

## “A Different Kind of Creature”: Caribbean Literature, The Cyclops Factor, and The Second Poetics of the Propter Nos

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In their 1993 book on Aimé Césaire, Roger Toumson and Simone Henry-Vallmore define the Creolist literary movement which began in Martinique in 1989 with the publication of *Éloge de la Créolité* (In Praise of Creoleness) as one of “ideological métissage, which is to say of seduction.” Targetting the earlier movement of Césairean Negritude, it marked the return in force of an “exoticism of the diverse” which was and is a denial, a refusal of “*radical alterity*” (230). This essay has its point of departure in their definition. It proposes that the central dynamic of twentieth century Caribbean literature and thought has centered on assumption or rejection of the identity and perspective of “*radical alterity*,” a perspective defining of Césaire’s Negritude as distinct from, for example, the perspective of *ethnicity* or of multi-ethnicity that is defining of the Creolist movement of Martinique—itsself a sub-version of the post-sixties “reterritorializing” strain of the multicultural movement which has occurred in the United States and Canada (Godzich, Intro. De Certeau xi; Wynter, *Do Not Call Us* 16-18).

To emphasize the meaning that I shall give to the concept of *radical alterity*, I have defined it in my title by a term taken (like that of the Sisyphus and Eldorado of the collection’s title) from the *Imaginary* of the now globally hegemonic yet still (as many have observed) *local culture* of the West: the “Cyclops factor.” By “Imaginary” here I mean that magma of images and encoded premises which, *while providing collective values and unitary meanings*, are themselves logically unprovable (Castoriadis 150-1). I also suppose that it is this Imaginary that in all cases institutes the modes of Carpentier’s “marvellous reality” (*lo real maravilloso*), and so of the modes of the Real that are specific to all human cultures, up to and including that of our contemporary Western and Westernized own; even though the central ideological strategy of the latter is to represent and see itself, in terms of its own Imaginary, as *not being a culture at all* but rather a supracultural reality-in-itself.

Why adopt the lineage of the Cyclops rather than the genealogy figured in Orlando Patterson’s *Children of Sisyphus*? Why adopt the quest demanded by this lineage and its legacy, requiring *assumption of alterity*, rather than the quest of *Eldorado* engaged in the Cuban Alejo Carpentier’s *The Lost Steps* or the Guyanese Wilson Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock*? as Benítez-Rojo notes (187). Further, if we see the quest of *Eldorado* as still linked in conceptual—imaginative terms to the quest of Homer’s Odysseus rather than to the as yet still unexplored nature of *what must be* the quest of the Cyclops, how is this choice of lineage and of legacy linked to the character Trumper’s discovery (in George Lamming’s classic *In The Castle of My Skin*), that the “Rights of Man” did not and can in no way include the “Rights of the Negro”?

'Tis a tremendous difference... One single word make a tremendous difference, that's why you c never be too sure what a word will do. I'm a nigger or a Negro an' all o' us put together is niggers or Negroes. There ain't no "man" an' there ain't no "people". Just nigger or Negro... 'tis the blacks who get affected by leavin' out that word "man" or "people." That's how we learn the race. 'Tis what a word can d Now there ain't a black man in all America who won't get up an' say I'm a Negro. ... I'm going to fight f the rights o' the Negroes, and I'll die fighting... He ain't got no time to think 'bout the rights o' Man People... It's the rights o' the Negro, 'cause we have gone on usin' the word the others use for us, an' no we are a different kind o' creature... If the rights o' Man an' the rights o' the Negro was the same sa thing, 'twould be different, but there ain't, *cause we're a different kind o' creature*... (Lamming 333-4

This is despite the fact that the *Rights of Man* had been the fruits won, both by the French Revolutio of 1789, as well as by the successful slave-revolution of Haiti which was its corollary, and yet which had ha to be fought, not only against the royalist slaveholders of the island, in order to secure their freedom, b also subsequently *against* the troops of Napoleon, heir to the French Revolution, who had then attempte to reinslave the former slaves freed now by their own efforts. What, therefore, from the Cyclops perspecti of alterity, had been the taint in that original conception of *freedom*, and of *Rights*, that had then led, n only to the failed attempt to reinslave the former slaves of Haiti, but also to an even more far-reaching para dox? To the paradox of the large majority of today's black Haitians, as well as of all peoples of African de scent (i.e. *Negroes*), coming to find themselves stigmatized not only as Trumper's "different kind of crea ture," but also as Brathwaite's "homeless nigger" ("Where then is the nigger's home?" *Arrivants* 77), an Walcott's "middle passage inheritors" who awoke to find that they had merely exchanged the chains of sla very for those of poverty?

"It huddled there," Walcott wrote in *Laventille*, "steel tinkling its blue painted metal air,/ tempered i violence, like Rio's favelas" (*Collected Poems* 85). Caribbean slums, Brazilian favelas, inner city ghettos of the US, all now reoccupy the place of the slave ships, quarters of new barracoons no less cramped, whe the Cyclops, physically unchained, is as firmly fixed to the place assigned it by the *narrative necessity* o the text of our present *Imaginary* as were its ancestors:

where the inheritors of the middle passage stewed,  
five to a room, still clamped below their hatch,  
breeding like felonies,

whose lives revolve round prison, graveyard, church...

The middle passage never guessed its end.  
This is the height of poverty  
for the desperate and black...

... lives fixed in the unalterable groove  
of grinding poverty. (*Collected Poems* 86-8)

If the link between our projected quest and that of the binary opposition between the *Rights of Man* and the *Rights-of-the-Negro* as a "different kind o' creature" is that of a shared kind of *alterity* of the radi cally "impious" and outsider Cyclops figure of Homer's *Odyssey* with the figure of a population group or

human hereditary variation (the *Negro*) that was to find itself, in the wake of the abolition of slavery and the triumphant paeans of the Haitian Revolution and Boukman's "insane song" (Césaire, *Collected Poetry* 369), swapping the role of forcibly coerced slave antithesis to free, rational and non-dependent landed slavemaster Self for that of a conceptually coerced "different kind o' creature" to French Revolutionary *Man*, how does this relate to the clash between the tendency of Caribbean literature that defines identity in terms of an *acultural ethnicity* and another tendency that defines it in the always culture-specific yet also transculturally applicable terms of *radical alterity*? Why, further, would the quest for the assumption of *alterity* and so of its counter-perspective, and whose revelatory or Koranic poetic text was to be Césaire's 1939 *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, necessarily call for what I have defined in my title as the "second poetics of the *propter nos*"?—a poetics able to negate yet carry over and complete what Fernand Hallyn has defined as the (first) poetics of the *propter nos*.

Elaborated by the lay humanists of Renaissance Europe, this poetics's revalorization of the "natural fallen man" of medieval Judeo-Christian Europe and frontal challenge to Scholasticism's theocentric concept of God (according to which God had arbitrarily and contingently created "fallen" man for His own glory rather than for humanity's sake—*propter nos homines*, as humanists would have it) was to lay the basis for the epochally new, because secular or increasingly degodded, poesis of being and its sixteenth century invention of *Man* (in the reoccupied place of *Christian*). While it was to be in terms of the *Imaginary* embedded in this poesis and correlating with this invention that the West was to effect its global expansion—beginning with the founding of its post-1492 Caribbean polities—and thereby initiate the single history with which we all have come increasingly to live. (I have presented and argued this at length in Wynter, "Columbus".)

Why in addition, should such a second poetics, and its Cyclopean quest for the assumption and revalorization of the being and perspective of *alterity*, be able at one and the same time to negate, yet carry over so as to complete, the central thrust of that first poetics? Finally, why should the perspective of alterity defining of this second poetics be compelled to effect as radical a discontinuity from the acultural premise of the present order of Western thought, its "epistemological locus" and *biocentric* mode of the Imaginary, as the humanist elaborators of that first poetics, from Pico della Mirandola to Ficino, had been in their time compelled to do with the premise of *atemporalism* that founded mainstream Scholastic thought and its theocentric mode of the Imaginary (and so of the Real) to which late medieval Europe had come to feel itself just as captive as we now find ourselves to be to our own biocentric one? Thus Walcott ended *Laventille*:

some crib, some grill or light  
 clang'd shut on us in bondage, and withheld  
  
 us from that world below us and beyond,  
 and in its swaddling cerements we're still bound. (88)

Defined firstly as *terra nullius* in the theological terms of the Pope's Apostolic authority (Mudimbe 45) and as such, as non-Christian lands that were *justly expropriatable* by Christians, the Caribbean polities were to be born out of the very process of transformation by which the expanding states of the West were to make the papal Apostolic Authority and its theological concept of *terra nullius* into a function of their own new political ethic of "reason of state." Within the terms of this shift, enabled at a broader level only by the terms of the new civic humanist Imaginary (Pocock 85-7) and its correlated poetics of the *propter*

*nos*, not only was hegemony gradually transferred from Church to state, but the new politics of the post-Columbus Caribbean were eventually to be grounded on a new juridical premise. This premise was that a "natural" difference of degree between the rational natures of Christian Europeans and indigenes (Pagd 38-9) which legitimated, in statal rather than papal terms, expropriation of the latter and their territory successive European states. The new Caribbean worlds were thereby instituted as the first secular answer to the question of the source of evil (to the *unde malum*) as soon as not theology but firstly natural history law and secondly biology/ evolution became the new ground of knowledge.

With this transumption, Western behaviors in the public sphere would come to be motivated no longer by the Augustinian postulate of mankind's enslavement to Original Sin as "the significant ill" or *malum* (Girardot 6) to be "redeemed" or "cured." Rather (although the replacement was not immediate), the new postulate was to be the *political* one of mankind's enslavement to the irrational aspects of its nature, ground differential degrees of such enslavement being ordained by Natural Law as the Judeo-Christian God's agent on earth. This led to a central change. Where the Augustinian postulate had been *actualized* in the medieval category of the Laity as Other to the Redeemed in Spirit category of the Clergy (because voluntarily celibate), the new postulate was now to be embodied in a new category of "Human Others" (Pandian 2-3) that of *indios* and *negros* (i.e. *natives*) whose "enslavement" to ostensibly *irrational* polytheistic religion and ways of life was now made to actualize the new answer to the *unde malum* question and its postulate of a post-religious mode of "significant ill." Simultaneously, Christian Europeans came more and more to embody the ostensibly rational category of *Man*, of "us humans." The origin of today's Caribbean thus lies not only in the context of a specific "local culture" but specifically, too, in the context of that culture's first secularizing transformation of its religio-cultural field, of its until then supernaturally guaranteed poesis of mode of being.

If we see today's Caribbean as having its source, then, in the intellectual revolution of humanism and its poetics of *propter nos* which revalued the "sinful being" of the *Christian* by reinventing it as the "rational being" of *Man*, and therefore in the *mode of history* to which its hybridly religio-secular transumption of the matrix Judeo-Christian culture Narrative would then give rise, then it was not, as the Créolistes propose, the "yoke of history" which determined the terms of the coexistence of the peoples of the Caribbean. Rather it was *the yoke of a specific culture*, conception of being, and mode of the Imaginary that were to function as the hegemonic "ground" of this history in its actual unfolding. These furnished the pre-nineteenth-century hierarchical terms in which the three founding groups, indigenous peoples, invading Europeans, and enslaved Middle Passage Africans, were to be "united on the same soil." They furnished them, too, for their association with later groups who came to the Caribbean in the wake of slavery's abolition, coming to be united with the others under the same "yoke of culture," even though it had itself been transmuted by the nineteenth century intellectual revolution of Liberal or economic humanism and its reinvention of *Man* and its Imaginary in new and now totally degodded because *biocentric* terms.

Only in these terms is the *acultural* conception of Créolité and its premise of cultural *métissage* or *mestizaje* thinkable. Now, too, the equally *acultural*—purely biocentric—concept of *Man* given by the transmuted Malthusian/Darwinian answer (Blumenberg 222-5) to the question *unde malum* leads to the prescriptive definition of Trumper's Negro as a "different kind o' creature." He belongs to a category that together with Césaire's series of condemned Others, Brathwaite's "homeless" nigger, and Walcott's "Middle Passage inheritors," is made into the bearer of the new mode of Cyclopean alterity instituting our contemporary mode of the Real:

As there are hyena-men and panther-men,  
 so I shall be a Jew man  
 a Kaffir man  
 a Hindu-from-Calcutta man  
 a man-from-Harlem-who-hasn't-got-the-vote.

Famine man, curse man, torture man, you may seize  
 him at any moment, beat him, kill him,—yes perfectly  
 well kill him—*accounting to no one, having to offer an  
 excuse to no one*

a Jew man  
 a pogrom man  
 a whelp  
 a beggar. (Césaire, *Return* 47-9)

In light of all this, we may extend a central point made by V. Y. Mudimbe, enabling us to distinguish two modes of *difference*: one of ethnicity or multiethnicity which functions within the “rhetoric of power” of the victor/the Same (however oppositionally); one of *radical alterity*, as the mode of “vast difference” which Lamming’s character must confront and deal with *outside* the victor’s or the Same’s (i.e. *Man*’s) rhetoric of power. Drawing on Foucault’s claims in *The Order of Things*, Mudimbe observes that an epistemological mutation occurred during the twentieth century that would change the terms of Western scholarship’s representation of Africa. Within “the framework of the epistemology still current in the early twentieth century, all discourses on alterity” could only be made as “commentaries or exegeses on excluded areas: primitive experience, pathological societies, or non-normal functionality, understood in terms of a *biological model* from which the determining terms—*function, conflict, signification*—emerged as classifiers with the power of *measuring the social, individual, or psychological distance vis-à-vis the model*.” Because there was only *one model*, that of the *Same*, anthropological as well as missionary studies of primitive philosophy were centrally concerned with “the study of the distance from the *Same* to the *Other*” (*Invention* 81).

The mutation that Mudimbe observes as having occurred in the course of the century resulted from universalizing the properties of the Same by representing them as those of an *ostensibly self-contained culture*. This would now enable “the very possibility of a grid which, using new criteria—*rule, norm and system*—could eventually account for the universality and the particularity of *each cultural organization according to its own rationality and historical strategies*” (*Invention* 81). A multiplicity of Others could now claim, *on the model of the same* in its new guise, their own ostensibly still self-contained cultures/multicultures.

Hence the paradox that it was in terms of the premises of the *Same*, the now globalized “local culture” of the West, that from the 1950s onwards a new way of speaking about other cultures, of their theodicies and cosmogony, arose, in which their differences could be used to “grant a *regional coherence* and at the same time witness to properties of the *human mind and its universal potentialities*.” Hence the paradox that, its existence imagined *in* the very terms of the “universal” Western culture against which it states its alleged self-contained and autonomous particularity, the *Créolité* movement (like all other variants of con-

temporary multiculturalism) must use the properties of that Western same to claim its ostensibly unique particularity. The dynamic fuelling emergence of Creolism in 1989, born from opposition to the Negritude movement, must therefore be understood in terms of an epistemological mutation internal to Western culture. This itself was responding to the changed geo-political situation of a post-World War II era marked global anti-colonial struggles and movements toward political independence by the non-West, movement which, although begun in the 1920s, culminated only in the fifties and sixties.

Negritude, however, as Mudimbe further points out, had arisen as part of the struggle against the earlier conception according to which African cultures and expressions in the post-Middle Passage Diaspora were defined not just as distant from the europhone *same*, but as the *most* distant, and so as the ultimate Lack of the Same.

Up to the 1920s, the entire framework of African social studies was consistent with the rationale of an epistemological field *and its sociopolitical expressions* of conquest. Even those social realities, such as art, languages, or oral literature, which might have constituted an *introduction to otherness*, were repressed in support of theories of *Sameness*. Socially, they were tools strengthening a new organization of power and its political methods of reduction, *namely assimilation or indirect rule*. Within this context, *négritude* a student movement emerged in the 1930s in Paris... [which] mostly used poetry to explore and speak *about their difference* as blacks. (*Invention* 83)

The idea of speaking about "difference" is however a post-modern one and more appropriate to the contemporary movement of *Créolité*. In the dynamic of its first creative phase, Negritude had arisen, rather to protest representation of black peoples in the "ghostly narratives" of the victor West (Quint 8-9) as its ultimate loser *Lack*, redeemable to *human status* only by assimilation to the Same—to a *blanchitude* that a now wholly biologized nineteenth-century concept of the human took as isomorphic with "normal" Man. Negritude, especially in its Césairean Caribbean form, attempted to assume the *actual perspective* of the loser-as-bearer of alterity, to transvalue—as in Césaire's *Cahier* or his poem *Mot/Word*—the negative value of the signifiers of *alterity* imposed on the physiognomic being of all peoples of African descent as the transumed form of medieval signifiers of otherness and by the logic of the likewise transumed, because now biologized, form of the original answer to the *unde malum* question.

According to this last, Trumper's category of the *Negro* to which the Creolists refer derisively in the original French (if not in the English) version of their *Éloge* as the *Nègre* with a capital N: 20) was now made to actualize the new transumed conception of evil, *malum*, as sited in humankind's enslavement to the random and contingent processes of *Natural Selection*, occupying the place (at the level of public existence) of humankind's enslavement to *Original Sin*. The contemporary Imaginary therefore stigmatized all attributes of this Other category's abode of origin, Africa, in the name of "another life" and its ideal concept of the human, *Man*, as "lawfully" as the Imaginary of medieval Europe stigmatized the Earth as the abode of fallen humanity in the name of "*another life*" and ideal concept of the human, *Christian*. Césaire exactly captured this stigmatization and its implications:

In the Martinican carnival, for example, our carnival devil with its horns, its red body, and its constellation of mirrors had always puzzled me. Once, as I was in Africa with [André] Malraux and Senghor attending village festivities, all of a sudden I saw emerging from a path my Martiniquan mask. There it was, indeed. "Fantastic! Oh you have it too," I said to a Senegalese. "what do you mean: we have it too? It is our

mask... It is the mask worn by our initiated," he replied.

Over there it is the mask one wears when one is initiated. *All this is very symbolic and does have meaning.* The oxhorns are the symbol of wealth and plentitude...

Extraordinary! That mask became here in Martinique the devil because we are a Catholic country, and as we say here: *the god of the vanquished became the devil of the vanquisher...* (Césaire, "Interview" 367-8)

The Negritude intellectuals and writers were however trained in this present mode of the Imaginary. Via their Western education, as Walcott wrote of his own case, they received it as *a natural inheritance* ("Muse of History" 25). Césaire's Negritude, therefore, could ostentatiously reject neither the canonized "other life" of the Western culture in which he had been educated nor indeed its great heresies, Marxism and Surrealism, as *exteriorities*. Rather, selected elements of this Imaginary gave him the ideas and influences, poetic and imaginative strategies, with which to go further than they had done, and effect a radical conceptual discontinuity in order to assume *alterity*, to create the "uncreated features of his face." This meant a face that had hitherto been made seeable only through the prism of its negative signifying function: as happened with the *devil* that the oxhead mask had become in the europhone Catholic imaginary. For the positive meanings of symbolic birth and initiation into "true" being that it had in its original autocentric cultural sphere and that it kept, if in transumed forms, in the underground of the popular Afrophone counter-cultural Imaginary had been the object of systematic repression within the terms of the hegemonic culture and its mode of Walcottian "Another life" ("Muse of History 25). Such repression was the condition both of the flowering of the hegemonic Imaginary and of the enactment of the Western bourgeois poesis of being, *Man* in the reinvented terms of its second conception as a genetically selected Self: *eugenic* rather than, as before, *rational*. Of this Self, Trumper's *Negro* must necessarily be the genetically dysselected or non-evolved Other, embodied idea of a bio-evolutionarily determined different "kind o' creature," of a genetically inferior kind of human being. For this Imaginary, "realization of the rights of Man" necessarily excludes the *Rights* of its Other, the "Negro," as well as those of all other *opprimés de la terre* (Fanon's *damnés*, condemned of the earth) assimilated to the represented mode of Cyclopean alterity that the "Negro," as a "different kind o' creature," is made to signify and actualize.

Consequently, while the African *négritude* of the Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor (the negritude of one whose ancestors had not undergone the Middle Passage and whose cultural historical origins so did not lie in the trans-Atlantic slave trade) sought to define itself as a *difference* complementary to *Europeanitude*, limited even to denotations of the terms *Négritude* and *Négro-Africain*, Césaire's post-Middle Passage *Négritude*, whose founding ancestry indeed lay in the slave trade, spoke not of a difference of *ethnicity* between cultures but of the "vast difference" of *alterity* (Lamming, *Castle* 335), as prescribed by the terms of the now globalized "local culture" of the West. My proposal here is that if the late-medieval humanists' return to their until then paganized and stigmatized Graeco-Roman conceptual heritage enabled them to conceptualize the new mode of political reason on whose basis the lay world would be enabled to free itself from the mode of difference in which the category of Laity (as associated with the earth and *malum*) was necessarily *ontologically* subordinate to that of Clergy, negritude's return to an even more stigmatized African conceptual heritage can enable us to use the original meaning of the oxhead mask to conceptualize a new mode of cultural reason. There, the "vast difference" of alterity will be identified and defined in transculturally applicable terms. Such terms will let us differentiate between *Créolité's ethnicity* as a "prop-

erty of the same" and an *alterity* that in order fully to enact itself must effect a "radical discontinuity" from the Same and its properties.

Many have shown how institutions of initiation central to all traditional African societies mark *symbolic birth* by means of which young men and women break with their pre-initiate selves and with primarily biological attachments, in favor of loyalty to their *symbolic kin*. Cultures thereby enact and signify the institution of specifically human forms of life. This is but one form in which all cultures represent human social life as always and only a mode of *symbolic life*. The initiation of this mode of course simultaneously enacts a culture's mode of Lack, alterity, or *symbolic death*. In the case given, everything associated with pre-initiate life will be marked negatively, with initiate life, positively. All cultures have their own forms of such symbolic life and death, codes that enact their poesis of being, or positively marked criteria of symbolic life, only by the negatively marked mode of symbolic death or alterity.

We propose, then, that within the code enacting our present biocentric and bourgeois conception of the human, *Man* (one of whose signifiers of alterity or Human Other, the "Negro," is the category of all peoples of African descent), Trumper's discovery that the "Negro" is "a different kind o' creature" from "Man" lets us define the "vast difference" he has come to experience as an *ontological* difference that is always a property of the code. This definition allows us to depict the tendency of "radical alterity" in Caribbean literature quite specifically as a tendency analogous to that of an earlier epochal Renaissance lay humanism (enacted in its poesis of the *propter nos*). It seeks to recode the code, to transvalue the negative value placed on the *Negro* as signifier of alterity, human embodiment of the Cyclopean Other, with all other categories assimilated to its mode of Otherness, being negatively marked in terms specific to our global cultural order and its Imaginary. These include such markers as those of supposed less or non-evolution, of economic poverty, scarcity, idleness, and other forms of *defectiveness*.

Césaire assumes this alterity via at least two such terms. One is that of the Negro as "genetically defective" because dissected (according to the bio-evolutionary criterion that the hegemonic Imaginary takes as defining of *Man* in its now purely biologized conception): Let us suppose, he said in a recent interview, "Blacks (*les négres*) had not been, let us say, a conquered people, indeed, an unfortunate and humiliated people; reverse history, make of them a conquering people. As far as I am concerned I believe there would have been no negritude" (Toumson and Henry-Valmore 7). A correlated assumption is that of the category of alterity as actualized in *poverty* (the Poor and jobless embodying *Natural Scarcity* as the socioeconomic form of the new purely secular "significant ill" in the transumed place of Original Sin), which Man-as-homo economicus, and therefore breadwinner, must master if he is not to be swept away by Malthus's "iron laws of nature." It appears, in the derisive terms of the *Éloge*, as the "*opprimeés de la terre*". It is this same expendable category, however, also embodied in Walcott's "Middle Passage inheritors," that is summed up in Césaire's series of alterity figures.

In *Omeros*, Walcott catches something of these meanings, with his use of the Cyclopean figure, the Cyclopean metaphor, transferred from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean:

Only in you, across centuries  
of the sea's parchment atlas, can I catch the noise  
of the surf lines wandering like the shambling fleece



of the lighthouse's flock, that Cyclops whose blind eye  
shut from the sunlight. . .

and the blind lighthouse, sensing the edge of a cape,

paused like a giant, a marble cloud in its hands,  
to hurl its boulder that splashed into phosphorous  
stars; then a black fisherman, his stubbled chin coarse

as a dry sea-urchin's, hoisted his flour-sack  
sail on its bamboo spar, and scanned the opening line  
of our epic horizon. . . (*Omeros* 13)

Or again:

And Achille himself had been one of those children  
whose voices are surf under a galvanized roof;  
sheep bleating in the schoolyard; a Caribbean

whose woolly crests were the backs of the Cyclops's flock,  
with the smart man under one's belly. Blue stories  
we recited as children lifted with the rock

of Polyphemus. (*Omeros* 323)

Because the epic feat narrated is the epic feat of the poem itself, however, these touches are incidental, reminiscences of the Cyclops, not the figure itself. It is in Césaire's *Cabier* that the Cyclops figure appears as a loser Other to a new mode of the Odysseus victor, a loss now defined by the alterity accoutrements of both his Blackness and his poverty, and set in the powerful episode of the poet's confrontation with a choice of options, a test of allegiance. Recounting it, he shows himself to have failed. But at the same time, by writing the poem, responding to the challenge of imaging the cause of alterity, of the loser, outside the terms of the victor's strategic projection, he performatively marks out the parameters of what the Cyclopean quest, the Other's narrative from its own perspective, must necessarily be. Let us call this episode *Encounter with the Cyclops on a Paris Tram*:

And I, and I,  
I who sang with clenched fist  
You must be told the length to which I carried cowardice.  
In a tram one night, facing me, a Negro.

He was a Negro tall as a pongo who tried to make himself very small on a tram seat. On that filthy tram seat he tried to abandon his gigantic legs and his starved boxer's trembling hands. And everything had left him, was leaving him. His nose was like a peninsula off its moorings even his negritude was losing its colour through the effects of a perpetual tanner's bleach. And the tanner was Poverty. A great sudden long-eared bat whose claw-marks on that face were scarred, scabby islands. Or perhaps Poverty was tireless workman fashioning some deformed cartridge. . .

He was an ungainly Negro without rhythm or measure.  
 A Negro whose eyes rolled with bloodshot weariness.  
 A Negro without shame, and his big smelly toes sniggered in the deep  
 gaping lair of his shoes.  
 Poverty, it has to be said, had taken great pains to finish him off.  
 She had hollowed the eye socket and painted it with a cosmetic of dust  
 and rheum.  
 She had stretched the empty space between the solid hinge of the jaws  
 and the bone of an old, worn cheek.  
 On this she had planted the shiny little bristles of several days' beard. She  
 had maddened the heart and bent the back.  
 And the whole thing added up perfectly to a hideous Negro, a peevish  
 Negro, a melancholy Negro, a slumped Negro, hands folded as in prayer  
 upon a knotty stick.  
 A Negro shrouded in an old, threadbare jacket. A Negro who was comical  
 and ugly, and behind me women giggled as they looked at him.  
 He was COMICAL AND UGLY.  
 COMICAL AND UGLY, for a fact.  
 I sported a great smile of complicity... (*Return* 68-9)

Lamming's account of how he came by the title of *In the Castle of My Skin* makes clear that the same assumption of alterity was the dynamic imperative behind his novel as well:

I first came across the phrase, "castle of my skin," in a poem by the West Indian poet, Derek Walcott. In a great torrent of rage inseparable from hate, the poet is addressing some white presence, and the assault is stated: "You in the castle of your skin, I among the swineherd." This phrase had coincided with my search for a title, and I remembered that night and knew that in spite of his Age, meaning Skin, Pa could never possibly see himself among swine. Nor could the village. So I thought it was correct, and even necessary to appropriate that image in order to restore the castle where it belonged. (*Pleasures* 228)

Lamming's classic anti-colonial novel depicts the political and social movements by means of which the Anglophone Caribbean island of Barbados won its political independence from Britain. But it also portrays the limits of that independence. For the novel shows how the people of one of the small villages, encouraged by the old man, Pa, shares in that struggle, only to find that in the wake of independence the new nationalist bourgeoisie, speculating with land in the overall goal of "development," is responsible for uprooting them from the housespots they had traditionally occupied over the years. Pa must therefore leave the village to spend his few last years in the Almshouse. In other words, since the logic of the bourgeois Imaginary and its "Another life" involves the rights of *Man* to accumulate more and more property and cannot include Rights of the Poor (who must be made to actualize the *malum* and its "significant ill" as the leper/leprosy had been made to actualize the *malum* of Original Sin in pre-Renaissance Europe) the end of the novel logically shows the dispossession of the *non-propertied* Pa and the rest of the villagers as the inevitable by-product of the ostensible "common good" of "national economic growth."

For this narrative, therefore, as long as *Man* is defined as the masterer of the *malum* of economic scarcity, and as such *bomo oeconomicus*, on the basis of his ownership of mobile property, or capital, the

*non-proprieted* villagers including the old man Pa, are inevitably the losers, as Trumper's negro is inevitably a "different kind o' creature." Both categories serve as the actualizers of alterity in our present biocentric Imaginary of the human as a genetically selected and purely biologized mode of being whose origins lie, unmediated by culture and the Word, in the purely extrahuman process of Evolution. They serve, that is, in the same way as had the category of the Laity as actualizer of alterity to the medieval order's theocentric conception of the human as an arbitrarily created contingent being whose negative legacy of Original Sin had left him hopelessly enslaved to his fallen flesh, redeemable only through the sacraments of the Church.

Lamming's expropriation of the image of the *castle*, and his restoring it to where it belonged—to the *non-proprieted*—is, like Césaire's Negritude and its daring to say, *I, the Nigger*, I, the *non-selected human*, therefore constitutes as deep a challenge to our present conception of *Man*, to its *biocentric* notion of human being, and to its correlated answer to the question *unde malum*, as the lay humanists' poetics of the *propter nos* had to the medieval order's theocentric Imaginary and conception of being. That first poetics and its assumption of *alterity* set in motion the processes of the degodding of being and secularization of human knowledge on whose basis Caribbean politics and the modern world system were laid down. The assumption of alterity at work in Lamming's novel as in Césaire's work, opens the frontier onto a parallel possibility.

This is that of a second poetics of the *propter nos*, able to call in question the present human's ostensibly purely biologized mode of being, and so our present answer to the *malum* question as a matter of human enslavement to random and arbitrary processes of bioevolutionary natural selection and of imperative adherence to an ostensibly obligatory order of a bioevolutionary cosmos. Really at issue is our not-yet conscious subordination to the hegemonic Imaginary as generated from this answer (its prescriptive code of symbolic life and death) and to the order of consciousness to which its poesis of being gives rise, Walcott's "shared imagination" of "another life"; viewed by Césaire as the *malum* of *désêtre* (Toumson and Henry-Valmore 212). In its terms, we have seen, two categories—Trumper's "Negro" (the Creolist's capital-N Negro), experiencing himself as a "different kind o' creature," and the non-proprieted Pa, representing the Poor and jobless oppressed of the earth—must continue to be dispossessed, the Others of a victorious elite whose ownership is symbolically authorized by the "other life" of their Imaginary.

For such alterity figures, condemned always to lose in the victor's narrative, the choice or refusal to assume the perspective and cause of alterity is choice or refusal of the Cyclops factor. To choose to *assume* the loser's perspective is to image its cause (prospectively forging a *new* Imaginary), and so call in question the "memory," the dominant Imaginary and its "other life," whose exclusion of its Human Others (Negro and non-proprieted jobless Poor) from the Rights of Man is as much prescribed by its laws as was the execution of Captain Cook by those of the Imaginary of the then culturally autocratic Hawaiians: at first accepted as the god Lono, he had breached the ritual proscriptions of the logic (Sahlins 38, 46, 79) of their governing code of symbolic life and death (Wynter, "Beyond" 641).

In his Introduction to Michel de Certeau's *Heterologies*, Wlad Godzich observes how the great sociopolitical upheavals of the late fifties and sixties, especially those in the name of decolonization and liberation, had a deep and challenging impact on Western ways of knowing. However, decolonization was soon to be followed by a reterritorialization, a reinforcing, in new terms, of these old orthodox ways of knowing. In this context the Creolist movement can be seen as moving to reterritorialize, since the late eighties, the assumption of alterity that had come out of the Negritude movement of the Francophone Caribbean from

the 1930s on and out of the anti-colonial movements of the Anglophone Caribbean of the late 1930s through the 1950s. These movements had led to the emergence of a literature, exemplified in Césaire's *Cabier* and Lamming's *Castle*—indeed in the range of their work, marked by an aesthetic power and force that was not to be approached by later post-colonial writers. For this had been a literature fuelled above all by the dynamic of alterity, the imperative to deconstruct the overarching *unde malum* premise of our present Imaginary, which Elsa Goveia aptly identified as the status-organizing principle of Caribbean societies: the premise that “*the fact of blackness is a fact of (racial/genetic) inferiority*” (“Social Framework” 9-14).

The Creolists sought not only to contain, but to displace and negate this earlier thrust. They wanted to replace its *imperative* to deal with the transformation of *meaning* with a new “imperative”: usage of the Creole *language* as basis of a supposedly authentic mode of being. Trying to make Creole vernacular the linchpin of an ostensibly in-itself Creole cultural authenticity, they therefore begin their manifesto (itself written in French) with the issue of Creole language use, posed as the touchstone of Martinican writing. They argue that although Gilbert Gratiant (an early collaborator of Césaire, but also antagonist in “*métissage*” and Marxist argument) had attempted to create a Creole literature by writing a novel in Creole and so was a “founding father,” because this literature had not been developed no truly Martinican and Caribbean literature yet existed. Their *pays natal* literature that should have followed Gratiant's novel had been blocked by the “emergence of a multi-dimensional phenomenon” that although said to “have had its origin in the Creole genesis” had for “several generations” overshadowed this genesis. The phenomenon was Aimé Césaire's *Négritude*. Although in the context of a “totally racist world” *Négritude* had restored mother, matrix Africa, “black civilization,” and given “Creole *society its African dimension*,” it had also had a negative effect. It had made a situation in which the (“authentic”) literary line of descent from Gratiant, “visionary of our authenticity,” with a few other writers of his time, had been submerged (“In Praise” 887-8).

A rhetorical sleight of hand here enables the reality of two cultures (that of sixteenth century Western Europe, symbolized by the Cross and the Pillar as markers of the expropriation of non-Christian lands to European temporal and Christian spiritual sovereignty, and that of West Africa, symbolized by the Oxhead Mask) and of the two language complexes giving them expression—Creole emerging from their syncretic interaction—to be repressed. In the end, this repression serves entirely to eliminate the West African pole. They canonize Gratiant by defining him as an author who, placing his “writerly expression on the poles of both languages, both cultures, French and Creole, had magnetized from opposite directions the compasses of our consciousness.” The Creole language, now supposed to have come into existence *sui generis*, displaces the West African matrix.

Gratiant's novel in Creole had set on foot exploration of “the vocabulary the forms, the proverbs, the mentality, the sensibility, in a word, of the intelligence of *this cultural entity* in which we are attempting, today, a salutary submersion.” Gratiant and others writing as he did come to be “the precious keepers of the stones, of the broken statues, of the disarranged pieces of pottery, of the lost drawings, of the distorted shapes: of *this ruined city which is our foundation*.” The maudlin rhetoric's pathos, paradoxically trying to imitate Césaire, matches the thought's poverty. But the politico-cultural purpose is consistent—reterritorialization of *Négritude's radical alterity* to replace it with a Western bourgeois identity-system of a supposed “Creole” ethnicity: hence the choice of Gratiant's Creole novel as the founding text and displacement of Césaire's *Cabier*. The line from Gratiant, they proclaim, however submerged, had enabled today's Creolist writers to “achieve” their “return” to *the native land*: without it “there would have been no signs or support of any kind” (“In Praise” 888). The *Négritude* movement should thus be seen as having served

to close off the path of their island's return to the *authentic or true path of its Creole language and culture*.

I have been agreeing fundamentally with those who urge that meaning and being are coeval. Transformation of being entails one of meaning—resemanticization of the Imaginary, of culture's self-conception, and so of the Real. *Language* is thus a function of *meaning*, of being, subordinate to the "governing code"—the meaning of whose transformation Césaire recognized in that illumination we saw. The Oxhead Mask that in its autocentric West African cultural field of Origin had been a marker of successful symbolic rebirth of youths into full humanhood, in its Western cultural *Manhood* variant had been made into the marker of symbolic death, into the negative sign of the Devil, its meaning wholly inverted to a Judeo-Christian conception of being and non-being in both its religious (spiritual) and secular (biological) variants.

In this context the clash between Creolists and Alterists can be seen as one not only between the primacy of *language* and the primacy of *meaning*, but centrally as a clash over the nature of being and, further, as one over their respective answers to "the source of evil" (*unde malum*) question. For Césaire the "source of evil" lies in the *désêtre* or alienation of the Martinican subject, induced to deny the part of himself that had been semantically stigmatized by the dominant culture as "*la part maudite*" (cursed, doomed or ill-fated part), as the signifier of "symbolic death" or of Cyclopean alterity (in much the same way as medieval Laity had been forced to deny its "fallen flesh" as its *part maudite* or the Senegalese initiate his/her pre-initiate self).

The Creolists answer the *unde malum* question in terms of language; so in those of a "property of the same." Reenacting the premise of European nineteenth century Romantic paradigms (as they do in their fiction, where, James Arnold shows, they reenact the narrative cum ideological strategies of a George Sand: "Créolité" 5), the Creolists propose that the multiple ills and crisis situation of Martinique is due to the "desolidification" of its writers and thinkers from their "native" Creole language as the substrate of their Creole culture and being. Repeating another Romantic cliché that distinguishes between *volkisch* concrete particularity (good) and abstract universality or "cosmopolitanism" (evil), they propose that this detachment from their "native" language and culture had been initiated by Césaire's Negritude. Although protesting against French colonization, it had done so, they claim, "in the name of universal generalities thought in the Western way of thinking, and with no consideration for our cultural reality." As a result, those following the path of Césaire's *négritude* had been exhausted by indulgence in "a really suspended writing, far from the land, far from the people, far from the readers, far from any authenticity except for an accidental, partial, and secondary one" ("In Praise" 889).

This *volkisch* "blood and soil" usage of "*authenticity*" as a value-term shows the mimetic nature of Creolist "particularity," the "exteriority" of the paradigm through which Creolism imagines itself. In his *Order of Things*, Foucault defines this paradigm in the course of analyzing nineteenth century philology and in the overall context of then new "fundamental arrangements of knowledge" whose disciplinary discourses instituted our present conception of the human *Man*. Breaking with the earlier classical discipline of general grammar, for which "language arose when the noise produced by the mouth or the lips had become a *letter*, it is accepted from now on *that language exists* when noises have been articulated and divided into a series of distinct sounds," so that "*the whole being of language is now one of sound*." The new discipline of linguistics was foundational of this second and Liberal humanist reinvention of *man* on the biocentric model of a purely natural organism and on the cultural model of pre-discursive being. This new concep-

tion of the nature of language as one of *sound* explains the interest, from the nineteenth century on, of European scholars and writers in “non-written literature, in folktales and spoken dialects.” Only these could now count as signs of pristine and authentic being/presence. In consequence language “is sought in its most authentic state: in the spoken word,” while the word is considered “dried up and frozen into immobility by *writing*.” Here the mystique that still governs the Creolist manifesto is being born, one in which by “means of the ephemeral and profound sound it produces, the spoken word accedes to sovereignty” (Foucault 286)

Sound, *speech*, becomes for the Creolists the touchstone of concrete particularity. Writing, presented as marking abstraction, becomes the volkisch sign of a cosmopolitan universality, mark of “inauthenticity.” Negritude, cosmopolitanism incarnate, say the Creolists, had seduced young writers from their “Caribbeanness” (whose touchstone of authenticity is use of Creole speech, or, Arnold notes, of “Creolized” French). So if, as Borges brilliantly observed, the Koran has no camels, then the Koran of the Creolists’ Caribbeanness demands the presence of camels, defined by writers’ use of “touches” of Creole speech verifying the Western bourgeois mystique through which the “spoken word” accedes to metaphysical “sovereignty” and, with it, to *the sovereignty of Man’s meanings*, albeit in its Caribbean Creole variant: sovereignty of a familiar Imaginary whose governing code prescribes Cyclopean alterity in the terms of Trumper’s Negro as its symbolic death.

The claim that use of Creole speech signifies “authenticity” and the use of this claim to attack Césaire, both in the *Éloge*, are further elaborated by one of the most prominent Creolists, Raphaël Confiant, as prelude to his more general accusation that Césaire had chosen to refuse the “concrete particularity” of Martinique’s “native” Creole reality in exchange for an “abstract universality” based on the exteriority of Negritude’s self-assertion and cause—of the capital-N Negro and the (Fanonian) oppressed of the earth. In his book-length study of Césaire, especially in the section on “The Creole Paradox,” Confiant charges that although Césaire had grown up on a Basse-Pointe sugar plantation, where he had inhabited a linguistically Creolophone world (daily life and work all taking place in Creole), his whole life he was to have a “strange relation to Creole speech.” While in public radio addresses Césaire might now and then use a semi-phrase of Creole, he would quickly revert to speaking “the language of Racine” (never mind that Confiant is himself *accusing* Césaire in the “language of Racine”!). Going on to attack what he defines as Césaire’s *Creolophobia*, Confiant focuses on part of an interview Césaire had with Jacqueline Leiner in 1970. Confiant cites Césaire: “For me it’s simply that writing is tied to French and not to Creole.” But he tendentiously takes the statement out of the wider context of Leiner’s question to which it replied. This decontextualization lets Confiant interpret Césaire’s reply as indicative of his reflex contempt for Creole (Confiant 96).

Leiner’s question was whether as a Caribbean writer he too had experienced the problem about which the Arab writer Malek Haddad had written: that as a writer of Arab extraction who could not express himself in Arabic he yet felt himself a prisoner of the French language, since he was unable to use it to express his Arab sensibility. León Laeou, she remarked, had also spoken of the difficulty he had had in having to use French words to express the sensibility of a heart from Senegal. How did he, Césaire, confront this problem? It was in this context that Césaire pointed out that he had never felt himself to be a “prisoner of the French language” because for him, growing up on Martinique, *writing had been as tied to the French language, as everyday speech had been tied to Creole*. In consequence, all his efforts in his writing had been directed to inflecting the French language, transforming it so that it could be made to express “ce moi, ce moi-nègre, ce moi-créole, ce moi-martiniquais, ce moi-antillais.” Indeed, his interest in poetry stemmed from the fact that “it is the poet who makes language.” Césaire’s answer, then, that for him writing

is tied to French, had nothing to do with being Creolophobic. Indeed earlier in the same interview he explained to Leiner that while Creole made use of a largely French vocabulary, it is in fact structured on an African-derived grammar and phonetics (Leiner xvi). Both French and Creole were his “*natural inheritances*.”

The really interesting point of Césaire’s answer is that he implies a fundamental difference between the Caribbean subject that he is and Arab and Senegalese subjects. This difference is that French, as the language of the elite or the official high culture of the Caribbean, was no less “natural” to him than Creole, for, unlike the once linguistically-speaking autocentric worlds of Laleau and Memmi, the new worlds of Caribbean polities (ones no longer those of the indigenous Arawaks and Caribs) had not pre-existed the sixteenth century expansion of the West. Nor had the *West*, as secularized transform of Latin-Christian Europe, pre-existed its relation with those post-1492 Caribbean polities. Rather, because these island worlds can be said to have been born out of that process of intellectual and imaginative revolution by whose poetics medieval Europe had reinvented itself, so a new West and the Caribbean had come into existence as inseparably linked as Prospero and Caliban were in Shakespeare’s play, and as they are, tellingly, in Césaire’s adaptation, *A Tempest*. For post-1492 Caribbean societies, there had been, as Glissant also points out, no *before*, no *outside* to the Text of the West, to which there could be a *return*.

There had been, however, another Text which, like that of the West, was to initiate its own expansion. This Text, carried *inter alia* by the Oxhead Mask on the slaveships of the Middle Passage, was one that bore other meanings. It is the processes of syncretic interaction between the two, as well as clash and conflict, the one as the Text of the victorious dominant elite, the other as the Text of the elite’s dominated Other, the loser, each with their mode of “another life,” that therefore define the cultural and linguistic matrix of the Caribbean. Just as, Jose Luis González points out in a decisive analysis, elite europhone and popular afrophone cultures daily interact with and influence each other in Puerto Rico (González 18, 25-30), so in Martinique an official French interacts with a vernacular Creole of which popular forces are the bearers (*not* the Creolist new literary academic caste). An example is the new afrophone musical form of *zouk*. For Césaire growing up in Martinique, the two languages would, as he observes to Leiner, have permeated each other to such an extent as to be inseparable places on a continuum. There are Martinicans, he said, who speak Creole thinking they are speaking French, and vice versa. At the same time, Creole itself, born from French and largely West African languages, may be defined indifferently as neo-European or neo-African. The frontier between them (as in the Anglophone Caribbean between English and Creoles) remains indecisive. If Creole was his vernacular, the language of immediacy, of folklore, of intense feelings, so French served (as it now does for the Creolists in their *Éloge*) when a more universally communicable medium of conceptualization was called for. In such a situation it is clear that the issue of “sensibility” for the Caribbean subject cannot be the same as for an Arabic or Senegalese writer.

A paradox of the Creolists’ linguistic position emerges here. The hierarchy that *does* exist between French and Creole is one that can only be dealt with from a perspective of “radical alterity” and from its challenge to the *inferiority/superiority* rule or status-organizing principle of Caribbean social structure, where, Goveia has pointed out, the “fact of blackness must be seen as a fact of inferiority” (14). The negative value meanings set on Creole language and its use are *not* primarily due to its *Creole* nature. Rather they are set as part of the reproduction of social power instituting Caribbean societies. In terms of their Imaginary, because the Negro category must function as marker of Human Otherness (of Cyclopean alterity) to our present conception of the human, *Man*, so all items associated with *Africa*, as the marker of this

alterity's culture of origin, must be negatively marked.

It is a parallel and culture-specific inferiority/superiority status-organizing rule, then, that prescribe not only that the facts of Blackness, Poverty, and joblessness should be facts of an ostensibly bio-evolutionarily determined genetic inferiority, but also that all Caribbean Creoles should be stigmatized, not only as languages reflecting a supposed inferiority of the original *African* linguistic matrix but also the second social-class and racialized inferiority of the mostly popular forces who were and are its bearers, principal inventors, and everyday users. In other words, the Caribbean Creoles are stigmatized as a fact of their *alterity* status, not as signifiers of *ethnicity*. The Creolists, with politically correct Creole "touches" in their largely French essays and fiction, represent Creole in terms of ethnicity to propose that the issue is engagement with the use of the Creole language, rather than with meaning and the governing code of the hegemonic culture of *Man*, its memory, and Imaginary. The choice confronting Caribbean writers, for the Creolists, is therefore that of writing or of not writing in Creole or, more specifically, of making use of rhythmic intonations or even quotations from the language—as Walcott does in the brilliant tour de force that is his poem *Omeros*:

*When cutlass cut smoke, when cocks surprise their arseholes  
by shitting eggs, he cursed, black people go get rest  
from God; at which point a fierce cluster of arrows  
targeted the sore, and he screamed in the yam rows. (21)*

For the Creolists, this supplants the choice and task of assuming alterity. But it is in the latter's terms that Caribbean writers must seek, like the Renaissance lay humanists, to transform meaning and revalorize the human away from its conception as a mode of being enslaved to the extracultural, extrahuman, and random processes of bio-evolutionary Natural Selection; as a being whose contingency and expendability is actualized in the negation of Trumper's Negro, in the expendability and degradation of the non-properly tied and Jobless Poor—both trapped in their imposed roles as Cyclopean Other to our *biocentric* conception of *Man*. Our task is to resemanticize meaning/ being from the perspective of alterity. So Césaire has consistently tried to do, refusing what he calls the Creolists' desolidification with Africa, defining it as the cursed and negatively marked part of themselves, with this the fundamental attribute of the "malum" of their/our *désêtre*, alienation from ourselves, our consciousness.

Just so does his poem "*Moi*" first image all the negatively marked Cyclopean signifiers of symbolic death:

and let me be nailed by all the arrows  
and their bitterest curare  
to the beautiful center-stake of very cool stars

the word nigger  
sprung fully armed from the howling  
of a poisonous flower

the word nigger  
all filthy parasites . . .



the word nigger  
 a sizzling flesh and horny matter  
 burning, acrid  
 the word nigger

like the sun bleeding from its claw  
 onto the sidewalk of clouds  
 the word nigger  
 like the last laugh calved by innocence  
 between the tiger's fangs... (Césaire, *Collected Poetry* 229)

Then, in a decisive move, he re-images, resemanticizes these negations as the opening onto a New Grand Narrative of Emancipation, of Trumper's "Negro as a different kind o' creature," of the dispossessed non-propertyed Pa on his way to the almshouse (the Creolists' mocked *opprimés de la terre*, Fanon's precisely defined *damnés*). It is a new narrative of emancipation whose expropriation of the image of the human, with its restoration to where it belongs, I have here defined in terms of both continuity and rupture as that of the second poetics of the *propter nos*. This poetics is the harbinger not now of the natural sciences as was the first but of Césaire's proposed new science of the word—a science whose equations can at last make our human world(s) intelligible ("Poetry and Knowledge" xlix):

and as the word sun is a cracking of bullets  
 and the word night a ripping of taffeta  
 the word nigger  
 hardened don't you know  
 with the summer thunder  
 expropriated  
 by incredulous freedoms (*Collected Poetry* 228-30)

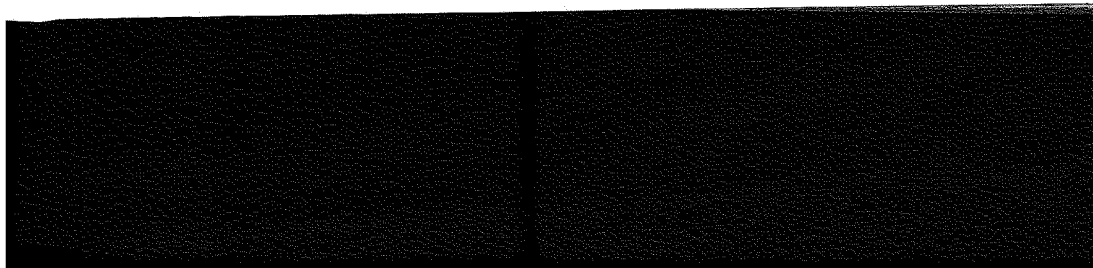
Before Césaire, before Fanon, Jacques Roumain of Haiti had prophesied these "incredulous freedoms," and had done so in a victor's narrative no longer Odysseus's, but the Cyclops's. From the perspective of alterity, it plots the quest to control the governing codes of symbolic life and death and their Imaginary, whose victor's narratives have hitherto governed us:

car nous aurons choisi notre jour	for we will have chosen our day
le jour des sales nègres...	the day of dirty niggers...
des sales hindous...	of dirty Hindus...
des sales juifs...	of dirty Jews...
Et nous voici debout	And here we are standing
Tous les damnés de la terre	All the condemned of the earth

("Sales nègres," *Ebony Wood* 44-5?)

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