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# Introduction

*Martin Munro and Celia Britton*

There is a curious relationship between the birth of an academic field and its death. In the manifestos and declaration of intent that mark the invention of a field there is often a recognition of its limitations and an intimation of its future demise. In some cases there is even a tacit challenge to bring about and hasten that expiration, or at least quickly to render the field's initial manifestations and conceptual apparatus redundant. Such would seem to be the case with Francophone Postcolonial Studies, a field of study that itself came into being through the end of another, the Association for the Study of African and Caribbean Literature in French. From the first issues of the new society's self-named journal, statements establishing the field and setting its parameters existed alongside self-reflexive critiques that questioned already the durability of many of its founding concepts (see, e.g., Assiba d'Almeida, 2003; Britton, 2003; Harrison, 2003).

This critical self-questioning has been an important and indeed salutary element in the subsequent development of the field. Key works edited by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy have primarily sought to prise open and 'decolonize' the terms 'Francophone' and 'postcolonial': through including France in their investigations of the former term they emphasize the complex, connected relationship between France and its former colonies; while by stressing the importance of French-language works to the postcolonial field more generally they seek to disrupt the almost exclusively anglophone focus of that discipline (Forsdick and Murphy, 2009: 4–5). One of the consequences of the rapid evolution of Francophone Postcolonial Studies and its distinctively self-reflexive nature is that its two constituent terms – Francophone

and postcolonial – are put under a particular conceptual and semantic stress that seems both to load them with meaning and deprive them of some of their critical usefulness. In a sense, they appear at once to mean too much and too little. Significantly in this regard, the second of Forsdick and Murphy's edited volumes jettisoned the term Francophone in favour of the more neutral 'French-speaking' – a move that acknowledges the ongoing difficulties of dissociating the notion of the Francophone from colonial connotations. It is similarly significant that a further edited work, *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-Monde*, likewise excludes the term Francophone and introduces a new term, transnational, which to some extent shifts the emphasis away from exclusively colonial and postcolonial situations and onto contacts and relations between, across and beyond nations no matter their history. Thus, the more its founding concepts are brought to light, the more they disappear, and the more the field develops, the more it in a sense breaks up. Paradoxically, too, the demise of the field, or at least some of its early incarnations, is a sign of its inherent health.

Our primary intention in this volume is to further this process of productive reinvigoration through directing attention towards a neglected though important dimension of 'Francophone' studies: the relations between the French-speaking Caribbean, including Haiti, and the American South. This shift in focus is prompted by several factors. First, a number of innovative recent works have altered the map of French studies in ways that resituate France into Atlanticist frameworks and asserted the importance of the Americas to French cultural and economic history. Christopher L. Miller's landmark study, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Miller, 2008), provides a timely reminder of the importance of the oceanic circuits of capital and human bodies to hexagonal prosperity and intellectual activity. Because slavery did not take place in France, it has been relatively easy, not to say convenient, to forget it and to leave its many and enduring consequences unacknowledged and misunderstood. Miller's work addresses this historical blind spot and in effect seeks to bring the experiences of slavery, and the social, political and philosophical conditions that allowed it to flourish, out of the shadows of memory and time to which much French political and historiographical discourse has cast them. Building an analytical model that is determined principally by both geography and economics, he shifts his analyses around the three points of the 'French Atlantic triangle' – metropolitan France, West Africa and the Caribbean – and retraces the trajectory that shaped the lucrative commerce between the three Atlantic sites. Miller's particular geographical focus reflects most obviously that of Paul Gilroy, though Miller works still in a largely colonial context and does not incorporate the United States.

Also, Miller's Atlantic is not exclusively 'black', in that it is concerned as much with Enlightenment-era 'white' literature and philosophy as with the representations of slavery in the work of prominent Francophone Caribbean authors such as Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant and Maryse Condé. A closer point of reference – and a further significant influence in recasting the map of French studies – is the work of Bill Marshall and his French Atlantic projects, which do not confine themselves to a triangular shape, but consider more broadly the relationship between France and the Americas. In prising open a broader area of inquiry that emphasizes Franco-American relations in all their diversity and complexity, Marshall redirects critical attention among 'Francophone' scholars to the Americas, inviting us to develop the many fertile areas of investigation that he opens up (Marshall, 2005; 2009).

While Miller and Marshall have opened up this broadly American dimension of Francophone studies, the field of Francophone Caribbean studies has arguably remained more exclusively focused on the two-way relations with Europe, at least in comparison with the rest of the Caribbean. The aim of this volume is therefore to reorient Francophone Caribbean studies and examine in detail the connections between the Francophone Caribbean, including Haiti, and the American South, including Louisiana, which among the Southern states has had a quite particular attachment to France and the Francophone world, being under French rule from 1682 to 1763 and from 1800 to 1803, and having received migrants from Acadia and Saint-Domingue (Haiti) at important points in its history.

These are sites born of the plantation, the common matrix for the diverse nations and territories of the circum-Caribbean. The basic configuration of the plantation, in terms of its physical layout and the social relations it created, was largely the same in the Caribbean and the American South. Such are the similarities that, when Édouard Glissant visited Mississippi and Louisiana, he found himself explaining to Americans the ways in which their world mirrored and echoed his own homeland of Martinique, how the families that fled the French and Haitian revolutions brought a distinctive culture that persists still in various forms: in cooking, in architecture and in music, which are 'principally the same in the culture of this whole area' (Glissant, 1999: 29). The African trace, Glissant says, was kept alive and reconfigured according to the 'inspiration' of particular places in this circum-Caribbean world, a zone shaped by a common, interconnected history that 'travels with the seas' (*ibid.*). The volume aims to examine these interconnections in depth, and to develop our understanding of the cultural, social and historical affinities between the Francophone Caribbean and the American South.

An important consequence in redirecting the discipline in this way is that it bypasses to a large extent the metropole and reduces greatly the anxiety

that runs through much of Francophone Postcolonial Studies over the fate of metropolitan France and its apparent inability to come to terms with its colonial past and postcolonial present. This anxiety has tended to deflect attention away from the non-metropolitan, postcolonial world and created an exaggerated sense of France's importance to the postcolonial world, particularly the circum-Caribbean, which encompasses a great variety of territories and states, ranging in historical and political terms from the US South and Haiti, both of which became independent from Europe more than 200 years ago, to the French Overseas Departments of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane. In redirecting Francophone Caribbean studies in the way we propose, we highlight a set of relations that do not require the mediation of France. Taking the French out of Francophone studies liberates the discipline, reduces the significance of France to the 'Francophone world', and shifts the focus away from metropolitan political and social intransigence and onto issues of history, language, politics and 'culture' in more or less tangible forms: for example, literature, dance, music, theatre, architecture, cooking, religion.

In other words, it focuses attention on the notion of 'Creoleness', that elusive, slippery, contested concept that is a peculiarly American invention, a term rooted in, born and indicative of contact between European and African people and cultures in the Americas. Its contested nature is epitomized in the debates it has provoked in the Francophone Caribbean in the past twenty years. The Créolité movement was effectively launched in 1989 with the publication of *Éloge de la créolité*, which later appeared in a bilingual edition with the English title of *In Praise of Creoleness*. The principal figures in this movement are the Martinicans Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant. Créolité centres on a belief in the importance of Creole language and culture, and an interest in the processes of creolization. Like Glissant, the Créolité group challenges the traditional, colonially inherited mimetic impulses in French Caribbean culture. Whereas they cite Glissant as an important influence, they have posed a very direct challenge to Aimé Césaire and *négritude*. Because Césaire wrote only in French, they say, he neglected the island's 'authentic' language, and the rich oral tradition. In their turn, however, the Creolists and their doctrine of Créolité have been criticized for their apparent desire to fix Antillean identity in their new, essentialized version of Creoleness. Critics say that, unlike Glissant, the Creolists have underplayed the evolving, non-teleological elements of creolization, and sought to ground identity once more in a new oneness. Perhaps the most strident critic of the Creolists has been Maryse Condé. She argues that the Martinican school of Créolité 'is singular because it presumes to impose law and order', and in implying a notion of 'authenticity', which inevitably

engenders exclusion, as “authenticity” is based on the very normative ideology that for so long consigned us to the world’s periphery’ (Condé, 1998: 106). Like Condé, this volume promotes an idea of Creole culture and creolization as open-ended, non-prescriptive phenomena. Like Sidney Mintz and Sally Price in *Caribbean Contours*, we insist that the terms remain some of the most useful for conceiving the circum-Caribbean as a cultural and historical unit, an overarching, polyvalent and malleable concept that does not deny internal diversity and difference, but which indeed incorporates these as constituent elements of Creole societies and cultures (Mintz and Price, 1985: 6). The book’s chapters are organized into three sections (under the headings Creolizations, Music, and Intertextualities: Faulkner, Glissant, Condé) that group the essays thematically, though our objective is that the sections and chapters be read not in isolation but comparatively, as particular inquiries into topics that are fundamentally related.

### Creolizations

Many of our contributors comment on the semantic instability of the term ‘Creole’: it has had a complex history, from designating the original white settlers of Louisiana to the potentially worldwide Glissantian dynamic of creolization. There is also a connection to be made between this linguistic indeterminacy and the hybridity and fluidity that are so prominent in its referent – Creole culture itself. As a cultural identity, ‘Creole’ seems to be definable only as a shifting set of *differential* terms which depend upon the particular context: French- versus English-speaking, mixed-race versus either black or white, culturally as opposed to biologically defined racial identity, and so on. Thus, Angel Adams Parham, for instance, groups her Creole-identifying interviewees according to the term that they define themselves *against*. In a rather different sense, however, binary oppositions are also deeply antipathetic to Creole culture. One of its most prominent features is its three-tiered racial classification as opposed to the Anglo-American binary black–white divide. Similarly, the characters of the play analysed by Typhaine Leservot are shown as building an identity as American citizens of Louisiana in opposition to *both* revolutionary Saint-Domingue and revolutionary France.

The chapters in this volume that deal explicitly with definitions of Creole culture and Creole identity discuss a wide range of types of text: journalism, ethnography (amateur and professional), interviews, drama, novels, political slogans, autobiography. This generic hybridity is indeed often in evidence within the work of one particular figure. Mary Gallagher’s analysis of Lafcadio Hearn’s writing on nineteenth-century Louisiana and Martinique

shows how it veers from journalism to a kind of proto-ethnography (in his descriptions of popular culture, and his published collections of Creole folk-tales, songs, etc.) to fiction: he also wrote two novels, one set in Louisiana and one in the Caribbean. Gallagher shows how for Hearn Louisiana and the French-speaking Caribbean form a 'Creole continuum' that disregards national boundaries; and how even this continuum lacks clear boundaries, as Hearn's writing on black communities in Cincinnati reveals the similarities between these communities and those that he defines as strictly Creole. She stresses his long-standing fascination with Creole culture: not only his intense intellectual investment in Creole issues but also – despite his always positioning himself as an outsider – a strong emotional attraction and aesthetic delight that, she suggests, result in his production of imaginative literature as well as quasi-ethnographic journalism. It is above all the phenomenon of racial mixtures that fascinates him: the aesthetics of skin colour and the 'depth of the inter-ethnic and inter-linguistic palimpsest that distinguished post-plantation culture' (29).

Staying with nineteenth-century Louisiana, Leservot's analysis of Auguste Lussan's 1837 play *La Famille créole* has a very different emphasis. It is more explicitly concerned with the mechanisms of a construction of collective identity, and less in relation to racial differences (except in so far as these are carefully excluded by the play) than in terms of an emerging national American identity. Leservot notes the importance of theatre as a forum for identity politics in the 1830s, when Louisiana was still regarded with some suspicion by the rest of the United States. A major factor in this was the influx of refugees fleeing the revolution in Saint-Domingue, of which Lussan's 'Creole family', the Clairvilles, are an example. The play is set in 1794, and opens with the Clairvilles' arrival in New Orleans, having abandoned their land and their wealth in Saint-Domingue. Rather than staying in America, however, they plan to settle in France, but get caught up in the French Revolution, are nearly guillotined, and return to Louisiana, which now assumes the status of a safe American haven for innocent victims of political persecution. Leservot shows how the journey to France and back is an essential stage in the play's manoeuvring of the Clairvilles into a position where they identify with America rather than France and are politically acceptable as American citizens. The way in which the French Revolution is superimposed on the Haitian one allows the latter to disappear: as victims, the Clairvilles can be presented not as slave-owning colonial planters but as innocents wrongfully accused of treason, neither revolutionaries nor royalists. Thus divested of any inconvenient allegiances, they are ready to become American citizens.

Angel Adams Parham's 'Caribbean and Creole in New Orleans' is an ethnographic study of the continuing significance of the Saint-Domingue

refugees in the present-day racial identifications of the Creoles of New Orleans. At the time of this migration Louisiana, because of its distinctive colonial history, was far more racially tolerant than the rest of America, and its large mixed-race community – the free people of colour – included individuals of considerable wealth and status; but all of this had been under threat since the Louisiana purchase in 1803. The refugees from Saint-Domingue more than doubled the numbers of the free people of colour in New Orleans and so helped the community resist the pressures of the American binary racial divide and retain its Creole culture. Parham's interviews with descendants of the refugees demonstrate their continuing awareness of the Caribbean component of their ancestry, and their feelings of affinity with the Caribbean. But she also distinguishes four 'cultural scripts' in which their self-identifications as Creole are formed by differentiating between themselves and, for the white subjects, either 'Américains' or the binary black–white divide, and for coloured subjects, either in opposition to or as part of the wider community of African Americans. This approach reveals the mobility of the signifier 'Creole'; it allows the complexity of racial and ethnic identities in Louisiana to emerge; and it also emphasizes the extent to which racial identification is not a biological given but a discursively constructed choice of a particular cultural script.

Valérie Loichot's analysis of representations of Barack Obama in France, the USA and Martinique moves the discussion of 'Creoleness' out of Louisiana but places an even more explicit emphasis on the cultural, as opposed to biological, nature of racial identity. She does this by contrasting biological 'métissage' (with its etymological roots in plant-breeding) with 'creolization'; in Glissant's sense of unpredictable cultural contact and exchange, 'métissage' stabilizes and creolization destabilizes racial constructs. Most French journalists describe Obama as a 'métis', while in Martinique he is referred to as 'créole'. Thus the French press essentializes Obama's racial identity; it does so, moreover, with a concept that is completely foreign to American definitions of race: in the binary opposition of the 'One-Drop Rule', the 'métis' corresponds only to the pejorative 'half-caste'. Conversely, the appellation 'African American' is not used by the French, because it transgresses the republican principle that citizenship is independent of ethnicity. These mismatches illustrate the 'untranslatability of race' between different national cultural discourses. But, in any case, Obama is not African American in the dominant sense of being a descendant of slaves. Since neither 'métis' nor 'African American' can satisfactorily define him, Loichot argues we must turn away from fixed biological or historical determinations and look at the freer identifications made possible by creolization. During his election campaign, the Martinicans enthusiastically adopted Obama as one



of themselves: Loichot cites a video of him dubbed into Creole in which he is made to say 'Moin cé un Matinikè' [I am a Martinican]. Obama is a Creole precisely because of his racial indeterminacy – 'his complex cultural, familial and racial diversity impossible to fix in one static definition' (88). Moreover, he is an *agent* of creolization through the chosen identifications of which he is both subject and object.

Christina Kullberg's chapter on Richard Price also focuses on Martinique, and brings together two themes that we have encountered in previous chapters: the hybridity of Creole culture and the ethnographic perspective. But she is most centrally concerned with another characteristic of Price's *The Convict and the Colonel*, one which is curiously similar to Lafcadio Hearn's writing a century earlier. Unlike Hearn, Price is a professional anthropologist; like him, however, Price's writing is, some of the time, openly subjective and emotionally involved with a Martinican culture that he is not only observing but to which (unlike Hearn) he also claims to belong. If Price's book thus combines anthropology and autobiography, it does so of course with a sophisticated reflexive awareness that is entirely lacking in Hearn's naively expressed attachments and prejudices. Indeed, Price is consciously participating in an ongoing debate within his discipline as to the validity of so-called postmodern anthropology, whereas Gallagher attributes Hearn's love of Creole culture to his own personal history of mixed Greek–Irish descent and childhood displacement. But they have in common, beyond the basic incorporation of affect into conventionally impersonal ethnographic description, a strong nostalgia for Creole cultures that they both see as disappearing: what Gallagher sees as Hearn's 'antiquarian' perspective is not all that far removed from Price's critique of the trivialization and commodification of cultural memory in a rapidly modernizing Martinique. Equally, Price's book develops in a far more deliberate fashion the generic diversity of Hearn's mixture of reportage, aesthetic appreciation and fiction; it combines anthropological analysis with travel writing and imaginative reconstruction (of, for example, the convict's years in French Guyana, of which there is very little documentation). One major difference between the two writers is that while Hearn always maintains the role of observer of a foreign culture, Price adopts a stance of emotional involvement with his Martinican subjects and writes as a participant in, as much as an observer of, their community, alternating between intimacy and distance to produce the 'staging of a distance which is then superseded' (101). Kullberg argues that the 'poetic' qualities of Price's anthropological narrative work to inhibit a fixed view of the other, and ultimately relates this lack of fixity to the nature of Creole culture itself. That is, she concludes that the reason for the hybridity of his discourse is not so much a move in a scholarly debate on the status of anthropological knowledge

as it is a recognition and replication of the heterogeneous nature of Creole culture itself and the difficulty of capturing its elusive reality: 'a representation of Creole society which can itself be described as creolizing' (105).

### Music

This notion of a creolized and continually creolizing cultural sphere across the circum-Caribbean is developed and expanded in four chapters – by Martin Munro, Jeremy Lane, Jean-Luc Tamby and Jerome Camal – that focus on the particular contributions of music and musicians. Music appears as a distinctively fluid and effective conduit for the kinds of non-hierarchical exchanges that creolization thrives on. Munro's essay deals specifically with rhythm and starts from the idea that European colonists in the plantation world created anti-rhythmic societies that lacked the basic rhythmic socialization (a common, functional understanding of time, culture and work) that has been a fundamental element in bonding communities from the beginning of human history. As Munro argues, however, among the enslaved people more organic and benign rhythms persisted and helped them survive the plantation and its anti-rhythmic foundations. A crucial aspect of Munro's thesis is that rhythm was not the property of one group, and that it became one of the most effective means of transgressing social and racial divides and in creating the unique social order and culture of the circum-Caribbean. The chapter examines some of the ways in which rhythm has functioned and continues to serve as a particularly malleable and persistent social and cultural element both in the Caribbean and in the American South. The initial focus is on James Brown's rhythmic innovations in the 1960s, and Brown's interpretation of his rhythms not as echoes of a recoverable racial past but as pre-echoes of the future, and of sounds and ways of thinking yet to be realized. The chapter discusses Brown's rhythms in relation to other instances in Haiti, Martinique and Trinidad where rhythm has been a prominent factor in moments of social and personal transformation. Rhythm, Munro argues, has been a primary force in creating these creolized societies, and remains a dynamic element of the circum-Caribbean world.

Jeremy Lane writes on Frantz Fanon, a figure not normally associated with creolization or with circum-Caribbean cultural relations. As Lane shows, however, Fanon's interest in one prominent manifestation of creolized American culture – jazz music – formed an important, if neglected, part of the Martinican's critique of Romantic interpretations of black cultures in the Americas. Arguing that Fanon's biographer David Macey misunderstands and underestimates the significance of Fanon's allusions to jazz, Lane calls into question Macey's assumptions about ethnic or national identity and the

particular cultural forms appropriate to that identity. He similarly questions Françoise Vergès's critique of what she sees as Fanon's 'disavowal' of the 'reality' of his Creole identity, in favour of a reinvention of his 'filiation' and 'symbolic ancestry in Algeria' (Vergès, 1997: 579). As Lane sees it, Macey's and Vergès's critiques are underpinned by fundamentally Romantic ideas about the organic relationships between ethnic identity, bounded geographical location and their associated forms of cultural and linguistic expression. Ironically, as Lane shows, Fanon's scattered allusions to jazz show him attempting precisely to question and re-formulate each of those Romantic assumptions, chiefly through the Martinican's critique of Léopold Sedar Senghor's conception of *négritude*. In his early essays and poems, Senghor had presented jazz as an important expression of *négritude*, that is to say of an essentialized  *nègre* identity, rooted in the unchanging rhythms of an organic rural community, of which West Africa was the archetype and the American South its faithful reproduction in the New World. As Lane shows, Fanon's allusions to jazz form an integral part of the Martinican's critique of Senghor's *négritude* and, as such, involve Fanon seeking to uncouple jazz's potential cultural and political significance from any organic links the music might be assumed to possess either to essential racial identity or to its putative geographical place of origin in the American South.

Jean-Luc Tamby carries out a music-based comparison of two figures that are rarely discussed together: Édouard Glissant and Miles Davis. Davis is not conventionally associated with the South – indeed, he seems to illustrate Fanon's critique of the essentialist association of jazz and the South – but Tamby's comparison of his and Glissant's aesthetics makes many telling connections between the two that implicitly expand the boundaries of the circum-Caribbean into the Northern states to which many African Americans migrated from the South during the twentieth century. Basing his analysis on a statement made by Glissant that his writing style is virtually the same as Davis's jazz style, Tamby asserts that the literature of the Caribbean and jazz music in the United States belong to areas of cultural activity which have comparable histories, despite their dissimilarities. Tamby's comparative approach to the two artists leads to reflections on their common 'strategies of resistance' and their individual formal concerns. Style and rhythm are Tamby's primary areas of interest – means of bridging historical differences between Caribbean literature and African American music. As Tamby argues, Glissant's concepts of *langage* and the (African) trace bring together different cultural phenomena within a single community and connect groups with a common history of slavery and colonialism but which are separated by either geography or linguistic differences. Glissant similarly conceives of an aesthetic community that joins several artistic disciplines, and, as Tamby

says, style in this case has a primarily collective value. Careful analyses of the rhythmic qualities of Glissant's and Davis's work lead Tamby to conclude that the power of the artists' rhythms cannot be reduced to their shared history, and that through rhythm they manage to escape the confines of history and attain a style that transcends their place in time, reaching perhaps a kind of ultimate destination of creolization, a space that incorporates all of history yet is freed from it.

Jerome Camal's essay similarly employs Glissantian concepts to frame its analyses of circum-Caribbean musical forms. Camal reflects on musicological debates concerning the usefulness of the concept of creolization in globalization studies as a means of emphasizing the fluid and unstable nature of culture, and in postcolonial studies as a marker of the putative creative ingenuity of 'subaltern and deterritorialized peoples' (Khan, 2007: 237). Noting that a number of anthropologists have argued that the historical process of creolization in the Caribbean has been fundamentally different from contemporary processes of globalization, and that creolization not be divorced from its original historical and geographic contexts, Camal sets out to test the usefulness of creolization through a study of American saxophonist David Murray's collaboration with Guadeloupean musicians. Drawing on written, ethnographic and musical sources, Camal compares musicological understandings of Glissant's *créolisation* with the meaning of creolization for the musicians involved in the Creole Project in Guadeloupe. Camal shows that 'creolization' – and its related terms 'Creole' and 'Créolité' – continue to hold specific and disputed meanings in Guadeloupean society, which render difficult their wider application as concepts capable of describing global processes of cultural exchange or identity formations.

### **Intertextualities: Faulkner, Glissant, Condé**

Glissant also figures centrally in three chapters in this volume which are concerned with his work on William Faulkner; in other words, the connections between the American South and the French-speaking Caribbean are also embodied in the relationship between two of their greatest writers. Glissant's admiration for Faulkner is evident throughout his career, culminating in the book *Faulkner, Mississippi* (1996), which he wrote while he was himself living in the American South, teaching at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. This book, whose title immediately proclaims the importance of Faulkner's affiliation with the South, is the subject of the chapters by Michael Wiedorn, Hugues Azérad and Celia Britton. Azerad emphasizes the impact that *Faulkner, Mississippi* had on existing critical assessments of Faulkner, both in its original form and in the English translation that

came out three years later, in 1999. Whereas Faulkner had previously been valued on formalist, aesthetic grounds for the modernist obscurity of his writing technique, he had also been castigated for his loyalty to the reactionary attitudes of the traditional white South and his tolerance of its racism; the idea that he could have a positive influence on African-American and Caribbean writers would have seemed ridiculous and even offensive. This, however, is what *Faulkner, Mississippi* very controversially proposes: Glissant in effect reclaims Faulkner as a 'Creole' writer and argues that his novels are, ultimately and perhaps despite themselves, politically progressive in their intuition of the possible future creolization of American society. Wiedorn shows how Glissant's view of Faulkner derives from his more general conviction that all writers belonging to the post-plantation societies of the circum-Caribbean, whether they write in English, Spanish, French or Portuguese, have a common '*langage*', or way of using language – and that this '*langage*' is characterized by one of Glissant's most important concepts: *opacity*.<sup>1</sup> As Wiedorn puts it, 'a literary method characterized by paradox and contradiction is necessitated by the particularity of this place or group of places' (183). Faulkner shares this '*langage*'; in fact, Glissant at one point suggests, even more contentiously, that he originated it and that other writers such as Carpentier, Wilson Harris, Césaire and Glissant himself 'borrowed' it from him. The obscurity of Faulkner's style, therefore, has less to do with European modernism than with his roots in a Creole plantation culture; and his novels' refusal to render their black characters transparent to the reader is a form of respect for their difference. But Wiedorn goes on to argue that the importance of opacity for Glissant is that it has the potential to extend far beyond Creole societies. It becomes a creative force in all literature, producing new genres and styles. But nor is it simply a literary technique: as the recognition of the unknowable dimension of the other, it is also both an epistemological and an ethical concept. As such, it allows Glissant to present literature as 'the final revelation of the other as concealed and unknowable finally' (189). Equally, this means that Faulkner's opacity bestows on his writing an ethical relationship to the other that outweighs the reactionary stance of Faulkner qua private citizen.

It will be clear from the above that Glissant's perspective on Faulkner is closely bound up with his own literary work, and his own ideas on literature in general. This relationship is developed more explicitly by Azérad, who sees *Faulkner, Mississippi* as a 'mirror structure in which the work of each

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<sup>1</sup> In a chapter of *Poétique de la relation* entitled 'Lieu clos, parole ouverte' Glissant derives this deliberate use of obscurity and indirect meaning from the slaves' need to hide their culture from their masters (Glissant, 1990: 82–83).

author would be tested out by that of the other' (201). It is through his reading of Faulkner, in other words, that Glissant can test out his own 'poetics of Relation' as a new form of thought and literary criticism. For Azérad, Faulkner's affinity with Creole society is based on the loss of history that both suffer from, although the loss is not identical: the historical void created by transportation and slavery that resonates through Glissant's work is put in parallel with Faulkner's obsession with the original crime of the American South, namely the unacknowledged stain of slavery that vitiates the attempt to found a legitimate lineage. In both cases, but from opposite sides, the institution of slavery causes an 'abyss' preventing both historical memory and historical progression.

But it is on the issue of Faulkner's modernism that Azérad sees the most far-reaching connection with Glissant's own work. Modernism is not a central term in Glissant's thought; but to the extent that it is commonly opposed to realism, and therefore sometimes seen as antagonistic to more straightforwardly political postcolonial fiction, it is highly relevant to his insistence that realism is an inadequate genre for expressing the opaque, 'unsayable' realities of Creole culture. Azérad compares Glissant's position with Adorno's theorization of 'modernist negativity', that is, the idea that it is precisely the autonomy of the modernist work of art, its refusal simply to imitate existing reality, that guarantees its 'truth' and its ability 'out of the depths of its negativity, to restore a form of hope to the world' (205). Modernism's refusal to represent is the negative moment of a dialectic which brings about future change. For Glissant, too, Azérad points out, the 'Negator' – the figure who refuses to accept society as it is – is a central value; and this can be linked to Glissant's belief that it is the 'literariness' of literature rather than its capacity for accurate realistic representation that gives it the potential to be a political force.

Celia Britton's chapter is not concerned exclusively with *Faulkner, Mississippi* but uses it as a framework within which to examine Faulkner's influence on two Caribbean novels: Glissant's *Le Quatrième Siècle* (1964) and Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove* (1989). Whereas the opacity of both Faulkner and Glissant is defined by Wiedorn as the foundation of an ethics of alterity, and by Azérad as the 'positive negativity' of a politically relevant modernism, Britton sees it rather differently as, in Faulkner's case, stemming from an unresolvable, largely unconscious contradiction in his attitude towards the white South and, in Glissant and Condé, a very conscious authorial *representation* of a different kind of repression or deferral of meaning on the part of the characters. Rather as in Azérad's account the abyss of history takes different but parallel forms in Faulkner's and in Glissant's novels, so for Britton the structure of repressed meaning

operates on different but parallel levels in their writing (and in that of Condé).

Britton sets *Faulkner, Mississippi* in the context of Glissant's more general discussions of the opposing principles of creolization and 'filiation', and his claim that Faulkner's novels are dominated by his sense of the 'damnation' of the South, that is, the crisis of filiation that stems from the crime that lies at its origins. Although this crime is usually taken to be the institution of slavery, Glissant shows how Faulkner never states this explicitly, and how it generates narrative structures in which a shameful secret buried at the origin of the novel is revealed only gradually, as though reluctantly, and incompletely. Britton analyses this deferred and/or concealed meaning in Machereyan terms as the text's determination by 'what it cannot say'; Faulkner's opacity is compulsive, and he is not wholly in control of his writing. Glissant, in contrast, constructs *Le Quatrième Siècle* more lucidly around a similar crime at the root of a lineage and mimics the long-delayed revelation of this secret as an expression not of the guilt of the slave-owners but the shame of the slaves – but also shows how in contemporary creolized society such questions of lineage and ancestral crimes have become irrelevant. Condé, similarly, organizes the narrative of *Traversée de la mangrove* so that the repressed awareness of slavery as it were bursts through to the surface of the novel only at the end; she also provides a clearly ironic reworking of the Faulknerian themes of the ancestral crime, miscegenation and incest.

Glissant's reclamation of Faulkner – despite the latter's ambivalent, even reactionary, ideas on race – as a 'Creole' writer ultimately indicates some of the paradoxes involved in relations between the American South and the Caribbean. Writers and artists from the Caribbean are often both repelled by the South and irresistibly drawn towards it. As the short piece of fiction 'An American Story' by the Haitian author Yanick Lahens shows, the South figures in Caribbean writing as a bastion of white racism, an often nightmarish world of segregation and fear. Set in 1963, it tells of a journey made by the Haitian narrator and her American companion through the South, a journey that feels like a trip to 'an abyss from which a Black person in those years could only return banged up or dead' (231). The South, to the narrator, with the Ku Klux Klan and the John Birch Society still powerful forces, is 'like a big trap'. Her experiences in the South lead her to reflect on Haiti's contemporary experience of dictatorship, to find some consolation in Haitian history, and the banishment of white rule from her country. Of colonial history, she says, Haiti 'bore only the scars. Today, we witness our own errors, our own grandeur and weaknesses. We pay the price dearly, but they are ours' (232). As Lahens's story demonstrates, the South is a site in which Caribbean people are emotionally and historically invested; the struggles of

the South echo those of the islands, which have their own particular ongoing tensions around class and colour. From a Caribbean perspective, the South appears almost like a distant branch of the same family, connected by blood and history. Aimé Césaire expresses such a Caribbean view of the South in the following passage from *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*:

Qui peut se vanter d'avoir mieux que moi? Virginie.  
Tennessee. Géorgie. Alabama  
putréfactions monstrueuses de révoltes  
inopérantes  
marais de sang putrides  
trompettes absurdement bouchées  
terres rouges, terres sanguines, terres consanguines.

(Césaire, 1983: 25)<sup>2</sup>

Césaire's evocation of these four Southern states as monstrous, putrefying products of 'révoltes inopérantes' [stymied revolts] seems to suggest the failure of the American Revolution or indeed the Civil War to establish racial equality there. These are to Césaire, and to many other Caribbean artists, nightmarish places, bogged down in the putrid swamps of history. As he suggests, it is as if the land itself is soaked in blood, and bleeds still. Strikingly, though, the abject, repulsive South is not only a 'sanguine' land; these are also 'terres consanguines', that is, lands connected by blood to Césaire's own. The blood of history thus attaches the Francophone Caribbean to the South and creates an enduring bond and a sense of common destiny that continue to be dynamic elements in the ongoing evolution of this Creole, creolizing world.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Who can boast of being better off than I? Virginia. / Tennessee. Georgia. Alabama / monstrous putrefactions of stymied / revolts / marshes of putrid blood / trumpets absurdly muted / land red, sanguineous, consanguineous land' (Eshleman and Smith, 1983: 47).



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