

18. BETWEEN CRIÉ AND ÉCRIT

Monchoachi

Translated from the French by Eric Fishman

“Migrant” comes from the Latin *migrare*, “to change dwellings,” in which we find the Greek root *mei*, shared with the French *muer* (to molt). This small etymological detour reminds us that language is a dwelling, and as a result, that different languages establish different dwellings in the world, different lights and different gods, different works. “Man,” writes the linguist Wilhelm Humboldt, “thinks, feels, lives in language alone” and “the diversity of languages is not a diversity of sounds and signs, but a diversity of views of the world.”¹ In other words, language isn’t first of all, or primarily, an instrument for communicating thoughts; if it was so we could easily *hear each other*. In this way, the same Humboldt, staying in Paris, wrote to the poet Schiller of his hopeless efforts to present Kantian philosophy to the French:

The conference lasted five hours and went every which way ... We absolutely did not understand each other ... To hear each other, in a true sense, is impossible, and for a simple reason. They haven’t the smallest idea, the smallest feeling for something outside of appearances: pure will, true goodness, the self, the pure consciousness of self, all this is for them completely incomprehensible. When they use the same words, they always take them in another sense. Their reason isn’t ours, their space isn’t our space, their imagination isn’t ours.

Written just before the dawn of the 19th century, these remarkable words of Humboldt’s concern neighboring peoples from inside the same civilizational air of Europe. It only makes the reach of his

¹ All Humboldt excerpts are translated from the French translations by Denis Thouard, *Sur le caractère national des langues, et autres écrits sur le langage* (POINTS, 2000).

reflection on the connection between language and visions of the world clearer. An important scholar of languages of America and Oceania, Humboldt's approach puts him quite certainly on the side of a Montaigne who three centuries before undertook a defense of the "cannibal-savages" of Brazil in the following terms: "It seems that we have no mark of truth and reason other than the example and idea of the opinions and customs of the country in which we live. *There* is always the perfect religion, the perfect government, the perfect and accomplished practices in all things."² He notes that he is naming "the marvelous distance" that the so-called savage languages open between their own humanity and Occidental humanity:

They have a way in their language in which they speak of men as halves of one another; they had noticed that there were among us men who were full and gorged with all kinds of commodities, and that their other halves were begging at their doors, wasted by hunger and poverty. They found it strange how these needy halves could suffer such an injustice, without taking the others by the throat, or setting fire to their houses.

To pass from one dwelling to another, from one language to another, necessitates a molting. More precisely, "to pass into" is in itself a molting; as the Martinican Creole language rightly says, a "passage" is the rhetorical figure of metamorphosis—more than a place that fades, a spell that blurs, both incantation and password.

Passing from the *crié* (cried out) to the *écrit* (written), from speech to writing, the Creolophone must pass at the same time from one tongue to another, changing his horizon at the same time he changes languages.

This situation of the migrant writer is evidently not unwritten about. Leopardi points out quite rightly that "in the Late Period, the Germans and English were truly *diglottoi* (bilingual), or more precisely those who belonged to the educated part of these nations, who wrote in Latin, using it for correspondence, letters, etc, and already spoke a common language very different from written Latin."³

² All Montaigne excerpts are from "Des Cannibales," c. 1580.

Or again: “the civilized nations of Asia, after the conquest of Alexander, were truly diglottoi—that is to say, they spoke and wrote the Greek language not as their own language, but as a cultivated language ...” Further on: “among these diglottoi who wrote in a language that wasn’t theirs, but who did it nonetheless remarkably, there was Lucien de Samosate. Examine his works, where he shows signs of his maternal language, etc.”

If not unprecedented, this situation is nonetheless distinct from a straightforward bilingualism in that it results in a gap: like an immutable moon, a true heterotopia in which you can sometimes hear the unpronounced, the unarticulated, trembling, licenses, dissidences.

Yet from the strict demarcation of languages to their infinite mixture, the common background is the allegation that speech and writing are simply two modes of the same articulation. This goes without saying for languages which have lost all memory of authentic speech and whose speaking has for ages been reduced to *speaking writing*. In contrast, going straight to the absolute hostility of writing toward authentic speech brings us, on the one hand, to consider this in a completely different way than the habitual condescension toward languages without writing. On the other hand, it brings us to reposition the problem of the diversity of languages to a consideration of the different registers in which they are deployed rather than to privilege only one “variety of sounds and signs,” which has as a consequence reduced the debate on diversity to a tiny spot, and enclosed it in the field of the unique language that the Occident speaks to say the same thing.

A few rare thinkers have had insights related to the implications of similar questions. Nietzsche first of all, when he exclaimed “the desert grows,” noted elsewhere: “a man for whom almost all books have become superficial, who has kept nothing (and this for a small number of men from the past) except the belief that they had enough profundity *to not write what they know*.”⁴ Heidegger as well, who wrote:

³ All Leopardi excerpts are translated from the French translations by Bertrand Schefer, *Zibaldone* (Editions Allia, 2004).

⁴ Nietzsche and Heidegger excerpts translated from the French translations by Aloys Becker and Gérard Granel, *Qu'appelle t-on penser?* (Presses universitaires de France, 1999).

Socrates, during his lifetime, and until his death, did nothing but hold and keep himself in the wind of this movement (toward what pulls away). This is why he is the most pure thinker of the Occident, *and also why he wrote nothing*. Since he who begins to write at thought's exit must without exception resemble men who take refuge out of the wind because it blows too hard. This remains the secret of a still-hidden history, that the thinkers of the Occident since Socrates, without prejudice to their greatness, must have all been "refugees." Thought enters into Literature. These ones decided the destiny of Occidental science which, passing through the *doctrina* of the Middle Ages, became the *scientia* of Modern times.

We can approach writing and its fundamental hostility toward authentic speech through a story of fratricide from the Bible.

This murder interrupts the fourth chapter of Genesis: "Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him."⁵ The first two chapters are the creation of the sky, the earth, and enchanted existence in the Garden of Eden. The third chapter sees the first fundamental rupture, that with Nature, the simultaneous projection into the historical Time of humanity, who has captured the power of knowledge and is destined to the double providence of freedom and death. The fourth chapter precipitates us to the second fundamental rupture, the first murder in the history of humanity.

The first murder is a fratricide. Abel (Hebel, in Hebrew) is "vapor," that which disappears without leaving a trace, in other words, speech. Elohim "had respect unto Abel," since he himself, Elohim, is Speech, and creation is *creation*: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." Cain is metal, an artisan of bronze and iron, the builder of the city, otherwise known as the law and writing. He is at the same time cursed and inevitably protected by Elohim ("And the Lord set a mark upon Cain"), since it is from him that the human (after "The Births" that follow this chapter) can truly proliferate in the creature-imposture duplicity that designates him, history can truly begin, and the Book can *be written*.

The first murder not only adds a second rupture to the one with Nature: extending this last, it casts and fertilizes it all at once, *sets it on*

⁵King James Version, Genesis 4:8. All subsequent Bible excerpts are also from the KJV.

its way. Following the rupture with Nature, the passage from the *crié* (cried out loud) to the *écrit* (written), in joining writing and culture, simultaneously opened the perspective of historical Time as the required temporality, as mechanism or as *machine* (and as *machination*) for the deployment and infinite completion of one in the other, of one by the other.

A possible etymology of the name Cain is “the man of possession.” There is assuredly possession in writing, like a challenge put to God and divine creation: the bet of *re-creating* the world, to make oneself “master and possessor” through knowledge. Writing and describing are ways of metamorphosing into *things* that which one offers to find the *cause* and, thus, if not ways of denying their existence due to divine will, at least placing themselves as *almost* equal to god (“And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil”), to be like him, by his side and at his height, in the *co-naissance* (knowing/co-birthing) of this world.

What does Cain kill in killing Abel? What does writing kill in actual speech? And, a subsidiary question (though not really subsidiary): what, in fact, is *actual* speech?

The name Abel, we are told, signifies “vanity, *inconsistance*” (inconsistence, crumbling). Inconsistent, that cannot hold itself together, what cannot hold itself together compactly, and from this, lacks solidity. The Latin word *consistere* from which it derives also gave us *consistory*, which designates an assembly. As for “vanity,” hearing it not in the moral sense but in its proper sense of *vannus*, expressing the idea of the void, the desert, vanity is there for “the state of the void,” *vannus*, from which descends equally *evanescere*, disappear, or again *vacare*, to be vacant, unoccupied. Hebel is in fact a nomad.

So speech wanders, or nomadizes, comes and goes, appears disappears, inconsistent and void, elusive Tao, “vessel usage will never fill,” invisible, impalpable, fleeting, enigmatic (“welcoming it, one does not see its front, following it, one does not see its back”), it must be the “ancestor of gods,” Lao Tzu interjects mischievously. Inconsistence and vacuity are necessary to welcome and gather the world, “join oneself into the universe” rather than “speak of it” with an eye toward grasping it. To be the “world’s riverbed” and not to try and “mold” it. *Actual*

speech is this “supreme vacuity” that apprehends that “it is by not-doing that one wins the universe” and that “softness and weakness are superior” to hardness and strength. This speech leads, therefore, to a wisdom that recommends to “restore the knotted cords and make use of them, to find one’s own food delicious, to find one’s clothing beautiful, to be content with one’s home and rejoice in one’s customs.”

This speech defies the intelligence and knowledge that “trains the great artifice” and from which flows “strange products” as “the manufacturing intelligence.” This speech, properly described, belongs to the “kingdom without things”; it is “the form without form and the image without image”; it can “open and close the gate of heaven,” “see all and know all without using intelligence.”

Cain, founder of cities, cannot in this way move through the world or live in it. He must each time leave his *mark*, his stamp, appropriate each parcel of earth, open in each place of the world an incision, a *graft*. This graft is *graphé*, writing. This writing-knowing, which, far from sheltering speech, keeps itself well away from taking it in custody (“Am I my brother’s keeper?” responds Cain to Elohim when asked about Abel) and is deployed mainly *from* its fundamental hostility and from its *bad faith* (“And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not ...”) in regards to speech. Speech is the veil with which Cain must henceforth cover his face in addressing his god and that immediately falls forever over the world, rendering it opaque again, each time that in the way of the writing-knowing resolves to elucidate it a little more. Actual speech is naked. Alone with its body. Destined to dissipate.

Speech is at the origin of the world’s creation, writing at the start of its negation. Between one and the other, a profound vertigo that disorients us, turns us, diverts us, throws us out, there where we endlessly sink into the devastation and growth where the writing-subject is formed, takes on *spiritus*, the writing-disaster, reduced to attempts to hold up the ruin, succeeding only in accelerating the loss, believing we are warding it off, deferring it through the constant grasping of illusions.

Writing, to paraphrase Marcel Duchamp, is speech put to death “by her bachelors, even.”⁶

Writing is “what remains” of creation’s celebrations.

CONTINUATION, ENTWINED

In an interview with Jacqueline Leiner, in honor of the re-publication of the literary journal *Tropiques* in 1978,⁷ Aimé Césaire, pressed to explain his relationship to Martinican Creole, both written and spoken, was led to assign “levels” to the French and Creole languages, on a ladder intended to be hierarchical, which had significant contradictions, or even a certain incoherence, in particular as regards his surrealist convictions.

Asked about the possibility of publishing the journal in Creole, he responded that it was “a question that didn’t make sense,” that such a journal was “not conceivable in Creole”; “I don’t even know if it could be *expressed in Creole*.” Throughout the interview, Césaire kept returning to the following words: “For me, writing is connected to French and not to Creole, that’s *all*”; “French is the language in which I’ve always *written*.” In fact, all these assertions that seemed to “surprise” his interviewer, would not in truth have surprised any Antillean, for whom the asymmetry of speaking Creole/writing French seems completely *natural*.

On the other hand, it is surprising that Césaire justified this *inconceivable* with “the current state of the language,” “the level of the language, of ‘creoleness’ (*créolité*), if you like, which is extremely low,” and is explained, according to him, by the “Martinican cultural gap.” All that remained for him, therefore, was to apply this system that led him to distinguish between an evolved French language, capable of “elevating itself, expressing abstract ideas,” to create a “conceptual work,” capable of “reflection,” and a Creole language behind in development, situated at an “extremely low level,” “language of immediacy, language of folklore, of feelings, of intensity.” Asked then on the use of Creole, not even in writing, but in “spoken language ... political speeches, for example,” he responded with a pirouette: “for me, all my speeches are affairs of reflection, they are conceptual works, so, I must make them in French.”

⁶ Marcel Duchamp, “La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même (La boîte verte),” 1934.

⁷ “Entretien avec Aimé Césaire par Jacqueline Leiner,” *Tropiques* 1, 1978.

One can, in reading this interview, speak of a profound failure. Even more so since later in the same interview, called to respond to an assertion of Sartre, who saw in “the image a degradation of knowledge,” he came to oppose him (but as a *surrealist*) with the language of “immediacy and intensity,” in other words, the imagist language that he had *just* rejected with his Creole hat on: “for me, the image isn’t a degradation, *au contraire!* It’s rather an enrichment.” “In comparison to conceptual language?” insisted Jacqueline Leiner. Césaire:

I have the sense that it’s an *Occidental* idea; the Occident privileges the concept over the image and is wary of the second, privileging logical reasoning over analogic reasoning, over the *analogon*, if you like (the motor of the image is also analogy). All of European thought was a reaction against analogic reasoning, which allows understanding, and is by the way its greatest accomplishment. But it doesn’t have only advantages, it also has inconveniences. We’ve made great progress in reasoning, but we’ve moved back at the same time, in poetry, for example. Everything that was won for reasoning was lost for poetry ... It seems to me that the surrealist conception of the image is the confluence! In this understanding, Europe makes a mea-culpa and comes back, in the end, to the *primitive* traditions ... *I find that it’s the image that is rich, and the idea that is poor.*”

This sense of failure is reinforced by reading the pertinent remarks that Césaire made elsewhere about Frobenius:

I was very interested in one of his ideas, namely that a culture is born, not when man *takes hold*, but when man *is taken hold of*. The world takes hold of him, and, in turn, he plays the world, *mimes* the world. ... He is *taken hold of*, in other words, he is *possessed*, exactly as in Vodou. ... You dance, you dance, and suddenly, the guy is possessed; he has moved on.

Well said. Only, as regards *being taken hold of*, the Frobenius detour is a striking and unnecessary addition, when you have direct access through listening to the Creole language.

Our current “defense and illustration” of Creole falls into the same linear vision, an obsession with writing the language. When it’s *speaking*

Creole that must almost entirely call on us; when it's the Creole workshop of *creation* that we must get going again (but this would necessitate, it's true, the mobilization of *other authorities*). We would like, in effect, to give Creole access, by any means necessary, to the status of a language. By any means necessary, since it's obvious that Creole is, at the least, resistant. To see it in reality thus exposed, at such a distance from the body and the mouth, one feels no connection. Does this come from the order of the written form? There is little doubt that alphabetic writing aligns with a certain organization of the world and of thought and that the question of knowing whether it *agrees* with Creole cannot be cast aside. Leopardi remarked, for example,—reminding us of the idea of representing a language with “another kind of signs”—that in Chinese,

characters (independent of spoken language in Chinese) were not a habit or used by the people (above all in China where the art of reading and writing is so difficult), and retain their essential forms and meaning much more easily than do the words used daily and universally ... by a population whatever its origin, its opinions, its nature, its ways of being and accidents of life. (On this subject, here is an excerpt from Voltaire ... ‘Almost all the words that fall frequently into conversational language are much degraded and it is difficult to explain them, something that does not happen to technical words since their meaning is more precise and less arbitrary.’) We also see this with Latin, whose spoken language we have lost and kept the written characters, the essential forms and their values. Same thing with Greek, etc.

In reality, the overuse of written Creole today is a backwards step: not only in the framework of a “faulty” writing system, with its blithe and highly dubious display, or when it insidiously and fatally tackles the dismantling and decomposition of the most symbolic part of the places’ identities, their names; but also at the phonetic level, an essential and delicate aspect of the Creole word, the result of the long and prodigious activity of the Creole workshop of *critation* with the aim of fabricating that veritable marvel that is the *Creole word*.

All the regressive attacks targeting the Creole word contribute to this singular debility, to the lack of vigor, to the exhaustion of the Creole workshop of *criation* that we can observe today. The result is that French words that are integrated into Creole vocabulary are no longer “deformed” but enter without giving up taxes or rights. This “deformation” is not arbitrary or without consequence: following artistic rules, it’s the product of acts of linguistic self-creation with the aim of continual formation and formulation of the language in its originality and its own character. Returning to the central role of phonetics in the character of languages, Leopardi (him again) noted the following, *a contrario*, about French:

With their pronunciation, the French remove from innumerable words which they took from Latin, Italian, etc., that expressive sonority they originally had and which is one of the most important merits of languages, etc. For example, *nausea* in Latin and in Italian, with this *au* and this *ea*, marvelously imitates the movement and noise that a man makes when his stomach rises up and his mouth and nose contort. But *nosé* imitates nothing, and resembles those things that, bereft of spirit, of salt, of humor, of fat, etc., remain as inert residues.

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AFTERWORD: MONCHOACHI'S POETICS OF TRANSLATION

Eric Fishman

*Antillean literature, as long as it has existed, has
endured the obligation ... of translating itself,
translating its body ...*
—Monchoachi, “What language does the
poet speak?”

The Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott once observed the irony that the manifesto which launched the Martinican Créolité literary movement was written in formal French: “[‘Éloge de la créolité’] urges orality in the solemn parentheses of the lectern, not of the vegetable market it wants us to understand.”⁸ A similar irony may seem to be at work in “Between Crié and Écrit,” which argues—in an essay—that the positivism associated with, and caused by, written language is responsible for a desecration of language, mystery, and meaning. I could note, to start, that Monchoachi is adept at wielding Western philosophies and practices to his own ends. Yet a deeper look into Monchoachi’s oeuvre suggests many ways his work—as a poet, as a translator, as a cultural organizer—offers generative paths for decolonizing translation.

Despite Monchoachi’s prominence in the worlds of Francophone and Creolophone literature, outside of literary circles, many people in Martinique know of him more as a cultural organizer than as a writer. He has created a number of events focused on Creole literature and culture over the past decades. One of his most prominent projects was Lakouzémi (the zémi assembly), which supported both the publication of a journal, in which “Entre crié et écrit” was originally published, as well as triannual journées de rencontre (meeting days). As the Lakouzémi mission described:

⁸ Derek Walcott, “A Letter to Chamoiseau,” *New York Review of Books*, August 14, 1997.

In order to leave the discourses that make us up, subjugate us, ... there is un lakou [an assembly] where the idea is to open to reconsideration, in all domains, without restriction, the most accepted approaches. The Journées-Rencontres are a moment for debates and also a place for diverse performances: dance, music, theater, art, gastronomy and other modes of expression that take place in the symbolic location of the pitt (cock-fighting auditorium).⁹

When Monchoachi asserts, in “Between Crié and Écrit,” that “it’s the Creole workshop of *criation* that we must get going again,” I think of Lakouzémi as one of these “other authorities” he refers to: a space where Creole orality and performance are at the literal and figurative center.

Monchoachi’s work as a translator is also relevant, particularly his renditions of Samuel Beckett’s plays, including “La ka èspéré Godot” and “Jé-a bout” (“Endgame”), which he published and staged in Martinican Creole.

When I asked what drew him to Beckett’s work, he replied that the dialogue felt very Creole to him. “I felt that I had seen and experienced scenes like those ... and I wanted the audience to wonder whether maybe it’s from *here*.” This is a fascinating form of subversive translation—transplanting “canonical” works from the colonial language and setting, “deforming” the French into Creole. His focus on (the performance of) Creole as a living, spoken language is central to his poetry as well—and he moves from the surface level of the language to the worlds underneath.

Although he maintains close relationships with many Caribbean writers, Monchoachi has never aligned himself with the literary movements of the Francophone world, most notably rejecting the Créolité movement initiated by Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé and Raphaël Confiant in the late 1980s. As Monchoachi explained to me, he thinks that Créolité was not radical enough in its relationship with Creole language and Creole thought. He believes that Créolité “stayed on the level of using Creole words, without ever going to *the roots*, to consider what it would mean to truly listen to Creole, to find out what the language is *actually saying*.”

⁹ Lakouzémi, lakouzemi.blogspot.com, accessed April 17, 2022.

While Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant might disagree with Monchoachi's characterization of their movement, his critique provides one way to understand his own literary methods and goals. The rebellion of Monchoachi's poetry stems from the connection between his radical experimentation with language(s) and the astonishing array of cultural and philosophical sources that the poems take as their points of departure. As he asserts in "Between Crié and Écrit": "language is a dwelling, and as a result, different languages establish different dwellings in the world, different lights and different gods, different works." His poems attempt to explore how we got here through a poetic *ressourcement*, starting from the deep past ("la provenance du monde"). Language—the language of the *crié*—also provides possible paths forward, serving as an access route to ritual, mystery, alternate ways of being.

The relationship between Martinican Creole, French, and other languages in Monchoachi's poetry is multifaceted and has evolved over time. Monchoachi's first three poetry collections, published in the 1970s, were written in Creole. In the 1980s, he shifted to "parallel" volumes in which the poems appeared in French and Creole on facing pages. Monchoachi told me that he was trying to "prove that any poetry written in French could also be written in Creole." Yet *Nostrom (And Here is Man)*, 1982, in particular, suggests a more radical relationship. The Creole title of the volume is not translated into French, and the Creole texts are written in bold, while the French is in a gentler italic script. Perhaps the actual question asked by this text is the opposite: can everything that is said in Creole be said in French?

There is a euphony of ideas in the nature of the French language, whereas English, and Creole itself for that matter, have a euphony of images, of simile. This euphony of ideas creates polemic, the polemic of Fanon, of *négritude*, of Césaire and Chamoiseau. The euphony of images is something else.¹⁰

For a translator, this sounds hopeful in theory: maybe translating these poems into English could allow different aspects of Monchoachi's poet-

¹⁰ Derek Walcott, "A Letter to Chamoiseau."

ics to emerge. But the reality of trying to translate Monchoachi's poems—particularly his later works—is fraught.

After releasing two poetry volumes written exclusively in French, Monchoachi began his ongoing, multi-volume poetic cycle *Lémistè* (*Myst'ry*). In each volume of this cycle, Monchoachi turns to a different region of the world: the Americas, Africa and Oceania, ancient Greece, ancient Judaea, ancient China. These recent volumes are primarily written in French, but Martinican Creole often rises up to break through the linguistic frame—along with occasional interruptions of Guyanese Creole, Haitian Creole, Old French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chinese, English, and Spanish, among others. Through this movement between languages, Monchoachi aims to “create gaps, to jostle the reader.”¹¹ The tension between these languages, and particularly between French and Martinican Creole, is central to the dynamics of these poems. Here is a small excerpt as an example of his translative poetics, taken from the poem “Les Imminences” (“The Imminences”), in the first volume of *Lémistè*.¹² For those without access to these languages, I've bolded words that are taken from, or inflected with, Creole:

Qui donc excellent encore à estropier les mots
Et à danser **lèsprit**

Nègues-féilles comme ça sous son **gade**
Tout' temps tendus ferme aux quatre points **céomonal**
Tout' temps dans la façon laver-tête
Suyer-pieds **soucouer**-corps dans la façon
Vòyer oune coup'd zos monté

Tendu comme ça
Dans la façon où ça vous prend **blo**
Où **latremblade** vous prend **cé mouri-quitter**
Et vous escorte comme ça dédoublé
Ha **lézange!**

¹¹ Monchoachi, interview conducted by Eric Fishman, February 2019.

¹² Monchoachi, *Lémistè*, Éditions Obsidiane, 2012.

How should the relationship between French and Creole be addressed in translations of these poems? To me, this question is closely tied to a second one: who is the intended audience of these poems? A bilingual Creole/French speaker, or a monolingual French one? And by association: how challenging should the text be for the reader? For a monolingual, mainland French speaker, Monchoachi's later poems are not all easy to gloss, although the majority of the text would still remain accessible, given phonetic proximities. This is a literary question, but also one enveloped in questions of linguistic and cultural power.

One of my ongoing explorations in translating Monchoachi's poems is of potential analogs to the relationship between Martinican Creole and French. The Caribbean offers a multiplicity of linguistic possibilities. I've consulted with a number of people so far about this question, including Monchoachi himself, Martinican author Raphaël Confiant, and Creole linguists Lawrence Carrington and Lise Winer. One of the most promising possibilities is Saint Lucian English. Saint Lucia and Martinique share not only geographical proximity (fifty miles), but also colonial, cultural, and linguistic history, reinforced by a constant stream of migrants between the two islands. Saint Lucia passed back and forth between French and English control over a dozen times over the colonial period. The contemporary language continuum includes, at one end, a French-based Creole, and so-called "Standard English" on the other, with Anglicized French Creole and Creolized English in between. These varieties, therefore, might offer promising analogs for the Martinican Creole, and I have been experimenting with these in my translations.

But is it a mistake to try and find an analog at all? In a note accompanying a handful of translations from Monchoachi's *Mantèg* (1980), scholar and translator Brent Hayes Edwards critiques this approach:

One might be tempted to carry over the relation between French and Creole in the neocolonial Caribbean context using a putative linguistic parallel: British English juxtaposed with Jamaican dialect, for instance, or US. English and African American vernacular. The problem with this approach, however, is that it assumes a homology between systemic racialized exploitation in very different contexts.

It seems to me reductive to imply a parallel between the situation of the United States or Jamaica and the peculiar situation of Martinique (which remains politically a département of France, one that never acquired independence after colonialism).¹³

St. Lucia, which has been a sovereign state since 1979, might belong in this list of Edwards' "very different" contexts. But Edwards is discussing Monchoachi's early work, in which French and Creole versions are on separate pages. In the volumes of *Lémistè*, Monchoachi moves between languages within single lines, phrases, even single words. Ignoring Monchoachi's poetics of translation would feel violently reductive. As Edwards notes, the linguistic tension between French and Creole comes from the histories of power and exploitation on the island. Choosing a specific English-based Creole to work with could be important, therefore, in that it makes it clear that more is at stake than just linguistic wordplay.

But if it's impossible to find a suitable analog among existing English-based Creoles, would it be preferable to instead put English into an orthographic "deformation zone," pulling it closer to Martinican Creole? To create a sort of "shadow language" that destabilizes standard English, in a similar way to Monchoachi's destabilization of French? This is the approach that translator and poet Patricia Hartland takes, for example, in their chapbook of translations from *Lémistè*, noting that they worked to "privilege[e] proximity to Kreyol over French when it [felt] possible without losing the reader."¹⁴ This approach is appealing in that it pulls directly from Monchoachi's original languages, and its flexibility can allow the translator to also maintain other important features of a poem, such as rhythm, rhyme, or wordplay. Yet I also feel concerned that this "shadow language" is not tied to a specific place. Attending to the relationships between place, language, and thought in Monchoachi's poems feels essential.

¹³ Brent Hayes Edwards, translator's note for "From *Manèg / Manteca*" (Monchoachi, trans. Edwards), *Chain* 10, 2003, p. 137. I am also indebted to Edwards for discussing (in this same translator's note) the idea of a "poetics of translation" in connection to Monchoachi's work.

¹⁴ Patricia Hartland, introduction to *Liberamerica* (Monchoachi, trans. Hartland), Ugly Duckling Presse, 2020, p. 15.

There are no simple answers here. In my work with Monchoachi's poems so far, I've utilized a combination of the above approaches, grounding my translations in the specific language(s) of St. Lucia when possible, and at other moments disrupting "standard" English to mirror features of Martinican Creole. In the end, Monchoachi is a poet whose work demands multiple translations, and I hope I will not be the last to explore ways to refract his work into English.

To return to the excerpt from "The Imminences": here is one attempt at a translation.¹⁵ These stanzas also serve as a description of one aim of Monchoachi's poetry—to channel the experience of "*being taken hold of* ... listening to the Creole language."

Those who excel at mangling words
And dancing lèspirit

Nègues-fèilles, wild wise men like this alert
Whole time outstretched to the four céomonial points
Whole time how they wash-head
Shuffle-feet scrub-body how they
Shoot the charm'd bones

Outstretched like this
How you're taken bram!
How the tremblin takes you to a death-fall,
And escorts you like this split
Ha lézangels!

¹⁵ The translation of "The Imminences" from which this is excerpted first appeared in *AGNI* 94.

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