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**LITERARY TRANSFORMATION OF CARIBBEAN HISTORIES: *TEXACO* BY
PATRICK CHAMOISEAU AND *DIVINA TRACE* BY ROBERT ANTONI**

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Abstract

In this paper I will compare representations of specific aspects of Caribbean history in the novels *Texaco* (1992) by Patrick Chamoiseau and *Divina Trace* (1992) by Robert Antoni. I will scrutinise the extent to which Chamoiseau and Antoni posit cultural and linguistic (re)creation and transformation as having shaped histories and collective identities in the Anglophone and French Caribbean. In both novels the transformation of cultural traditions is represented through the transformation of certain myths and beliefs which are adapted to the specific cultural and historic contexts. A closer analysis of the significance and function attributed to these myths and tales will reveal similarities and differences in the interpretation and fictional representation of colonial history in the Anglophone and French Caribbean.

In their novels Antoni and Chamoiseau highlight traditions of storytelling, and they juxtapose and merge different cultural beliefs and literary styles. They thus seek to complement official and Eurocentric chronological accounts of historical facts and to account for certain Caribbean communities or cultures with their own specific beliefs and traditions. Antoni's and Chamoiseau's transformations of 'standard' English or French reinforce their focus on the local. Both writers create neologisms and combine different languages and linguistic registers which allude to the linguistic and cultural diversity in the Caribbean. The Francophone *créolité* movement of which Patrick Chamoiseau is one of the adherents considers this variety of languages as well as of ethnic and cultural groups to be characteristic of the Caribbean archipelago. It seems, however, that the Creolists' concept of culturally diverse Caribbean societies is represented more starkly in *Divina Trace* than in *Texaco*.

It is my contention that some of the ideas laid down in the Creolists' theoretical manifesto *Eloge de la créolité* are not restricted to the French Caribbean but are similarly manifest in Anglophone Caribbean fiction. This paper will therefore scrutinise thematic and, to a certain degree, linguistic similarities between the texts selected and show the extent to which concepts developed in the discourse of *créolité* can productively be used in an analysis of both Francophone and Anglophone literary texts.

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This paper offers a critical reading of Patrick Chamoiseau's and Robert Antoni's representations of cultural transformation in colonial Caribbean history as manifest in their novels *Texaco* (1992) and *Divina Trace* (1992). Scrutinising their transformation of certain myths, which fictionalise recreation in Caribbean history, will allow me to tease out context-specific nuances in the approaches towards cultural diversity in Caribbean societies adopted by these two writers. Until recently most literary criticism on Caribbean fiction has remained within the context of either Anglophone or Francophone writing. This focus on one linguistic and cultural area only has prevented

intellectuals from acknowledging ways in which ideas and literary concepts have travelled back and forth across the islands of the Caribbean. My paper is intended to overcome the insularity of many existing and admittedly incisive textual analyses by focusing on nuances between Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean criticism and fiction. These differences have to be considered within the wider context of critical debates about Caribbean history and creolisation that dominated the 1990s. My paper constitutes work in progress in a field where little research has been done to investigate connections between Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean literature. I am aware that my ideas are somewhat tentative, but they are part of a necessary and growing set of developments in this field.¹

In order to establish a framework for my analysis of *Texaco* and *Divina Trace*, I will briefly point out key aspects of literary trends in the wider context of contemporary Caribbean literature.² As McCusker argues, and as the prolific literary output addressing the issues of history, memory and amnesia confirms, the period of the 1980s and 1990s was marked by a heightened preoccupation with the Caribbean past.³ Many critical as well as fictional Caribbean texts written and published during this period represent the colonial history of this archipelago as traumatic and the origin of the widespread repression of memories of this past.⁴ While these historical discontinuities have, in the 1970s and 1980s, commonly been interpreted in terms of a lack – a lack of collective Caribbean consciousness and a lack of cultural identity – the response to this fragmentation of the Caribbean past has more recently been a focus on creolisation.⁵ In the 1990s the cultural diversity that characterises Caribbean societies has thus been regarded as enrichment, with a focus on the dynamic process of different forms of linguistic and cultural transformation.⁶ This emphasis on transformation and the fertility of cultural diversity is reflected both in *Divina Trace* and *Texaco*.⁷ I will assess

the extent to which Chamoiseau and Antoni posit cultural and linguistic transformation as having shaped histories and collective identities in the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean. In my comparison of Antoni's and Chamoiseau's representations of various processes of cultural transformation in different creolised Caribbean societies I will explore the instability of the concept of creolisation itself, the aspects associated with it and the significance attributed to it.

Both *Texaco* and *Divina Trace* represent the issues of Creole cultural identity and of Caribbean history. Like Antoni, Chamoiseau posits his novel as a fictional (Creole) family chronicle.⁸ What this suggests is that both writers represent local Caribbean histories from the perspective of individuals whose retold memories have remained unaccounted for in chronological historiography. *Divina Trace* is the history of Corpus Christi, a fictionalised version of Trinidad, rewritten through two major legends, namely the myth of La Divina Pastora and the Indian epic of the *Ramayana*. The main story line evolves around Manuelito, a mysterious anencephalic child, half-human, half-frog, and his mother Madgalena, who becomes the patron saint of the island.⁹ The plot is told in different and often contradictory versions, which Johnny Domingo, the main narrator, tries to piece together into a coherent story. Besides numerous flashbacks, Antoni concentrates on the post-abolition period, particularly the late nineteenth and the entire twentieth centuries.¹⁰ Chamoiseau, by contrast, chose to retrace the developments in Martiniquan society from slavery until the mid-twentieth century. The ethnically and culturally diverse Trinidadian society developed after the abolition of the slave trade, and was reinforced by the subsequent importation of indentured labourers. By contrast, the ambiguous relationship between African-Antilleans and French people in the French Antilles, which is portrayed in *Texaco*, goes back to the period of slavery. In his novel Chamoiseau reveals how the almost mythical

Noutéka, a settlement which was founded by recently freed slaves, constituted itself largely in opposition to the system of slavery and French colonial influences.

Chamoiseau fictionally retraces the predominantly African-Antillean society of Martinique, which has, to the present day, been strongly influenced by France. Antoni, by contrast, represents the process of creolisation in culturally diverse Trinidadian communities. These differences in time, setting and societies portrayed in *Texaco* and *Divina Trace* imply that Chamoiseau's novel reveals the ambivalent relationship between (former) coloniser and colonised to a greater extent than *Divina Trace*.¹¹

In *Texaco* the development of a Creole cultural identity in a community of recently freed slaves who have come from different places in Africa is initially chiefly based on their opposition to the French colonisers. Chamoiseau's comparatively greater focus on the ambiguous relationship between coloniser and colonised has to be considered in the socio-historical context in which the novel is set. The vast majority of Martiniquans have been descendents of former African slaves, for whom the development of an Antillean cultural identity was initially based on the struggle for freedom. Their relationship with the *békés* has necessarily been more dualistic than was the case in the culturally diverse society of Trinidad. Significantly, the African-Antillean communities represented in *Texaco* are not ethnically homogenous. On the contrary, the fictional *personae* are descendents of different African countries.¹² Chamoiseau's focus on heterogeneous African-Antillean communities in Martinique seems to be suggestive of Glissant's assertion that creolisation operates not only between different ethnic groups – as portrayed in *Divina Trace* – but within similar cultures too.¹³

Antoni focuses on a different aspect of creolisation than Chamoiseau, namely creolisation between entirely different ethnic and cultural groups. In *Divina Trace* the

transformation of cultural traditions and the adjustment of African slaves and East Indian indentured labourers to the Caribbean take place in an already culturally diverse society. As Antoni indicates, people from different European countries had settled on the island which was still inhabited by an Amerindian minority. Alongside these different ethnic groups, Africans and, since the abolition of slavery, East Indians were brought to the West Indies, and these groups came to constitute the ethnic majority.¹⁴ In this culturally highly diverse society, the relationship between European colonisers and the different groups of colonised people played a less important role than in Martinique. These crucial differences between the socio-historical contexts in which *Texaco* and *Divina Trace* are set are, to an extent, reflected in Chamoiseau's and Antoni's representations of the transformation of social values and cultural beliefs and traditions.

In both texts these aspects of creolisation are most explicitly illustrated in the adaptation of different myths and legends which are part of the collective consciousness of the different Caribbean societies. In *Texaco* the issues of recreation and transformation are closely related to the formation of a Creole cultural identity and the development of a Creole Martiniquan society. In this Francophone novel recreation has to be understood in terms of creativity, flexibility and adaptability, which are posited as characteristically Creole traits.¹⁵ Thus the first freed slaves deliberately follow a path leading away from colonialism. In deciding where to go these Martiniquans have to listen to their hearts: '[t]he Trails were therefore something other than the colonial roads' (Chamoiseau, p. 130). Although it is pointed out that black Martiniquans eventually have to reach some form of accommodation with the white population of the island, they still have to follow their own beliefs and retain their own life-style: '[l]ater we had to connect the Trails with roads going to the factory. But the Trails still remained something other' (Chamoiseau, p. 130). This sharp distinction

between French and Creole communities in Martinique is based on a clear attempt made by the colonised to break with the colonial influence. Chamoiseau seems to suggest that forms of cultural and social recreation, which largely resist French influences, lead to the development of characteristically Creole Martiniquan societies. Only within these communities does transformation play a major role.

In *Texaco*, Chamoiseau posits Esternome Laborieux's chant of 'The Noutéka of the Hills' as a form of foundation myth for the Creole Martiniquan communities which have developed since the abolition of slavery.¹⁶ This passage, which portrays the establishment of the first post-abolition settlement, Noutéka, suggests the peaceful co-existence of black Martiniquans from different social classes who all represent the supposedly Creole values of solidarity and mutual help. As the chant indicates, '[h]elping each other was the law, a helping hand to do what was possible, working together for the immediate needs' (Chamoiseau, p. 131). Noutéka is contrasted with the individualism, isolation and personal distance that dominate the French communities in St. Pierre and later in Fort-de-France (Chamoiseau, pp. 131-32).¹⁷

As Milne argues, Noutéka represents a place that Esternome and the other freed slaves can, for the first time, claim as their own.¹⁸ Representing the start of a new period in the history of black Martiniquans, this quarter promises an 'ideal, harmonious relationship between human being and landscape'.¹⁹ It is thus represented as an Edenic place where the black Martiniquan community seems to arrogate to itself what Walcott calls the 'Adamic' task of naming or of creating.²⁰ In other words, freed slaves establish a community that sets itself apart from the capital, the life of suppression on the plantations and from African societies insofar as blacks from different countries and tribes live together in Martinique.²¹ As such this post-abolition settlement represents a

form of creolisation that operates between ethnically similar and yet culturally heterogeneous African groups.

I would argue that Chamoiseau primarily focuses on the African cultural heritage in *Texaco* which has constituted the principal cultural influence on the island. What is interesting is that the Creolists posit culturally diverse Caribbean communities as particularly fertile societies in *Eloge de la créolité*, whereas Chamoiseau's novel *Texaco* does not account for this very cultural and ethnic diversity praised in the theoretical manifesto. The Francophone writer chiefly portrays Africans who were brought to the Caribbean during slavery, and he only introduces a few minor characters from Europe, Asia and the Middle East, who worked in Martinique as indentured labourers. Thus he briefly mentions the arrival of Madeirans, Chinese and East Indians at the period of gradual industrialisation (Chamoiseau, p. 138). At a later stage in the novel he refers to Horace Ferjule, whose father came from China (Chamoiseau, p. 204). However, the characters who live in the various Creole settlements represented are all of African or mixed African origin. Chamoiseau's principal focus on the African heritage of Martinique has to be considered, to some extent, against the sociological background of this island. As the theoretical nature of *Eloge de la créolité* suggests, this manifesto, by contrast, is set up to constitute an exploration of the fertile and transformative character of various Caribbean societies.²²

Chamoiseau concentrates on creolisation within Martiniquans of African origin, in other words, within similar ethnic groups, whereas Antoni represents a more syncretic form of creolisation that incorporates a number of entirely different cultures. In his fictional account of the different forms of cultural transformation in the process of creolisation, Antoni draws on several legends that originated in different cultures. The writer establishes intertextual links between the ancient Indian epic of the *Ramayana*

and the Catholic legend of La Divina Pastora, both of which are creatively transformed into a 'callaloo-like' Trinidadian story.²³ Many deities from the *Ramayana* reappear in *Divina Trace* as common people and with different family relations. In order to exemplify the emphasis on recreation in the novel, it suffices to point out that Barto, the husband of the black Madonna, is the incarnation of Shiva, the Destroyer, rather than Vishnu, the Preserver.²⁴ Magdalena's husband is represented as a coloniser and slaveholder who owned Evelina's African grandmother Aiyaba.²⁵ His characterisation as a destroyer thus alludes to colonial violence during the period of slavery.

Antoni's reference to violence and oppression during slavery is reminiscent of the view shared by most contemporary Anglophone and Francophone critics that this traumatic experience constitutes the basis of the collective memory of Caribbean societies. Simultaneously, however, both Antoni and critics such as Derek Walcott, Wilson Harris, Edouard Glissant and the Creolists emphasise the paradoxical fertility and cultural richness to which the slave trade and colonialism have led.²⁶ In Antoni's novel the change from Vishnu, Sita's husband in the *Ramayana*, to Shiva, Magdalena's husband in *Divina Trace*, establishes a link between the ancient Indian epic and slavery in the Caribbean. Although Antoni associates Barto with Shiva rather than with Vishnu he foregrounds the possibility of overcoming the trauma of slavery. Barto personifies slavery and colonial oppression but, unlike Shiva, lacks the Third Eye or *tilak*. Consequently he can damage or destroy lives on his estate or in private relationships but not on a larger scale. In the context of Caribbean history this means that, despite its oppression and violence, slavery and colonialism have not led to an apocalypse, since continuous resistance has eventually brought about the official end of colonialism. In the novel, slavery is therefore not depicted as a solely traumatic experience that has engendered amnesia, but it is insinuated that oppression and destruction can lead to

recreation.²⁷ Preservation by contrast, might, in the Caribbean context, be associated with stasis, with attempts to recuperate a lost past. Antoni's rejection of a fixed identity and stasis reinforces the general emphasis in contemporary Caribbean writing on the dynamic processes of recreation and transformation.²⁸

Chamoiseau's focus on cultural transformation and creolisation between several groups of African-Antilleans differs from Antoni's fictional exploration of creolisation between entirely different ethnic communities, namely Africans, some Amerindians, Europeans and, above all, Asians. Both novels thus represent different facets of the same process of fertile cross-cultural influences and adaptations. In contrast to the Francophone writer, Antoni's portrayal of religious syncretism, diversity and cultural mixing highlights that the concept of a creolised society need not be rooted in African traditions as is proposed in *Eloge de la créolité* and especially in *Texaco*. Chamoiseau concentrates on ethnically similar African-Antillean communities, whereas Antoni merges traditions and beliefs of various, entirely different cultures in his rewriting of the history of Trinidad.

While (re)creation as presented in *Texaco* is primarily based on resistance to French domination, Antoni's novel illustrates the extent to which various cultural traditions have been transformed in the Caribbean. Displacement and rupture are not depicted as solely traumatising experiences; here, emphasis is placed on the assumption that uprooting and destruction can engender recreation. Antoni's view of the history of the Caribbean is thus reminiscent of Walcott's claim that history ought to be accepted as it is without nostalgia or a sense of revenge. For Antoni this acceptance of the past seems to imply an acknowledgement of the various religious, cultural and ethnic groups that

have influenced the Caribbean in general and Trinidad in particular. The 'callaloo'-like society portrayed in *Divina Trace* thus ironically illustrates the concept of a creolised Caribbean archipelago praised in *Eloge de la créolité* to a greater extent than *Texaco*. Antoni highlights the productive transformation of the various cultural influences on culturally and ethnically creolised Trinidadian communities. By subtly merging various cultural beliefs and ethnic traditions, the Anglophone writer transposes some of the Creolists' claims to the Anglophone Caribbean. His novel thus indicates that the ideas developed in the discourse of *créolité* are not necessarily restricted to the Francophone Caribbean context.

As my textual analysis has revealed, the culturally heterogeneous Caribbean societies have been characterised by different forms of creolisation, within and across different ethnic groups. I would contend that this ethnic, cultural, linguistic and historical diversity of Caribbean societies has to be accounted for by literary critics in a more sustained way than has so far been the case in most contemporary literary criticism. Because of the heterogeneity of the Caribbean archipelago it would be an over-generalisation to speak of 'a' Caribbean creoleness. This means that there is a need to differentiate between the creolisation that has taken place between the various ethnic groups of highly diverse societies such as the ones in *Divina Trace* and that within culturally similar groups as represented in *Texaco*.

In conclusion it has been my intention to point out differences and parallels between specific Francophone and Anglophone texts and to show that literary criticism need not pertain to one linguistic and cultural region only. I would argue that cross-cultural readings of Caribbean literature are necessary in order to see connections between general literary trends. At the same time, however, attention must be paid to the

specific cultural contexts from which the texts emerge. This paper is part of the wider project in my PhD thesis of comparing Caribbean histories and identities in Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean literature. My research can be situated within the recent and growing trend in postcolonial studies of foregrounding cross-cultural connections in Caribbean criticism and fiction and this paper is a small contribution to that process.

¹ Although scholars like Robert Young and John McLeod have recently taken more interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches in their research, such advances have been rather tentative in the field of Anglophone postcolonial studies. Due to the recent opening of French and Francophone studies towards postcolonial criticism there seems to be a growing awareness amongst Francophone intellectuals of the need for interdisciplinary readings of Caribbean literature.

² The publications of *Eloge de la créolité* (1989) by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant and five years later *The Location of Culture* (1994) by Homi K. Bhabha were placed as central to scholarly debates about notions of *créolité* amongst critics of Francophone Caribbean literature and about hybridity in the field of Anglophone postcolonial studies.

³ Maeve McCusker, “‘Troubler l’ordre de l’oubli’: Memory and Forgetting in French Caribbean Autobiography of the 1990s”, *Forum of Modern Language Studies* (October 2004), 11: 4, 438-50 (440-41).

⁴ McCusker, ‘Troubler l’ordre de l’oubli’, 440 and my analysis of critical approaches towards as well as fictional representations of Caribbean history in chapters one and two.

⁵ Reading Caribbean literature in the light of the literary trends of modernism and postmodernism, Celia Britton argues that postcolonial novels have made a ‘transition from a problematic of alienation and marginality to one of creolization, as a shift from modernity to postmodernity’, Celia Britton, ‘The (De)Construction of Subjectivity in Daniel Maximin’s *L’Île et une nuit*’, *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* (November 2001), 24: 3, 44-58 (48-9). Other critics that support Britton’s argument are, for instance, Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992); Françoise Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1995); Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: the Creole Identities of Postcolonial Literature* (Stanford, Stanford UP, 1998). In his analysis of *Divina Trace* Pattenon, too, points out the contemporary emphasis in Caribbean literature on creolisation. He contends that ‘the creolization process [...] has become history’s answer to its own dismemberment’, Richard F. Pattenon, *Caribbean Passages: A Critical Perspective on New Fiction from the West Indies* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 145.

⁶ Britton, ‘The (De)Construction of Subjectivity’, 49-50.

⁷ Although writers such as Maryse Condé in *Traversé de la mangrove* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989) and Edward Kamau Brathwaite in his collection of poems *Middle Passages* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1992) fictionally address the issues of creolisation and métissage, Chamoiseau’s and Antoni’s novels represent the combination of a rewriting of Caribbean history and the development of creolisation most explicitly. As I argue in chapter two of my PhD thesis, Pauline Melville, too, refers to the cultural diversity of the Caribbean in her novel *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), but in contrast to Chamoiseau and Antoni she interrogates the fertility of cross-cultural encounters, Angela Brüning, ‘Caribbean Connections Comparing Histories and Identities in Modern Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean Literature’, PhD thesis, work in progress, University of Stirling.

⁸ Patteson, *Caribbean Passages*, p. 144 and Solange Billano, *Discours et stratégies des romanciers de la créolité* (Mémoire de DEA, UAG / GRELCA, 195-1996, p. 34. Billano compares *Texaco* with *Le Nègre et l'amiral* (Paris: Grasset, 1988) by Raphaël Confiant, pointing out similarities in the writers' fictional representation of 'Creole' narrative structures as suggested in their *Eloge de la créolité*.

⁹ According to the medical interpretation Manuelito is an anencephalic child, which means that an excess of liquor in the womb causes a 'defective development [...] in the early embryo' (Antoni, p. 97).

¹⁰ Although several dates are included in the novel, these references to historical events and incidents in the lives of the different characters tend to contradict each other. As Hawley and Patteson point out, details about Magdalena's age and significant events in her life are inconsistent, Patteson, *Caribbean Passages*, p. 152 and John C. Hawley, S.J., 'Robert Antoni's *Divina Trace* and the Womb of Place', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 1 (Jan 1993), 24: 1, 91-104 (96). Similarly, dates in Johnny Domingo's life contradict each other. See Patteson, *Caribbean Passages*, p. 154. While accounting for an approximate time frame with the incorporation of certain dates, Antoni simultaneously underscores the fictional character of his text and interrogates the concept of linear time.

¹¹ It has to be pointed out, though, that the intertwining of the histories of the French colonising power and Martinique as well as of chronological historiography and local histories is alluded to throughout the novel. In the course of the novel as in the course of history, the relationship between *békés* and African-Antilleans grew slightly less oppositional.

¹² Through the naming of his characters Chamoiseau alludes, for instance, to cultural elements from West and Central Africa, for instance from Nigeria, Guinea and neighbouring countries. For an in-depth analysis of African elements in *Texaco* see Joseph, Nnadi, 'Mémoire d'Afrique, mémoire biblique: la congruence des mythes du nègre dans *Texaco* de Patrick Chamoiseau', *Etudes Francophones*, 15: 1 (2000), 75-91, esp. 77, 79-80 and 89, endnotes 7, 8. These regions historically represent the main areas for the French slaver trade in the nineteenth century.

¹³ Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* quoted in Charles Forsdick, 'Travelling Concepts: Postcolonial Approaches to Exoticism', *Paragrap* (2001), 24: 3, 12-29 (23).

¹⁴ Apart from East Indians low numbers of Chinese and Syrians immigrated to the Caribbean. They have, however, constituted minorities only, and they are only fleetingly referred to in *Texaco* and *Divina Trace*.

¹⁵ For a further investigation of subjectivity and identity in Chamoiseau's work, particularly in *Texaco*, see Milne, 'From Créolité to Diversalité', 170.

¹⁶ This chant praises the achievements of the first freed slaves in their creation of a 'Creole' settlement, which in turn become an ideal for subsequent Creole towns. In Esternome's chant the primarily African-Creole community assumes an almost mythical dimension.

'The Noutéka of the Hills' might be interpreted as a vision of an allegedly 'Creole' society that has created an idealised community. As pointed out earlier, I would maintain that Chamoiseau does not portray a 'Creole' society since he centres on black Martiniquans. Marie-José Jolivet points out that Chamoiseau presents a dreamlike 'Creoleness' in *Texaco*. Marie-José Jolivet, 'Les cahiers de Marie-Sophie Laborieux existent-ils? Ou Du rapport de la créolité à l'oralité et à l'écriture', *Cahiers des Sciences Humaines* 29:4 (1993), pp. 795-804 (p. 804).

¹⁷ See also Richard D. E. Burton, *Le Roman marron: études sur la littérature martiniquaise contemporaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), p. 192.

¹⁸ Lorna Milne, 'From Créolité to Diversalité: The Postcolonial Subject in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*', in *Subject Matters: Subject and Self in French Literature from Descartes to the Present*, ed. by Paul Gifford and Johnnie Gratton (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), 162-180, p. 169.

¹⁹ Milne, 'From Créolité to Diversalité', p. 169.

²⁰ Derek Walcott, 'The Muse of History: An Essay' in Orde Coombs, ed., *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press / Doubleday, 1974), pp.1-27 (esp. pp. 5, 13).

²¹ For references to different locations in Africa see Nnadi, 'Mémoire d'Afrique, mémoire biblique', 77, 89 endnotes 7-8: Madame Ibo recalls the Nigerian origin of many black Antilleans, and 'Grand papa du cachot' is presented as 'un home guinée'.

²² *Eloge de la créolité* reveals, in fact, a strong focus on the French Antilles rather than accounting for the different socio-historical developments and political statuses between the Anglophone and the Francophone Caribbean.

²³ In his discussion of *Divina Trace*, Patteson provides the reader with a good summary of the main plot of the twenty-four thousand verse long epic of the *Ramayana*. Since Patteson focuses on those aspects in the Indian epic that are relevant for a discussion of Antoni's novel, I will quote his summary of one of the many versions of the *Ramayana* in its entirety:

In the *Ramayana*, Rama is the son of Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya, by his wife Kausalya. Dasaratha also has two sons, Lakshman and Satrugna, by his wife Sumitra and another, Bharata, by his wife Kaikeyi. When he attains adulthood, Rama marries Sita, foster daughter of the king of Janaka. Sita lives in the city of Mithila (nicely transformed by Antoni into “Mythmythilia”). Eventually, Rama is banished for fourteen years through the trickery of the jealous Kaikeyi, who is ambitious for her own son. During their exile, Sita is kidnapped by Ravana, the demon ruler of the island of Lanka. The monkey demigod Hanuman [– whose version of the story constitutes, in a transformed way, the middle section of *Divina Trace* –] and his monkey army help Rama rescue Sita, and during this period Hanuman tells the embedded story of the monkey race – a subplot that to some extent parallels the main plot but which is probably much older (Patteson, *Caribbean Passages*, p. 159).

²⁴ Patteson, *Caribbean Passages*, p. 159.

²⁵ Evelina is the Domingos’ black servant.

²⁶ See, for instance, Walcott, ‘Muse’; Wilson Harris, ‘History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas’ in Hena Maes-Jelinek, ed., *Wilson Harris: Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles 1966-1981* (Mundelstrup : Dangaroo Press, 1981), pp. 20-42; Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997); Bernabé et al., *Eloge de la créolité*.

²⁷ This interpretation of the meaning of Barto as a destroyer figure can be substantiated with the underlying positive tone of the novel and the emphasis on beginning rather than end. As Johnny points out, ‘[t]here is no end to any of this. There is only beginning, and between, and beginning again’ (*DT*, p. 62). The two versions of the *Ramayana* as passed on by Valmiki and Magdalnea respectively as well as the contesting stories that form one of the plots in *Divina Trace* illustrate the creative potential associated with myth and story making.

²⁸ Other contemporary writers who emphasise the dynamic nature of Caribbean societies are, for instance, Shani Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (London: Granta, 1996) as well as Neil Bissoondath, *Innocence of Age* (Toronto: Knopf, 1992) and *A Casual Brutality* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988) as well as Caryl Phillips, *Crossing the River* (London: Pan Books, 1994), Maryse Condé, *Traverser la mangrove* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989) and *Chair Piment* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2002), Edouard Glissant, *Mahagony: roman* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987).

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