in general and in particular, as his title indicates, Admiral Robert's administration (1939-1943). The novel is divided into five "circles" of four chapters each. Confiant punctuates this structure by introducing each circle or section with interventions -- a sort of re-reading of history and a pre-reading of the text -- that comment on the events taking place and their effect on the island and its people. The first section begins with a commentary on the blockade of the island and the government of the Admiral who "institua ici l'ordre de l'Agenouillement". The last section of the novel comments on the return of normalcy to Morne Pichevin

after the war. But the sense of normalcy is relative for each character has been forever changed by the events: their sense of identity is even stronger having been forged by the difficulties of war. The community's consciousness is forged through their collectively becoming aware of their place in the world and by locating themselves, as expressed in Eloge de la Créolité, "in situation with their history."

In Chronique des sept misères and Le Negre et l'Amiral, orality is a vital creative force which resonates throughout. The importance of orality and the oral tradition is due in part to the authors desire to the create or reconstruct a literary and cultural continuity between the oral and written traditions. The emphasis placed on orality and oral tradition culturally links the word and artistic creation to the *pays d'avant*: Africa. This desire to link the word to a secret, mysterious source is embodied in Glissant's work in the character of Papa Longoué. In Chronique des sept misères, the zombi-slave Afoukal is resurrected by Pipi. Elmire's creole songs of faraway lands and unknown ancestors haunt the listeners in the market and her songs long outlast her presence. The power of the spoken word, the creole word, is again illustrated in Le Nègre et l'Amiral in the character Rigobert whose curses and abjurations are the embodiment of the resistant (subversive) and creative force of the creole language. And then, there

is Philomène who is arrested for simply singing traditional creole songs in public: she is taken for a mad woman and locked away.

In Chamoiseau's second novel, Solibo Magnifique the protagonist is the threatened creole language itself as embodied by the character Solibo, master story-teller. Through the central character, Solibo, Chamoiseau's desire to link the spoken word (la parole) to a mysterious or secret source (le souvenir? le pays d'avant?) is manifest. Like Papa Longoué in Glissant's novels, Solibo is the embodiment of this desire as both characters function to link the past with the present. Solibo, "maître de parole", mysteriously dies of an *égorgette de parole* as his audience listens and participates in his art. One can debate the significance and meaning of the expression "égorgette de parole": did Solibo suffocate while speaking? Did he die from too many words or too few? His mysterious death leads to an investigation by the authorities: Solibo's body is brutally dissected in an official autopsy which reveals no apparent cause of death. Despite the savage and cannibalistic desecration of Solibo's body the authorities cannot explain his death and their report remains incomplete. Each member of Solibo's audience becomes a suspect and is questioned by the authorities. This specious investigation disperses the group by making each one out to be the assassin. However, this insidious attempt to dismember the social body is a failure and the group

reunites symbolically at the end of the novel to take up where Solibo left off: they reconstruct his words and the voice and the word is passed on.

In Solibo Magnifique we see Glissant's vision of the writer at work: it is a question of digging down deep into the collective memory and patiently exploring the community's language and words. The writer actively participates in this community but also acts as scribe and chronicler of both "histoires" and history. It is indeed significant that Chamoiseau includes himself as a character in the novel. As narrator and character, Chamoiseau records and relays the words or stories told by Solibo. He attempts in vain to capture on tape the vivacity of Solibo's discourse. Chamoiseau, the character, simply considers himself a "marqueur de paroles": he literally attempts to record and save Solibo's words and the tradition and past that he represents for future generations. But the true savior is the community who reclaims, and reconstitutes Solibo's discourse in order to pass it on to the people: the community takes charge of its own expression and re-embodies a broken and dispersed discourse. The textual manifestation of this process is the final section of the novel, "Les Dits de Solibo". This reconstitution of Solibo's words by the community is essential since the written word, like the official report of Solibo's death, cannot express the mystery, the life force and creative spirit of the spoken word. Chamoiseau, the writer, reminds

the reader once again of the conflictual relationship between French and Creole.

In Solibo Magnifique it is a question of restoring dignity and necessity to the Creole language and culture symbolized by Solibo. Chamoiseau's desire as a writer is to edify a monument to all that Solibo represents and around which the collective parole will be organized. This monument, the broken stele of Solibo's dissected body, stands without written inscription but speaks none the less to the community. Solibo and the past he represents lives on through memory, through the "traces" left behind:

> Car si de son vivant il était une énigme, aujourd'hui c'est bien pire: il n'existe que dans une mosaïque de souvenirs, et ses contes, ses devinettes, ses blagues de vie et de mort se sont dissous dans des consciences trop souvent enivrées. (Solibo, 26)

In the three novels discussed in this chapter, the Creole language, as embodied by the protagonists is a source of unifying power within the culture and community. Le Nègre et l'Amiral ends with the community reuniting after a period trial and difficulity with a new sense of self and hope for the future. However, Chronique des sept misères and Solibo Magnifique lacks this sense of closure and the future of the Creole language and Martinican community appears less certain. Chamoiseau's role as writer seems to parallel that of the story teller waiting for his audience's response: only through their active participation can the story continue.

Despite the authors' contention that Martinican literature does not yet exist, the prologue to Eloge de la Créolité is an excellent primer of the literary production of Martinque from the beginning of the century to the present. The great pains taken to name their literary predecessors reveal, for the most part, not an "anxiety of influence" but rather the expression of an enormous debt to the writers who have lead the way. The fact that Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant place or locate themselves within a literary tradition that is inherently Martinican, beginning with the pre-Negritude works of Gilbert Gratiant and continuing with the works of Césaire and Glissant, seems to affirm their desire to write (right) into existence a body of Martinican literature. Glissant himself confirms the emergence of a body of literature in his introduction to Chamoiseau's first novel, Chronique des Sept Misères.

> Elle [la littérature antillaise] investit, avec une intensité croissante de production, le mélange de cultures dans cette partie du monde, la quête d'un passé historique hier encore interdit, l'avancée périlleuse dans les conforts et les pièges du monde moderne, l'aventure d'un language en gestation sous les espèces de plusieurs langues pratiquées. Les Antilles et la Caraïbe balisent un des versants vertigineux du brassage planétaire. (3)

However, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant do seem to suffer from a "Bloom-type complex"[12] in relation to Glissant and his work. They borrow heavily from his works and ideas in their articulation of "Créolité" while gently reproaching: "Glissant lui-même ne nous y aidait pas

tellement, pris par son propre travail, éloigné par son rythme, persuadé d'écrire pour des lecteurs futurs." (Eloge, 23) Glissant's literary presence looms heavy and appears to overwhelm them -- Glissant himself publicly reprimanded the authors for not citing his works consistently in Eloge de la Créolité.[13] In my opinion, Eloge de la Créolité is in essence an *eloge* to Glissant's concept of *la poétique de la relation* and illustrates a collective search for a literary identity. Bernabé's, Chamoiseau's and Confiant's, search for identity as writers is a collective endeavor which seems to parallel their characters' collective search for identity. Eloge de la Créolité reflects the authors' desire to establish a Martinican literary identity and embodies, as stated earlier, how a literary *langage* is being forged and continued in the works of a new generation of writers. It describes an emerging body of literature, as Chamoiseau's and Confiant's fiction demonstrates, that not only chooses to name itself *in relation* to its literary predecessors (Césaire, Glissant) but also *in relation* to its own cultural, linguistic, social and historical realities. These writers *name* themselves to the World by asserting their identities and becoming one with their own.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Edouard Glissant refers to Eloge de la Créolité in a note to his essay "Poétiques" in Poétique de la Relation: "Un Manifeste, qui tente de définir, ou de proclamer, la ligne de continuité de la littérature martiniquaise." (230)

2. Martinican poet who wrote exclusively in creole and whose works were attacked as being folklorist by the writers of Légitime Défense.

3. See discussion of Négritude and Antillanité in chapter three.

4. In chapter two, we examined Sartre's essay "Orphée Noir" and Breton's essay "Martinique, charmeuse de serpents" and how they -- as white European writers -- seized the writings of the Négritude poets as the poetic expression of all oppressed peoples.

5. See discussion of Glissant's concepts of *détour* and *retour* (translated by Michael Dash as diversion and reversion) in Chapter 2.

6. See the following article on Malemort, Elinor S. Miller. "Narrative Techniques in Edouard Glissant's Malemort", The French Review, 53.2 (1979): 224-231.

7. In the opening paragraph of his essay "Lieu clos, parole ouverte" (Poétique de la relation, Paris: Gallimard, 1990) Edouard Glissant refers to Chamoiseau and Confiant's concept of Créolité and the geography of the term: "Le système des plantations s'est étendu, dans les mêmes principes structurels, sur le Sud des États Unis, la Caraïbe, la côte caraïbe de l'Amérique Latine et le Nord-Est du Brésil. Il a couvert des pays, dans l'Océan Indien par exemple, dans ce que MM. Patrick Chamoiseau et Raphaël Confiant appellent le territoire de la créolité." (77)

8. Glissant, Edouard. "Discours prononcé à l'occasion de la remise d'un doctorat honorifique par le Collège universitaire de Glendon de l'Université York", Editions du GREF: Toronto, 1990, p. 13.

9. Edouard Glissant, notes and conversation, Spring 1989. The urban setting also allows the author to draw upon the cultural diversity of the island. The city is a microcosm of the cultural diversity of Martinique and the Caribbean. The city unites not only "ceux d'en haut" and "ceux d'en bas", it also offers a panoramic view of the island's population.

10. Le Nègre et l'Amiral is Confiant's first novel written in French.

11. The figure of the *dorliss* will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

12. Sylvia Wynter discusses Glissant's own complex relationship with Césaire in note 10 to her article "Beyond the World of Man" in World Literature Today.

13. Colloquium on the Plantation System; Louisiana State University; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; April 1989.

Chapter 5

Intertextuality and Identity: *La Poétique de la Relation*

> *La pensée de la relation est la gardienne de notre énergie, comme elle est à la source de notre imaginaire ... La Relation est d'abord la volonté, et comme la vocation de comprendre l'ailleurs, le divergent. La Poétique de la Relation éclaire et résume cette obligation qui nous est faite désormais, d'avoir à nous définir par nous-mêmes, mais de le faire chacun dans son rapport à l'autre, et d'y recontrer l'occasion de forces renouvelées.(Glissant, "Glendon," 11-12)*

In chapter four we explored the critical importance of Eloge de la Créolité as a re-reading and recuperation of Glissant's theoretical writings, especially Le Discours Antillais, and the *mise en oeuvre* of his concept *la poétique de la relation*. In this chapter we will further explore the impact of Glissant's *poétique de la relation* as a critical tool for the analysis of a possible New World intertextuality in the novels of Patrick Chamoiseau and Toni Morrison. As one of the authors of Eloge de la Créolité, Chamoiseau clearly states his intent to situate and include himself in a Martinican literary continuum (Négritude, Antillanité, Créolité).[1] Chamoiseau's novels in particular bear the traces of Glissant's influence as well as his own conscious desire to name his Martinican literary fathers. However there are textual indications that Chamoiseau also seeks to break free of the continuum he establishes in order

to align his works with an African American literary tradition through silent allusions to a possible unnamed literary "mother", the African-American novelist, Toni Morrison. This chapter will deal primarily with the novels Chronique des sept misères by Chamoiseau and Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison. I will undertake a comparative study of the two novels as New World texts and as examples of Glissant's poétique de la relation at work in contemporary fiction.

In chapter four, we discussed how the writers of Eloge de la Créolité situate themselves in a literary continuum through a didactic process of reclaiming and naming their literary predecessors and fathers. The literary expression of this conscious desire (*volonté*) to write/right into existence a Martinican literary tradition is most evident in the work of Patrick Chamoiseau whose novels exhibit not only his preoccupation with the development of a Martinican historical consciousness but also his preoccupation with his own identity as a writer.[2]

Chamoiseau's first novel Chronique des sept misères addresses the question of historical identity and consciousness through the evolution and metamorphosis of the protagonist, Pipi. Chamoiseau's primary concern in Chronique des sept misères seems to be what Glissant refers to as "re-insertion into history" through the exploration and recovery of a period of Martinican history instrumental in the formation of a collective consciousness.[3] However,

in his second novel, Solibo Magnifique, the historical setting is never explicitly revealed and is eminently less important than in his first novel. The temporal and narrative framework of the second novel is *carnaval* (carnival): a period of renewal, resistance, rebirth and becoming.[4] Framing the text in the carnival setting allows Chamoiseau to more readily explore popular myths, legends and traditions in terms of the thématique de l'existence outlined in Eloge.[5] Because *carnaval* links the past to the present it allows the writer to establish a sort of cultural continuity which coincides with the historical and literary continuities described in chapters three and four. Furthermore, the choice of the *carnaval* setting systematically embeds the novel in orality and tradition and thereby allows Chamoiseau to focus his attention on his role as a writer who has undertaken the task of restoring a voice to his people.

In keeping with the Martinican writer's aims as outlined in Eloge de la Créolité, Chamoiseau consciously grounds his novel Solibo Magnifique in a Martinican literary tradition while establishing a continuity between the creole oral tradition embodied by the title character of the novel, Solibo, the *maître de paroles*, and the written literary tradition characterized in the novel by the young writer Patrick Chamoiseau, a *marqueur de paroles*. By doing so, Chamoiseau weaves a text teeming with allusions to and appropriations of both oral and written traditions which

permit the author to explore the conflictual relationship between Creole and French.[6] Chamoiseau's inclusion of himself[7] in the novel as one of the characters allows him to adeptly incorporate his own views and to challenge his role as a "marqueur de paroles".

Solibo Magnifique, like Eloge, is permeated with a "Martinican intertextuality" -- the conscious and unconscious appropriation of the writings of others. The numerous occurrences in Solibo Magnifique might be categorized in the following ways: textual naming of literary and intellectual predecessors; unattributed direct appropriation; and paraphrase.

Chamoiseau makes direct allusions to René Ménil and Aimé Césaire in the text. The first instance occurs when the narrator suggests a possible reaction to the injustices wrought upon Solibo's followers by the police immediately following the storytellers's demise:

> Mais, amis ho! devant ces policiers gardez les dents à l'embellie, car, ainsi que le pense René Ménil* dans une écriture, c'est par le rire amer qu'une époque se venge de ceux qui encombrent tardivement la scène, et se sépare d'eux, en espoir, avant leur mort réelle. (27)

The asterisk appears in the original text and sends the reader to an explanatory note at the bottom of the same page: "*Philosophe d'ici-là."[8] In a second direct allusion, the narrator uses the adjective "Césairien" to describe the chaos created by the unexpected and unexplained death of the storyteller, Solibo.

> Le brandon du flambeau inutilisable, l'on éclaira avec des débris dont les lueurs sporadiques agitaient les ombres. Tout semblait en désordre Césairien, étonnements et douleurs réveillaient la Savane. Crabes, rats, bêtes-longues se battaient pour les abris des trous. Se croyant prises d'assauts, les chauves-souris s'abîmaient dans le ciel. L'auditoire empressé autour de Solibo piétinait les racines, s'étageait aux épaules, conseillait la médecine que par ici chacun ramène de ses luttes contre la mort. (37)

Chamoiseau begins the second section of Solibo Magnifique with the famous first line of Césaire's seminal work Cahier d'un retour au pays natal:

> Au bout du petit matin, quand Solibo Magnifique exhala les premiers gaz des morts, libérant une odeur désespérante, la compagnie quitta sa léthargie pour questionner la hauteur du soleil... (67)

In Cahier d'un retour au pays natal, the line is repeated throughout the poem, each time associated with the misery of the island and its people. This line appropriated by Chamoiseau in the context of confusion and discontinuity imposed upon the community by Solibo's death resummons and reiterates the original accumulation of meanings associated with the line in Césaire's poem.

> Bouaffesse, en habitude nocturne, utilisait son bureau pour la consommation impromptue de ses histoires d'amour. Il n'y a pas de paroles sur l'Amour par ici. Ces roches du malheur à domestiquer sous la dent font que la parole sur l'Amour n'a pas trouvé son nègre. Notre pré-littérature est de cris, de haines, de revendication, de prophéties aux Aubes inévitables, d'analyseurs, de donneurs de leçons, gardiens des solutions solutionnantes aux misères d'ici-là, et les nègres cela, et l'Universel, ah l'Universel!... Final : pas de chant sur l'Amour. Aucun chant du koké. La Négritude fut castrée. Et l'antillanité n'a pas de libido. (62)

A good deal of this passage relates directly to Glissant's discourse on national literatures in which he states that "Cette exploration ne revient donc ni à une mise en schéma ni à un pleur nostalgique" (DA, 132). "Le grand cri nègre" is how Césaire first defined the poetry of négritude and Glissant emphasizes in Le Discours Antillais the necesssary *dépassement* of this literary *cri* in order to forge a literary parole: "Quitter le cri, forger la parole. Ce n'est pas renoncer à l'imaginaire ni aux puissances souterraines, c'est armer une durée nouvelle, ancrée aux émergences des peuples." (19) The idea of a pre-literature, also developed in Eloge de la Créolité, must also be attributed to Glissant who on numerous occasions in his works uses this idea to describe the present state of becoming that characterizes Francophone Caribbean literature.[9] The above-cited examples exemplify the way in which Chamoiseau, through the reclaiming of his literary origins, creates a literary *langage* embedded not only in the creole oral tradition of his homeland but also in the writings of his twentieth-century literary fathers. Rather than finding his expression in the appropriation of European models he centers his langage in Caribbean realities and traditions: *Carnaval*, the creole language and, a Martinican literary continuum.

In Eloge de la Créolité the writers state that "La littérature antillaise n'existe pas encore" however, Edouard Glissant in his introduction to the second edition

of Chamoiseau's first novel, Chronique des sept misères proclaims that "la littérature antillaise d'expression française prend désormais corps." And indeed Chamoiseau's novels attest to the coming into being of a body of Francophone Caribbean literature. Ever present in Chamoiseau's novels is Glissant's vision of Caribbean histories and realities. Following Glissant's "exigences transitoires" as stated in Eloge de la Créolité Chamoiseau consciously attempts to "tout assumer tout d'un coup" and his novels embody Glissant's discourse on national literatures. Glissant's discourse on Caribbean histories and literatures functions as a nurturing force by which Chamoiseau structures his own literary projects. This compelling writer-to-writer relationship can be likened to the paternal relationship between Glissant's pivotal recurring character, Papa Longoué and his adoptive son, Mathieu. In the opening passage of Le Quatrième Siècle, Mathieu implores the quimboiseur: "Dis-moi le passé, papa Longoué! Qu'est-ce que c'est le passé?" (15) In his own quest for identity as a writer in search of his past, Chamoiseau seems to turn to Glissant for the response to this obsessive question. Likewise, Chamoiseau's search for knowledge parallels those of the characters Pipi (Chronique) and 'Ti Cham (Solibo Magnifique). Pipi's guide on the precarious journey to self-knowledge is Afoukal, the legendary African slave, who through a series of mystical encounters restores to the young *djobeur* his lost

historical and cultural identity. Ti Cham, the author-character-narrator of Solibo, recalls his seances with the *maître-conteur* and the young *marqueur de paroles* restores their unity through a dual process of memory and re-membering. Solibo's words guide the young writer through the text and to a greater awareness and understanding of the true nature of his task as a writer within the community. Les dits de Solibo unify both the text and the dispersed body social as the storyteller's audience reunites at the end of the novel to revivify his interrupted discourse.

The same desire for unity is at the heart of Eloge de la Créolité as the authors continue Glissant's difficult task of bringing a voice to a people and it underlies the authors' goal of naming their literary fathers. The process of naming allows them to create a literary unity and continuity. Chamoiseau carries this *volonté* to his novel Solibo Magnifique in the naming of Césaire and Ménil. The omission of Glissant's name stands out like a glaring void especially in light of the way in which Glissant's discourse functions as an underlying structuring force in Chamoiseau's novels: in Solibo Magnifique the unnamed literary father is emininently the most influential. The fact that Glissant remains unnamed perhaps indicates Chamoiseau's unconscious endeavor to break free of the more established writer's authority in order to establish his own identity as author.

Upon close examination of Solibo Magnifique, there are indications that in addition to locating his works in a Martinican literary continuum Chamoiseau also seeks to align himself and solidify ties with a broader "American" tradition. Among the numerous undeveloped allusions and references to popular culture and oral tradition, we find one fleeting reference to "les nègres volants" --flying Negroes[10] -- which conjures up the image of slaves flying away to freedom, an image and metaphor prevalent in African-American oral tradition.

> Comme des nègres volants, les chauves-souris regagnaient l'arbre, disparaissaient dans le feuillage, ravivant l'odeur sûre des tamarins qui s'apaisait avec l'approche du jour. (Solibo, 36)

However fleeting this allusion may appear, its significance takes on a more significant dimension in that it allows the reader to textually link Chamoiseau's work to that of the African-American writer Toni Morrison. In Morrison's novel Song of Solomon (1976) the central and unifying theme of freedom through self-discovery and self-knowledge is inextricably bound to this image of flight. While the flight metaphor is not developed in Chamoiseau's novels, the allusion brings the two authors together on a common textual ground -- the African-American oral tradition they share and in which both anchor their works.

Given the *volonté* that Chamoiseau, as one of the authors of Eloge, exhibits to relate his literary project to those who have preceeded, the possible intertextual

connection between Morrison's work and Chamoiseau's is not at all a far-fetched notion. In light of the fact that Chamoiseau goes to great lengths to declare certain paternal influences (Ménil, Césaire) while omitting the name of the most influential paternal figure (Glissant), the possibility of an unnamed literary mother is intriguing. Upon closer examination of works by the two novelists, one finds striking textual connections between Song of Solomon and Chronique des Sept Misères and with a thorough reading of the texts the similarities become more profound and compelling. Furthermore, this prospect seems more plausible given the fact that the authors of Eloge de la Créolité express their political solidarity with their neighboring islands and Central and South America and culturally align themselves with these same societies as well as the Southern United States. This expressed volonté to create continuity through la relation permits the reader to extrapolate and see the works of these two novelists in terms of a New World order and to read them, in glissantian terms, as "Romanciers des Amériques".[11]

The fact that these two established authors, Glissant and Morrison, share many of the same concerns as writers, confirms the intertextual link between Chamoiseau's Chronique des Sept Misères and Morrison's Song of Solomon. I feel it also more firmly grounds their works in an American or African-American tradition.[12] As novelists, Glissant and Morrison share many of the same concerns,

namely the unwritten or unspoken histories of their respective "American" (in the large sense) communities. Glissant focuses his attention on the Caribbean, in particular his native Martinique, and Morrison directs her efforts towards the African American experience in the United States. The critical reception of the authors' works is also similar: both authors have been heralded as the bearers of a new voice in contemporary literature.[13] In order to more fully appreciate the common ground Glissant and Morrison share and upon which Chamoiseau draws his inspiration, we will examine three common points of reference found in both Glissant's and Morrison's works: the role of the writer, the Ancester figure, and form and style.

The Role of the Writer: In chapter three, we discussed Glissant's vision of the role of the Caribbean writer in relation to question of History. Glissant poses the writer's task in terms of the *questionnement* of History. For Morrison the same problematic is expressed in terms of *debate*: "while you really can't blame the conqueror [the West] for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it":

> There's a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours. It's a very serious responsibility and one single human being can only do a very very tiny part of that, but it seems to me to be both a secular and non-secular work for a writer. You have to stake it out and

> identify those who have preceded you -- resummoning them, acknowledging them is just one step in that process of reclamation -- so that they are always there as the confirmation and the affirmation of the life that I personally have not lived but is the life of that organism to which I belong which is black people in this country. ("Interview with Toni Morrison", Présence Africaine, 142-143)

In Morrison's novels, history -- past, present and future -- is ever-present; Susan Willis states "In Morrison, everything is historical" (248). Willis further explains the importance of history in Morrison's work:

> The temporal focus of each of Morrison's novels pinpoints strategic moments in Black American history, during which social and cultural forms underwent disruption and transformation. [...] Morrison develops the psychological aspects that characterize the lived experience of historical transformation. (265)

The "temporal focus" of Morrison's novels corresponds to what Glissant refers to in Le discours antillais as moments in history when the sterilizing barriers that obstruct the formation of collective consciousness have been partially torn down.[14] The writer thereby becomes a "chronicler" and as Mason states, takes a constructive and creative role within the community as a "conservator" of histories and traditions.

The Ancestor: Glissant's and Morrison's obsession with history does not limit itself to the history of the Black communities in the New World. Through their fiction they also seek to discover and uncover the bond between contemporary African-American societies and their ancestral homeland, Africa. In the works of both novelists, we find

the desire to tie contemporary lived experience with the past through a recurring character that symbolically links what Glissant calls "le pays d'avant" -- Africa -- to the present. The function of the "négateur", the naysayer,"the primordial maroon" (Silenieks 123) in Glissant's novels is the same as that of the "Ancestor" in Morrison's novels -- in both authors there we find "la présence irréfutable d'un Ancêtre". (Discours, 448) In Glissant's work the ancestor is embodied in the character Papa Longoué, the descendant of the first rebellious maroon, and who carries with him knowledge of past traditions and the land as well as the key to the future. In Morrison, the corresponding figure is Pilate -- "an 'Ancestor', a social or secret outlaw who must defy the system ... provide alternate wisdom, and establish and maintain and sustain generations in the land." (Otten 48) Within the novels of both authors, these characters live on the edge of society (Papa Longoué, in the hills which once sheltered the runaway slaves, and, Pilate, in her self-created refuge within the city) and act as guides to a younger generation of characters (Mathieu in La Lézarde and Le Quatrième Siècle and Milkman in Song of Solomon).

Perhaps the most important aspect of both Glissant's and Morrison's works is that they place themselves outside a Western tradition -- the most evident manifestation of this is their shared views on history. Their style also reflects their views on history, or, as Glissant states,

the "nonhistory" of their people. These two writers "force the reader to fill in the spaces -- to create a sense of history by means of apprehending fiction." (Mason 566) In order to "force the reader to create a sense of history", Morrison and Glissant demand of the reader the same patient and careful searching of the past that the writer must undertake. As discussed in Chapter three, in Glissant's work the textual presentation often reflects the gaps and voids of History. In Glissant's novel, Malemort, the reader must reorder the chaos of a broken and disrupted chronology; the reader must follow the same process with Morrison's Beloved. Both writers de-center the text in that the "West" is no longer the center; the center has been displaced to more accurately describe the lived reality of their respective communities. Morrison clearly explains this de-centering and its necessity in the following passage from her article "Memory, Creation, and Writing".

> In the Third World cosmology as I perceive it, reality is not constituted by my literary predecessors in Western culture. If my work is to confront a reality unlike that received reality of the West, it must centralize and animate information discredited by the West -- discredited not because it is not true or useful or even of some racial value, but because it is information held by a discredited people, information dismissed as "lore" or "gossip" or "magic" or "sentiment". (Morrison, "Memory", 388)

What Morrison refers to as "information discredited by the West ... information dismissed as 'lore' or 'gossip' or 'magic' or 'sentiment'" is specifically the same cultural

experiences confronted and reclaimed by the authors of Eloge de la Créolité. I feel that the common views that all these writers share only reinforce the textual ties between Morrison's and Chamoiseau's novels and solidifies the intertextual connections.

Before further developing our discussion of the novels in terms of Glissant's concept of *la poétique de la relation*, we must first examine the more basic parallels of central theme, plot, characters and narrative that manifest themselves to the reader. The analysis of these basic similarities between the two novels is a necessary exercise in order to more fully understand, appreciate and, later on, examine in detail how Morrison and Chamoiseau seem to working towards a similar, if not the same, literary goal: the forging of a literary langage which expresses their concerns and obsessions as "American" novelists.

In both novels the central theme is that of a quest[15] for identity undertaken by both protagonists -- Milkman in Morrison's Song of Solomon and Pipi in Chamoiseau's Chronique des sept misères. In both novels, this quest is at the outset a search for gold in which the protagonists embark into an unknown territory and future. Milkman leaves his comfortable bourgeois life and a rather secure position and future in his father's business in the city in search of the legendary legacy of gold left by his grandfather. Pipi's own economic situation is indeed more precarious than Milkman's: as a djobeur[16], Pipi leads an

existence on the margins of society. His world is the market and his family, the community of other djobeurs and the merchant-women upon whom he depends for his livelihood. The advent of Martinique's departmentalization only exacerbates his (as well as the island's) already unstable economic situation -- the importation of produce and goods from France deal a devastating blow to the local economy -- and is the catalyst which launches him on his search. In search of a way to transcend his poverty, Pipi becomes obsessed with the legendary treasure of the murdered slave Afoukal and begins his own search for the hidden gold. Although both characters come from different socio-economic backgrounds, they both pursue riches as means to financial independence and individual freedom. However their quest is transformed into a return to their respective historical, geographical and spiritual origins in the New World[17] and the outcome of their endeavor is not the discovery of riches but of self-discovery and self-renewal.

The textual division of Song of Solomon and Chronique des sept misères parallel each other -- the authors divide the two novels into two parts: Song of Solomon is divided into "Part I" and "Part II"; likewise Chronique des sept misères is divided into "Première partie" and "Deuxième partie" respectively entitled "Inspiration" and "Expiration". The first division of each novel is set in an urban milieu while the second half deals with the young protagonists symbolic flight or journey and return to their

communities' (African American and Martinican) rural origins in the New World: the American South in Morrison's novel and the *forêt* in Chamoiseau's. The journey upon which these characters embark leads them to "adventures that are both personal and ethno-historical, as well as geographical; that is, they achieve -- or fail to achieve -- identity through a discovery of their cultural heritage." (Campbell 395) The urban setting of each novel -- Morrison's novel begins in an urban setting in Detroit, Michigan and Chamoiseau's novel in the markets of Fort de France -- emphasizes the alienation of being separated from the land (landscape or *paysage*) suffered by the two communities. The protagonists' return to nature, or rather to the land, is rousseauesque in that they strip themselves of the trappings of urban civilization: their reunion with the land also reunites them with their lost historical and cultural identities.

In addition to the obvious textual parallels I find in my comparison of the two novels, there are also pivotal characters who resemble each other and/or whose presence carry the same or similar symbolic meaning. In both novels, we encounter a character whose birth is linked with the supernatural and who is therefore imbued with an understanding of and a relationship with the past: in Song of Solomon this charater is Pilate who is an object of ridicule and suspicion due to her lack of navel. The lack of a navel[18] labels her as someone not quite human and

indicates that she is not among those "people who were born natural" (144) and therefore imparts her character with a certain *other-worldliness*. Pilate's counterpart in Chamoiseau's novel is the protagonist himself, Pipi. Pipi, as described in the *Première Partie* of Chronique des sept misères was born of the union between Héloise (Man Elo) and Anatole-Anatole. Anatole-Anatole was by profession a *fossoyeur* or gravedigger like his father Phosphore; however, profession was not the only legacy the father passed on to his son. Anatole-Anatole like his father possessed the ability to change himself into a *dorlis* -- an entity associated with the devil in Martinican folklore -- a power which allows him to copulate with and thereby requite his sexual desire for the unwilling Héloise.[19] Pipi's conception appears all the more miraculous in that, according to Glissant, the *dorliss* is sterile.[20] The *unnatural* beginnings of these two characters set them apart in their communities in different ways. Pilate is rejected by her community and becomes an outcast when her secret is discovered and circulated among a group of pickers she has lived with for three years.

> Pilate didn't understand that [her lack of a navel as being something unnatural], but she did understand the conversation she had later with the root worker and some other women in the camp. She was to leave. [...]
>
> "On account of my stomach?" But the women would not look at her. They looked at the ground.
>
> Pilate left with her share of earnings, because the women did not want her to go away angry. They thought she might hurt them in some

> way if she got angry, and they also felt pity with their terror of having been in the company of something God never made. (144)

Pipi's unnatural conception seems to single him out from the other *djobeurs* and his own community exalts him to the position of maitre-djobeur. They extoll the virtues of son of the dorlis, who despite his unearthly beginnings, faced his existence with aplomb.

> Le voir vivre, dominer la fatalité de son père dorlis et cet impossible amour pour Anastase, prouvait qu'il était bien planté dans la vie, dur et résistant comme le bois des campêches. Ho, il avait quelque amertune dans le regard, un ou deux plis au front, mais au midi du marché, dans le peuple des paysannes et la fureur des djobs, il déployait son énergie étonnante -- il était royal. (128)

As the *nous* narrators tell <u>his</u> story, they present his life as exemplary and it takes on legendary proportions. His miraculous conception resembles that of Christ[21] and the hope of the community lies in him. Pipi is also like the classical hero whose destiny is predetermined by his paternity. His birthright determines his future role -- in the second part of the novel -- as *quimboiseur*. The *quimboiseur* -- a kind of shaman and healer -- filled the role of spiritual leader in society and was traditionally the vocation of maroon slaves (<u>Discours</u>, 105). This revelation is made by Pipi's dorlis-father, Anatole-Anatole who visits the market to speak with his son. His words foretell Pipi's future: "Tu sauras parler à la jarre, mais la Belle te mangera..." (53) His foreboding and prophetic

words come to be in the second half of the novel and their enigmatic meaning is finally understood.

Pilate can also be likened to the character Elmire in Chronique des sept misères. Elmire might best be described as the songtress of the market. She enchants and enthralls her familiar audience with songs and stories of faraway places and lands.

> Quittant le perchoir des caisses, nous accomplissions alors ce qui était devenu un rituel : rejoindre Pipi autour du panier d'Elmire, pacotilleuse aux voyages innombrables. Il y avait toute la poussière du monde sur ses souliers. Pour susciter dans sa tête ses souvenirs, elle secouait ses papillotes grises. Sa parole d'os nous rendait chiens. (79)

Elmire's songs and stories recur as a leitmotif throughout the novel: through her songs she not only entertains her audience, she also infuses her words with a didactic quality by educating her listeners about their history and present situation in the world.[22] Her memories rendered in song and story maintain a continuity in the collective memory of her listeners. Elmire's words retain the unwritten past of the community and their decline in the second half of the novel is indicative of a potential cultural loss in the years following departmentalization as the proliferation of things French overtake the island's economy, people and traditions:

> Messieurs et dames de la compagnie, à mesure que passait le temps, les avions et bateaux de France augmentaient. Ils amenaient des caisses de marchandise à bon marché, des pommes et raisins exotiques à nous chavirer le coeur, des produits en conserves, sous cellophane ou en sachets sous

> vide. Les békés vendaient leurs terres agricoles aux organismes d'H.L.M. [...] Bientôt, ils quadrillèrent le pays de libres-services, supermarchés, hypermarchés, auprès desquels les nôtres faisaient triste figure. [...] Le monde nous parvenait enfin: les postes de télévision regorgeaient de plus d'images que la mémoire d'Elmire. (133-134)

Likewise the song Pilate sings throughout Song of Solomon contains within it the hi(story) of Milkman's past. As he persists in his journey into his past origins in the South (Virginia), he gains the knowledge necessary to decipher or decode the meaning of the words "O Sugarman done fly / O Sugarman done gone". In both novels, song functions as "the unwritten text of history and culture". (Willis 271)[23] The role of each of these characters is to link this world to another -- the world of folklore and myth and other realms of information that, in Morrison's words, have been "discredited" by the West -- and thereby connect past historical experience to present lived experience.

In both Song of Solomon and Chronique des sept misères, we find the presence of an almost evil force which seeks to thwart the protagonists' full assertion of their newly-gained self-knowledge and freedom. In Song of Solomon, Guitar embodies this force. A member of the group Seven Days, a militant revolutionary group, Guitar seeks not so much freedom from but vengeance upon the dominant white system which oppresses him. Each member of the Seven Days is appointed a day of the week and on that day is

assigned the duty of killing a white person. Milkman's friend and confidant, Guitar identifies Milkman with Macon Dead's alienated, bourgeois lifestyle. Guitar shares Milkman's thirst for gold -- gold which will allow him to carry on his revolutionary and violent mission. In the first half of the novel, together they steal what they believe to be Pilate's sacks of gold taken from the cave in Pennsylvania only to discover the contents were old human bones. In the second part of the novel, Guitar secretly stalks Milkman during his journey south in the belief that Milkman has betrayed him and wishes to keep the gold for himself. By this point, Milkman has given up his search for gold, having discovered a much more precious treasure: his people, his origins, his identity. Milkman and Guitar confront each other like two opposing forces at the end of the novel in what appears to be a final battle. Milkman symbolically leaps or flies to his death in a last assertion of his new-found freedom and identity.

In Chronique des sept misères, the corresponding character is Man Zabyme, whose very name suggests the depth of her evil -- *abyme* or abyss. Her presence was announced earlier in the novel by Anatole-Anatole "*la belle* te mangera" and she appears to Pipi at the end of the novel in the form of a beautiful woman. Her appearance is dream-like and Pipi follows her, unable to capture his fantasy. His sexual desire for her overcomes him and he forgets the prophetic words of his dorliss-father and the legacy that

the zombi-slave Afoukal passed on to him. He soon realizes her evil nature when she speaks by the defiant and threatening nature of her words:

> -Tu es quimboiseur, ti-mâle? [...]
> -Pourquoi tu veux savoir ça ma câpresse?
> Il avait retrouvé ce ton qui impressionnait les jeunes marchandes lors du paiement des djobs.
> -C'est toi qui as fait chanter la terre et libéré l'âme ancienne de la jarre? La créature avait reculé, étrangement sur ses gardes. Son regard avait perdu toute douceur. Deux billes dures et glacées scrutaient Pipi.
> -C'est moi-même, madame, c'est moi-même! Et je sais faire plus que ça, se pavana-t-il.
> -Tu sais donc qui je suis! (238)

The beautiful câpresse then reveals herself as Man Zabyme described the narrator's as "notre plus redoutable diablesse, celle qui te grille le coeur du charme d'amour avant de te le manger réellement, beuglant de plaisir au-dessus de ta poitrine ouverte." (239) And as foretold in the first half of the novel and according to the legend, Man Zabyme, upon recognizing the power imbued upon Pipi through his encounter with Afoukal, and at the very moment Pipi himself becomes fully aware of his strength, slays Pipi. "On ne retrouva rien du grand maître des brouettes, fils de dorlis, roi de nous autres djobeurs" (239) the narrators state after Pipi's disappearance. Pipi's life ends seemingly as mysteriously as it began: in the myth and folklore of his community.

Likewise, Song of Solomon begins and ends on a mythical note. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the theme of flight is connected to Milkman's quest for

identity. This theme also frames the narrative of the text: the novel begins with the suicide of an insurance agent who leaves the following note on his door:

> At 3:00 P.M. on Wednesday the 18th of February, 1931, I will take off from Mercy and fly away on my own wings. Please forgive me. I loved you all.
>
> (signed) Robert Smith,
> Ins. Agent (3)

It is the day after Mr. Smith's suicide that

> ... a colored baby [Milkman] was born inside Mercy for the first time. Mr. Smith's blue silk wings must have left their mark, because when the little boy discovered the same thing Mr. Smith had learned earlier -- that only birds and airplanes could fly -- he lost all interest in himself. (9)

The novel ends with the same leap or flight to death and freedom in Pilate's and Milkman's final encounter with Guitar. As he looks at Pilate's body -- killed by Guitar -- Milkman discerns her secret power: "Now he knew why he loved her so. Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly." (340) Milkman's journey towards selfhood has given him the power and confidence to "fly" on his own as he confronts Guitar in their final skirmish: "Without wiping away the tears, taking a deep breath, or even bending his knees -- he [Milkman] leaped." (341) More important, however, is the idea of flight as myth, as "les nègres volants" (as mentioned in Solibo Magnifique) -- negro slaves flying away to freedom from slavery. Glissant describes Myth as "le lien primordial entre une perception d'histoire et une ambition de littérature" (Discours, 138)

and in Morrison's text mythological allusions abound.[24] However, it is most pertinent to this study to clarify that in the case of Song of Solomon, Morrison's text is framed by and structured around the African American myth of "flying Negroes" -- the same "nègres volants" to which Chamoiseau briefly alludes to in Solibo Magnifique. This myth is the origin of Pilate's "old blues song" (Song 303), and is also the thread that ties all the (hi)stories (*les histoires*) together as well as the key to Milkman's true name, history and genealogy. Likewise Chamoiseau's text is structured around myth -- the protagonist, Pipi, is literally *fathered* by a myth -- a *sterile* myth which flourishes fecund and full of life within the textual space of the novel. Through the structuring force of these myths the authors firmly anchor their novels in the oral tradition and *New World* histories of their respective communities.

Throughout this study, I have insisted on the quest for identity or search for self as the predominate obsession or theme in the novels and works analyzed. I would now like to shed a different light on the heroic quest of Morrison's and Chamoiseau's protagonists. Within the narrative space of both novels, we find the same historical movement back in time (from the wartime period in Martinique and the politically active 1960's in the United States to the period of slavery) as well as

geographic displacement of the protagonists (from their enslavement in the city to freedom in the countryside). The protagonists' trek resembles that of the *marrons* (maroons) -- escaped or runaway slaves who in the Caribbean traditionally sought safety and refuge in the hills surrounding the plantations.[25] It is not by accident that the flight of the two "heroes" or protagonists in Song of Solomon and Chronique des sept misères take on the historical and geographical dimensions of the *marrons* escape to freedom. Their quest can be seen, transposed into a New World context, as a sort of marronnage -- a journey to true freedom through self-knowledge in which they explore and discover the geographical and historical space of their communities in the New World.

The *nègre marron* was the slave who rebelled against the master, who left the plantation or *habitation* for the hills or *mornes*. His was a self-imposed exile: rather than be enslaved he chose to sever his ties with his community and live in isolation. The marron, in his isolation, reestablished a relationship with the land and through him the memory of the *pays d'avant* -- Africa -- was maintained. As discussed in chapter three, in Glissant's novel, La Lézarde, Thaël, descendant of the marrons, leaves his place of exil in the mornes to join Mathieu and the others in the city. He takes with him the knowledge of the land and unspoken history that has been passed down to him

by previous generations. However, unlike Thaël, Milkman and Pipi acquire that knowledge along their journey.

In Le Discours antillais Glissant frequently refers to the lack of popular heroes in the Antilles and he declares the *marron* as the only true hero in the Caribbean.

> Il n'en reste pas moins, nous ne le soulignerons jamais assez, que le Nègre marron est le seul vrai héros populaire des Antilles, dont les effroyables supplices qui marquaient sa capture donnent la mesure du courage et de la détermination. Il y a là un exemple incontestable d'opposition systématique, de refus total. (DA, 104)

And in his own oeuvre, the *marron* figure plays a pivotal role and functions as a positive force in society.[26] Furthermore the *marron* figure is historically linked to the quimboiseur, as Glissant states:

> Au long du peuplement, ont vocation de quimboiseurs les marrons qui en Afrique remplissaient déjà des fonctions socio-culturelles : chargés de la vie religieuse, des soins de médecine, du rythme des travaux, etc. A l'intérieur de cette constatation globale qu'est le marronnage, le quimboiseur est en quelque sorte l'idéologue, le prêtre, l'inspiré. C'est en principe le dépositaire d'une grande idée, celle du maintien de l'Afrique, et, par voie de conséquence, d'un grand espoir, celui du retour à l'Afrique. (DA, 105)

However, the marron is denied as hero by the community:

> Le marronnage. Evidé de sa signification originelle (une contestation culturelle), il est vécu par la communauté comme déviance punissable. La communauté se prive ainsi de ce catalyseur qu'est le héros comme référence commune. (DA, 154)

Milkman and Pipi are, in all senses of the word, maroons in search of freedom and identity denied them by

the societies in which they live. Their initial act of flight is born of their frustration at their apparent inability to change their situation, and, like the original maroons, the refusal to live under white authority (Geopolitics in the Caribbean). Milkman feels totally enslaved and imprisoned in his father's, Macon Dead's, household and world. He sees the devastating effect of the father's rigid control on his mother, Ruth Dead and his sisters Lena and Corinthians. They are truly *dead* in Milkman's eyes, as Terry Otten states, "disenfranchised from other blacks and severely warped by the crass materialism they shared with the white power structure."(47) Macon Dead's stagnant middle-class materialistic world is juxtaposed with the marginal lifestyle of his estranged sister, Pilate -- who fascinates Milkman -- as well as with that of the poor tenants of his rent houses. Pilate represents Milkman's first encounter with his discredited cultural heritage and past -- rejected by both the dominant culture as well as by his father and Pilate's brother, Macon Dead. Macon resents his son's relationship with Pilate whom he calls "a snake": "Just listen to what I say. That woman's no good. She's a snake, and can charm you like a snake, but still a snake." (Song, 54)[27] In an attempt to lure his son away from Pilate and her "wine house" and back to the fold, he employs him, however, his attempt is in vain:

> Life improved for Milkman enormously after he began working for Macon. Contrary to what his father hoped, there was more time to visit the wine house. Running errands for Macon's rent houses gave him leave to be in the Southside and get to know the people Guitar knew so well. (56)

Pilate and Guitar are Milkman's only true contact with the community from which he is estranged. Terry Otten describes Guitar as Milkman's "Other" or double (Crime, 51) and Pilate as his "true spiritual mother (Ruth is indeed his "Foster" mother): her magical potion made possible his birth; her curse protected him from Macon's attempt to have him aborted." (Song, 48)

In contrast to Milkman's sense of estrangement from his community, Pipi is nurtured throughout his childhood and adolescence by his community. From his birth, his mother, Man Elo, carries him with her to the market where he thrives amidst the djobeurs and the *marchandes* -- "... coqueluche des jeunes marchandes et fils de toutes les vieilles...." (16) It is clear from the beginning of the novel that Pipi's identity is inextricably bound to that of the community as a whole. His existence is embedded in the vitality of the market where the creole language and the art of story telling thrives. Pipi's downfall begins in the second part of the novel with the economic decline of the island and market (after departmentalization) when he sets out on his search for Afoukal's treasure.

Milkman and Pipi break ties with both their community and the authority structure when they set out on their

quest -- Milkman from the "would-be-white" paternal authority[28] and Pipi from the disintegration of the island's economic and cultural structure and the imposed French order.[29] Their expedition simultaneously leads them to an exploration of both historical and geographic space and parallels the maroon's escape to freedom. Along their way, Milkman and Pipi ecounter oracle-type guides who show them the way, point out landmarks and counsel them.

Milkman's first guide, of course, is Pilate whose name indicates her role as "pilot", mentor and counselor. From the information he gleans from both Pilate and his father, Macon, Milkman begins his journey Southward to Danville, Pennsylvania -- the home of Macon and Pilate's father, also Macon Dead. Macon Dead was a free black man who owned a prosperous and productive farm, Lincoln's Heaven. Out of greed and jealousy, local white land owners killed him, leaving Pilate and Macon orphaned and dependent upon the generosity of Circe, a household servant to the family behind the murder.

Milkman takes the bus to Danville -- a means of transportation which allows him a visual encounter with the landscape about which his father had raved.

> His father had raved about the beauty of this part of the country, but Milkman saw it as merely green, deep into its Indian summer but cooler than the city, although it was farther south. The mountains, he thought must make for the difference in temperature. (228)

Milkman cannot share his father's enthusiasm for the countryside since he has been completely alienated from it his entire life. Upon his arrival in Danville, the same feeling of unfamiliarity with the place and the people bring about feelings of confusion and uneasiness. Out of his urban context, Milkman is lost, yet persists in his quest. When he asks for help in locating Circe, one of the locals directs him to Reverend Cooper. Reverend Cooper knows of the Dead family and enthusiastically replies: "Well I'll be.... I know your people." (231) This response allows Milkman to *locate* himself in relation to *his people* for the first time in his life and to thus establish a continuity between his past and present history. He suddenly feels less estranged from the setting and the strangers before him immediately become friends. During the conversation that ensues, Milkman retraces, through the remembrances of Reverend Cooper, the steps of his father and Pilate after the murder of his grand-father. His people, his family, and his history come alive and provide the impetus necessary to carry on his journey.

In this area the Dead family saga is part of the local folklore. Everyone knows of the story of the prosperous black landowner murdered because he did too well. The old men of the town piece together the story for Milkman, all of them filled with "such awe and affection" for Macon Dead. Macon Dead's story as passed down by the community is a Horatio Algiers type rags-to-riches[30] story and his

heroic life, an inspiration and an example to follow and of which his community can be proud:

> He had come out of nowhere ... with nothing but free papers, a Bible, and a pretty black-haired wife, and in one year he'd leased ten acres, then ten more. Sixteen years later he had one of the best farms in Montour county. A farm that colored their lives like a paintbrush and spoke to them like a sermon. 'You see?' the farm said to them. 'See? See what you can do? Never mind you can't tell one letter from another, never mind you born a slave, never mind you lose your name, never mind your daddy dead, never mind nothing. Here, this here, is what a man can do if he puts his mind to it and his back in it... [...] can you hear me? Pass it on!' (237-238)

However, the success story ended in the tragedy of Macon Dead's murder -- a lesson to the black community -- and with his death, the dreams and aspirations of a generation: "But they shot off his head and ate his fine Georgia peaches. And even as boys these men began to die and were dying still" (238). If these old men allow Milkman to reconnect with his past, he does the same for them. He begins to talk and answer their questions about the success of his father: his marriage to a doctor's daughter, his new cars, his properties and income. Their hope and dreams for the present are renewed and their memory of Macon Dead rekindled in a new light as they listen to his grandson's words, exclaiming: "That's him! That's Macon Dead's boy, all right!" (238) And Milkman, consumed by his new-found identity and place in the world, momentarily forgets his original objective.

With renewed spirits, Milkman, sets out to meet Circe[31], the woman who sheltered the orphaned Pilate and Macon in the home of the white family who killed them and where she still resides. His first physical contact with the land occurs as he walks down the rocky path that nature has overtaken for lack of upkeep. The Butler house too has fallen into disrepair: Milkman encounters the smell of decay and animal flesh as he enters, yet can still make out the hand-laid and hand-finished wooden floors indicative of the ill-gotten wealth of its former inhabitants. (241) Circe, now a woman "so old she was colorless", greets Milkman whom she mistakes for Macon Dead, the child she harbored in secret: "I knew you would come back. Well that's not entirely true. Some days I doubted it and some days I didn't think about it at all. But you see, I was right. You did come." (241) Again, Milkman confronts voices from his past and is able to reestablish a continuity with his past. In his dialogue with Circe, they exchange information -- Milkman providing responses to her questions about Macon and Pilate, and Circe giving him landmarks to his past by showing him the room where she sheltered his people, revealing his grand-father's true name, and directing him to the cave where the grandfather's gold is supposedly hidden.

Each leg of Milkman's expedition brings him more in tune with the land or landscape: the landscape he simply looked at from the bus window, the short footpath he walks

down to the Butler home and the more treacherous one he must take to get to the cave. His city clothes encumber his movements, his shoes are not suited for the rocky passage, and "he cursed the creek" (251) that he had to cross to reach the cave. After Milkman passes through this symbolic baptism, he is struck with awe at his ancestor's relationship with the land: "Cleared this? Chopped down this? This stuff he could barely walk through." (252) Milkman's relationship with the land from which he is alienated is made complete during the last segment of his journey into his past during the hunt in Shalimar. He lacks the familiarity with the land, the forest, necessary to keep up with the older men. He clumsily makes his way through, trying in vain to keep up with them. His senses fail him: unable to see clearly in the night forest, he trips; the sounds of the forest deceive him; his body, unused to the rigors of the hunt gives way to fatigue. Throughout this ritual, his mind wanders back to the past he left behind in the city and the past he has now found in Shalimar. It is only at this point in his journey that Milkman becomes one with the land.

> Under the moon, on the ground, alone, with not even the sound of baying dogs to remind that he was with other people, his self -- the cocoon that was "personality" -- gave way. He could barely see his own hand, and couldn't see his feet. He was only his breath, coming slower now, and his thoughts. The rest of him had disappeared. (280)

The trek followed by Chamoiseau's protagonist entails the same process of exploration, questioning and discovery. Struck by *la fièvre d'or*, Pipi begins digging in the hope of finding what he seeks but to no avail. He then solicits the help of the "vieux chercheurs." Pipi, like Milkman, encounters a group of wise old men who share their experience with him. They, too, have spent their lives in search of Afoukal's treasure. They mockingly respond to Pipi's questions and warn him of Man Zabyme:

> --Aaah Pipi, Afoukal n'est pas facile. Vivant, il avait déjà la tête dure; mort avec la tête fendue, c'est deux têtes dures qu'il a! Que faire je te demande, contre deux têtes dures à la fois? (148)

From these "vieux chercheurs," he learns what is necessary to bring Afoukal to him -- "...il faut de la patience et il faut de la chance...":

> Si tu sais l'attendre, et si tu as de la chance, il viendra une nuit dans ton sommeil. Et là tu sauras comment faire pour prendre la jarre sans pièce problème... (149)

Soon after this meeting, Pipi loses his taste for the *djob*, he spends more and more time in the *clairière* where the zombi-slave was reputed to have buried his master's gold. He becomes familiar with the flora and the fauna of the place: the white cows that grazed on the "prairie aérienne", the bands of maroons who would come to mock at Afoukal's grave for not resisting the master as they had, and the fireflies "who drew the contours of their souls" and illuminated the "constellation of a dream land" (150).

Having established a relationship of oneness with the place, the murdered slave appears to Pipi, just as the old men said he would, in his dreams. The zombi-slave leaves with the young djobeur "ses propres souvenirs sans jamais rien lui confier à propos de la jarre." After this first meeting, the visits become more frequent and Afoukal reveals in greater detail his story and history as a slave in the New World.

> Pipi renouvela souvent l'opération. Afoukal prit plaisir à visiter ses rêves, à lui parler de plus en plus nettement de la vie des plantations sous l'esclavage : plus grandes des détresses quotidiennes. (151)

Afoukal's history is contained in *Les dix-huit paroles rêvées qu'Afoukal lui offrit.* The words spoken by Afoukal are textually set apart from the text by parentheses -- a procedure Chamoiseau uses throughout the first part of the novel when digressing from the protagonist's story in order to reveal the lives and histories of other characters. Through these *paroles*, Pipi "remonta sa propre mémoire fendue d'oubli comme une calebasse et enterrée au plus loin de lui-même." (151) Afoukal's paroles inform Pipi on the groups of Africans transplanted into slavery, the horrors of the middle passage, the daily suffering which was part of the slave's life (hunger, disease, the fields) as well as forms of resistance to enslavement (naming, suicide, the Caribs jump into the sea, marronnage). Afoukal ends his words with his own privileged and ambiguous relationship with the master who killed him. Like Milkman, during his

dialogue with the old men of Danville, the obsessive question "Et la jarre?" dissolves as Pipi is caught up in the (hi)story of his people.

Pipi continues his seances in the *clairière maudite*. Through these meetings, Chamoiseau symbolically establishes a dialogue with the past. When Afoukal first revealed his paroles to Pipi, many of them ended with a question about present day experience: "Ça a changé?"; "Est-ce que la petite marronne se pratique encore aujourd'hui?"; "Est-ce que cela se voit encore aujourd'hui?". Pipi replies to all these questions and more in his later meetings with the ghost. In this way the past informs the present and vice versa. The meetings intensify and soon Pipi no longer leaves the *clairière*: the rumor spreads that he "speaks to the jar", as foretold by his dorlis-father. His friends bring him food, helpless to do anything else now that the *maître djobeur* is possessed by this ghost from his -- and their -- past. A group of Rastafarians bring him food and venerate "cette chair qui les surpassait dans le rapprochement avec la terre, mère universelle..." (177)

Pipi's transformation in the forest takes on carnal dimensions as well as mystical: *his body*, lying flat on the ground, converses with Afoukal; he refuses to stand, literally planting himself in the earth, and is obliged to nourish himself with only what immediately surrounds him

(176); and finally, his skin, from the "moustiques [qui] lui parlèrent de la vie" (178), takes on the allure of an "undefinable rind."

> Les moustiques lui parlèrent de la vie. Sa peau se couvrit de boutons. Puis de squames. Enfin, elle se remua en une couenne indéfinissable, répugnante à la lumière mais moelleusement luisante dans le noir. (178)

Pipi's physical metamorphosis only reflects the spiritual or mystical transformation he has undergone. The rumor spreads that he has become a *quimboiseur* and would-be-followers come out in droves to request seances with the spiritual leader and healer, all bearing their "offrandes-à-sorciers." This holy ground turns into a spectacle covered by local journalists in France-Antilles, and filmed by FR3 as part of a televized magazine. Pipi's presence -- a reminder of the past that intrudes on the established order -- is a thorn in the side of the authorities who on numerous occasions arrest him as a sort of public nuisance. His arrests stir the island's political activists -- *autonomistes* and *indépendantistes* and other "models of exalted negroes" -- who embrace the quimboiseur as a symbol of "la dégradation de l'homme antillais sous le régime colonial." (180) But Pipi resists their efforts to "symbolize" -- or, perhaps, colonize? -- him and they soon lose interest in their once celebrated cause, feeling that "il était préférable de le laisser symboliser à son insu, sauvagement, mais en toute liberté. Depuis, Pipi connut dans sa clairière l'absolu de solitudes." (180)

Pipi's knowledge of the landscape comes to its climax with the garden he cultivates to feed the malnourished children of Marguerite Jupiter. After the episode in the clairière, Marguerite discovers Pipi while searching for ignames. She takes him in and nurses and nurtures him back to health and Pipi rediscovers the pleasures of the flesh. Pipi watches the children while Marguerite works. He feeds their hungry spirits with his tales of

> ...les héroïsmes sans histoire des nègres, négresses et négrillons dans le plus terrible des tiroirs de la vie. Yeux agrandis, les enfants buvaient ses paroles et, quand il leur en donnait le signal, l'accablaient de questions... (194)

During one of his story-telling sessions, the youngest child cried out "Pipi, j'ai faim." (195) From that moment on, he devotes all of his attention to the garden: to cultivating food for his family. The *jardinier miracle* cultivates his garden totally dependent on his knowledge of the land and plants and herbs. Pipi once again becomes the object of official inquiries and the media: Aimé Césaire -- mayor of Fort-de-France -- visits him, he is interviewed on television (which leads his friends to believe he can speak French -- a miracle for a man not educated in school) and *les hommes de science* seek to know his methods. The scientists treat the garden with insecticides, chemicals and fertilizers and relish in the fact that it finally dies seemingly unaware that is their interference that brings about this destruction. The *papa-à-feuilles* who normally treats the family's maladies cannot be found and they are

under the care of a doctor trained in Paris. The intervention of the public authorities has devastating effects on the family structure and the final blow comes when the social services take Marguerite's children away.

As the narrators relate the rest of Pipi's odyssey, they intervene and continue the stories of the other characters. The untimely death of Bidjoule is announced as "une invocation du désastre" (222). Anastase, the beautiful couli with whom Pipi falls in love in the first part of the novel, like Hagar in Song of Solomon, attacks the man who cannot or does not return her love, the Syrian Zozor Alcide-Victor. Ti Joge is killed in a fire at Chinotte's. However, these interventions are not separated by parentheses from the rest of the text. This perhaps indicates that the *histoires* of the community are now truly part of the protagonist's, that their destinies and future are linked to the present life of the quimboiseur -- that perhaps he is their future.

As I have attempted to show, Milkman's and Pipi's quest for self parallels that of the maroons' escape to freedom in the following ways: they first seek independence from white authority; secondly, they establish or reestablish a relationship and therefore, maintain a continuity, with their communities' histories in the *pays d'avant* and the New World; and lastly they reestablish a relationship with the land from which they have been alienated. Through their protagonists, Morrison and

Chamoiseau essentially *decolonize* their communities' historical and geographic space by reclaiming their heroes, by giving them credence and validity and by placing them in a continuum with present-day lived experience. As Glissant would say, both authors speak the same langage:

> Il est des communautés de langage qui outrepassent les barrières des langues. Je me sens plus proche des écrivains de la Caraïbe anglophone ou hispanophone, ou bien entendu créolophone, que de la plupart des écrivains français. C'est ce qui fait notre antillanité. Nos langues diffèrent, notre langage (à commencer par notre relation aux langues) est le même. (Poétique de la relation, p. 231)

Chamoiseau and Morrison also locate their communities' histories in the New World through a didactic and cathartic process of *naming*. In both Caribbean and African-American literature the obsession with the name stands out to both the reader and the critic. The act of naming encompasses both self-creation and reformation as Kimberly Benton states:

> For the Afro-American [...] self-creation and reformation of a fragmented past are endlessly interwoven: naming is inevitably genealogical revisionism. All of Afro-American literature may be seen as one vast genealogical poem that attempts to restore continuity to the ruptures or discontinuities imposed by the history of black presence in America. (Kimberly W. Benton, "I yam what I am: the topos of un(naming) in Afro-American literature" Black Literature and Literary Theory, 152)

By restoring continuity to the collective memory through the symbolic act of naming, the writer re-members a broken body and regains a wholeness not possible otherwise. For Glissant, the act of giving a *nom de voisinage* -- a

nickname, or more importantly, one given or chosen by one's community -- manifests itself as form of positive resistance to the imposed or official name given by the master.[32] This is reiterated in Chronique in Afoukal's third *parole*: "Quand le maître te nommait Jupiter, nous t'appelions Torticolis ou Gros-Bonda. Quand le maître disait Télémaque, Soleil or Mercure, nous disions Sirop, Afoukal, Pipi ou Tikilik." (152) Each of the djobeurs has his own *nom de voisinage* as well as identifying cries or shouts that he uses -- and that locate him -- in the market. In the opening pages of Song of Solomon the name of Doctor Street (called so by the whites because the towns only black doctor lived there) becomes Not Doctor Street in the black community. The key to Milkman's quest is the true name of his murdered grandfather -- Jake. The name Macon Dead -- the official one passed on from generation to generation -- was due to the bumbling efforts of a cleric who mistook a vital statistic for a name. ("Interview with Morrison") Milkman's own nickname came about when he was observed his mother at his mother's breast at an age when that was no longer acceptable behavior. In Macon Dead's family the ritual of naming all children except the firstborn male by opening the Bible and giving the name that appeared on the page was passed down from generation to generation. Hence Pilate, Corinthians, Magdeleine, Hagar and Reba.

The persistence of the name reverberates in both novels. Milkman's father's office is known as "Sonny's Shop" -- he does not bother with removing the lettering from the windows since he knows the name will persist in the memory of the community. The mystical presence of Afoukal in Chronique lingers on in the memory and legends of the people. Perhaps the most important example of this persistence is Pilate's song "Sugarman done fly away" -- despite the passage of time and deformations of the spoken words, Milkman is able to decipher its meaning by returning to his "people's" origins: Shalimar, Virginia. While listening to the local children play and sing, he recognizes the names of his ancestors: Jake, Sing, Rayna, Solomon. Sugarman-Shalimar-Solomon. The legendary flying negro who took flight to freedom was his true "ancestor". At the end of the novel he is able to piece together *les traces* of his identity. For Milkman, *naming* is concomitant to *locating* for he must first locate himself both geographically and historically before he can know his true name.

Ironically perhaps, the heroes never locate what they originally set out to find; however, they find something much more enduring and precious. Near the end of the novel, Pipi, still determined to "tear the gold from the earth", comes upon the infamous jar and to his dismay finds nothing but bones.

> Ce qui avait été l'essentiel de sa vie gisait à ses pieds, ruines d'os, d'argile cuite, d'effritements méconnaissables. Pipi titubait dans la désolation.
> -- Afoukal, Afoukal, mais où est l'or, où est l'or je te demande, où, où...
> La voix du zombi déjà décroissante : Et oui mon fi, pièce d'or, pièce bijoux, les vieux nègres d'ici croient encore que toutes les jarres plantées en terre contiennent des trésors... ils ont raison, mais ils oublient que tous les trésors ne sont pas d'or : il y a le souvenir... Cette révélation aurait pu terrasser Pipi. Mais elle se perdit dans l'euphorie où le plongea la soudaine apparition de l'étrange matador [Man Zabyme]. (238)

These bones, like her father's bones that Pilate carries with her most of her life -- as well as the pouch that Papa Longoué carries with him -- are the relics, the souvenir of a treasure more precious than gold: a memory and a past. Milkman's quest enables Pilate to return the bones to their true place of origin and give her father the hero's burial he deserves. Together they "fly" South. The ambiguous ending of the novel leaves the reader stupefied. Their deaths seem useless and Guitar's reason for killing unfounded. However, Milkman is finally able to assert himself and his identity and in confronting Guitar (if we accept Guitar as his Other as Otten states), he confronts and clarifies his position and in this one last stand, reconciles the ambiguities of his life and his community's history: he is finally able to fly.

In Chronique des sept misères, it is left to the community to pick up the pieces left in the aftermath of Pipi's death, to keep the memory alive. Man Zabyme devoured

Pipi, but the "diablesse" that devours the djobeurs is of another kind:

> Epuisés sur les caisses, serrés les uns aux autres pour conjurer un froid lancinant, nous disons et redisons ces paroles, ces souvenirs de vie, avec la certitude de devoir disparaître. Vous en donner cette version nous a fait un peu de bien, si vous venez demain vous en aurez une autre, plus optimiste peut-être, quelle importance. Cela se sait maintenant : l'Histoire ne compte que par ce qu'il en reste; au bout de celle-là rien ne subsiste, si ce n'est nous -- mais c'est bien peu. A la disparition de Pipi, la douleur nous en grappe, comme nous le sommes maintenant, incapables du Je, du Tu, de distinguer les uns des autres, dans une survie collective et diffuse, sans rythme interne ni externe. Nous tressaillons encore à la rumeur d'ouverture du marché, aux grincements des paniers débarqués sans nous, aux senteurs mêlées de quelques fruits... O douce absinthe. (240)

Chronique des sept misères ends with the *service municipal* carrying away the carts that once animated the market. The story or narrative ends here, however the author continues the history of the djobeurs in the *Annexe*. What follows are remnants of information and stories provided by the author. The first document we find is a newspaper clipping announcing the construction of the new market in Fort de France with the following *note d'ethnographe*:

> Aujourd'hui : plus un seul djobeur dans les marchés de Fort-de-France. Plus une seule brouette. Leur mémoire a cessé d'exister. Son ultime réceptacle, le vieux métal des grilles, n'était pas fait pour durer. Ceci pour vous dire, amis, de prendre bien soin de vous; arrosez vos différences et soyez vigilants : seul l'ethnographe pleure les ethnocides insignifiants. (243)

Chamoiseau mourns the irrevocable loss of a way of life, a culture and the creole language that Pipi and the djobeurs

represent. This passage echoes Glissant's discourse on *Antillanité* and his *poétique de la relation*. In a time when the extinction of species is accorded more importance than the loss of a culture and way of life, the message contained in Chronique des sept misères is not simply the "chronique des naufragés de la Colonisation" but also an admonition to preserve cultural and linguistic diversity. More than a Chronique which simply relates what has happened, the novel foretells what might come to be -- the unrecoverable loss of a language and way of life. The number seven in the title perhaps signifies the completeness of that loss. In Song of Solomon, the number seven also appears embodied by the character Guitar, member of the Seven Days. Milkman's confrontation with his Other, viewed in light of the symbolism of the number seven, might be interpreted as his reaching a stage of triumphant completion, perfection and assertion of his selfhood. However, this is not the case for Chamoiseau's protagonist Pipi, whose death is mourned by his community and whose memory is kept alive only by their retelling his and their story. When transposed to Martinique's cultural and political context as discussed by Edouard Glissant in Le discours antillais, the perfection or completion that the island may soon reach is that of the "perfect colony" deployed of any authentic cultural identity and heritage.[33]

Or, if we accept the number seven as the number of the universe or a number symbolic of both the spiritual and the temporal, Chronique des sept misères might be seen as conveying a more universal message on the loss of cultural diversity at the global level. In Le discours antillais, Glissant elaborates on his *poétique de la relation* and the importance -- and struggle -- of diversity:

> Le Même requiert l'Etre, le Divers établit la relation. Comme le Même a commencé par la rapine expansionniste en Occident, le Divers s'est fait jour à travers la violence politique et armée des peuples. Comme le même s'élève dans l'extase des individus, le Divers se répand par l'élan des communautés. [...] On ne peut se faire trinadadien ni québécois, si on ne l'est pas; mais il est désormais vrai que si la Trinidad ou le Québec n'existaient pas comme composantes du Divers, il manquerait quelque chose à la chair du monde -- et qu'aujourd'hui nous connaîtrions ce manque. (190-191)

Chamoiseau laments the disappearance of the djobeurs from the streets of Fort de France. However, in a recent issue of the Martinican magazine Antilla, a short article is devoted to their "reappearance". Their presence is seen as a sign of hope for the future, and their struggle for existence can be read as a metaphor for the struggle for existence of a way of life and language. Theirs is a healing presence within the community and embodies the very possibility of survival. Glissant, Chamoiseau and Morrison seek to heal the wounds inflicted upon their respective communities by bringing to the surface the painful history of their people. However, the history of their community is intertwined with the histories of all the communities

which played a role in New World history: American Indian, European, and African. Like William Faulkner whose novels portray the oppressive society of the Southern United States, they *question* History. Ultimately, their quest is one which entails a glissantian *questionnement* of New World histories.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. See chapter 4.

2. As stated in chapter four, Chamoiseau includes himself as both character and narrator in his second novel Solibo Magnifique. Patrick Chamoiseau ('Ti Cham or Oiseau de Cham): ethnographer and more importantly "marker of words" (marqueur de paroles).

3. See discussion of Chamoiseau's and Confiant's novels in chapter four.

4. In his work El laberinto de la soledad (first published in 1950), Octavio Paz discusses the function of the fiesta in Mexican culture and society. The idea of resistance and rebirth are all consolidated in the idea of fiesta and carnaval:

> La fiesta es una Revuelta, en el sentido literal de la palabra. En la confusion que engendra la sociedad se divuelve, se ahoga, en tanto que organismo regido conforme a ciertas reglas y principios. Pero se ahoga en si misma, en su caos or libertad original. Todo se comunica; se mezcla el bien con el mal, el dia con la noche, lo santo con el maldito. Todo cohabita, pierde forma, singularidad y vuelve el amasijo primordial. La Fiesta es una operacion cosmica: la experiencia de Desorden, la réunion de los elementos y principios contrarios para provocar el renacimiento de la vida. (46)

5. See chapter four.

6. Chamoiseau's desire to confront this dilemma is underscored by the opening quote taken from Glissant's Discours Antillais. The conflictual relationship reveals itself as deadly: Solibo's sudden and unexplained death from an "égorgette de parole" and the useless death of one of Solibo's listeners, Congo, who unable to speak French with his cruel interrogators, jumps from a window to his death. Congo's apparent suicide is better understood when examined in light of Afoukal's twelth "parole" (as revealed to Pipi in the dream sequence of Chronique des sept misères) on the communal act of suicide of the Carib indians who according to the legend preferred to jump to their death from the cliffs of Martinique rather than become enslaved by the Europeans: "Belle tracée qui déroute les dogues de l'esclavage!" (160) Suicide was also a means of resistance and escape for the Africans captured and sold into slavery: "Mais nous gardions le silence pour mieux revoir nos propres élans dans la mort : dès le bateau ou le débarquement, dès

la première case ou en pleine récolte. Sais-tu que certains, à l'heure du suicide, avaient les cheveux blancs? Sais-tu la patience et la force nécessaires pour avaler sa langue?" (160)

7. Chamoiseau's character is Patrick Chamoiseau, also known as 'Ti Cham, his "nom de voisinage" or the name given to him by the community.

8. René Ménil was one of the writers of the short-lived journal Légitime Défense and contributed numerous articles to Tropiques, the journal founded by Aimé Césaire during the wartime period in Martinique.

9. See glossary to Malemory.

10. In his article, "Historical dimensions in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, Utelinde Weterz-Furtado states: "Stories of flying people are part of Afro-American cultural heritage and recur as a manifestation of their wish to escape slavery and confinement." (222) This metaphor is also prevalent in other African-American traditions, such as the slave songs or negro spirituals in which the desire for freedom in North was often couched in the Christian notion of flying away to heaven where, in the eyes of God, all men are equal.

11. According to Glissant what *les romanciers des Amériques* share is their irruption into modernity:

> Nous n'avons pas de tradition littéraire lentement mûrie: nous naissons à brutalité, je crois que c'est un avantage et non pas une carence. [....] Nous n'avons pas le temps, il nous faut porter partout l'audace de la modernité. [...] L'irruption dans la modernité, l'irruption hors tradition, hors la <<continuité>> littéraire, me paraît être une marque spécifique de l'écrivain américain quand il veut signaler la réalité de son entour. (DA, 256)

12. Here the meanings of American and African-American should be defined in their broadest sense, that is pertaining to the American continents. Josie P. Campbell uses the term African American to describe the works of Toni Morrison and the Guadeloupe writer Simone Schwarz-Bart in her article "To Sing a Song to Tell a Tale". Both novelists belong to the same tradition of African-American literature born of the trauma of slavery and uprooting to a new land in the New World or the Americas.

13. Glissant's work has been the topic of numerous conferences and colloquia, including the Puterbaugh conference in Norman, Oklahoma. Toni Morrison has perhaps attained a more popular following and audience in the United States yet her work engenders much scholarly research and as Theodore Mason states:

> Perhaps no black writer, man or woman, has attracted as much attention in the last decade as Toni Morrison. She has been claimed as the spokeswoman in her fiction for any number of points of view, including Marxist and feminist. Others have tried to characterize her as a postmodern fictionalist whose work reveals the deep fissures in our comfortable illusion that the world outside the text has some kind of innate coherence apart from that conferred by language. Most all these attempts to "modernize" or "postmodernize" Toni Morrison's work by seeing her as a reviser of past traditions in fiction which have been predominantly male, or white, or upper-class. While parts of five novels do indeed display such revisionist inclinations, much of the current criticism about her fiction misses her profoundly traditional view of the relation between literature and culture.

Theodore O. Mason, Jr. "The Novelist as Conservator: Stories and Comprehension in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon." Contemporary Literature (vol. 29, no. 4) Winter 1988. p. 564.

14. See discussion of the importance of history in chapter two (La Lézarde) and chapter three (Chronique des Sept Misères and Le Nègre et l'Amiral).

15. In her study of Glissant's novel, La Lézarde, "The Freeing of the Waters" (quoted in chapter three) Beverly Ormerod, describes Glissant's novel as being built upon traditional archetypes, and more specifically refers to Thaël's journey as a heroic quest, a journey from the known into the unknown. Josie P. Campbell in her article "To Sing the Song, To Tell the Tale: A Study of Toni Morrison and Simone Schwarz-Bart" (Comparative Literature Studies, vol. 22, no. 3, Fall 85; pp 394-412) also discusses the theme of the quest for self as one of the points which unites these two women writers and further states that "the use of the heroic quest in no way denies the complexities and differences between Morrison's and Schwarz-Bart's novels." (p. 394) The same holds true for this study of Morrison and Chamoiseau.

16. See discussion of the role of the djobeurs in the novel Chronique des sept misères in chapter four.

17. Susan Willis states that "Milkman's quest is a journey through geographic space in which the juxtaposition of the city to the countryside represents the relationship of the past to the present" and that "the end point of Milkman's journey is the starting point of his race's history in this country: slavery." ("Historicizing Toni Morrison", Black Literature and Literary Theory, 271)

18. Pilate's lack of a navel has been interpreted in several ways. In The Crime of Innocence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison, Terry Otten identifies Pilate with Eve "a nurturer of life", the "mother of all living". (48) Utelinde Wedertz-Furtado, in "Historical dimensions in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon", states that this lack "symbolically suggests her selfhood". (231)

19. Héloïse awakes the following day and discovers "des taches sanguinolentes de ses draps, percevant son ventre en attente d'une satisfaction que le sommeil avait bloquée, elle se sut souillée par l'homme de la mort." (34) In a vain, she bathes herself in a tub of water in which she places a rosary and the next night, expecting Anatole's return, protects herself by wearing a pair of black panties inside-out. Anatole-Anatole does return but remains impotent against the power of the charm.

20. In Le discours antillais, Glissant describes the dorliss in a note on page 300:

> Le *dorliss* : Il a le corps luisant d'huile, il satisfait le désir des femmes sans leur en laisser le souvenir (sinon dans la fatigue du corps), il peut se faufiler par les trous de serrure ou sous les portes, il est invisible pour les maris, il est stérile. Les femmes s'en protègent en portant des slips noirs pour dormir et en disposant une paire de ciseaux ouverts sous leur lit. La croyance au dorliss est généralisée. Fantasme d'impunité et de castration. On ne connait pas de cas de dorliss homosexuel.

Chamoiseau implies that his *dorlis* (note Chamoiseau's spelling), Anatole-Anatole, is also an *engagé* -- someone who has made a pact with the devil -- in a note to the reader on page 35 of Chronique des sept misères:

> Ce terme désignait en créole ceux qui avaient passé un contrat (...). On était alors *aux gages* de quelqu'un, tant à l'époque on exécutait aveuglément les ordres du colon. Le terme est

> maintenant appliqué à ceux qui sont supposés obéir au diable en échange de quelque pouvoir.

Chamoiseau also bestows upon Anatole-Anatole the power of procreation.

21. The parallel between the life of the protagonist Pipi and that of Christ begins with Pipi's conception: his "earthly" mother is visited by the supernatural entity, the *dorliss*, Anatole-Anatole. His origins like that of Christ are humble: his mother is a simple merchant woman. However, the father-figure is absent -- a recurring theme in Caribbean literature. Pipi's spiritual transformation includes a period of fasting and meditation in the forest reminiscent of Christ's forty days in the wilderness. Like Christ, Pipi will be tempted by the forces of evil embodied in the sorceress Man Zabyme. Pipi's "disciples" are his fellow djobeurs who see in one of their own possibilities for the future.

22. The role of song in Chronique des sept misères is similar to its function in Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle by the Guadaloupe writer Simone Schwarz-Bart. In Pluie et vent, the protagonist, Télumée first encounters her history and past through the slave songs her grandmother sings to her.

> Lorsqu'elle chantait les chansons ordinaires, la voix de Reine Sans Nom ressemblait à son visage où seules les joues, à hauteur de pommette, formaient deux taches de lumière. Mais pour les chants d'esclaves, soudain la fine voix se détachait de ses traits de vieille et s'élevait dans les airs, montait très haut dans l'aigu, dans le large et le profond, atteignait des régions lointaines et étrangères à Fond-Zombi et je me demandais si Reine Sans Nom n'était pas descendue sur terre par erreur, elle aussi. Et j'écoutais la voix déchirante, son appel mystérieux, et l'eau commençait à se troubler sérieusement dans ma tête, surtout lorsque grand-mère chantait :
>
> *Maman où est où est où est Idahé*
> *Ida est vendue et livrée Idahé*
> *Ida est vendue et livrée Idahé...* (52)

23. Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington wrote of the importance of song in their slave narratives. W.E.B. DuBois devoted an essay to the "sorrow songs" in his work The Souls of Black Folks in which he underlines their importance as a component of American culture, sign of the contribution of African Americans to American history:

> Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood. Are not these gifts worth the giving? Is not this work and striving? Would America have been America without her Negro people? (276)

Frederick Douglass wrote that the songs allowed the slaves to "sing" their complaints without fear of punishment. Blasingame states that they often contained messages of clandestine meetings and the cry of Freedom in the North couched in the hope of a "Promised Land". In his essay "Slave Songs and Slave Consciousness" (The Afro-American Slave: Community or Chaos?, Randall M. Miller, ed., Florida: R.E. Kreiger Publishing Co., 1981), Lawrence Levine states that the Negro Spiritual responded to a psychological need to transcend (and therefore symbolically free themselves from) the closed universe of the plantation.

> They extended the boundaries of their restrictive universe backward until it fused with the world of the Old Testament, and upward until it became one with the world beyond. The spirituals are a record of a people who found the harmony, the values, the order they needed to survive by internally creating an expanded universe, by literally willing themselves reborn. (64)

24. See Josie Campbell's and Terry Otten's studies of Toni Morrison's work.

25. In his book Geopolitics in the Caribbean: Ministates in a Wider World (Praeger: New York, 1984), Thomas D. Anderson gives the following description of *maroon* slaves:

> Never numerous, one category of Caribbean blacks is currently the basis for a popular mythology that has growing political implications. These are the Maroons. The name derives from *Cimarrones* (dwellers of the summits) which was the Spanish term for surviving Indians who withdrew to the forested interiors to escape enslavement. There they retained their ways and raided lowland settlements. Escaped slaves later joined such groups and added African elements. Racial mixing overtime made the groups essentially black, and the term Maroon came to mean runaway slaves living independent of white authority. (47)

26. See chapter three for discussion Glissant's novels and the *marron* figure.

27. In his work The Crime of Innocence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison, Terry Otten traces the Fall theme in Morrison's novels. He often describes Pilate as an Eve figure but also sees her as the serpent -- the temptress, so to speak -- who lures Milkman from his father's bourgeois paradise. (46) He also links Pilate with Guitar whom he describes as "Milkman's Other" in that together they oppose Macon Dead's lifestyle and propose alternatives.

28. In one of his discussions with Guitar, Milkman expresses his frustration at his situation:

> I just know that I want to live my own life. I don't want to be my old man's office boy no more. And as long as I'm in this place I will be. Unless I have my own money. I have to get out of that house and I don't want to owe anybody when I go. My family's driving me crazy. Daddy wants me to be like him and hate my mother. My mother wants me to think like her and hate my father. (223)

29. The bar owner, Chinotte, responds to Pipi's question on the location of Afoukal's treasure by pointing out the futility of such a search in light of the people's alienation and suffering:

> Hébin, ouais!... Comment veux-tu que ce pays ne coule pas? Les enfants vont à l'école pour apprendre des choses de France que personne ne comprend, les jeunes sont charroyés vers Paris par milliers, la canne est malade,...les gendarmes tuent chaque année deux ou trois ouvriers agricoles dans la dèche les supermarchés, la misère mène partout son bankoulélé, et toi, tu viens me parler de trésor de pirates. (140-141)

30. An appropriate literary comparison is Booker T. Washington's autobiography Up from Slavery.

31. Circe, like Afoukal, embodies the ambiguity of the slaves relationship to the master. She resents the fact the daughter died and left her alone in the world and in the old house. She dutifully takes care of the pedigreed dogs more out of revenge: she allows them to destroy and defecate on the once fine decor. Afoukal describes his relationship to the master as one of friendship and true affection, yet he realized that the master considered him nothing more than property. The ambiguity of the relationship is epitomized by his death: rather than free his slave, the master split his skull, and buried him with the rest of his wealth.

32. In The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South, Kenneth M. Stampp concludes that when addressing slaves, certain rules were followed and that in their naming, the master often let his sense of whim take over.

> Even the most sensitive master called adult slave men "boys" and women "girls" until in their old age he made them honorary "aunties" and "uncles". In addressing them, he never used courtesy titles ...; except in Maryland he seldom identified them by family names but in selecting given names the master often let his sense of humor have full play. If familiar with the classics, he found a yard full of Caesars, Ciceros, Pompeys, Catos, Jupiters, Venuses, and Junos deliciously ludicrous; and he saw to it that every distinguished soldier and statesman had his slave namesake. (328-329)

33. In Glissant's last novel Mahogany, Martinique reaches the final stages of colonization in his futuristic depiction of Martinique "Musée de la Colonie" -- an island enclosed under a glass dome and which exists for the pleasure of tourists.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: The Quest as *Questionnement*

> *Savoir ce qui s'est passé (pourquoi, c'est-à-dire pour quelles raisons "valables", les Blancs ont exterminé les Indiens et réduit les Nègres en esclavage, et si cela leur sera compté) est la question qu'on (oui, que Faulkner) ne peut se dispenser de poser. Une question qui ne comportera pas de réponse agie. L'important n'est pas dans la réponse mais dans le questionnement.* (Edouard Glissant, Le Discours Antillais, 149)

In William Faulkner's Go Down, Moses the hunt and its various forms appear as a leitmotif throughout the novel beginning with the parodic fox hunt in "Was" and ending with Molly's desperate search for her grandson in "Go Down, Moses". Three different aspects of the hunt are emphasized. In "The Fire and the Hearth," the hunt or quest revolves around Lucas' search for the white man's gold. In "The Old People," the deer hunt is the setting for young Ike McCaslin's initiation to the land under the tutelage of the Indian half-breed, Sam Fathers. And finally, in the last section of "The Bear," an older Ike McCaslin's quest for truth leads him into the hell of the commissary ledgers where he discovers the curse recorded there by Buck and Buddy McCaslin -- a discovery which eventually leads him to renounce his rights to the McCaslin plantation.

In "The Fire and the Hearth," the story centers around Lucas Beauchamp, the grandson of Carothers McCaslin and the slave woman Tomey, and his obsessive search for the twenty-two thousand dollars worth of gold reputedly hidden on the estate by Buck and Buddy, the two McCaslin brothers. Lucas' search for the gold is not triggered by financial need since he

> already had more money in the bank now than he could ever spend, more than Carothers Edmonds himself, provided that a man believed Carothers Edmonds when he tried to draw anything extra in the way of cash or supplies from the commissary". (33-34)

Lucas' money in the bank came from the money set aside for the illegitimate children of Carothers McCaslin and Tomey by his sons Buck and Buddy. The money, which Lucas claimed from Isaac McCaslin on his twenty-first birthday (pp. 107-108), would have allowed him financial independence away from the plantation; however, Lucas claimed the money but chose to stay on the land he considers rightfully his.

Throughout the story, the theme of legitimacy recurs as Lucas meditates bitterly upon that which is, or should be, rightfully his: the money bequeathed to the illegitimate McCaslin heirs (a retribution intended to somehow expiate the sins of the father); his wife, Molly, who takes the place of Edmonds' wife after her death and whom Lucas must defiantly repossess; and finally, the land which Lucas knows so well and which he should rightfully possess. Lucas' quixotic quest for the gold is just one of many

manifestations of his frustrated search for legitimacy and manhood in a white-dominated southern society. When he confronts Roth Edmonds to reclaim his wife Molly and take her back to their home, Lucas identifies himself as society does (according to his race), but he also asserts his manhood: "I'm a nigger... But I'm a man too. I'm more than just a man. The same thing that made my pappy that made your grandmaw." (47) Lucas' hunt for the hidden gold seems even more perverse in that what he seeks and considers legitimately his that which was gained through the exploitation and enslavement of his people. Ultimately, there is no heroic or transcendent quality to Lucas' quest: it seems unnecessary (he does not need the money) and it leads him nowhere (he returns to his "hearth" with no new insight into his situation).

In "The Old People," the focus of the hunt is on the young Ike McCaslin who undergoes his first rite of initiation to the land in the form of a deer hunt under the mentorial direction of the old and wise Sam Fathers, who acts as his guide through the spiritual realm of the wilderness. As a half-breed of African and Indian descent, Sam Fathers represents the archetypal *ancêtre* (Glissant, 448)[1] who, like the recurring character in Edouard Glissant's fiction, Papa Longoué, links the spiritual and physical realms of existence and acts as mediator between the past and present. Sam Fathers' role as ancestor is twofold in that he possesses the ancestral memory of his

Indian past as well as the experience of the injustices of the enslavement of Africans. Sam Fathers possesses above all else an intimate knowledge of the land: an intuitive sense of oneness with the wilderness and the spirits that inhabit it which he passes on to Ike McCaslin:

> And as he [Sam Fathers] talked about those old times and those dead and vanished men of another race from either that the boy knew, gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become part of the boy's present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted. (171)

Sam is Ike's spiritual father who baptized him in the sacred blood of Ike's first sacrificial deer (177-178) and who "marked him [Ike] (...), not as a mere hunter, but with something Sam had had in his turn of his vanished and forgotten people" (182). It is this respect for the past and the land that Ike acquires from Sam Fathers -- and which becomes part of his historical consciousness -- during his first hunt that prepares him for the archival descent into hell found in "The Bear" which leads him to renounce his rights to plantation.

In Part 4 of "The Bear," Ike McCaslin is twenty-one years old and his concern no longer lies with the wilderness but with the "tamed land which was to have been his heritage" (254). In a lengthy discussion with his cousin McCaslin Edmonds, Ike reflects upon the dispossession of the land suffered by the original inhabitants -- the Indians --

as well as the tamed wilderness as property to be owned and possessed (254-261). This section of part 4 is a prelude to Ike's reading of the commissary ledgers through which he learns of the nature of the McCaslin curse. As he reads the brothers' (Buck's and Buddy's) accounts, he pieces together the sordid history[2] of his family, and the ledger entries

> took substance and a sort of shadowy life with their passions and complexities too as page followed page and year year; all there only the general and condoned injustice and its slow amortization but the specific tragedy which had not been condoned and could never be amortized. (265-266)

Ike's choice to give up his rights to the familial land is the symbolic way in which he atones the sins of the patriarch, Carothers McCaslin. It is through this gesture that he attempts to free himself from the family curse. However, Ike's choice only displaces his confinement within the system he deems unjust and cursed. Rather than freeing himself of the curse, he remains indirectly bound to the "tamed land" and all it represents by becoming financially dependent upon the cousin to whom he relinquishes the plantation. And, as the reader discovers in "Delta Autumn," Ike's consciousness of the injustices of the racist system does not allow him to overcome his own personal racism. As an old man, Ike encounters Roth Edmonds' mistress -- the nameless woman whose child represents the last of the tainted McCaslin lineage. As he speaks to her, he realizes who she is, and cries out: "You're a nigger!" (361) Despite the fact that she is "almost white" (363), she

remains in Ike's eyes a "nigger" whose only "salvation" is to marry a man of her own race (363). Like Lucas, Ike remains imprisoned in the closed system of the plantation mentality. However, Ike symbolically transcends his state of confinement through a gesture of hope: the childless Ike gives the hunting horn, which embodies the accumulation of the old man's knowledge and experience, to the woman's male child.

The curses of miscegenation and incest that has tainted the McCaslin lineage seem to propel each of the characters in their search for gold, oneness with the land, and true history. The quest of each of Faulkner's protagonists (Lucas, the young Ike and the older Ike) is in essence a quest or search for legitimacy and reflects Faulkner's own *questionnement* -- questioning -- of Southern society and history. And while Faulkner does not, in Edouard Glissant's words, propose "a active response", the greatness of Faulkner's work lies in this reflection upon the society he "knew best"[3] and in his questioning of New World history -- its destruction (of the wilderness) and its injustices (wrought upon the Indians and the African peoples transplanted into slavery).

The hunt or quest in Faulkner's Go Down, Moses reflects a search for legitimacy and a questioning of historical and social injustices as well as the tormented desire to overcome and transcend these wrongs. This same desire to explore and question their people's histories in the New

World is at the heart of Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and Patrick Chamoiseau's novel Chronique des Sept Misères. The hunt or quest in the novels of Faulkner, Morrison and Chamoiseau is the locus of what Edouard Glissant refers to as the *questionnement*[4] of History and histories. Faulkner, Morrison, and Chamoiseau explore the *histories* of their respective communities in their specific social, historical and geographical contexts through their protagonists' quest.

The heroic quest in Song of Solomon and Chronique des Sept Misères combines the three basic elements of the hunt in Faulkner's Go Down, Moses (the treasure hunt, the hunt and initiation to the land, and the search for historical truth) in an intertextual *métissage*.[5] Both Morrison and Chamoiseau recuperate the hunt and its variations from Faulkner's Go Down, Moses and transform the seemingly futile quests of Faulkner's protagonists into a heroic quest which leads to freedom through knowledge. The hunt and quest allow Milkman and Pipi to transcend their situation in history. Unlike Lucas, who never leaves the closed system of the plantation, Milkman and Pipi achieve freedom through the search for gold. Their search is a means to freedom which will allow them to leave the confinement of their respective milieus. Their quest for gold leads them to the land of their people's origins in the New World from which they have been alienated. Milkman's rite of initiation is a hunt with the old men of Shalimar and represents his becoming one with the land but also with his own community.

Pipi's rite of initiation is in the solitude of the *clairière maudite* where he, like the young Ike McCaslin, achieves a sense of oneness with nature and the "spirits" that inhabit it. Through this mystical experience, Pipi achieves unity with his past through the ghost Afoukal.

Perhaps the most extraordinary transformation of the quest motif in Morrison's and Chamoiseau's novels is found in the events which correspond to Ike's reading of the ledgers and which lead Milkman and Pipi to the discovery of their true historical origins. Milkman's journey south leads him to his family's hometown where he encounters the old men of the community who actually knew his grandfather, Macon Dead, whose story is now part of the local folklore -- the unwritten history of his people. Milkman's investigation and interrogation of the old men lead him to the truth about his family and identity. The trek followed by Chamoiseau's protagonist entails the same process of exploration, questioning and discovery. Pipi's knowledge of his people's history comes to him through his dialogues with Afoukal.

In Go Down, Moses, Ike's discovery of his ancestral past entails his solitary reading of the "official" plantation ledgers. In Song of Solomon and Chronique des Sept Misères, Milkman and Pipi discover the "true" history of their people as it is passed down in the collective memory and recollections of the community. The spoken word displaces the written record as the bearer of truth and the

discredited oral tradition is the key to the protagonists' understanding of their true historical origins.

With the help of the community, Milkman and Pipi are able to come to terms with the injustices of the past. Their willingness and ability to share their new-found knowledge and identity play a pivotal role in their search.[6] The ability to pass this knowledge on solidifies their identity. Ike McCaslin bears his burden of knowledge in solitude: the despair and tragedy of his situation lies in the impossibility of sharing that burden with his community in order to bring about positive change. Ike's family history is written in the plantation archives but remains *unspeakable.* It cannot be shared or passed on. Ike finds it impossible to connect with his past and his act of renunciation is also a denunciation of the injustices of that past. The promise of any sort of reconciliation with that past lies in the future: "Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he [Ike] thought. But not now! Not now!" ("Delta Autumn," 361)

For Faulkner and those writers inspired by his poetic vision of history and society -- Glissant, Morrison and Chamoiseau -- the *questionnement* of the past and its injustices is essential to that reconciliation. These writers -- who possess a privileged vision of life and history -- pose "no active [or transparent] response" to the "conflicts of the heart" brought about by the injustices of the past. The writer questions the past and challenges the

reader, like Ike McCaslin, Milkman, and Pipi, to embark on his or her own quest/*questionnement* in order to seek out that truth in all its opacity and ambiguity. The reader, like Ike, must "shoot quick, and slow" ("The Old People," 163); and like Pipi -- who is told that Afoukal will appear to him "vite, si tu as de la patience" (Chronique, 149) -- must wait and be willing to hear and to *relate* to that truth. The "poetic intent" behind Faulkner's, Glissant's, Morrison's and Chamoiseau's works is that their voices be heard -- a desire which Glissant explicitly states in the last section, "Ouvertures", of Le Discours Antillais:

> ...je souhaiterais qu'à travers l'enchevêtrement de mes approches [...] il ait surpris ce ton qui monte de tant de lieux inaperçus: oui, qu'il ait *entendu*. (466)

What is this "truth" that the writer can bring to his or her community of readers? Through literature the writer helps the community resolve its conflicts and clarify its vision of the past, present and future by opening up the wounds of history and exposing the human condition in all its anguish, folly, and triumph.[7] The vision of history espoused by Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison and Chamoiseau is not totalitarian and is profoundly revisionist in that they strive to reveal those stories that fill the voids of History. History, in their vision and as Glissant describes it in his essay "L'Errance, l'exil" (Poétique de la relation) takes the form of "la racine [qui] est unique, c'est une souche qui prend tout sur elle et tue alentour..."

(23). Using the terms employed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in Rhizome (1976), Glissant opposes the suffocating effect of the single root (*racine*) to that of the rhizome "qui est une racine démultipliée, étendue en réseaux dans la terre ou dans l'air, sans qu'aucune souche y intervienne en prédateur irrémédiable." (Poétique de la relation, 23) History is no longer the domain of the conquerer of lands and peoples but becomes the realm of those lands and peoples conquered. These writers actively seek to disentangle the truth from the obfuscated and eviscerated versions of their communities' histories perpetuated by the West through a literary expression embedded in *la relation*.

For Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison and Chamoiseau this expression can only take place in relation to what they know best -- their own social, historical and lived realities. However, they possess "a shareable language" (Morrison, Playing, xiii)[8] and a "prophetic vision of the past" (Glissant,Discours, 132) which allows them to lift the veil of *History* and cross Dubois' "color line"[9] and, envision, through the power of the imagination, those moments when the histories of different peoples and communities come together.[10] The shared moments of *histoires* manifest in the works of these writers are the locus of Glissant's *poétique de la relation*.

Notes to Chapter 6

1. In Le Discours Antillais, Edouard Glissant makes this short statement in relation to the work of the Latin American artist Cardenas in whose work Glissant finds the "présence irréfutable d'un Ancêtre qui sans crier se brise." Faulkner's stoic characterization of Sam Fathers seems to be the prototype for this Ancestor figure in the works of Glissant, Morrison, and Chamoiseau. In Glissant's novels, the ancestor figure is embodied in the character of Papa Longoué -- shaman, seer, healer, and link with African pasts. The same figure is present in the works of Toni Morrison in the recurring character, Pilate. In Patrick Chamoiseau's novel, Chronique des Sept Misères, traces of the Ancestor are found in the characters of Pipi, Afoukal (the ghost of the murdered slave) and in Elmire, the songstress of the market who revivifies the historical memory of her listeners with her songs of faraway lands and peoples.

2. Ike's reading of the ledger entries can be seen as an allegory of re-reading and re-writing. The task that Ike undertakes in his reading of the ledgers seems to parallel the task that Faulkner assumes in his re-reading and rewriting of history. In Le Discours Antillais, Edouard Glissant states that the writer must "contribuer à rétablir" the "tormented chronology" of an imposed nonhistory (133). And although Glissant's remarks are directed specifically to the case of the Martinican or Caribbean writer, they are pertinent to Faulkner's work. Ike's exploration of the past recorded in the ledgers reveals the unspeakable history of his family and as he reads he must fill in the gaps and voids left in the text before him. Ike, like Glissant's writer and like Faulkner, must "'fouiller' cette mémoire [écrite]" (133) in order to find its chronology and meaning. Ike's research is indeed a tormented search.

3. In response to a question asked about his "fictitious county" during one of his conferences at the University of Virginia, Faulkner answered that he "was simply using the quickest tool to hand. I was using what I knew best, which was the locale where I was born and had lived most of my life. That was just like the carpenter building a fence -- he uses the nearest hammer. Only I didn't realize myself that I was creating a pageantry of a particular part of the earth. That just simplified things to me. (Faulkner in the University, 3)

4. For Morrison this *questionnement* takes the form of an "intellectual adventure [...] without the mandate of conquest." (Playing in the Dark, 3)

5. In Solibo Magnifique, among the numerous allusions to other texts and writers, Chamoiseau "names" Faulkner: "...mais nous, baignés d'une lueur crémeuse, nous espérions Doudou-Ménar, *plus fixes et opaques que des nègres de Faulkner.*" (45)

6. Milkman's quest is not complete until he returns home to tell his father and Pilate of his findings. Pipi's knowledge of his historical origins is strengthened by his "history lessons" with Marguerite Jupiter's children.

7. William Faulkner states "that man, whether he's black or white or red or yellow still suffers the same anguishes, he has the same aspirations, his follies are the same follies, his triumphs are the same triumphs. That is, his struggle is against his own heart, against -- with the hearts of his fellows, and with his background." (Faulkner in the University, 197)

8. In her preface to her latest collections of essagy Playing in the Dark, Toni Morrison addresses the question of "racial (not racist) language" in relation to American literature:

> How compelling is the study of those writers who take responsibility for all of the values they bring to their art. How stunning is the achievement of those who have *searched for and mined a shareable language for the words to say it.* (xiii) (Emphasis is mine.)

9. For W.E.B. Dubois, literature represented the sole means of crossing the color line and of reaching beyond the veil of racial and racist distinctions of American society at the turn of the century, as he states in The Souls of Black Folk,

> I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas [...]. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? (139)

10. I refer to the following quote from Le Discours Antillais: "Là où se joignent les histoires de peuples, hier réputés sans histoire, finit l'Histoire." (132)

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Title of Dissertation: Decolonizing the Text: Glissantian Readings in Caribbean and African-American Literatures

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