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Frenchness and its Peripheries in Daniel Boukman's *Delivrans!* And Jean Barbeau's *Manon Lastcall*

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Literary and critical scholars in French studies have long sought to understand cogently the literary production of French-speakers outside the Hexagon. Even today, when the French colonial empire is a distant memory, literary and cultural production in French remains highly centralized with Paris as its focal point. Of course, there have been various attempts to change this dynamic. In their own ways Aimé Césaire's concept of *négritude*, Edward Glissant's notion of *antillanité* and Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé and Raphaël's praise of *créolité* have all offered imperfect solutions to this issue of French hegemony. More recently, notable French-speaking authors have advocated for a more open identity as a counterweight to the French center in the 2007 manifesto *Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français*, first published in *Le Monde*. Trumpeting "l'émergence d'une littérature-monde en langue française consciemment affirmée, ouverte sur le monde, transnationale" (3) the manifesto's authors have declared the "fin de la francophonie" (1). According to this sort of "révolution copernicienne," the French center "n'est plus le centre," but instead it is "désormais partout, aux quatre coins du monde" (1). This new paradigm has not been without controversy, of course, especially in terms of its connection—or not—to past intellectual paradigms.¹

Nonetheless, for the heirs of *négritude*, the fundamental question remains: can *littérature-monde* as a critical theory finally decenter French literary studies, or will France and its cultural values maintain their privileged position of cultural locus? More practically, how might the theory of *littérature-monde* and its antecedent *créolité* help readers avoid the dual impulses of exaggerating difference among non-Hexagonal French speakers to the point of radical alterity while also

resisting what Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant refer to in *Eloge de la Créolité* (1993) as “fausse universalité” (28).

With these questions in mind, I propose a transnational and transhistorical reading of two plays, *Manon Lastcall* (1972) by the Québécois author and playwright Jean Barbeau, and *Delivrans! Une farce sérieuse* (1995) by the Martiniquan author and playwright Daniel Boukman. Using the paradigm of *littérature-monde* as my critical background, I analyze these works to reveal the ways in which both texts attempt to articulate “authentic” identities in relation to an alienating French one. The texts do this by focusing on questions of language and register and their intersection with physical spaces. Read together, I argue that these texts from so-called peripheral regions of the French-speaking world push back and challenge the identity pressures emanating from the hexagonal center. By doing so, these texts advocate a reevaluation of the terms of French-speaking identity outside of France. Ultimately, these texts champion a French-speaking identity that is both authentically rooted in a specific cultural and linguistic geography, but also open to the larger world.

Boukman and Barbeau’s texts are heavily tied to specific cultural and historical periods. Barbeau’s interest in socio-linguistic tensions in Québec are part of the larger language debates that arose in the 1960s and 1970s. Out of this debate will come the language laws and the *Charte de la langue française*. For Boukman, his work comes at a time when the notions of *antillanité* and *créolité* were slowly supplementing—or supplanting—older notions of *négritude*. The historicity of the texts poses a challenge as we avoid engaging in arguments that are passé. I do not wish to refight past debates. Instead, I use *littérature-monde*’s emphasis on decentering to show how we might breathe new analytical life into texts that are anchored in time to very specific socio-political concerns. This approach allows me to place into dialogue these texts from very different places and times. What unites these works is less the overt problems of social class, gender and race—although such readings could be fruitful—than their shared resistance to cultural hegemony emanating from a Parisian center. Although these are not the only texts that resist this center, I have chosen these works because I find them to be especially poignant examples of this phenomenon.

Furthermore, what makes these works ripe for renewed critical analysis by new intellectual models is the fact that these texts have been under studied. In a word, they are marginal texts that live in the

shadows of more well-known works.² Their marginality, thus, adds a new layer to this dynamic between center and periphery. As ultra-peripheral texts, these works reflect and engage with discourses from the margins of the margins. As my analysis will show, they provide conclusions that challenge and complicate the discourses of otherness that came from their respective geographical locations. Therefore, they enrich our understanding of identity discourses in the French-speaking world outside of France.

My argument rests on the proposition that both Martinique and Québec must navigate identity in relationship to Frenchness. Yet, “Frenchness” or *francité*, is a slippery term and difficult to define in a totalizing way. Martiniquans, for example, are *both* “French” and Antilleans. Similarly, before the rise of the term “Québécois” these French-speakers were both “French” and “Canadian.” Frenchness, has thus always been part of their identity makeup. Nonetheless, a lingering sense of alterity remains. Therefore, in this work I will follow the lead of Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant by defining “Frenchness,” as “l’adoption conjointe de la langue française et de ses valeurs” (34). This is not to say this is the only definition of “Frenchness,” but it is helpful because it highlights the centrality of language in the articulation of identity and the intersection of language and culture—*valeurs*. In conjunction with this definition of Frenchness, I will use the term “authentic identities” to describe an identity anchored culturally and linguistically to Martinique and Québec, respectively.

The interplay between French and its local linguistic rivals unites the Francophone experiences of the New World, both North and South. In Québec and the French-speaking Caribbean, local languages and dialects—Creole in Martinique and *Joual* in Québec—have developed alongside standard French in a diglossic, hierarchical, relationship. In other words, differences in language and register are deeply tied to questions of class and are the symptoms of deeply ingrained power structures, with French on top. As such, the mere presence of *Joual* and Creole in a literary form is a provocative act. Doing so puts into the question the linguistic and socio-political hierarchy and blurs the nice clean binaries of public/private, high/low, oral/written. In short, the linguistic medium is the message of these texts.

Jean Barbeau was born outside of Québec City in 1945 and attended the *Université de Laval* in 1968 to study theatre. At the time, it

was France—and not Québec—that first inspired Barbeau. As he commented in a 1986 interview, “The question of Quebec theatre never arose . . . There was no course on Quebec drama at Laval University [. . .] it was theatre itself that first interested me, not Quebec theatre” (Smith 320). Disillusioned with the disconnect between his studies and the changing world around him, Barbeau began to take interest in the social and identity consequences of the popular speech of Québec—*Joual*.

Barbeau’s engagement with Québécois identity and the *Joual* dialect came as a reaction to the omnipresence of Parisian French and its cultural values in 1960s Québec. As Barbeau remarked in the same interview, “When I put the Frenchman from France and the Québécois on stage at the same time . . . the spectators could easily understand how ridiculous [the Frenchman] came across and how *genuine* [the Québécois] was” (323 my emphasis). As this citation suggests, Barbeau believes the only way to represent authentically the socio-cultural reality of the Québécois is through their language. Finding the “right” accent is thus a way for Barbeau to discover his proper authorial voice and identity in opposition to the weight of “standard” French.

Although the title rifts on Abbé Prévost’s canonical *Manon Lescaut*, the characters of Barbeau’s *Manon Lastcall* are only tangentially related to Prévost’s story of Des Grieux and Manon, the latter of whom, we will recall, dies on the hostile American soil. Instead, Barbeau’s text revolves around the relationship between Maurice, a bourgeois and well-educated museum curator, who yields impeccable “standard” French and Manon, a “fille de joie,” who speaks a lyrical *Joual*. Manon enters Maurice’s world after a drunken tryst, which she uses to blackmail him into offering her a job as a guide at the fictionalized museum of Québec. Having infiltrated the museum, Manon brings popular speech and opinions into the hitherto Frenchified and bourgeois space. At the same time, she slowly reveals Maurice’s linguistic and cultural alienation from Québécois popular culture.

Given the preponderance of the French canon in his intellectual upbringing, it is unsurprising that Barbeau pushes back against it ironically in the title of his play. By bastardizing the title of Prévost’s work, Barbeau points to the way in which the text will play with notions of cultural mixing. *Manon Lastcall* references both “high” French culture through its literary allusion, and also “low,” pub life culture through its reference to Manon’s “last call.” The title, thus,

already foreshadows the content of the work, which puts into question the exclusionary culture of Frenchness,

Likewise, the choice of museum as the backdrop for the play is revealing as it represents a closed and privileged space both culturally and linguistically. Indeed, Maurice’s first words in the play reveal the constrictive nature of his surroundings. While on the telephone to a nun who has presumably misdialed, Maurice explains, “Non, ma soeur, ce n’est pas la prison de Québec . . . c’est le musée . . .” (24). But, once the comparison is made, the audience is forced to ask, are prisons and museums really all that different? Like a prison, a museum both prevents what is inside from getting out, and limits entry to outside elements. Within this metaphor, the “prisoner” of a museum is culture, or at least a certain idea of what culture should be. Moreover, Maurice, is also a metaphorical prisoner both of his job as curator and of his Frenchified bourgeois existence, which he detests. At the same time, he is also a warden of culture and language in his role as curator / *conservateur*. In short, he is both slave and master of the museum. As proof of his personal loathing, the narration suggests that Maurice is an alcoholic. Indeed, alcohol allows him to escape his rarified world and to lower the figurative walls around his true self, represented by his speaking of *Joual*. As Manon remarks, “tu étais bien joué hier soir” (26) under the influence of alcohol. This play on words—*joualé* references both his state of intoxication and his use of popular speech—suggests that Maurice’s Frenchness is a mere façade.

What Maurice is attempting to *conserve* as the *conservateur* is an elite, linguistically “standard” French perspective of culture. Thus, Manon’s “corrupted” language and popular culture are especially threatening to Maurice’s sense of propriety. The juxtaposition of linguistic registers reveals the distance that separates Manon and Maurice at the beginning of the text:

Maurice – Qu’est-ce qui me vaut l’honneur et le plaisir d’avoir été dérangé dans mon travail par votre charmante, distinguée, et discrète personne?

Manon – Ris pas d’moé, toé, parce que . . . si tu sais pas ce que c’est que la clé d’bras japonaise, tu va l’apprendre.

Maurice – la clé de bras japonaise? J’en perds mon latin, moi. (27)

In this exchange, Maurice's language drips with sarcasm as he uses the most polished vocabulary to speak of Manon who is decidedly lacking in charm, distinction, and discretion. Maurice's pretentious language only heightens the gulf between his register and the popular dialect of Manon. Moreover, through his exaggerated formality Maurice attempts to commit a form of linguistic violence against Manon. That is to say, by employing such refined language Maurice appears to want to confuse Manon in order to make her leave his office. He hopes she is unable to stand up to the pressure of his formal register. Manon, however, turns the tables. Faced with this metaphorical, linguistic violence, Manon threatens Maurice with physical violence. Ironically, her reference to the *clé de bras japonaise* comes from a vocabulary that Maurice is unfamiliar with, causing him to lose his wording. In this way, Manon has the last laugh in the exchange as she destabilizes Maurice linguistically and not vice versa. She has infiltrated the museum, this exclusive repository of "Culture," and made a stand against the arbiters of it.

As the citation above reveals, the uneasy juxtaposition of Maurice's French with Manon's *Joual* leads to funny and revelatory misunderstanding, especially on the part of Maurice. Maurice's confusion before Manon shows the extent of his cultural and linguistic alienation. In fact, at several moments in the text Maurice seems not to have understood Manon at all: "Hein? . . . Plaît-il" (24); "j'en perds mon latin, moi" (27); "je ne suis pas sûr de bien comprendre" (26); and "je ne comprends pas un seul mot de ce que vous dites" (27). Manon, on the other hand, has no problem understanding Maurice. It is Maurice, thus, who is disadvantaged in the exchange despite his elite education and place in the social hierarchy. This suggests that Maurice is highly resistant to the popular culture and speech of Manon because he has internalized an inauthentic European French, cut off from Québec's reality.

Undeterred, Maurice continues to try and correct Manon. Doing so allows him to make himself into the arbiter of proper French. The vocabulary surrounding the car is an especially fruitful terrain to see this attempt at continual correction:

Manon – T'as un char, toé?

Maurice – J'ai une auto-moile, oui.

Manon – Chrysler d'l'année, bleu royal, power-brake, power-stéring, bucket seat . . .

Maurice – Chrysler de l'année, bleue royale, freins et conduit assistés, siège baquet . . . (28)

In this exchange, Maurice tries to silence Manon's *Joual* through correction. He refuses to accept her terminology and thus refuses to accept the Québécois language and reality that Manon represents. Instead, he offers more "standard" French automotive terms in order to insist on his own Frenchness. For Maurice, language is power, and proximity to "standard" French is the measure of this symbolic power. Correction is, thus, his way to claim it.

Nonetheless, throughout the text, the narrative voice subtly plays with this notion of what is more "French"—is it the *Joual* of Manon or the Hexagonal French of Maurice? For example, in the citation above Manon refers to a "char" which, according to the *Trésor de la langue française*, is older than the term "automobile." Similarly, later in the text, Manon uses the term, "pris quelqu'un sur le pouce" while Maurice refers to "des autos-stoppeurs" (28). In this example, it would seem that Manon comes up with the more "French" version. Taken together, these examples make clear that the narrative voice is trying to destabilize the notion of what "proper" French is. To wit, Barbeau has noted that an attack on anglicisms is not the focus of his *oeuvre's* critique: "I don't react to anglicisms with any feeling of disdain . . . I just want people to realize they can use anglicisms as long as they are aware of it, because often it's more practical" (Smith 323). Therefore, Barbeau's linguistic grievance is not that French is "contaminated" by English, which often provides useful terms. Nor is his text a reaction to the hegemony of English or Anglo-Saxon language and culture, as one might assume given the political context of Québec. Rather, the French language and its cultural domination are squarely in the text's sights: "We have to get beyond the reactions of French people who laugh at our accent. It's time they accepted us as we are" (Smith 323). He could have also added that it is time the Québécois accept themselves as they are. Read in this way, Barbeau's text represents a reaction against the weight of Frenchness that the Québécois feel each time they open their mouths to speak. The dynamic between Maurice and Manon is thus a meditation on how to come to terms with one's Quebeckness. The play fundamentally reveals an acute existential problem for the Québécois.

Indeed, when Manon arrives at the museum to claim the job that Maurice had promised her she represents a threat to Maurice's notion of high—Frenchified—culture. At first Maurice attempts simply to deny her entry: "Écoutez. Je n'aime guère les plaisanteries de ce genre, et je vous prierais de sortir de mon bureau immédiatement" (25). Soon his blood begins to boil, "Sortez d'ici immédiatement, ou je vous fais expulser, *manu militari*" (29). This threat of literal violence, which the term *manu militari* suggests, joins Maurice's linguistic violence already witnessed by audience. The question remains, however, as to why the presence of Manon and her *Joual* are threatening to Maurice?

Maurice's resistance to Manon is more than a reaction against her blackmailing of him. She threatens the very of essence of Maurice's walled-off world. She must be contained, if not completely banned from this closed space. Even when Manon does succeed in blackmailing her way into a job, Maurice tries at first to relegate her to the margins of the museum as part of the janitorial staff. Manon, however, refuses this "p'tit jobine à trente sous" (36) that Maurice offers in an effort to silence her. Instead of looking at the floor, Manon wants to lift her head and gaze upon the adorned walls of the museum. Manon insists that she has a right to have an opinion on art even without any formal training or knowledge: "Toutes les vues belles, pis tristes, ça m'fait brailler comme si j'épluchais cent douzaines d'oignons" (37). When Manon is hired as a guide, her folksiness pays dividends. The number of visitors to the museum doubles as word of Manon's special tours spreads far and wide. Manon's presence opens this closed space to the larger Québécois public. As Ritz Deitz suggests in article "Up Against the *Joual*: Dépaysements linguistiques et le théâtre québécois," Manon's tours succeed in "réanimant l'intérêt des Québécois pour leur patrimoine culturelle" (218). Manon's tours spark both increased interest among Québécois for their culture, but also highlights the instability of the binaries of "high" (Frenchified) and "low" (*Joual*) cultures. It is her "lowly" speech that makes the "high" culture of the museum accessible to the masses.

On a deeply symbolic level, thus, Manon represents a "contamination" of the French and bourgeois space of the museum. As the following exchange reveals:

Manon – Pis, toutes les filles que t'embarques, leu-promets-tu des jobs?

Maurice – Leur promettre des . . . des . . .

Manon – Dis-lé . . . des jobs. As-tu peur de salir ton beau langage?

Maurice – Ce n'est pas dans mes habitudes de promettre des . . . des . . .
'un job' aux gens que je ramasse sur le bord de la route. (30)

In this quotation the use of the word "salir" (to dirty) to talk about language is revealing as it highlights the juxtaposition of Manon's "dirty" language and Maurice's proper / clean French—or *un français propre*. Manon's tours open the museum up to the masses and *their* dirty French.

Maurice is not alone in his fear of "contamination" by *Joual* and its cultural values. The Minister of Cultural Affairs, Maurice's boss, explicitly notes the "danger" of *Joual* in the museum: "Mais . . . elle parle *joual*," which, "met la culture . . . en danger;" Manon is a "fléau qui [. . .] mine [la culture]" (48. My brackets). This choice of vocabulary evokes images of an epidemic and infestation. Indeed, the term *miner* is associated with pests and rodents. In contrast, the Minister of Culture serves as the sanitizing "flambeau." In short, Manon is an "outrag[e] [à] la langue française, la peinture et [le Ministre]" (49, 50) because she threatens the boundaries of the museum that attempts to wall off "culture" as something for the "right" kind of people, who speak the "right" kind of French.

Manon not only "contaminates" the museum, but her presence also threatens to "contaminate" Maurice's sense of identity, tied to his use of proper / *propre* French. Her relentless use of common speech takes its toll, and Maurice begins to slip into his authentic *Joual*. At first he attempts self-correction: "C'est moé-même . . . c'est moi qui vous ai . . ." (27); "J'ai dit ça moé . . . euh! Moi?" (29); and "La semaine passé, alors que tu n'étais . . . Pardon . . . alors que vous n'étiez pas guide" (43). In these instances the audience recognizes the "deterioration" of Maurice's French towards *Joual*. His linguistic slips reveal the full extent of his cultural alienation and the artificiality of his French *persona*. More than a simple linguistic quirk, Maurice's code-switching is highly relevant in a diglossic situation because of the socio-cultural weight associated with language. As Monic Heller writes, "Code-switching [is] a means of drawing on symbolic resources and deploying them in order to gain or deny access to other resources, symbolic or

material" (160). In other words, code-switching implies a break in the unwritten socio-cultural code within a larger hierarchical cultural structure. Thus, not only does the barrier between French and *Joual* begin to crumble, but so also does the barrier between "low" and "high" culture.

Moreover, Maurice's auto-correction suggests that *Joual* exists just below the surface of his mask of Frenchness. At the end of the work, when Maurice decides to "commence [s]a petite révolution culturelle" (52) by leaving his equally Frenchified wife and work, it seems clear that Maurice has finally become cognizant of his authentic Québécois identity. His last lines in the play are, in fact, in *Joual*, "T'as ben raison, Manon" (51); "Cinq heures, on farme" (55). Hand in hand Manon and Maurice leave the museum in a gesture of solidarity between classes and socio-linguistic cultures.

Even if *Joual* becomes the *lingua franca* of the characters at the end of the play, it is revealing that the characters' final decision is to travel to France to visit the Louvre. Over the course of the play Maurice experiences moments of recognition, perhaps even a rebirth, of the *Joual* part of his Québécois identity. Yet neither he nor Manon rejects France and Frenchness outright. On the contrary, by returning to France—in an inversion of the plot of its namesake *Manon Lescaut*—Maurice and Manon challenge center-periphery notions of culture. The text suggests that this *Joual* identity is ultimately reconcilable with the notion of Frenchness, or with a sense of belonging to a larger francophone community. Moreover, the Louvre is not just French, but represents a mecca of worldwide cultural productions from all cultures and languages. Therefore, Maurice's rediscovery of the *Joual* part of his identity does not lead to a withdrawal into the confines of a Québécois identity, but actually allows him to open himself to the larger world. His *Joual* cultural revolution moves to the French center, potentially recrystallizing the terms of international French-speaking identity.

Although separated by time and space, Daniel Boukman's work *Délivrants! Une farce sérieuse* dovetails well with Barbeau's meditation on authentic identity. Like Barbeau, Boukman grew up with France as a privileged point of reference in his education. Born in 1936 in Martinique to a monolingual French-speaking family, Boukman left Martinique in 1954 to attend the Sorbonne where he studied Classics. In 1961 Boukman took refuge in Algeria where he worked closely with

the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN). Long exiled from France for his involvement in the FLN, Boukman was granted amnesty in 1975 and allowed to return to his native Martinique. In the 1970s Boukman became particularly interested in the Creole language and its ability to express the socio-cultural reality of the Antilles. As he recounted to Stéphanie Bérard in 2004:

J'ai écrit essentiellement en français. Et je me suis aperçu en 1976 [. . .] qu'il y avait quelque chose qui n'allait pas. Je voulais faire un théâtre militant, tant sur le plan esthétique que par le choix du thème, or il y avait une contradiction: Comment faire ce théâtre en évacuant un élément fondamentalement politique, à savoir la langue, la langue parlée par le peuple, par ceux qui sont les porteurs d'espoir de changement? (Bérard. My brackets)

Boukman brought his desire to write an engaged theatre to fruition in his 1995 play *Délivrants! Une farce sérieuse*. This play represents his return to theatre after an absence of almost twenty years and is his first bilingual play. The interplay between French and Creole in the text serves as a reflection on identity in Martinique as he reinvests Creole with its political force.

Indeed, the play's central concern is the articulation of an authentic Creolophone identity in relation to French cultural and linguistic hegemony. The text presents the story of M. Cupidon, a black Martiniquan school teacher, who has alienated himself from his Antillean heritage and the Creole language, replacing them with the cultural and linguistic "mask" of Frenchness. Raised in a Creolophone home and as a descendant of slaves, M. Cupidon is the quintessential example of colonial mimicry. Although M. Cupidon's actions are ridiculous and humorous, the text ultimately suggests that these alienating cultural practices are serious. Thus, the play's oxymoronic subtitle, "une farce sérieuse," becomes clear. M. Cupidon is a walking, talking contradiction. The audience should both laugh at M. Cupidon but also take heed of his lesson about cultural and linguistic authenticity.

M. Cupidon's alienation from his native culture is most easily seen in his home, which he has fashioned into an oasis of metropolitan Frenchness. Through technology and isolation, M. Cupidon continually attempts to keep Martinique outside his doors. For example, M.

Cupidon listens only to metropolitan French radio where “débite un bulletin météo où il est question de neige et de verglas sur les routes” (3). Obviously, this information is irrelevant for M. Cupidon who lives thousands of miles away from the Parisian ice storm. Similarly, the closed windows of his house are meant to silence his native island with “[s]es musiques bamboula” (4) and “[s]es rumeurs visqueuses, des éclats de voix, des rires insupportables” (9). Indeed, a leitmotiv appears early on in the play where Hortense, the maid, opens the windows of the house only to be reprimanded in short order by M. Cupidon. As he commands with increasing frustration, “Tenir cette fenêtre fermée” (1); “Cette fenêtre doit demeurer fermée” (Boukman 5); “Ouvrez donc la fenêtre . . . surtout pas!” (9) and finally “FENÊTRE!” (30). This recurring theme reminds the audience that M. Cupidon’s home is artificially French and a veritable fortress against Martiniquan language and culture. Together the closed windows and French media reveal how M. Cupidon attempts to live virtually in France, voluntarily cut off from Martinique.

Indeed, M. Cupidon bans all cultural markers of Martinique and replaces them with overt and often absurd signs of Frenchness. He rejects the fresh air of the Antilles for sterile air-conditioning. The orality of La Fontaine’s fables replaces the authentic oral tradition of Creole tales. M. Cupidon forsakes the rum of the Antilles for European whisky. Even European beet sugar is preferable to the native cane. Together, these examples reveal a systematic rejection of authentic cultural materialism for their French equivalents.

M. Cupidon prefers the signs of Frenchness even when they are ludicrous for the local context. For example, he imagines with his wife the bright future of their son Athanase, who is away at French university, when he will make “son retour au pays natal” (11). As a successful functionary Athanase will produce “un gazouillis de nouveau-nés! . . . [avec leur] peuplade de blonde poupées Barbie . . . Patins à glace . . . blanche-neige . . . un deux, trois, quatre, cinq blousons de cuir, avec au dos, brodée, la tour Eiffel” (11). Obviously, ice skates and leather jackets are out of place in the Antilles. The implication, thus, is that success can only be gauged by proximity to the Parisian center, no matter the reality on the ground. In this way, the text serves a healthy dose of derision and humor in order to mock the characters of M. Cupidon and his wife, who represent a satirical

vision of “Europeanized” Blacks among some members of the Martiniquan community.

Race, although a minor aspect of the overall work, cannot be ignored in the quotations above. In M. Cupidon’s desire to see his grandchildren play with Snow White and blond Barbies, the informed reader hears clearly the echo of Franz Fanon and his work *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Indeed, M. Cupidon appears to be the living embodiment of what Fanon called the desire of certain colonized peoples to “se blanchir” (60) culturally and linguistically. Clearly, M. Cupidon represents what Fanon called “l’internalisation—ou mieux—l’épidémisation—de cette infériorité” (11) of colonized people. Therefore, M. Cupidon’s rejection of Martiniquan cultural signs for French ones is a way to prove his belonging to White French society. As Fanon argued,

Tout peuple colonisé—c’est-à-dire tout peuple au sein duquel a pris naissance un complexe d’infériorité, du fait de la mise au tombeau de l’originalité culturelle locale—se situe vis-à-vis du langage de la nation civilisatrice, c’est-à-dire de la culture métropolitaine. Le colonisé se sera d’autant plus échappé de sa brousse qu’il aura fait siennes les valeurs culturelles de la métropole. Il sera d’autant plus blanc qu’il aura rejeté sa noirceur, sa brousse. (37-38)

Seen in this light, M. Cupidon’s cultural and linguistic isolation is the embodiment *par excellence* of his desire to renounce “sa noiceur, sa brousse.” The figurative and literal walls that M. Cupidon has erected around himself are a response to this desire to become (White) French. They act as a bulwark against his native Martinique and reveal a deep sense of shame of his Martiniquan identity.

Unsurprisingly, M. Cupidon also sees the Creole language as a sign of linguistic inferiority. Over the course of the play, M. Cupidon presents himself as the guardian of the French language. As he says to his parakeet Démosthène, “Ici, pas parler créole! Parler français” and “Pas de tam-tam ni de créole sous mon toit! Respectez la langue française” (32). Creole is not even good enough to be spoken by, and to, an animal. As M. Cupidon states, in a bit of dramatic irony, “[Parler en Créole!] Jamais! Quelle horreur! Vous voulez l’ensauvager [la peruche]?” (32). Creole threatens to make this domesticated animal wild again (*ensauvager*). M. Cupidon, who goes so far as to use the

formal *vous* with his parakeet, associates Creole, thus, with notions of beastliness, wildness, and pre-civilization.

However, despite M. Cupidon's best efforts, he cannot stop the intrusion of Creole. As he exclaims when reading over a dictation that Hortense has written, "Sacrebleu! Que de monstruosité orthographiques! Oh ! là ! là ! Papillon ne s'écrit pas P A P I Y O N, mais P A P I, deux L, O N . . ." (3). It is important to note that this is the first example of written Creole in the text. For a character like M. Cupidon, however, Creole is not *supposed* to be written. At best, Creole is a corrupt oral language. This scene represents, thus, in microcosmic form the stakes of the text. That is to say, the appearance of Creole in written form is already a provocative gesture that points to the larger message of the work. M. Cupidon shows, unwittingly, that Creole *can* be written, and thus holds, potentially, the same status as French. In denouncing it, he reveals the possibility of it.

M. Cupidon's cannot keep up his charade forever, and the walls of Frenchness begin to falter and crack. Creole creeps in furtively at first and only when the Master is away: "Lè chat pa la, rat ka bay bal" (Quand le chat n'est pas là, les souris dansent) (4). These words, pronounced by Hortense, reveal a double significance within the context of diglossia. Not only is she referencing the relative freedom of her person while M. Cupidon is away, but she also is making a comment on her freedom to express herself in Creole.

It is, however, Démosthène, M. Cupidon's parakeet, which finally pushes his master to speak in Creole in a moment of anger, "wouvè djôl'ou" —*ouvre ta gueule* (22). At these words the text takes a surrealistic turn. In a clap of thunder, four figures "géantes, à la voix caverneuse" (22) appear to scold M. Cupidon for having transgressed his linguistic code. In this Dickensian scene, these spectral characters, representing the Father, the Teacher, the Sergeant, and the Priest, stand in for the central pillars of French and Frenchness. These reproaching voices are the agents of socialization tasked with creating *petits Français*. Moreover, the otherworldly nature of the scene suggests that M. Cupidon has internalized these protectors and guardians of French. Therefore, this moment of anger and the resulting Creole and the mental pain associated with it reveal the artificiality of M. Cupidon's mask of Frenchness. For a brief moment, the mask is dropped, and the text lays bare the extent, and the source, of M. Cupidon's cultural and linguistic alienation.

From this moment on, Creole slowly invades the play until it completely replaces French in Athanase's final monologue. Up until this point, Athanase, M. Cupidon's absent son in Paris, is talked about in the play, but he is never seen. Until this scene he represents a blank slate onto which his parents hope to impose their idealized image. This absence is important in so far as it suggests that Athanase's model of Creole identity has not yet found its way home. He has not yet returned to his native land. What his model of identity actually entails is a refocusing of identity away from a dogmatic imitation of Frenchness. Indeed, on the cassette recording Athanase sends to his parents, he rejects his European education, his training to be a *fonctionnaire*, and the "French" cage in which he has been confined. As Athanase proclaims in Creole:

J'ai fait des études de fonctionnaire [. . .]
Mais il y a quelques années
J'ai eu une envie folle de vomir
Enfant de cœur latin, grec, violon,
fonctionnaire
Ma tête, elle allait éclater!

Alors
au plus profond de moi-même
J'ai regardé j'ai vu
j'ai écouté j'ai entendu

mon cœur
a libéré mon âme
mon âme
a ouvert la cage emprisonnant mon esprit [. . .]

j'ignore encore
au sommet de quel arbre
j'irai me poser

Man fè lètid fonksyonè [. . .]
Mé sa ka fè dé twa lanné
An sèl lanvi vonmi anni pran mwen !
Akolit laten grèk viyolon
fonksyonè
Tèt-mwen té près pété !

Alô
An'didan fondôk kô'mwen
Man gadé man wè
Man kouté man tan

Tjè'mwen
Démaré nanm'mwen
Nanm'mwen
Wouvè kalôj lèspri'mwen [. . .]

Man pôkô sav
Anlè fètay ki pyébwa
Man ké pozé.
(32)

As this monologue suggests, Athanase represents a foil to his father's alienation. Athanase readily embraces his Martiniquan identity and rejects the false signs of Frenchness that have been forced upon him. However, he articulates his identity within the context of the modern world, the cassette tape. Again, the medium is the message.

That is to say, by employing technology to transmit this “letter” to his parents, Athanase suggests that creolity and modernity are not in opposition, but in fact complementary. Indeed, through the cassette tape, Athanase has translated Creole’s orality to the modern context, revealing that orality is not pre-modern or antiquated. Furthermore, in an ironic twist, Athanase uses Western technology to decry his “Classical” European education—Greek, Latin, and violin. Yet the fact that he has mastered these subjects while preserving his Creole identity shows that creolity is reconcilable with contemporary, i.e. European, standards of sociocultural success. Therefore, Frenchness and creolity are not inherently exclusive identities. In fact, Athanase’s choice to remain in France suggests that he can remain Creole and French.

Therefore, Athanase does not reject one set of strict identity codes in favor of a new set of Creole ones. By moving first towards his Creole interior—“au plus profond de moi-même”—Athanase is then able to open himself up to larger world, to break the “cage emprisonnant [s]on esprit.” He refuses to replace the closed, Frenchified, space of his father’s home with the same Creole isolationism. Fundamentally, thus, Athanase is calling for a creolity that is open to the world. As he declares to his parents, he has evolved from a “jako-répèt” (parakeet), like his father’s pet bird Démosthène, mimicking French linguistic and cultural norms into “an toutwèl,” a liberated turtledove (33). Freed from the cage of French hegemony, Athanase gazes into the future optimistically wondering to what summits he will fly. This is not a rejection of the larger world, but an embracing of it. Instead of the false universality of Frenchness, Athanase suggests that by embracing his Creole identity he can finally see through the myopic values of Frenchness. Moreover, Athanase’s transformation is meant to be a model for the larger Creolophone audience to whom he asks rhetorically, in Creole, “Porteurs de masques, quand cesserez-vous de jouer au jeu de l’hypocrisie” (33).

In both Boukman and Barbeau’s texts we see the continued weight of France and its linguistic and cultural signs in the former colonies. Frenchness and the French language remain a center that pushes other identities to the periphery. Maurice and M. Cupidon represent an older, universal French model that is fundamentally alienating. Athanase and Maurice, post-Manon, represent a different authentic path. Yet these texts are not calling for us to replace the French center with a Québec or Caribbean center, but to do away with the idea of center and

periphery altogether. Athanase and Maurice’s awareness of their respective alienation does not lead to the destruction of one set of walls, the walls of French and Frenchness, in order to erect new ones around some mythical notion of *créolité* or Quebecness.

On the contrary, in their call for authentic cultural and socio-linguistic identities, Boukman and Barbeau’s texts view Frenchness and French as components, among others, in the construction of identities among French-speaking communities. In this enunciation of authentic identities anchored in local realities, yet still open to the world, we hear the echoes both of *créolité* and *littérature-monde*. These texts are an invitation to “bâtir le monde en pleine conscience du monde” (13) in the same spirit of Confiant, Chamoiseau and Bernabé’s *créolité*. At the same time, they share with *littérature-monde* the notion that “la langue délivrée devient l’affaire de tous, et que, si l’on s’y tient fermement, c’en sera fini des temps du mépris et de la suffisance” (4). Rather than a call for disdain (*mépris*) for France or a sense of self-importance, these works long for a new configuration of the French-speaking world. Hopefully, this new world will be built with fewer walls, fewer centers, and fewer peripheries.

NOTES

¹ As Lydia Moudileno asks in her chapter “From Pré-littérature to Littérature-monde: Postures, Neologisms, Prophecies” from the 2013 study *Antillanité, Créolité, Littérature-monde*, “can we really speak of a continuum from ‘pre-littérature’ to ‘littérature-monde; or instead, are there important disjuncture that need to be accounted for” (15)? Is *littérature-monde*, in fact, a radical break from past critical models or merely a continuation of them?

² I am thinking specifically of texts which comment on language, culture, and imitation of “French” cultural values, like Jean-Paul Desbien’s *Les Insolences du Frère Untel* (1960) and Michel Tremblay’s *Les Belles Soeurs* (1965) in the Québec setting or works like Léon-Gontran Damas’ *Le Hoquet* (1939) or Aimé Césaire’s *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* (1963) in the *négritude* movement.

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Le pouvoir d'exorcisme des mots dans *Solo d'un revenant* et *L'ombre des choses à venir* : Kossi Efoui dans la perspective d'un nouvel engagement

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Les mots sont puissants. Qu'ils soient transmis oralement ou écrits dans un journal ou roman, les mots ont le pouvoir d'inciter à la violence ou de conduire à la paix. Les mots peuvent détruire notre réalité ou éblouir notre imagination. Cependant, au-delà de leur pouvoir destructif, les mots possèdent aussi bien la capacité de toucher, de guérir les cœurs meurtris et encore mieux, dans un sens spirituel, « d'exorciser ». C'est dans cette seule perspective qu'intervient l'étude de *Solo d'un revenant* et *L'ombre des choses à venir* de Kossi Efoui, qui voit dans la parole et les mots un outil dont se servent les pouvoirs politiques pour garder les citoyens dans l'ignorance, afin de mieux les exploiter. Cependant, dans le souci de mener une contre-attaque contre cette vicieuse réalité, Efoui est en mission pour saisir les mots comme une arme non seulement pour révéler aux « peuples » l'objectif réel derrière les discours politiques de « paix et espoir », mais aussi de « guérir et d'exorciser » les opprimés et les affligés qui vivent dans l'abîme du désespoir.

Les deux romans, *Solo d'un revenant* et *L'ombre des choses à venir* sont écrits par Kossi Efoui, écrivain francophone de nationalité togolaise. Persécuté par l'ancien régime dictatorial togolais à cause de ses engagements aux côtés des mouvements estudiantins en faveur de la démocratie, Efoui s'exila en France dans les années 80, pays où il vit jusqu'à ce jour.

Solo d'un revenant est une œuvre à travers laquelle l'auteur présente une nation fictive, Sud Gloria, victime d'un génocide qui a coûté la vie à des centaines de milliers de personnes, massacre dans lequel les hommes font exhibition d'une furie inouïe qui surpasse toute rage et sauvagerie animalières jamais imaginées, même dans le monde