‘The Captives are Translated, Attached at the Wrists’

A study of Antillean Identities in the works of Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé and Patrick Chamoiseau

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a study of the various interpretations of Creole identities in the French Caribbean, with reference to the literary works of three esteemed French Creole authors, namely, Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé and Patrick Chamoiseau. Due to the horrific nature of the transatlantic slave trade as well as the arrogance of former colonising nations, the true 'voice' of the slaves and their descendants – the foundation of Creole societies – has been largely silenced in the official archives of France, and threatens to disappear irretrievably. The Creole authors I discuss attempt to combat these silences through a rewriting and recreation of history through literature. As a tool in analysing the ways in which these authors have interpreted the silencing and fragmentation of their histories, I present and discuss the metaphor of the transatlantic slave trade as an act of physical and metaphorical translation. More specifically, I suggest that the Middle Passage can be seen as the translation of human bodies and identities from East to West across the Atlantic Ocean, from their origins in the continent of Africa, to the Americas and to the islands of the Antilles. Secondly, I propose that a human being can be compared to a living, literary text that contains a wealth of cultural information, language and history, a text that can be subjected to translation. In order for this metaphor be complete, I introduce a possible translator in the vast system of the transatlantic slave trade, a professional that played a major role in the translation of African captives into 'slave bodies' for France. To demonstrate how these Creole authors have interpreted their past, I discuss selected theories on the translation of a literary text and compare them to the metaphorical and literal translation of a human being. I argue that the various ways in which the literary text resists or complies to a translation into another language may reveal insights into how the transatlantic slave reacted to his own translation into slavery. Secondly, I suggest that the slave's resistance towards his or her translation into slavery may be seen to represent the resistance that Creole oral tradition displays towards a translation into the strictly linear nature of Western, written narratives. Finally, I conclude that translation can be seen as an act of resistance in itself. In translating their histories from oral tradition, myth and legend into written narrative and specifically into French literature, Creole authors display a resistance to the silencing of their histories in the oppressive narratives of the coloniser. Their literary works can thus be seen as alternative, 'conceptual' narratives that challenge the dominant, often oppressive narratives of our time.

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Toute horreur crée son gouffre
ainsi celle de la Traite à nègres qui fit de l'Atlantique
le plus grand oublié des cimetières du monde
(crânes et boulets relient les îles entre elles
et les amarrent aux tragédies du continent)[1]

[1] Chamoiseau, *Lampedusa: ce que nous disent les gouffres* (Lyon: Maison de Passages, 2013), 1.

I

INTRODUCTION

> "Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanely?"[2]
>
> Edward Said, *Orientalism*

> "Humanity is divided into two: the masters and the slaves."
>
> Aristotle, *Politics*

For over four hundred years, the Atlantic Slave Trade thrived, transferring tremendous wealth to European powers, causing the forced migration of an estimated thirteen million people from various parts of Africa to the 'New World'.[3] Estimates vary on the number of Africans captured and taken to the Caribbean and the Americas during the slave trade. E. K. Brathwaite places his estimate at 15 million, whilst Hugh Thomas mentions certain sources that offer figures as high as 50 million. Given the high death rate aboard the slave ships during the Atlantic crossing and the dishonest methods of recording these deaths, the figure may well be higher. Before entering into this terrible commerce, the French empire had already put down roots in Canada (1603), and several islands of the Caribbean (1625).[4] However France was reluctant to enter into the slave trade at first. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to engage in slave trading off the coast of Africa as far back as

[2] Said, E. *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 45.
[3] Thomas, H. *The Slave Trade: The history of the transatlantic slave trade 1440-1870* (London: Papermac, 1998)
[4] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 173.

the fifteenth century and their neighbour Spain, eager to compete, licensed the trade of slaves to the 'New World' in 1510. The infamous captain John Hawkins initiated the English slave trade in 1562, and the Dutch followed suit in the 1620s.[5] Exactly when the French "scruples" against the slave trade were discarded is unclear, but as Elizabeth Donnan, a great historian of the slave trade points out, "by the time that French planters called for negro labour for their growing sugar plantations French merchants were willing… to provide such labour."[6] And so, in the mid-1600s, the French *Traite des Noirs* began, and was responsible for the forced migration of over one million human lives to her profitable sugar plantation territories in the Antilles. Black labour was in high demand as most islands of the Caribbean Archipelago had already been violently eradicated of their indigenous populations by Spanish conquistadors,[7] as well as by French colonisation.[8] Brathwaite remarks that in fact, "with the appearance of European sail and sword and small pox, the Caribbean population of Hispaniola alone fell from 300,000 to 500 by 1548."[9] The number of slaves that perished during the long and terrible journey across the Atlantic Ocean is unknown. For those that survived, their stories have been silenced due to centuries of forced illiteracy, mingled with the myths and legends of the native islanders who dwelled there before them, or simply painted over in black and white by the powers that controlled the pen; *les colons, les planteurs;* France.

I. THE TRIANGLE

The triangular route mapped out by the slave traders and their haunting vessels has been discussed in great length as a symbol for "Creole" identity – a term coined during the slave trade and referring broadly to any person; black, white or *mulâtre*, born in the islands.[10] Despite some exceptions, this classic journey was responsible for three quarters of all slave voyages. The infamous *négriers*[11] would set off from Europe, collect slaves from the coast of Africa in exchange for European manufactured goods, transport the slaves to the Americas and trade them there for tropical produce, which had been harvested by slaves on European plantations. The final journey back to

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[5] Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 155.
[6] Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 173.
[7] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 174.
[8] Miller, C. *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 22.
[9] Brathwaite, K. "World Order Models – A Caribbean Perspective," *Caribbean Quarterly* 31 (1985): 57.
[10] Condé, M. "The Role of the Writer," *World Literature Today* 67 (1993): 699. *Mûlatre* refers to a person of mixed race.
[11] A French term referring to both a slave trader and a slave ship.

Europe transporting the raw tropical products completed the triangular voyage.[12] In their search to re-evaluate and recreate the lost history of the creole people (the descendants of slaves and indentured workers), and in an attempt to overcome the stigmatic Antillean identity as the 'illegitimate children' of France, Creole writers have come to view this triangular voyage as a means of returning to the 'homeland' by following the triangle via France and finally back to Africa. In *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,* Aimé Césaire explores the complexities of such a return, offering a solution of 'renavigating' the triangle, in an attempt to escape from its endless, cyclical motion, a solution that he calls '*véerition*'.[13] Other Antillean writers would concur with Maryse Condé, however, that, "Just as a river does not flow back to its source, the Middle Passage can only be navigated once."[14]

During the Slave Trade, very few slaves would have been able to undertake such a return voyage due to the strict regulations of the *Exclusif*, an ingenious "colonial system" drawn up by the French statesman, Colbert. It was based on the notion that the colonies were essentially to be the "economic children" of France. Their interests were to be held entirely subordinate to the fatherland – a crushing ideology that continues to resonate in Antillean Creole identity today. The restrictions of the *Exclusif* on French merchants in the Atlantic commerce served to solidify the triangle, making it the only legitimate pattern of trade. As its name suggests, the central aim of the code was to enforce "exclusivity". Trade with all other colonial empires was prohibited, as well as the direct trade between the French Caribbean and Africa, thus prohibiting any possible 'return' voyages from west to east along the 'base' of the transatlantic triangle. Everything had to pass through the apex: France.[15] Other countries drew up similar trading 'codes' such as the British "Navigation Acts". Thus, the slave trade and the Caribbean came to house one of the greatest monopolies in history, one that endured for more than three centuries. Sugar was the dominant crop, the colonies were to be "immediately dependent on their original parent" and the trade was to depend on one national monopoly company, such as the Dutch East India Company and in France, the *Compagnie des Îles*.[16] In order to grasp its monumental scale, it is essential to understand that the Transatlantic Slave Trade was a governmental enterprise: the prime investor was the state.[17] Despite its abolition over one hundred and fifty years ago, its consequences are still visible in Antillean culture as well as in global

[12] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 301.
[13] Césaire, Aimé. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1983)
[14] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle*, 55.
[15] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 55.
[16] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 189.
[17] Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 298.

society, politics and economic opportunity. The Slave Trade ensured that all profit, wealth, luxury and social freedom flowed in one direction: towards the *métropole.*

II. THE MIDDLE PASSAGE AS AN ACT OF TRANSLATION

In this study, I intend to discuss the 'base' of the transatlantic triangle; the terrible voyage that transported a 'cargo' of human beings from East to West, from various parts of Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas: the Middle Passage. More precisely, I shall analyse the Middle Passage as an act of forced *translation* in French Creole literature, both in the physical and the metaphorical sense, of African identities across the Atlantic Ocean. The act of translation can entail both a literal translation of meaning or *sens* from one language to another, as well as a 'transferal', or even a 'transformation', of physical objects, knowledge, culture, and history – even human beings – from one linguistic, ideological or physical 'form' to another. The forced migration of roughly thirteen million people from Africa into slavery echoes the 'translation' of their own histories and their very conception of the past, from oral tradition into the predominantly written historical narrative of the colonizers. My central aim in this study is to analyse the various resistances to these imposed translations, as displayed in the literary works of French Creole authors. I shall argue that the slave's resistance to slavery can be seen to represent the rejection of the forced translation of his or her identity across the Atlantic. Secondly, I propose that the slave's resistance to slavery may be seen to represent the ways in which the oral history or tradition of the Antillean Creole people continually resists a translation into the Western written historical narrative. The enormous challenge that Creole writers face is this: How does one *translate* oral history – that is, the true history of the slave's experience and that of his or her descendants – into written form, into *literature*, and particularly into the oppressive language of the coloniser, the very translation it so forcefully resists? This question is an urgent one, especially when one considers that modern culture continues to place value and confidence in 'official' written history. In other words, a history composed by the victor, no matter how fallible and prejudiced that history may be. If Creole history is not *translated* from the oral to the written, the stories of millions of slaves and their descendants may risk disappearance from historic consciousness. For in the words of Walter Benjamin, "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."[18] Furthermore, as Mona Baker has argued, a common historical narrative or a shared "story" of origins, is essential in cultivating and preserving a sense of common identity and in turn is the only

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[18] Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255.

basis for meaningful political action and social change.[19] If the Creole people of the French Caribbean do not find a method of reclaiming and possessing their history from the negligent and oppressive archives of their former colonisers, the prejudiced relationships of power created during the four centuries of their enslavement will continue to exist.

III. THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE AS A LITERARY TEXT

In order to fully grasp the metaphor of the Middle Passage as a process of translation, I shall introduce and discuss the metaphor of a human being as a living, literary 'text'. I shall propose that a human being can be viewed as a work of art, one that carries the language and histories of its ancestors and their beliefs, as well as a text that is continually transforming and acting out its own story. Several interesting parallels can be drawn between the linguistic translation of a literary text and the physical and mental translation of a human being from one ideological 'form' to another. The various ways in which a literary text resists or accepts a translation into another language may reveal various insights into how the transatlantic slave reacted to his own forced translation. To demonstrate these parallels, I shall discuss selected characters and themes in the works of three esteemed Creole authors, Édouard Glissant (*Le Quatrième Siècle,* 1964), Maryse Condé (*Moi, Tituba Sorcière*, 1986) and Patrick Chamoiseau (*Le vieil homme esclave et le molosse,* 1997), as they attempt to 'rewrite' and 'recreate' their histories through literature. The reactions of these characters to their imposed translation into slavery shall be the focus of this study. According to these Creole authors, the choices that they make, in rejecting, accepting or collaborating with slavery, in naming themselves or being named, will define their histories. The distinction between their reactions – resistance, acceptance or collaboration – is not as clear-cut as it first appears. Nevertheless, as is clear in the works of the authors I shall discuss, their reactions will greatly impact their identities and possible histories in the 'New World'.

Of course, the task of translation requires the presence of a translator. In this study, I shall also identify the various forces and professions present during the era of the Slave Trade, which specialised in the translation of human bodies across the Atlantic Ocean. In order to understand why these writers feel morally compelled to "rewrite" their own history, it will be useful to briefly discuss the forces which helped to perpetuate the Slave Trade; the public opinion in Europe during the eighteenth century, the scientific and religious beliefs in France at the time and the conditions in

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[19] Baker, Mona. "Translation and Activism: Emerging Patterns of Narrative Community," *The Massachusetts Review* 47 (2006): 463.

Africa, all of which contributed to the gaping silences in the official historical archives, silences which deprive us of the true experience of the slave himself as he was forced into captivity and slave labour. In order to fully realise the metaphor of the Middle Passage as the forced translation of African identities, I shall also give a brief account detailing what the haunting voyage would have been like for the slaves, and how the misery and torment of the Atlantic crossing has come to represent the gaping silences; the "présences hurlantes"[20] in the written historical record.

IV. QUE SAIT-ON DE LA CONSCIENCE DE L'ESCLAVE?

The task of recovering the true history of French speaking Creole cultures in the Caribbean is of increasing importance to France, due to the mass migration in the 20th century of Creole people to Europe, in search of political stability and economic opportunity. The number of Antilleans living in France today equals the number living in the two overseas departments, Martinique and Guadeloupe. It would appear, as Maryse Condé has remarked, a re-evaluation of the word "Creole" and its historical connotations is urgent, due to the fact that a considerable number of Creole people no longer live in the Antilles, and the Antilles are inhabited by a large amount of people that are not technically "Creole".[21] France often claims the moral high ground of being the first nation to abolish slavery. However their first 'abolition' was merely the result of the pressures created by the Haitian revolution and lasted only from 1794 until 1802, after which it was reinstated by Napoleon. Slavery was more definitively abolished in 1848, several years after the abolitions of Britain and other European nations. The tenth day of May has been selected as a date of commemoration for Slavery, the Trade and their respective abolitions in France. Françoise Vergés asks the all-important question, as have many others: can this date do what centuries have failed to do – inscribe the memory of slavery in French consciousness and in the public space?[22] Has France sufficiently acknowledged the fact that due to its lengthy participation in the Slave Trade, many of its citizens today have ancestors that were slaves or engaged workers? Vergés remarks on the apparent reluctance of France to accept responsibility for the various inequalities resulting from the Slave Trade, for fear of having to make full compensation to the African continent and the Antilles, and of having to admit that much of the nations wealth, strength and capitalism was built up by slaves whose descendants continue to live in poverty.[23] As a result of this reluctance, memory of the Slave Trade has been manipulated. The

[20] Chamoiseau, Patrick. *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 17. From here on abbreviated to *EVHM*.
[21] Condé, "Role of the Writer," 699.
[22] Vergés, Françoise. *La Mémoire Enchaînée: Questions sur l'esclavage* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006), 35.
[23] Vergés, *La Mémoire Enchaînée,* 84.

problem especially infects state education, where the brutality and racial divides of a shameful period in French history must somehow be explained to children who may associate themselves with certain historical races. Public forums in other former slave trading nations, such as Black History Month in the United States, have helped to bring the memory of slavery into the public eye. However, besides the 10 May – a date that focuses on abolition rather than the three hundred years of slavery that preceded it – these are completely absent in France. In order to counteract this forgetfulness, Vergés poses the crucial question, one that many Créole writers seek to answer; "Que sait-on de la conscience de l'esclave?"[24] It is this question that has motivated my thesis, and shall remain at the heart of this study.

The importance of this study is of course not restricted to the commemoration of slavery and the acceptance of responsibility in France for an embarrassing era in its history. It is a question that concerns the entire global community. The fact of the matter is that slavery continues to exist. The UN estimates that there are about 27 million people enslaved around the world today.[25] Those that argue for progress often say there is no use in dwelling on the past, in re-evaluating the history of an institution that was abolished 150 years ago. However if humanity is to learn from past mistakes, we must re-open the archives, and agree on methods by which we can expose the disagreements and acknowledge the plurality of memory in history.

[24] Vergés, *La Mémoire Enchaînée,* 66.
[25] Vergés, *La Mémoire Enchaînée,* 146.

II

LE MAL D'ARCHIVE

> "Les histoires d'esclavage ne nous passionnent guère. Peu de littérature se tient à ce propos. Pourtant, ici, *terres amères des sucres*, nous nous sentons submergés par ce nœud de mémoires qui nous âcre d'oublis et de présences hurlantes."[26]
>
> Patrick Chamoiseau
> *L'esclave vieil homme et le molosse*

The seemingly insurmountable obstacle that historians and writers face when dealing with the French Atlantic slave trade is the absence of an authentic francophone slave 'voice'.[27] The English archives boast of several first hand slave accounts, although their authenticity may sometimes be called into question, such as Olaudah Equiano's famous *Interesting Narrative* (1789) and *The Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* (1854), to name only two. However there are very few (if any) authentic first hand slave narratives in French. As Christopher Miller points out, "there is no French Equiano."[28] Those that exist were mostly subjected to embellishment by abolitionist writers of the 19th century and are often denounced as fictitious. The abolition of slavery in France received far more attention than the history of the slaves themselves and, as Vergés remarks, it is often taken as the starting point and the finish line in the search for the true history of the trade. As I shall discuss in this chapter, the silences in the written historical archives seem to stem from the horrific nature of the Middle Passage itself, as well as from the feigned ignorance and deliberate silencing of the slave's suffering in most literature of the French Enlightenment period.

[26] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,*17.
[27] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 34.
[28] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,*33.

I. ARCHIVE FEVER

These silences in the Western historical archives stand in stark contrast to the haunting memories of the Slave Trade, the "présences hurlantes", as Chamoiseau illustrates in the opening paragraphs of *L'esclave vieil homme et le molosse,* that continue to inhabit the Antillean islands.[29] To counteract these silences and respond to the suffocating web of memories in which they live, Creole writers display an obsessive desire not only to recover their origins, but also to possess them, to own their history. This obsession can perhaps be compared to what Jacques Derrida has described as the *mal d'archive,* or its rather clumsy English translation, 'archive fever'.[30] Derrida's conception of the *mal* is a kind of "sickness unto death" *for* the archive. Carolyn Steedman clarifies that it is "the fever not so much to enter [the archive] and use it as to *have* it."[31] To illustrate the feverish desire to possess moments of history, Derrida offers the example of *Gradiva*, a historical character from Pompeii, and an over-zealous archaeologist searching for the true "impression" of this woman – a kind of literal and figurative footprint – in short, a man suffering from archive fever. He explains that this archaeologist,

> "Wants to exhume a more archaic *impression*… an imprint which each time is singular, an impression which is almost no longer an archive but which almost confuses itself with the pressure of the footstep which leaves its still-living mark on a substrate, a surface, a place of origin… An archive without archive, where, suddenly indiscernible from the impression of its imprint, Gradiva's footstep speaks by itself!" [32]

Thus, *Gradiva's* story appears to the archaeologist mysteriously, as if it were a very real, yet fleeting memory. I believe that Derrida's illustration echoes the desires and mystical means by which several Creole writers attempt to recover and possess their past. In *Le Quatrième Siècle,* Glissant repeatedly refers to the evasive nature of the Creole past and the arduous efforts required by those that wish to recover the ancient voices of their ancestors. As the *quimboiseur*[33] papa Longoué warns the young Matthieu Béluse, "tu dois faire le gymnaste si tu veux les attraper, ne pas rester les bras sur la tête

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[29] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 17.
[30] Derrida, Jacques & Eric Prenowitz. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impressian," *Diacritics* 25 (1995): 9-63.
[31] Steedman, Carolyn. "Something She Called A Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust," *The American Historical Review* 106 (2004): 1159.
[32] Derrida, "Archive Fever," 61.
[33] Antillean word for healer

comme un lambin à attendre qu'ils se posent au frais près de toi."[34] Even when the past does appear to Glissant's characters, it is momentary, magical and as transient as the wind. It envelops and invades the consciousness of the storyteller; it falls into his hands, enters his mouth and inspires his tongue, provides brief glimpses of images, sounds and smells – memories – and then disappears. Créole authors would perhaps agree with the historical materialism of Walter Benjamin, which aims at supplying "a unique experience with the past." Speaking of the recovery of history, Benjamin explains,

> "A true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at an instant when it can be recognized and never seen again… To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger." [35]

The preservation of Créole history, as I shall illustrate, appears to be a delicate balancing act, a task of reconciling memory – the frantic, mysterious, almost living recollections of legend and oral tradition – with written narrative. In *Moi, Tituba Sorcière,* for example, Maryse Condé draws inspiration from a real historical event; the Salem Witch Trials that took place in 17th century America. Tituba, a slave from Barbados and the alleged instigator of the 'witchcraft' that sends Salem into a frenzy of superstitious hysteria, is described in the official archive merely as "une esclave originaire des Antilles et pratiquant vraisemblablement le 'hodoo'."[36] In the novel, Tituba laments that "aucune biographie attentionnée et *inspirée, récréant* ma vie et ses tourments" shall be found.[37] Through literature and with the aid of oral tradition, legend and songs from the island of Barbados, Condé recreates what she imagines to be Tituba's side of the story, even drawing from the real yet minimal dialogue of Tituba's trial recorded in the historical archives – the only moment of her life that had any value to European historians. Again in the final chapter of *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse,* Chamoiseau reveals the inspiration for his story; the discovery of a man's skeleton laying at the foot of an ancient boulder inscribed with Amerindian writing in a forest of Martinique. He writes that the bones, "disaient une époque tout entière, mais ouverte dans l'incertain total." He regrets ever having touched the remains, since from that moment, he becomes "victime d'une obsession, la plus éprouvante et la plus familière, dont l'unique sortie s'effectue par

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[34] Glissant, Édouard. *Le Quatrième Siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964), 204. From here on abbreviated to *QS.*

[35] Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 255.

[36] Condé, Maryse. *Moi, Tituba Sorcière* (Paris, Mercure de France,1986), 173.

[37] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière,* 173. [emphasis mine]

l'Écrire."[38] Thus, the story of the unknown man flows frantically and mysteriously through the author or *conteur,*[39] "en chants de langue créole, en jeux de langue française."[40]

In the opening paragraphs of *Le Quatrième Siècle,* Glissant hints at the enormous task, the obligation, in fact, that the Antillean writer is burdened with, to combat the gaping silences and the singularity of history in the official archives. The old *quimboiseur* silently asks himself why Mathieu, a Béluse, the mortal enemy of his ancestors, sits before him, why he has come there alone, "s'il n'y a pas une obligation, un malfini dans le ciel qui tire les ficelles."[41] He is hesitant to speak because he is aware that the translation of his visions of the past into the spoken word is difficult, often impossible. Like the Antillean author, "[il redoutait] surtout l'irrémédiable puissance des mots dits à haute voix."[42] But he must speak. To combat the dominant and forgetful historical narrative of European powers, the Antillean writer must emphasize and transmit the plurality of Creole history. Glissant does so exquisitely throughout *Le Quatrième Siècle.* He would agree with the authors of *Lettres Creoles,* who implore us to understand that, "[les Antilles] n'a pas *une* Histoire comme dans les vieilles aventures, elle s'émeut en histoires, et mieux, elle sillonne en tracées."[43] The symbolism here is exquisite. The "tracks" that history follows, are compared to the physical paths, the "infinies petite sentes... Élaborées par les Nègres marrons, les esclaves, les créoles" in the foothills and forests of the islands.

Papa Longoué, exacerbated by the impatience and interruptions of Mathieu Béluse, warns him that, "le passé n'est pas dans ce que tu connais par certitude, il est aussi dans tout ce qui passe comme le vent et que personne n'arrête dans ses mains fermées."[44] Créole history is portrayed as being as evasive and plentiful as the wind, a story that no one can hold captive in clasped hands. The process of rediscovering it requires effort; one cannot simply passively absorb the plurality of history by reading a textbook. On the contrary, papa Longoué exclaims, "tu dois faire le gymnaste si tu veux les attraper, ne pas rester les bras sur la tête comme un lambin à attendre qu'ils se posent au frais près

[38] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 132.
[39] This is a French word that means 'storyteller', referring to a slave who would interactively tell stories with the other slaves often in the evenings on the plantations.
[40] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 18.
[41] Glissant, *QS,* 11.
[42] Glissant, *QS* 12.
[43] Chamoiseau, Patrick & Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres Créoles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 13. From here on abbreviated to *LC.*
[44] Glissant, *QS,* 146.

de toi."[45] It is no coincidence then that the opening words of *Le Quatrième Siècle* refer to the wind, as if Glissant wishes to make clear, from the outset, the uncertainty, the multiplicity, as well as the fury of the words that papa Longoué will transmit:

> " – Tout ce vent, dit papa Longoué, tout ce vent qui va pour monter, tu ne peux rien, tu attends qu'il monte jusqu'à tes mains, et puis la bouche, les yeux, la tête. Comme si un homme n'était que pour attendre le vent, pour se noyer oui tu entends, pour se noyer bonne fois dans tout ce vent comme la mer sans fin…" [46]

The wind personifies the past and it's urgency desire to be known. It inhabits the very island on which they live, a vast history hidden behind "le rideau des arbres" which papa Longoué and Mathieu can only peer into, without knowing it's true depth.[47] Mathieu Béluse, the young man who sits at the *quimboiseur's* feet can perhaps be seen to represent Glissant himself, burdened with the *mal d'archive,* the obsessive desire to possess the moments of his origin, to experience his own history.

It would appear then that the work of the Créole author may be restricted to the realm of magic, mysticism and fiction, never to enter into the esteemed halls of factual, historical archives. However, there is still hope. In the opening paragraphs of *Le Mal d'Archive: Une Impression Freudienne* (1994)*,* Derrida challenges our very conception of the archive, reminding us of its privileged and exclusive nature, and its direct relationship with state power. He begins with the Greek root *arkhe,* which he explains can refer to both a physical and ontological place of commencement ("in the beginning…"), as well as place of commandment, a place where authority is exercised. The word archive is closely related to the Greek term *arkheion* meaning the house or residence of the *archons*, the chief magistrates who possessed the power to make or represent the law. It was therefore also the place where official documents were stored. The *archons,* Derrida explains, were not only the guardians of this collection of documents, but possessed the right to interpret them as well. Thus, it is "in this *domiciliation,*" he states, "in this house arrest, that archives take place."[48] The *arkheion* was not merely a sort of public library. Only certain documents were admitted and classified under the title of the archive "by virtue of a privileged topology". In other words, the *archons* would select only the documents that agreed or supported the agenda of whatever

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[45] Glissant, *QS* 204.
[46] Glissant,*QS,* 11.
[47] Glissant, *QS,* 12.
[48] Derrida, "Archive Fever," 10.

power was in place at the time. Derrida explains that their goal was to "coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration."[49] By its very definition therefore, the archive can contain no heterogeneity, no secrets or difference of opinion that might cause separation. Derrida's definition of the archive, although placed in the distant past, can certainly be applied to modern sources of information. The mass of cultural and historical narratives collectively known as the "Enlightenment literature" of eighteenth century France is an excellent example. As I shall demonstrate, this historical archive of literary sources admitted, classified and therefore preserved only those documents and opinions that suited the agenda of the state. The result: the virtual silencing of an entire historical occurrence, and the justification of a terrible crime against humanity, one that lasted for over three hundred years and greatly affected the world we live in today.

Thus, to trust only the official state archives as the definitive source of historical data would be foolish. To dismiss all other "unofficial accounts"; oral tradition, legend, and memory as fictitious would be to accept and relive the prejudices and injustices of the past. In their task of recovering their history, translating it from the disregarded forms of oral history to the more approachable and convenient forms of written, literary narrative, Creole writers will face much criticism. As Derrida points out,

> "Wherever one could interrogate or contest, directly or indirectly, this archontic principle, its authority, its titles, and its genealogy, the right that it commands, the legality or the legitimacy that depends on it, wherever secrets and heterogeneity would seem to menace… this can only have grave consequences for a theory of the archive, as well as for its institutional implementation."[50]

Such a re-evaluation of history inevitably threatens the powers that represent the privileged and oppressive archives that exist today. However, these archives and the narratives that they contain must be challenged. As Baker argues, it is the "unexamined assumptions of narratives" that conceal patterns of domination and submission, and which "exclude the experience of large sectors of society while legitimating and promoting those of the political, economic, and cultural elite."[51] Thus, the task of Créole authors is to critically examine the existing narratives of their history, and elevate the

[49] Derrida, "Archive Fever," 10.
[50] Derrida, "Archive Fever," 10.
[51] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 470.

forgotten voice of the slave and his descendants. As Walter Benjamin remarks, “Not man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge.”[52]

As Vergés explains in her work *Mémoire Enchaînée* (2006), Slavery is an experience of exile. In his exile, the slave is forced to forget his language, his rituals and beliefs, he is forbidden from having a subjective point of view; he essentially becomes an object. However, as Vergés has demonstrated the slave’s language, beliefs and history survived as traces throughout Créole culture, remembered through ancestral rituals and legends, and personified in music, such as the blues, maloya and ségas (a fascinating subject which deserves its own in depth analysis). Thus, imaginary roots are created and woven together across the Atlantic, connecting the transatlantic slave with his origins. These winding paths, Vergés argues, are the true “archives” of the slave’s experience, and they cannot be ignored.[53]

II. THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

As I have mentioned above, side by side with the elitist archives of the Enlightenment, the unspeakable and horrific nature of the voyage that came to be known as the Middle Passage contributed greatly to the literary and historical silences that have inspired the *mal d’archive,* the urgent desire that Créole authors display to recover and possess their past. It must be noted that the trade in human beings was in no way a new concept in human history; slavery had existed for centuries on most continents of the ancient world, including Africa. As Maryse Condé soberly points out, one vital condition that made the European slave trade possible was the existence of slavery in African societies, although it was carried out in different forms.[54] However it was Europe’s prolific participation in the trade and the terrible voyage of her ships across the ocean, that “green sea of darkness”, which gave the Atlantic slave trade its horrific name.[55] As the philosopher Jack Dahomey has argued, the horrors and abhorrence of colonial slavery cannot be downplayed, because “c’est la modernité qui institue l’esclavage dans les colonies” and not an antique system.[56] Colonial slavery stands apart from slavery in antiquity: it is an occurrence of the recent past.

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[52] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 260.
[53] Vergés, *La Mémoire Enchaînée,* 44.
[54] Condé, Maryse. “Négritude Césairienne, Négritude Senghorienne,” *Revue de la Littérature Comparée* 48 (1974): 3-4
[55] Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 20.
[56] Vergés, *La Mémoire Enchaînée,* 47.

The average French *négrier* of the eighteenth century carried about four hundred slaves and took roughly two to three months to cross the Atlantic, with longer journeys being quite common.[57] In France, these ships were often named after some kind of virtue or quality, such as *la Confiance, la Paix,* or *l'Amitié* and perhaps most ironically, *la Liberté.*[58] After a violent capture and quite possibly a long, arduous journey from the interior of Africa the slaves would be held in "trunks" on the African coast; prison cells or barracoons in which they would await purchase.[59] Conditions were usually harsh, crammed and very unhygienic. Before being loaded on the ship they would be stripped naked, put in chains and subjected to humiliating inspections by the ship surgeons and merchants. Besides being held captive by strange people that spoke a foreign language, it is important to remember that these events would often have taken place on the coast of Equatorial Africa, and the conditions in the ship's hold were unbearably hot and often overcrowded. A diagram of the *Vigilant,* a French vessel from Nantes in the 1820s, illustrates that the space in the hold where the captives were kept was a mere five feet three inches high, by four feet four inches wide. Countless slaves suffered and perished from dysentery, dehydration, smallpox and ophthalmia, a disease that can ultimately lead to blindness – a condition that tragically symbolises the loss of sight of the slave's homeland, and subsequently of their identities as free human beings. In 1783, Dr Thomas Trotter, described his experience aboard an English ship named the *Brookes,* explaining that the slaves in the hold had absolutely no room to move or turn freely, laying "spoonways" and "closely locked to one another." He wrote that he had "seen their breasts heaving and observed them drawing breath, with all the laborious and anxious efforts for life which we observe in expiring animals subjected by experiment to bad air."[60] In the years leading up to abolition, several captains testified to their efforts in maintaining good hygiene and ensuring the survival of their cargo. After all, a high survival rate meant a better profit. Despite this, however, mortality rates were extremely high, and according to the records of the slave traders in Nantes, losing a quarter of the ships 'cargo' was not unusual.[61] In Glissant's *Le Quatrième Siècle,* his masterful recreation of the history of the Creole people of Martinique, he introduces the reader to a slave captain on board the *Rose-Marie,* who, while reviewing his ships crossing notes that, "la maladie, la vermine, le suicide, les révoltes et les exécutions avaient ponctué la traversée de cadavres. Mais deux tiers, ça faisait une excellente

[57] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 408.
[58] Thomas,*The Slave Trade,* 302-4.
[59] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 392.
[60] Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 413.
[61] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 421.

moyenne", thus portraying the general apathy of the *négriers* towards the death of slaves aboard their ships.[62]

The fact that a slave was worth far more in the New World than in Africa added to the complacency in improving conditions aboard the *négriers*. At the dawn of the Atlantic slave trade, a single horse could be traded for twenty-five slaves on the coast of Africa. Once transported across the Atlantic, however, the price increased exponentially and one healthy slave could fetch a price of up to nine thousand pounds of sugar in the Americas.[63] This certainly cultivated a sense of indifference amongst the crew, and a general disregard for life aboard the *négriers*. Once off the coast of Africa, one slaver described the atmosphere aboard the ship as "half bedlam, half brothel",[64] the captain and crew enjoying several liberties with their human cargo. The women bore the worst of this experience, and were often, if not daily, subjected to rape and violence. Despite the fear of punishment or death, revolts were startlingly frequent aboard the slave ships, but seldom successful. Hugh Thomas estimates that there may have been an average of one uprising in every eight to ten voyages, usually taking place when the coast of Africa was still in sight.[65] The rebellious slaves were often maimed or put to death in the most cruel and violent ways, so as to set an example to the others. In 1694, Thomas Philips sailing aboard an English ship, the *Hannibal* wrote, "I have been informed that some commanders have cut off the legs or arms of the most wilful, to terrify the rest."[66] So indeed, silent endurance and the shameful acceptance of one's fate must have seemed like the only chance of survival.

III. L'ÉCRITURE DU REGISTRE

Amidst all this human suffering, it seems preposterous that the only literature to be found on the slave ship, the only records or writing that was produced, as Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant observe in *Lettres Créoles,* was *l'écriture du registre*; the cold, factual logbook in which the captain would meticulously record the ships human cargo. The authors describe this 'literature' (and all other ethnocentric colonial writing similar to it), as "prédatrice et aveugle. Simplifiante, elle précipite le Divers dans le pensée de l'Un."[67] French slave traders were hardly preoccupied with

[62] Glissant, *QS,* 20.
[63] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,*16.
[64] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 416.
[65] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 422.
[66] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 416.
[67] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 33.

documenting the emotional anguish and physical torment of their unfortunate 'cargo'. Like the first mate of the *Rose-Marie* in Glissant's *Le Quatrième Siècle,* indifferent to the sudden eerie silence of the slaves as they catch sight of the new land, the *négriers* "ne s'intéressai[ent] pas aux énigmes, mais aux chiffres."[68] Thus, the multiplicity of the slaves' experiences and the terrible mortality aboard the ship was reduced to the simplistic language of profit and loss. As Françoise Vergés remarks, "le crime étant organisé en commerce, on a utilisé tout le vocabulaire du commerce pour le masquer."[69]

These literary silences on board the *négriers* have come to represent the unspeakable suffering of the slaves in the hold. In *Le Quatrième Siècle*, Glissant describes the silence of the slaves upon their arrival on board a slave ship in Martinique, explaining that "… aucun d'eux n'avait ouvert la bouche pour avancer une parole; la souffrance s'était trouvée muette, la haine aussi. Muette, la mort. Muet le drame couvé dans le délire de l'entrepôt".[70] This literal silence amongst the slaves symbolises the silencing of their own histories as they were translated and transformed into slave bodies for France, to serve a purpose that was not their own. Of course, this silence is largely symbolic. Olaudah Equiano writes in his famous autobiography that aboard the *négriers,* "the shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered a scene of horror almost inconceivable."[71] However this scene of audible physical pain stands in stark contrast to the deafening literary silences, and serves to accentuate the terrible arrogance and apathy of the nations that participated in the Trade. It would be centuries before this historical 'muteness', born in the foul womb of the *négriers*, could be broken with the written word – literacy among slaves on the islands was a risk of insurrection. Fénelon, governor of Martinique in 1764 wrote, "The safety of the whites demands that we keep the Negroes in the profoundest of ignorance."[72]

In addition to the absence of an original slave "voice" in the literary sources is what some scholars have labelled the 'forgetfulness' of France.[73] Despite some exceptions, there were very few slaves in France during the eighteenth century. This was mostly due to a noble, if not slightly hypocritical belief, that France was *La Mère de Liberté* and that, therefore, any slave that set foot on French soil should be freed. This belief dates back to a decree passed by King Louis X as early as

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[68] Glissant, *QS,* 23.
[69] Vergés, *La Mémoire Enchaînée,* 30.
[70] Glissant, *QS,* 61.
[71] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 412.
[72] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 35. Quoted from Peytraud, *L'esclavage aux Antilles françaises* (first published 1897) p.192.
[73] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 37.

1315, which seems to have endured for several centuries, as depicted by a law passed by the *parlement de Bordeaux* in 1571 stating that, "France, Mother of Liberty, does not permit any slaves." [74] There even appears to have been an actual practice of freeing slaves in France that continued throughout the era of the Atlantic slave trade, although it was not very widespread.[75] Naturally, therefore, the strict trading laws of the *Exclusif* made it quite clear that no slave was to be sold at any French Port. Thus in a recent work Glissant writes that,

> "The former slave-trading cities of Europe did not know the crowds of piled-up and festering slaves, nor the shouting markets nor the shitholes, the din and the public whippings […] We look in vain for the stigmata of the Trade: the odour has not remained in the air, […] no noise left a trace".[76]

IV. LES PHILOSOPHES

Inevitably, of course, there was some 'noise' from France concerning the slave trade. The political and emotional ideas that arose during the *Époque de Lumières* were quite hostile towards the institution of slavery, far more so than those of its cousin, the British Renaissance. However the supposedly abolitionist writings of *philosophes* such as Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Diderot, are tinged with a certain irony.[77] Given that hardly any slaves were actually *seen* in France, slavery was more often used and readily accepted as a metaphor for the condition of man in eighteenth century French society, rather than to describe the physical enslavement of Africans across the Atlantic. Indeed, there is a cruel irony in the fact that just as men in France began to contemplate freedom and equality of mankind, the slave trade was reaching its apogee. In the decade preceding the French Revolution, it is estimated that 70 000 slaves were being transported per year by European enterprises to the Americas and the Caribbean. Nantes sent off more than 1400 slaving expeditions in the eighteenth century alone. In the late 1700s, she challenged Liverpool as the largest transporter of slaves. The beautiful new buildings, the streets paved with white stone and the affluence of the slave merchants in Nantes all testified to the profits gained from the *Traite de Noirs.*[78] Arguably, the philosophers mentioned above did indeed condemn slavery in one way or another. Rousseau wrote that, "however we look at the question, the right to enslave is null and

[74] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 148.
[75] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 20.
[76] Glissant, *Omerod* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 217-18.
[77] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 63.
[78] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 448.

void… because it is absurd and meaningless.”[79] Diderot, perhaps the most obviously and morally opposed to slavery and the trade, said, “This purchase is a business which violates religion, morality, natural law, and all human rights.”[80] However, they did little else than to “launch their ideas into cafés” and expect the governments to follow suit.[81] It appears that it was merely the fashion in Paris for these men of great intellect to express indignation at the sufferings of the Africans. Their use of slavery as a mere literary device and their indifference, at times even contempt, towards the slaves themselves, rendered their works useless in their time. Rousseau described those enslaved as ignoble, “vile” and “grovelling”[82] while Voltaire wrote that, “Un peuple qui trafique en ses enfants est encore plus condenable que l'acheteur, ce négoce démontre notre supériorité.”[83] In fact, Voltaire seems to have dabbled in the trade himself. When Jean-Gabriel Montaudin, a leading *négrier* of Nantes offered to name one of his ships after him, he accepted willingly.[84] Even though their writings would later aid the momentum of the Abolitionists, the *philosophes*' portrayal of Africans was more often used to justify and perpetuate slavery.

Allow me to make a brief note on the paradoxical relationship between the rise of Enlightenment thought and sudden expansion of the Slave Trade, a relationship that is both sinister and thought provoking. Edward Brathwaite refers to this phenomenon as the “alter-renaissance”, citing several of the world's greatest intellectual discoveries and literary works – Galileo and the development of the telescope, the work of Da Vinci and Michelangelo, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* to name a few – written and invented whilst Columbus sailed west, and the machinery of the Slave Trade was set in motion.[85] He asks, “Where was Voltaire and Cervantes? How did the Calvinists see the New World?” It appears that none of these “spiritual” or philosophical forces were exported by Europe. Rather, to borrow Brathwaite's words, “the European missile was mercantilist.”[86] Orlando Patterson, in his work entitled *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, comments that perhaps, “the enslavement of Africans by Europeans was not simply a blind spot in the minds of the *philosophes*; perhaps the joint rise of slavery and the

[79] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 63. Quoted from Rousseau, ‘Du Contrat Social,’ *Oeuvres Complètes,* Pléiade ed., vol. I, iv.
[80] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 64. Quoted from Diderot, *Éncyclopédie,* vol. xvi (Neuchatel, 1765), p. 532
[81] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 462.
[82] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 63.
[83] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 69-70. Quoted in Voltaire (Paris, 1963), II., 805
[84] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 463.
[85] Brathwaite, “World Order Models,” 59.
[86] Brathwaite, “World Order Models,” 59.

cultivation of freedom was no accident."[87] He argues that amidst the various economic relationships of the transatlantic triangle there was one, certain direct exchange: the African's loss was the European's gain, in money, happiness and in freedom. In support of this theory, Boubacar Barry remarks in his analysis of Senegambia that it was slave labour that "freed the aristocracy" of manual, productive work, and allowed them to live in luxury, to devote their time and energy to politics, to philosophy and the study of Holy Scripture, as well as to cultivating and enforcing cultural norms and beliefs which would help institutionalise and perpetuate slavery and the trade.[88] Rousseau himself pondered this paradoxical relationship in the *Social Contract*, asking, "Could it be that freedom is only maintained through the support of servitude? Perhaps. The two extremes meet."[89] C.L.R. James, in his controversial study entitled *The Black Jacobins* (1989), goes as far as to propose that it was in fact the wealth generated in Europe from the slave trade and slavery that created the economic basis for the French Revolution. He explains, with a quote from Jean Jaurès, that, "the fortunes created at Bordeaux, at Nantes, by the slave trade, gave to the bourgeoisie that pride which needed liberty and contributed to human emancipation."[90] Thus it appears that "freedom" in Europe relied heavily on the enslavement of Africans in the Americas. It is perhaps even more interesting to note that it was the Revolution in France, that distant cry for freedom, that allowed the slaves of Saint-Domingue (modern day Haiti), the opportunity and the courage to launch their own successful revolution under Toussaint L'Ouverture, as the French plantation owners became more vulnerable throughout the events of 1789. In turn, many have argued that it was that Haitian revolution that put the wind in the sails of the entire abolitionist movement.[91] However, this is just one event amongst many that have been silenced in the official archives of France. Although the Haitians fought for democracy and freedom – the very qualities for which France fought for in their own revolution – their actions are seen as barbaric. The role they played in the fight for abolition is downplayed, and France given all the glory.[92]

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[87] Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). 8-9.
[88] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 67.
[89] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triange,* 8.
[90] James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 47.
[91] Brathwaite, "World Order Models," 61.
[92] Vergés, *La Mémoire Enchaînée,* 39-40.

V. THE MEMOIRS OF JOSEPH MOSNERON

At first glance, it would appear that these two critically interdependent forces, the transatlantic slave trade and the Enlightenment, managed to avoid any form of direct contact with each other. People philosophised in France, and as I have argued, their philosophies appear to have remained there. Of course, there were a few exceptions. An extraordinary example of the close contact between the participants of the slave trade and the Enlightenment, one that Christopher Miller has analysed in fascinating detail,[93] can be found in an extremely rare document; the memoirs of Joseph Mosneron. In his memoirs, this French sailor and *armateur* describes the fortuitous performance of Voltaire's play *Alzire* on board the *Compte d'Hérouville,* a French *négrier*, while awaiting cargo off the Coast of Gorée Island in 1766. It is a rare exception to the dominant trend described by the authors of *Lettres Créoles* that the only literature found aboard the *négrier* was the accounts leger, *l'écriture du registre*.

Born in 1748, Joseph Mosneron was the third son of an armateur in Nantes. Upon returning from his second slave voyage in 1767, he discovers that he is rather uncultured compared to the intellectual society of Nantes, which despite being the largest slave trading port in France was in no way immune to the radical ideas of the *Lumières*. He decides to devote his time to studying "the parcels of genius in our language among… selected readings of good French authors."[94] Thus, Joseph Mosneron is an excellent example of the aristocracy that Boubacar Barry describes in his thesis, whose time had been freed of productive work and whose newfound wealth allowed them to indulge in new luxuries, such as the study of Enlightenment philosophy and literature. Without a doubt, Mosneron would have come across the works of Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot and Rousseau. Perhaps he may have even taken their words to heart. However as I have already demonstrated, it would not have been too difficult for him to overlook their denunciation of slavery and the trade – the very source of his wealth – due to their treatment of slavery as a mere metaphor for people in French society. On board the *Compte d'Hérouville* in 1766, Mosneron describes his first theatrical experience. In order to pass the time, the crew decides to put on a play. He writes,

> "The first time in my life that I saw live theatre, it was in Africa. *Alzire* was performed, and my very uninitiated eyes were very pleased by this spectacle, in which all the roles were filled by men. You

[93] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 71-82.

[94] Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Moi, Joseph Mosneron: Armateur Négrier. Portrait culturel d'une bourgoesie négotiante au Siècle des Lumières* (Rennes: Editions Apogée, 1995), 161.

> have to be truly carried away by the illusion in order to go along with the sight of a grenadier dressed up as Alzire, declaiming in a booming voice and with the gestures of a victorious Hercules the melodious verses of one of Voltaire's masterpieces." [95]

The account is brief, but it gives us an exceptional example of the contact between the seemingly contradictory voices of the Enlightenment and the slave trade. What Mosneron fails to mention is that Voltaire's *Alzire* deals with the very pertinent questions of conquest, colonialism and slavery. Performed just off the coast of Africa, fate seems to have brought these questions directly to the source. However, instead of African slaves in the Caribbean, the play is set in Lima, Peru, and enacts the conflict between the native South Americans and the Spanish conquistadors. The choice of this *pièce de théâtre* may seem only natural given the crews occupation aboard the French *négrier*. However the irony becomes clearer when one discovers that the play paints the Native Americans as "noble", while criticising the despotic nature of the Spaniards, portraying them as the real "barbarians".[96] *Alzire, ou les Américains, Tragédie en cinq actes et en vers,* first performed in Paris, 1736, tells the story of Alzire, a beautiful Indian princess who is forced to marry Gusman, a despotic Spanish colonist, in order to "buy" her people's freedom despite her love for Zamore, a strong Indian warrior. Alzire agrees to marry, but the despotic Gusman still intends to kill her people. At the play's climax, Zamore, who is thought to have died three years before, returns to rescue Alzire and avenge his people's "enslavement". After gravely injuring Gusman, it appears that the only possible ending for the brave Alzire and her lover is a cruel and gruesome death. But in a bizarre twist, Gusman's character is overcome with goodwill, rises from his deathbed and grants them forgiveness. Overcome with such "grandeur d'âme", Zamore converts to Christianity, he and Alzire marry and the play ends peacefully in a state of perfect Christian harmony.[97]

Thus, Voltaire manages to write a play that directly targets the immoral nature of slavery by placing it in an exotic landscape where its perpetrators are the evil Spanish and the victims are light-skinned and noble. In doing so, he completely overlooks the existence of the transatlantic slave trade in which France was profitably participating, and in which he himself had invested. Although preaching a message of general "humanitarianism", Voltaire upholds the European right to colonise and rule its subjects, based on the superiority of the Christian faith. By emphasizing the "civilised" qualities of his Incas, he keeps sympathy for "primitive" African slaves in check. One could argue

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[95] Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Moi, Joseph Mosneron,* 118. (translated in Miller, 2008: 71)
[96] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 72.
[97] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 72.

that Joseph Mosneron and his crew would have seen no similarities between the Incas of *Alzire* and the black captives held in chains below the very deck on which the play was performed. Mosneron does not describe the crew's reaction to the performance, but judging by his own account, the only aspect that made a lasting impression was that the female role of *Alzire* was played by a man. Despite all these disheartening factors, it is hard to imagine that, upon hearing verses such as these, all those who witnessed the play on board the *Compte d'Hérouville* were impervious to Voltaire's sympathy towards the enslaved:

> "Tu vois de ces tyrans la fureur despotique,
> Ils pensent que pour eux le ciel fit l'Amérique" (*A,* 422)
>
> "Ce peuple de vainqueurs armé de son tonnerre,
> A-t-il le droit affreux de dépeupler la terre?" (*A,* 429)[98]

It is safe to assume that the play did make some impact. In fact, as Christopher Miller points out, *Alzire* appears to have made its way around the Atlantic, tracing out the triangular slave-trading route and enjoying considerable success in Saint-Domingue where theatre had been introduced as early as 1740. Despite the racist laws of separation at the time, we learn that people of "colour" were allowed to attend the theatre and even participate on stage.[99] Thus a ripple of the revolutionary waves of the Enlightenment seems to have found its way to the colonies through theatre, ironically transported, one might even say *translated* aboard a slave ship. Despite the fact that Voltaire's *Alzire* ignores the existence of the Atlantic slave trade, we may dare to think that it opened the eyes of some to its glaring moral problems and was perhaps one amongst several factors that gave those people of "colour" the hope to dream of their own freedom. Unfortunately this exception to the rule and the few others like it are only a drop in the ocean of historical silences, and they take an extremely determined archivist to dig them up. Although *Alzire* may have impacted the minds of a few, it is more likely that its exotic setting would have kept discussion away from the reality of the African slave trade, and only hindered the abolitionists' cause.

[98] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 76.
[99] *Alzire* was performed at least eight times in Sainte Domingue in 1765, 1769 and 1782 (Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle*, 78.

VI. THE MARITIME NOVEL

The Maritime novel – much in vogue in the 1830s – also played a role in keeping the French people in blissful ignorance, contributing to the enormous 'blind spot' in the public eye of France.[100] The abolitionist movement was already underway in Britain and America in the early nineteenth century. Both nations had passed bills in favour of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 – although very little was done to enforce them.[101] After the battle of Waterloo, France came under pressure to become 'abolitionist' as well and in 1818 it declared the Slave Trade illegal. This was by no means the end of the slave trade's profitability however, seeing as the actual institution of slavery had in no way been outlawed. In fact, after the failure of plans to suppress the slave trade at the conference of *Aix-la-chapelle* in 1818, a Tuscan diplomat famously noted that, "we have not yet begun the golden age."[102] The new illegality of the slave trade made slave traders into pirates, and so, sensing their opportunity, real pirates flocked to the trade. This created a rich backdrop for the eighteenth century maritime novel, with writers such as Mérimée and his *Tamango* (1837), Edouard Corbière's *Le Négrier: Adventures de mer* (1834) and Sue Brulart's *Altar-Gull* (1831) enjoying substantial success. These exciting, seafaring adventures left fantastical images in the minds of the French public; scenes of courageous battles against barbaric Africans on the high seas, of peaceful and exotic island paradises, of plantations run by noble masters and their loyal slaves. All this at a time when the situation in the Antilles was growing increasingly volatile, and slaves revolts were in fact on the rise. Two important examples certainly worth mentioning were the slave revolt in Martinique of 1822 and the successful Haitian revolution from 1791 to 1804 after which Saint Domingue, as it was then called, gained its independence from France. An excerpt from Corbière's *Le Négrier* is an excellent example of how this literature was void of any historical accuracy, and deliberately ignored the instability of slavery in France's *territoires d'outre mer*. He writes, "These blacks, fat and portly, lazy and jolly, whom I saw joking all day in the streets seemed much happier that our workers in Europe and than most sailors…"[103] Thus, these romantic novels helped to perpetuate the belief that slaves (and particularly black slaves) did not have the capacity to govern themselves, as well as the idea that however unpleasant it was to be enslaved by European colonists, it was better than being a slave or even a free man in Africa.[104]

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[100] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 198-200.
[101] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 551-5.
[102] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 559.
[103] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 642.
[104] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 300.

It must be said, however, as Christopher Miller demonstrates in his study of abolitionist French literature,[105] that the works of some French *philosophes* and authors did indeed give voice to the horrors of slavery and of the Trade. Unfortunately though, these accounts were few and often far from factual, sometimes completely fictitious. Furthermore, instead of calling for the complete abolition of slavery, most abolitionists advocated rather for the 'softening' of the treatment of slaves. In the opinion of Chamoiseau and Confiant, these authors and their works were no more influential than the *écriture du registre* which, "malgré d'accidentelles joliesses" were the "bruit de plus de *silence littéraire* que la moindre pierre gravée des consumés Sauvages."[106]

VII. A Few Remarkable Exceptions

All the same, the sympathetic works of some remarkable French abolitionist writers cannot be omitted. The Abbé Henri Grégoire, known as the "veteran abolitionist" was amongst the first to oppose slavery, and certainly deserves mention. At the moment of the 1814 Treaty of Paris, when France obtained an extension on the slave trade from Britain (the victors of the battle of Waterloo), the Abbé Grégoire spoke out and openly criticized France's indifference towards the abolitionist movement, which was already well underway across the Channel:

> "Can one cite a single petition from a city or guild opposed to the article of the treaty that relates to the slave trade, an article which, in England, stirred so many souls? Instead, we have the deplorable scandal of a petition that came from Nantes, asking for he continuation of the misfortunes of Africa, in order to enrich a few Europeans."[107]

Again, in his work *Des peines infamantes à infliger aux négriers* (1822), he openly rebuked the *négriers* (the slave merchants) of France, describing them as "more criminal than the assassin because, slavery being only an agony cruelly prolonged, death is preferable to the loss of liberty."[108] In the same work he condemned all those who were complicit with the trade, declaring that, "I call *négrier* not only the captain of the ship who steals, buys, chains, barrels and sells slaves… but also every individual who, by direct or indirect cooperation, is an accomplice in these crimes."[109] These were certainly some of the most potent words against slavery and the trade in France and were a

[105] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle*
[106] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *Lettres Créole,* 35. [emphasis mine]
[107] Abbé Henri Grégoire, *De la Traite et de l'Esclavage des noirs et des blancs par un ami des hommes de toutes les couleurs,* (Paris: Adrien Egron, 1815), 23.
[108] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 590.
[109] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 622.

considerable contribution to their respective abolitions. Several female French authors are also worth recognition, such as Olympe de Gouges and her work *Zamore et Mirza, ou l'heureux naufrage,* (1788), Madame de Staël's "Mirza, ou lettre d'un voyageur" in *Œuvres de Madame la Baronne de Staël-Holstein* (1786) as well as Claire de Duras' *Ourika* (1823), all of whom would have met much opposition based on their gender alone, never mind the uncomfortable and unpopular content of their work.[110] The works of these authors could possibly be seen as the "accidentelles joliesses" mentioned by the authors of *Lettres Créoles*. However, in their focus on the ideology of abolition in Europe, and "dans son souci d'exciter son 'cher lecteur' par du merveilleux tropical",[111] they failed to evoke the personal, mental experience of the slave, and as far as Chamoiseau and Confiant are concerned, they are no more useful in recreating the history of the Creole people than *l'écriture du registre;* the accounts leger of a slave ship.

VIII. Filling the Void

The transatlantic crossing and the institution of slavery were systems that translated people, creating docile spirits and slave bodies. The slave's will was made completely subordinate to that of the colonizer, the master. As I have demonstrated, his voice was silenced and forgotten in the historical archives of France due to the language of commerce that masked the horrors of the Middle Passage, as well as by the indifference of Enlightenment literature and philosophy. Cilas Kemedjio defines slavery as the "total alienation of the will at the individual and collective level". As a result of this total deprivation of the will, Kemedjio concurs with Fanon that the slave system "presents a situation in which the colonized are dispossessed of *historical initiative* to the advantage of the colonial power."[112] As I have demonstrated, the silences in the official historical record of France are both apathetic and deliberate. In his theory of decolonisation, Fanon describes the arrogance of colonizing nations, stating that,

> "The colonizer makes history and knows that he is doing so. And because he constantly refers to the history of his *métropole*, he clearly indicates that here he is the extension of that *métropole.* The history that he writes is thus not the history of the country that he is plundering but the history of his nation as

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[110] A thorough and interesting commentary on these works, demonstrating their strengths and shortfalls can be found in Christopher Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle* (2008).
[111] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *Lettres Créoles*, 35.
[112] Kemedjio, C. "Rape of Bodies, Rape of Souls: From the Surgeon to the Psychiatrist, from the slave trade to the slavery of comfort in the work of Édouard Glissant," *Research in African Literatures* 25 (1994): 52. [emphasis mine]

> it ravages, rapes, and starves others. The immobility to which the colonized [or enslaved] is condemned can only be called into question if the colonized decides to put an end to the history of the pillaging, in order to *create* the history of the nation, the history of decolonisation."[113]

The creole writers that I shall discuss in this study are amongst the "colonized" who have decided, "to put an end to the history of pillaging" and recreate their history by translating the predominantly oral history of their people into written form through literature. The silences created by the ethnocentric culture of the slave trade have left a void in Créole history that only 'fictional' literature, can fill. Gleaning what they can from colonial sources "d'anthropologie égocentrique", from memory, oral tradition and legend, Créole writers attempt to rewrite their past.[114] Not in a logical order of events like the history books that the young Matthieu Béluse in *Le Quatrième Siècle* has read, which according to Glissant only help "oublier le détail,"[115] but rather in following the example of the old *Quimboiseur* papa Longoué, who claims "qu'il ne faut pas suivre les faits avec logique mais deviner, prévoir ce qui s'est passé."[116] Thus Christopher Miller, in questioning how the reading of literary texts can add to the historiography of the slave trade, observes that, in fact, "the voice of the revolted slave", one that cannot be found in clear, documented accounts, "emerges from a limbo between fiction and authenticity, thus precisely as *literature.*"[117]

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[113] Fanon, Franz. *Les Damnés de la Terre* (Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 1985), 36. Translated in Kemedjio, "Rape of Bodies, Rape of Souls," 52. [emphasis mine]
[114] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *Lettres Créoles,* 33.
[115] Glissant, *QS* 121
[116] Glissant, *QS* 57-8
[117] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 35.

III

AN ACT OF TRANSLATION

> *"*Chaque phrase est un écho de falaise. Chaque livre est un homme. Chaque mot tremble du fourmillement des siècles d'écriture. Et le tout témoigne de l'inépuisable quête d'un idéal changeant."
>
> P. Chamoiseau & R. Confiant,
> *Lettres Créoles*

The concept of literature filling the void of history has tremendous symbolic weight in the context of this study, which is why I have lingered on these 'literary silences' in the historical archives. For the Antillean authors that I shall discuss, literature is indeed one of the most powerful tools available in their search to 'recreate' the lost history of the Creole people. One could go as far as to say that literature *is* history, that is, the individual stories, personal and public narratives, the myths, even magic that these writers have translated from oral tradition into literature, woven together in the lives of their characters. People create history. In *Lettres Créoles,* Chamoiseau and Confiant expertly illustrate how each person is an embodiment of history, remarking that, "Littérature est mêlée à l'oxygène des vies," and that, "Chaque phrase est un écho de falaise. *Chaque livre est un homme.*"[118] For Glissant, myth and legend – oral tradition – are essential in establishing the vital link between History and Literature. As he demonstrates in *Le Discours Antillais* (1981)*,* myth represents the "initial manifestation of [man's] historical consciousness in the process of its formation as well as the primary matter of the literary work."[119] Man tells his story through speech, passing audible stories from generation to generation in order to perpetuate his past, his existence on the earth. This story becomes myth as it is transmitted through oral tradition, and figuratively speaking, can be seen as the living memory of a person, passed down through generations. This same

[118] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *Lettres Créoles,* 12. [emphasis mine]
[119] Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais,* 138.

myth, which through the generations grows and intertwines with the myths of others as each descendent follows his own path, is the "primary matter" from which Glissant draws his inspiration to create literature, which in turn is a *re*creation, therefore, of history. One can think of the succession as follows; man creates history, history becomes myth, myth is translated into literature. Literature can be seen as the embodiment of each man or woman's family or community history. To put it succinctly and to recall my primary metaphor: "chaque livre est un homme."

The metaphor of a man or woman as a book, a type of a living narrative or a work of art*,* has been the essential inspiration for my thesis: that the Middle Passage, the greatest forced migration of human beings in history, can be compared to an act of *translation,* both of human bodies and human identities from their origins in Africa to the islands and mainland of America, or more specifically in this study, to the Antilles. This metaphor is useful in the study of modern Créole societies as they attempt to redefine themselves within the modern global community. The various ways in which a text rejects or accepts a translation into a different language and culture may shed light on the complex and symbolic ways in which the transatlantic slave resisted his own translation into the system of slavery.

I. HUMAN BEING AS A TEXT

Fascinated by this metaphor, I began to consider the various parallels between the translation of a literary text and that of a human body and, consequently, his or her identity. I began with the definition of the root word of 'translation' in both English and French. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the English verb *to translate* means firstly, "to bear, convey or remove from one person, place or condition to another; to transfer, to transport."[120] Even more interesting is the definition of the French equivalent *traduire,* which, according to the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* of 1798 (the pinnacle of the slave trade), meant "transférer d'un lieu à un autre. Il ne se dit que des *personnes*."[121] In English, a reversal has taken place, and we now use the word *translate* in its linguistic sense only, whilst *traduire* in modern French now also refers to the translation of language. It is interesting to note that the word *traduire* was indeed used in common eighteenth century French to describe the transport of Africans across the Atlantic. A slave trader by the name of Jean Pierre Plesse recorded in his journal that, "The male captives are translated [*traduits*],

[120] According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2004)
[121] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 1798 (5th ed.) p. 860 [emphasis mine]

attached at the wrists."[122] The ambiguity of these two words – to transfer a physical entity from one place to another, as well as to translate meaning, to convey a message, to interpret – seems to support the metaphor I have mentioned above. If a human being can be considered as a work of art, a living novel, then like all texts a person may be subject to translation and indeed to translation against their will, represented in this study by the forced migration that was the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Thus I propose that the men and women that survived the middle passage and their descendants, whose stories are recreated and retold through Creole literature, can be seen as living "texts", texts translated from oral history and myth, and as the continuously changing forms of their own histories and identities, from their origins in the continent of Africa to the islands of the Antilles.

The task that French Créole writers face in recreating their past is one of many levels of translation. Firstly there is the translation of various creole dialects into French, the language of the coloniser. This translation is unfortunately necessary if Créole writers are to make their history accessible and known worldwide. Secondly, it often entails the translation of oral tradition into the concrete, strictly linear tradition of written narrative – the type of narrative that is the most appealing to the Western world. Finally, it is a task that retraces and explores the physical translation of human lives from one continent to another across the Atlantic Ocean. These captives were the carriers of their histories, the oral traditions, myths, legends and cautionary tales that became systematically silenced in the coloniser's narrative.

II. NARRATIVE

Before I continue and in order to fully grasp the importance of the metaphor of translation that I have outlined above, I believe it is necessary to define and clarify the distinction between "written" and "oral" narratives in order to come to terms with the difficulties and necessity of a translation between the two. It is a distinction that often assumes a prejudiced hierarchy between the two forms, where oral tradition is dismissed as an illegitimate source of historical data. In the context of this study and with the central metaphor of my thesis in mind, this hierarchy directly reflects the hierarchy between the colonising nation and the colonised. The transatlantic slave embodies oral narrative, whilst the powers by which he is enslaved represent written "official" historical narrative. The archive, as I have previously discussed, is an example of an apparently trustworthy source of written historical knowledge. But as illustrated by Derrida, the archive can and must be called into

[122] Jean Pierre Plesse, *Journal de bord d'un négrier,* (Paris: Editions Le Mot et Le Reste, 2005), 123.

question given that it is directly influenced and often controlled by state power and the agenda of the colonising nation. Narrative, Baker observes, particularly in literary studies, has been defined merely as a possible mode of communication, like argumentation or exposition. However, social theorists such as Margaret Somers and Walter Fisher offer a far broader definition, one that breaks down the barrier and undermines the hierarchy between oral and written forms. They maintain that narrative is "the principal and inescapable mode by which we experience the world." The notion of a "narrative" therefore incorporates a multiplicity of stories, both personal and public, the stories we tell other people as well as those to which we choose to subscribe, the stories that determine our place and behaviour in society and the world. In the words of Somers and Gibson, "They are the stories we tell ourselves, not just those we explicitly tell other people, about the world(s) in which we live."[123]

Rather than draw a line between the oral and written, Somers and Gibson identify four types of narrative, namely, *ontological, public, conceptual* and *meta* or '*master*' narratives.[124] *Ontological narratives* are the stories that we tell ourselves about our own personal history. By nature they are social, told amongst family and friends, even though they focus on the self and its immediate world. *Public narratives* are stories that are elaborated and spread by the group: family, religious institutions or schools, political groups, activist organisations, media, the nation. These narratives are plentiful and often conflicting. The competing public narratives on the war in Iraq are a good example. Each party gives different accounts of what has happened, reasons for why it happened, and identifies different scapegoats on which to place the blame.[125] Baker broadly defines *Conceptual narratives* as "the stories and explanations that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves (and others) about their objective enquiry." These conceptual 'stories' developed by academics in their field of study can have a large impact on the global community. Alternatively they can simply remain in the realm of academics. One example of a conceptual narrative that has made a tangible and lasting impact on the world is Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996).[126] His narrative divides the world into distinct groups based solely on their "inherent" cultural characteristics; Western, Eastern, Orthodox, Latin American, Islamic, Japanese, Chinese, Hindu and African civilizations – most of which are in opposition to American values. He predicted that culture would replace ideology as the main cause of war. His thesis has gone as far as to influence George W. Bush's time in office as president of the United States and has been the spark

[123] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 464.
[124] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 464.
[125] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 465.
[126] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 465.

to fuel several official *public* narratives relating to the events of 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[127] Finally, *meta* or *master narratives* have been defined as those in which "we are embedded as contemporary actors in History… Our sociological theories and concepts are encoded with aspects of these master-narratives – Progress, Decadence, Industrialization, Enlightenment, etc."[128] A modern example of such a *meta* narrative, as Baker remarks, is the "War on Terror", an ideal that has been tirelessly promoted through the media and government, justifying cultural war and greatly impacting the world's population. To qualify as a *meta* narrative, Baker explains that the 'story' or ideal must have similar scope as well as a sense of inevitability.[129] Most relevant to this study and as cited by Somers and Gibson, the period known as the Enlightenment serves as a perfect example of a *meta* narrative. A movement set in motion by a vast collection of *public* and *conceptual* narratives – government policies, philosophers and novelists – preaching freedom, equality and *les droits de l'homme* in France, whilst conveniently neglecting the uncomfortable topic of slavery in the islands – arguably the very power house of the wealth which gave the French the time to philosophise in the first place.[130] In the same train of thought, we can perhaps identify the Creole authors that I shall discuss as the inventors of *conceptual* narratives, their field of study being the Transatlantic Slave Trade. They attempt to thoughtfully develop alternative 'stories' to oppose the dominant and neglectful *master* narratives born and cultivated during the *Époque de Lumières*. They do so by drawing from a myriad of sources; *ontological* – the personal stories of slave communities preserved in fragmented oral tradition, and *public* – government publications, censuses, philosophic works, literature. If one accepts Somers and Gibson's four categories of narrative, it would appear that the oppressive distinction between *oral* and *written* history loses some of its power. The difference is reduced to a culture's historical tradition, their access to education, their standards of literacy and their various codes of recording the past.

III. TRANSLATION AS METAPHOR: THE *LAIS* OF MARIE DE FRANCE

This is not the first time that translation has been employed as a metaphor in order to discuss the various forms of transformation in history resulting from colonisation and colliding cultures. A fascinating example, and one that further clarifies my point, can be found in Marie de France's *Lais,*

[127] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 466.
[128] Somers, Margaret & Gloria D. Gibson, "Reclaiming the Epistemological 'Other': Narrative and the Social Constitution of Identity," *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (1994): 63.
[129] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 467.
[130] See page 11.

composed in twelfth century England.[131] The *Lais* is a collection of twelve Breton tales that Marie claims to have heard or perhaps seen performed. She decides to translate them into written, rhymed French verse in order, she claims, to preserve them.[132] The *Lais* belong to an entirely oral genre of storytelling; lyrics set to music (a *lai*) in the Breton language and sung by Breton minstrels from generation to generation in order to easily remember the detail and truth of the original adventure.[133] The actual evidence of their existence relies completely on the writers or historians that have mentioned or translated them. Peggy McCracken, who has conducted a fascinating analysis on the subject of translation and animals in the *Lais,*[134] has observed that Marie clearly recognizes her project as one than participates in the translating cultures of Anglo-Norman England, and appears to understand the moral and ethical implications of such an endeavour.[135] Translation has several meanings for Marie de France. It includes the translation of language to language, of the oral word to written verse or prose, and also of one cultural interpretation to another. Most interestingly, she also appears to use the transformation of humans into animals, or animals into humans, a central theme in the *Lais*, as a metaphor for translation.

As distant and unrelated as they may seem, Marie de France's *Lais* share several similarities to the oral history of the Antillean people. Centuries before Columbus "discovered" the Americas, and before the Atlantic slave trade made its terrible mark on human history, the socio-political context of twelfth century England was comparable to the situation in the Caribbean today. After waves of Roman and Germanic conquest, contact with Muslim culture and Arabic, Hebrew influence and a Celtic past that was preserved through oral traditions, the England of the twelfth century was a site of diverse postcolonial medieval culture, ruled by a king from Normandy.[136] Interestingly enough, Normandy would later become a region of France, the nation that would colonise several Caribbean islands four centuries later; islands that it continues to hold control over to this day. William the conqueror had successfully led the Norman invasion of England in 1066, and was crowned king soon after. He, his nobles and followers spoke a range of Northern French dialects, collectively known as Norman French, which soon became instituted as the language of administration, law and business.

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[131] Warnke, Karl (ed.) *Les Lais de Marie de France,* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990), translations cited from Keith Busby & Glyn S. Burgess, trans., *The Lais of Marie de France* (New York: Penguin, 1999)
[132] McCracken, "Translation and Animals in Marie de France's Lais," *Australian Journal of French Studies,* (2009): 207.
[133] "The Lais of Marie de France" Judith P. Shoaf, The College of Liberal Arts: University of Florida. Last modified: 1 January 1996, http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jshoaf/Marie/
[134] Peggy McCracken, "Translation and Animals in Marie de France's *Lais,*" *Australian Journal of French Studies,* (2009) p. 206-218
[135] McCracken, "Translation and Animals," 206.
[136] McCracken, "Translation and Animals," 207.

The aristocracy and common people soon adopted Norman French as a second language due to its prestigious status as the "language of the king" and also because of its use in education as a medium through which Latin was taught.[137]

Thus, the Anglo-Norman England in which Marie de France lived was a site of linguistic and cultural diversity, where (Old) French, the language of the victor, was dominant but coexisted with Breton, Middle English and Latin. Besides different social, political and economical factors, twelfth century England would not have been too different, ideologically speaking, from postcolonial Martinique or Guadeloupe. These islands, as a result of European colonisation and the slave trade, have become home to a range of diverse ethnicities: African, Asian, Indian and European.[138] On both islands, French remains the official language of justice, administration and education, despite the existence of numerous creole dialects whose roots can be traced to several different continents across the Atlantic, dialects which have been translated and cultivated by years of slavery and colonisation. Breton, the language from which Marie de France claims to translate her *Lais*, originated in Western England around the sixth century AD and was brought to Armorica (present day Bretagne) by migrating Britons throughout the early middle ages.[139] Her project therefore deals with the translation of an oral tradition that was born in England centuries before, one that travelled south across the English Channel to the north western coast of France, leaving remnants behind that were still in use when Marie composed her *Lais*.[140] Her project encompasses both a linguistic translation, from Breton to Old French, as well as the translation of oral tradition to the written word, that is French verse, a task that she claims is for the preservation of the oral Breton tales. She makes this clear in her prologue to the *Lais*, explaining that she has been inspired by the traditions of the "ancients" who with a gift of knowledge or "science" and a talent for speech, would pass on stories through song:

> "Thus my idea began to take shape:
> I'd find some good story or song."
>
> "Then I thought of the lais I'd heard;
> I had no doubt, I was assured
> They'd been composed for memory's sake

[137] Loyn, H.R. *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest* (London:Longman, 1991)
[138] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *Lettres Créoles,* 43-83.
[139] 600-1100 AD
[140] McCracken, "Translation and Animals," 208.

About real adventures – no mistake:
They heard the tale, composed the song,
Sent it forth." [141]

A comparison is readily made between Marie's task of preserving the Breton tales and the preservation of the true history of the Antillean people: a task which also deals with the translation into literature of oral stories "composed for memory's sake," stories that have been passed down through several generations. The preservation of Creole history entails a translation from the language of the conquered to the language of the conqueror, the colonist. Thus we have two instances where the task of translating is of utmost importance to the preservation of a culture (or cultures) and the history embodied in their oral traditions, which have travelled across oceans from continent to continent, becoming enriched by the diversity of different landscapes and human contacts. Just as creole writers often explain or attribute the composition of an oral tradition or myth to certain characters in their stories, such as the *quimboiseur* papa Longoué in *Le Quatrième Siècle* and the several unnamed *conteurs* in the works of Chamoiseau, Marie de France often ascribes the composition of the *Lais* to the "old ones" within the narrative of her French verse. For example, Tristan in *Chevrefoil* ('The Honeysuckle'), who memorializes several words he has carved on a stick as well as a conversation he has had by composing a song for the harp.[142] Like the *conteurs* of Creole history who acknowledge that the past is not a simple, singular narrative but a path that, "s'émeut en histoires, et mieux, elle sillonne en tracées," Marie would have also drawn on a plurality of oral sources present in her time, in order to expand and enhance each Breton lyric.[143]

In her translation of the Breton tales, Marie de France clearly indicates that animals are the subjects of translation. Firstly, they are the protagonists of a story whose attributes and character must be translated from one language to another. Secondly, they can be seen as a subject, a *sens* that moves between the animal and human forms, such as the werewolf in *Bisclavret* who leaves his human form three days a week*,* or Muldumarec, the hawk-man who comes in answer to a ladies prayers for love in *Yonec.* It becomes apparent, as Peggy McCracken has argued, that by emphasising animals as beings that can be subjected to translation, Marie tacitly identifies the

[141] "The Lais of Marie de France" Judith P. Shoaf, The College of Liberal Arts: University of Florida. Last modified: 1 January 1996, http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jshoaf/Marie/
[142] "The Lais of Marie de France" Judith P. Shoaf, The College of Liberal Arts: University of Florida. Last modified: 1 January 1996, http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jshoaf/Marie/
[143] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *Lettres Créoles,* 13.

animal-human transformations in her *Lais* as metaphors for translation.[144] In other words, the bodily transformations of the animal to the human and the human to the animal in the *Lais* emphasize a movement between two *forms* (rather than highlighting their differences or creating a hierarchy between humanity and animality). As a result, human-animal transformation in the *Lais* can be viewed as a metaphor that reveals the various ways in which the oral Breton tales *resist* and/or comply to a translation into written French.

This is perhaps best exemplified in *Bisclavret*, the story of a knight who transforms into a wolf for three days every week. It is one where animal-human metamorphosis emphasizes power relationships that demand 'animal' submission to 'human' authority. I intend to demonstrate how the 'animal', that is the werewolf in this *lai,* may be seen as a metaphor for the oral tradition of the Breton tales which Marie translates (as well as oral traditions in general), while the 'human', especially seen in the character of the king, symbolises written historical traditions, a tradition that today is usually associated with the European coloniser and the Western approach to the past. There is no hierarchy implied between the value of the 'animal' and that of the 'human' in *Bisclavret*, as Marie herself clearly indicates and thus no hierarchy is assumed between oral tradition or written. The transformations merely emphasize the fluidity or difficulty of movement between the two forms. If a hierarchy does appear to exist then it is a subjective one, imposed by the coloniser and his personal perception. McCracken appears to have imagined this comparison as well, stating that,

> "…If the metaphor of translation obscures the power relations that define animal submission and domestication, so too the translation of Breton oral stories to written French verse both invites and hides an acknowledgement of the power relations of colonization."[145]

Bisclavret is the Breton name for a werewolf, which Marie chooses to keep in her translation rather than using the Norman word *Garulf,* in keeping with her overall project of preserving the Breton tales. It is the tale of a knight who leaves his human form, changing into a wolf for three days each week, disappearing into the forest to hunt. Fearing that he has a secret mistress, his wife asks him where he goes to every week. After much persistence, he answers; "Lady, I become a werewolf. I enter the forest and live in the deepest part of the wood where I feed off the prey I can capture."[146] His wife is afraid and immediately asks if he undresses or remains clothed when he transforms in an

[144] McCracken, "Translation and Animals," 207.
[145] McCracken, "Translation and Animals," 218.
[146] Burgess, Glyn & Keith Busby (transl.) *The Lais of Marie de France* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 69.

attempt to deduce whether he retains any of his ‘humanity’ as a wolf. The knight tells her that he goes about “toz nuz”, completely naked.[147] She asks him where he hides his clothes, a question he is reluctant to answer since he needs his human garments to resume his human form. After more insistent questioning, he eventually reveals the hiding place. The next time the knight transforms into a *bisclavret*, his wife hides his cloths with the help of a neighbouring knight, trapping her husband in his animal form and condemning him to live in the forest. An entire year goes by when one day the werewolf encounters the king to whom he was once a faithful human subject, who is on a hunt with his dogs in the forest. After a long chase, the dogs corner him, but when the king arrives the *bisclavret* approaches and kisses his leg in a human gesture of submission.

It is this moment of the story where the metaphor I have mentioned above is most apparent. The king is amazed at the wolf’s actions and recognizes in them a sense of human understanding. However, considering that this encounter takes place when both are hunting, an activity with fairly animalistic connotations, McCracken has speculated that just as the king sees human qualities in the wolf (because of the wolf’s submissive gesture to his human authority), we can imagine that the wolf recognises *animal* qualities in the king (who is on a hunt just like him in the forest).[148] If we can accept McCracken’s interpretation, the resulting conclusions are significant: Marie de France appears to imagine that both the king and the wolf resemble each other, each share both animal and human characteristics. In a way, they are equal; “the man is like a wolf, the wolf is like a man”, but due to the existing power relationships, “the king’s perception is the one that dominates at the end of the story.”[149] This encounter can be compared to the colliding of different cultures and their conceptions of the past. The two parties recognise similarities as well as differences in each other but in the end the voice of the stronger and his perspective reigns. For this reason, Columbus could completely ignore the acts of universal kindness shown to him by the natives of the first island he discovered in his “New World”, and instead judge them as less than human due to their technological and military weakness. Like the similarities between the animal and the human in this *lai,* oral and written traditions share various characteristics as well. As Glissant has argued, myth is the “initial manifestation of [man’s] historical consciousness in the process of its formation as well as the primary matter of the literary work”[150] and thus the mother of the written historical narrative. But because Columbus and the colonists that followed him belonged to an ethnocentric, nation-centred

[147] *Bisclavret* 1. 70 (Warnke, 1990)
[148] McCracken, “Translation and Animals,” 215.
[149] McCracken, “Translation and Animals,” 216.
[150] Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais,* 138.

culture, the oral history of cultures that had no method of recording their past in writing were and continue to be silenced or dismissed. The wife's hiding of her husband's clothes in *Bisclavret* out of fear of his transformations can perhaps be discussed as an interesting metaphor for the centuries of state enforced illiteracy upon the indigenous people of colonised nations, of how slaves and their descendants were deliberately deprived of education because the colonists feared that this would encourage rebellion and revolt. It was one of the primary conditions that locked their history of enslavement in the form of oral tradition, at a time when only written tradition was recognised.

Back to the story: the king is so impressed by the *bisclavret*'s human-like gesture, that he takes him back to his court. He lives peacefully there in his animal form, continuing to display human characteristics, until one day his wife and her new husband visit the king. Suddenly, in an outburst that is surprisingly out of character and decidedly "animal", the wolf attacks them, tearing off his wife's nose. His behaviour is so strange to the court that the king is persuaded to spare the *bisclavret*'s life, and rather pressure the wife into explaining why the wolf may have some grudge against her. Under great "distress", the wife reveals her treachery and is banished. The king orders the *bisclavret's* clothes to be brought to him. There is an interesting moment in the narrative where the wolf hesitates to shed his animal form before the court and must be taken away to a room where he transforms in private, and only after a long while;

> "The King wants the clothes on the spot;
> Whether the lady wants to or not
> She has them brought back out
> And given to Bisclavret.
> They set them down in front of his nose,
> But Bisclavret ignores the clothes." [151]

Some critics attribute this reluctance to a sense of shame or shyness at the prospect of shedding his "semblance de beste" in front of the court, which is perhaps supported by certain verses of the *lai.* [152] However, McCracken argues that when read alongside the emphasis on human-animal transformations as a metaphor for translation throughout the *Lais,* the wolf's hesitation can be read as "less a corruption of the human than as another form of being in which the wolf-man might be

[151] "The Lais of Marie de France" Judith P. Shoaf, The College of Liberal Arts: University of Florida. Last modified: 1 January 1996, http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jshoaf/Marie/
[152] *Bisclavret,* l. 286 (Burgess, 1999)

equally at home."[153] *Bisclavret's* hesitance to transform back into his human form can be seen as a metaphor for the resistance of oral tradition when faced with a translation into written form. Eventually the wolf does transform, but he does so secretly in a private room where the transformation takes place over several hours. Thus Marie enshrouds the movement between the animal and the human, the two "forms of being" in mystery. There appears to be strong evidence that the secrecy of the *bisclavret's* transformation into human form reflects the difficulties and resistances of the oral tale to a written translation, as well as the mysterious, obscure methods used to overcome these resistances. By emphasizing both likeness and difference between the king and the *bisclavret* (the noble king hunts like the wolf; the wolf submits to authority like a human, but savagely attacks his wife like an animal), Marie destroys any sense of hierarchy between the two forms. As McCracken argues, the animal-human transformations in the *Lais* should rather be seen as "a continuity of being that may take animal or human form. To posit the human as translatable by the animal, or the animal by the human, is to posit an equivalence of being and an *equivalent value* of being for each."[154] The same can be said of oral tradition and written history. They resemble each other: both are methods of recording the past and are of equivalent value. Thus, although difficult, a translation between the two is indeed possible.

The use of metaphor and translation in Marie de France's *Lais* has hopefully helped to clarify my own, namely the transatlantic slave as a living 'text' subjected to translation through slavery and more specifically through the Middle Passage. As demonstrated through Marie de France's translation of the Breton *Lais,* it is clear that a language carries a wealth of information on each culture. The transfer of culture, therefore, is implicated in all forms of translation. Thus it has been argued that any metaphorical uses of translation assume that cultural and linguistic diversity is indeed translatable.[155] In the *Lais*, the animal-human transformation as a metaphor for oral to written translation assumes that the two forms, although different, share various qualities and thus comply to a certain degree of translation – although how this is achieved remains mysterious. With the metaphor of the transatlantic slave as a living, translated text, I intend to show that the oral history of the Creole people can indeed be preserved through a translation into literature and even into French literature, the very language that has silenced their history for so long. However, the nature and scale of the Atlantic slave trade make such a translation decidedly more difficult. The African captive was

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[153] McCracken, "Translation and Animals," 216.
[154] McCracken, "Translation and Animals," 217. [emphasis mine]
[155] Stahuljak, Zrinka. "An Epistemology of Tension: Translation and Multiculturalism," *The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication.* (2004): 37.

forcefully translated across the ocean from freedom into slavery. So too was his oral history and his very conception of the past subjected to a translation into the ideologically different, ethnocentric and racially constructed historical narrative of his captor; the coloniser. Since he had no free will of his own and acted only for the purpose of his master – to whom he was nothing but a slave with no need of a history – his past ceased to exist. Or rather it existed, but was condemned to literary silence. As a result, the sources that Creole writers have to work with are fragmented and obscure. The task is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible. But as José Ortega y Gasset has argued, all translation "is very difficult, it's unlikely, but, for the same reasons, it is very meaningful."[156] To borrow his words, the misery and splendour of the task of translation is this:

> "One tries to say in a language precisely what that language tends to silence. But, at the same time, one glimpses a possible marvellous aspect of the enterprise of translating: the revelation of the mutual secrets that peoples and epochs keep to themselves and which contribute so much to their separation and hostility; in short – an audacious integration of Humanity. Because, as Goethe said: 'Only between all men can that which is human be lived fully.'"[157]

Thus the task of translating the oral history of the transatlantic slave and his descendants may be an impossible one, but for the same reasons, it is a magnificent one, one that may reveal the "mutual secrets" hidden in Creole culture, aiding the momentum of reconciliation and forgiveness, perhaps over time even healing the racist and social divides that continue to exist as a result of the enduring consequences of the slave trade. If anything, the *Lais* teach us that history repeats itself. What is unfolding in the Caribbean is comparable to what Europe herself once experienced over hundreds of years of feudalism. It reveals that the apparent hierarchy between written and oral forms of history is neither universal nor objective, but one that has been strategically constructed over time by the conquerors of history, in order to preserve their version of events. Although perhaps praise is due to those victorious tribes and nations, it must be said that the main technological achievement that propelled them to glory was their proficiency in the art of warfare, in violence. As Walter Benjamin has illustrated, the sobering fact is this: history as we know it today has been predominantly written and transmitted by the barbarian – "Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the rulers step over those who are lying prostrate."[158]

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[156] Ortega y Gasset, José. "The Misery and Splendour of Translation" *The Translation Studies Reader,* Edited by Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000), 60.
[157] Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and Splendour of Translation," 57.
[158] Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 256.

IV. THE BODY

Marie de France compared the oral-written translation of the Breton tales to a bodily transformation: from the human to the animal, and vice versa. This is significant as the physical body, although not a defining factor, is certainly an integral part of one's identity and is therefore susceptible to translation. An interesting parallel emerges between the translations of the 'body' or language of a text and that of a human body. In *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1948), Sartre compares language to the image of a verbal body. He even goes as far as to consider language as,

> "A prolongation of one's body, a means of extending one's hand… it is a prolongation of our senses. We are within language as we are within our body. We feel it spontaneously while going beyond it towards other ends, as we feel our hands and feet." [159]

For Chamoiseau, it is only when the slave achieves a sense of "interior vision", looking inward towards one's body that he can reject the self-denigration caused by the coloniser's cultural domination.[160] It is perhaps for this reason that the old slave blindfolds himself during his flight into the forest in *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse,* heightening his senses and allowing his body to become in touch with nature, enrooted in the land. Similarly for Glissant, one of Chamoiseau's major influences, it is in relocating consciousness in the body that his characters begin their journey towards self-formation.[161] Liberation for Glissant is the simultaneous freeing of the mind and body. He explains this concept in *Le Discours Antillais* stating that,

> "The alienated body of the slave, in the time of slavery, is in fact deprived, as if to make the emptiness more complete, of language. Self-expression is not only forbidden, but impossible to envisage… When the body is freed (when that day comes) it accompanies the explosive scream."[162]

For this reason, in *Le Quatrième Siècle,* the primordial maroon Longoué cries out a long scream upon his escape into the forest on the first day of his arrival in Martinique. The *cri* or the frenzied scream is the transatlantic slave's physical and verbal rejection of the translation that has been imposed upon him. In creating the link between the scream and the freed body, Glissant presents a

[159] Sartre, Jean-Paul, *What is Literature?* (London: Menthuen, 1950), 11.
[160] Seifort, Lewis C. "Oral History and "Creoleness" in Patrick Chamoiseau's 'Creole Folktales'," *Marvels and Tales* 16 (2002): 216.
[161] Dash, Michael. "Writing the Body: Édouard Glissant's poetics of re-membering," *World Literature Today* (1989): 610.
[162] Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais,* 238.

bond between the psychic and physical liberation of the slave, the reclaiming of his identity. In *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse,* Chamoiseau describes the initial rejection of the imposed translation as an involuntary bodily reaction, known as *la décharge.* He describes it as a strange sickness or fever that comes over the slave's body,

> "On allait désarticulé par une impétueuse présence en soi. La voix prenait un autre son. La démarche s'ourlait grotesque. Une vibrée religieuse vous tremblait les paupières et les joues. Et vos yeux portaient les marques de feu coutumières aux dragons réveillés." [163]

The slave finds himself in fits of rage and feverish hallucinations of fire and volcanic magma. This strange sickness, Chamoiseau explains, is the reason why a slave would suddenly attack his foreman, or maroon with no real hope of escape. This involuntary bodily reaction, experienced at least once in a lifetime, represents each slave's inherent refusal of slavery, of the forced translation of his or her body and identity. It must be noted that it is perhaps for this reason that Creole oral tradition in the Caribbean is often accompanied by the frenzied movement of the body, by wild gesticulating – physical displays of resistance, commemorated through oral tradition against the translation of their identities into slavery.

Considering that the slave trade, and the Middle Passage in particular, dealt directly with the translation of human bodies (and thus their identities and histories), it is fascinating to note that one of the most frequent punishments for rebellion on the slave ship or for marooning on the plantation was the physical maiming or mutilation of the slave body. As I shall discuss shortly, the system of the slave trade put in place an apparatus of observation that acted on the human body, in order to make it as docile, obedient and useful as possible. It is very symbolic then that the punishment for the act of rebellion against slavery, the rejection of the imposed translation of one's body and identity, was the brutal fragmentation of that body. Pieces of the slave's body, an arm, a leg, perhaps just an ear, were literally cut off and discarded. Perhaps most symbolic was the law that allowed a master to cut out the tongue of a slave whom he thought spoke out of turn or against him – a literal silencing of the slave voice.[164] Although this punishment was chosen primarily for its extreme cruelty, the symbolism cannot be ignored. The slave trade took African captives and transformed them into slave bodies. If those bodies became a threat, if their spirits resisted slavery and desired their own story, their will was crushed, their bodies were broken and maimed, their very identity

[163] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 38.
[164] Vergés, *La Mémoire Enchaînée,* 150.

fragmented. Given that the utility of the slave body was its physical labour, such damage to the 'merchandise' seems an extremely drastic precaution. However, this physical mutilation was the heavy cost of producing and maintaining the 'docile spirits' inherent in 'slave bodies'.[165] When considered alongside the metaphor of a human being as a living text, the violent physical mutilation of the slave body directly reflects the fragmentation of Créole history as each slave voice or 'text' was silenced or suppressed.

The theme of fragmentation permeates throughout the history of the Caribbean. According to Edward Kamau Brathwaite, the region known today as the Caribbean – a 2000-mile arc of some 5000 islands or "fragments", the peaks of an ancient, sunken mountain range that at one time belonged to mainland America – was once home to a native, "whole society" or at least an aspect of homogenous culture. There were Taino, Carib, Arawak and Luayo tribes, as well as canoe sailing routes between Florida and Guanahani, Yucatan and Aruba, and between Trinidad and the coast of Venezuela. But with the "missilic intrusion of Columbus" the fragmentation of the region began.[166] As Brathwaite illustrates, any chance of recreating a "whole" society again was destroyed by the rise of rival European nations, all racing to claim land for their respective king, queen or variant of the Christian Church. The Spanish were followed swiftly – despite several sanctions by the Papacy in Rome – by England, France and Holland, each with their own ethnocentric, "nation-centred" concept of the World. Besides eradicating the islands of their indigenous populations through hostile encounters and by diseases imported from Europe, the impact of European colonisation was that, "[there] was not one master-language but four; not one mother church, but at least two; and a mercantilist system that consolidated these fragmentations."[167] Upon discovering that there was in fact no gold in the islands, no liquid wealth, many settlers then sailed North to Massachusetts, abandoning the new fragmented, culturally denuded Caribbean. This resulted in "Geological fragmentation, political fragmentation, psychic fragmentation. To be followed by plantation slavery." The import of some 15 million Africans, as part of a larger forced migration to the Americas further fragmented the Caribbean region with new people, languages and religions. As Brathwaite remarks, it also introduced and maintained a strong culture of racism – one that continues to divide and corrupt our world today – in order to justify the inequality imposed by the dominant

[165] See Cilas Kemedjio, "Rape of Bodies, Rape of Souls: From the Surgeon to the Psychiatrist, from the Slave Trade to the Slavery of Comfort in the Work of Edouard Glissant" in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 25, no. 2, Special Issue: Caribbean Literature (Summer, 1994), pp. 51-79, in which the author illustrates two of the multiple strategies of domination in the Antillean world: the production of slave bodies and the production of docile spirits.
[166] Brathwaite, "World Order Models," 57.
[167] Brathwaite, "World Order Models," 58.

group on the other.[168] Even the abolition of slavery itself in the Caribbean added to the fragmentation of the region, in that their was not one date of emancipation, but several – Haiti achieved independence and emancipation in 1804, British slaves in 1834, the French islands in 1848, and finally Cuba as late as 1886 – so that there was not one single core or origin from which a new Caribbean society may be formed.[169]

In his work, *Le Quatrième Siècle,* Glissant emphasizes the fragmented nature of Créole history, through the interrupted, often non-linear and chaotic ramblings of the *Quimboiseur*, papa Longoué. The old man constantly places his story – the history of three generations of his ancestors in Martinique – in contrast to the official history books, "les livres pour oublier le détail," on which Mathieu depends to discover his past.[170] Mathieu Béluse, brought up and educated under colonial rule in Martinique in the years following the first World War, would prefer to "suivre les faits avec logique," and continuously mocks papa Longoué's magical, interrupted and almost non-linear way of retelling history.[171] He taunts him, saying "Nous appelons cela le passé. Cette suite sans fond d'oublis avec de loin en loin l'éclair d'un rien dans notre néant."[172] However, papa Longoué is not deterred and continues in his jolted narrative, "foreseeing" and "making out" the past, placing little importance on chronological facts, slipping into repetitions and obscure paths – pages written in italics display this confusion – and then suddenly emerging, becoming clear and coherent when the vision he seeks, *la parole* of his forefathers, seems 'stronger'.[173]

To a western reader, the audacity of calling such a narrative 'history' is inconceivable, but for Glissant and many other Creole writers, it is the only legitimate method of recreating the history of the Créole people. He explains this in *Le Discours Antillais,* arguing that,

> "The Antilles are the place of history made of ruptures and whose beginning is a brutal rooting up: the slave trade. Our historic consciousness could not 'settle', so to speak, in a progressive and uninterrupted manner, as it does with people who have engendered an often-totalitarian philosophy of history, such as European people. On the contrary, it aggregated its elements under the auspices of shock, contraction, painful negation and explosion." [174]

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[168] Brathwaite, "World Order Models," 59.
[169] Brathwaite, "World Order Models," 60.
[170] Glissant, *QS,* 121.
[171] Glissant, *QS,* 57-8
[172] Glissant, *QS,* 59
[173] Glissant, *QS,* 58
[174] Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais,*130-1.

For this reason, the opening question of *Le Quatrième Siècle,* is not, “Qu’est-ce que c’est, le passé?” but rather, “Que nous reste-t-il du passé?” The fragmentation, maiming or torture of the slave body was one of the chief instruments of control that translated the African captive into slavery. When comparing the slave to a literary text, this fragmentation can be seen to reflect the fragmentation of Creole history as his voice was silenced – like a bitter translator, tearing out entire pages of a book. In the next chapter, I shall discuss in greater detail the complex apparatus of control that acted on the human body, as well as identifying a specific translator in the system of the transatlantic slave trade.

IV

TRANSLATORS, INTERPRETERS, & SURGEONS.

> "Le moment historique des disciplines, c'est là où naît un art du corps humain, qui ne vise pas seulement à la croissance de ses habiletés, ni non plus l'alourdissement de sa sujétion, mais la formation d'un rapport qui dans le mécanisme le rend d'autant plus obéissant qu'il est utile, et inversement. Se forme alors une politique des coercitions qui sont un travail sur le corps, une manipulation calculée de ses éléments, de ses gestes, de ses comportements. Le corps humain entre dans une machinerie du pouvoir qui *le fouille, le désarticule, et le recompose*." [175]
>
> Michel Foucault
>
> *Surveiller et Punir*

I. FIDELITÉ

When faced with the translation of a literary text from one language to another, the translator must decide whether he will be more faithful to the source, *le texte d'origine*, or if he will be faithful to his target audience, *la cible*, for whom he is translating the text. Will he ensure that the author's style is preserved at the risk of sounding foreign or confusing to his readers, or will he ignore the stylistic elements and merely produce a piece of entertaining literature? It is a question that continues to raise much debate amongst theorists of translation. I have spoken of the slave trade as the forced translation of human bodies across the Atlantic Ocean and have introduced the metaphor of the human body as a living 'text' within the metaphor of the Middle Passage as translation. If a translator must approach the text choosing to remain more faithful to the *source* or to the *cible,* then I

[175] Foucault, Michel. *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 139. [emphasis mine]

propose that the Middle Passage can be viewed as the greatest and the most careless translation of human beings or living 'texts' across a divide, with absolutely no *fidelité à la source* but rather for the sole pleasure and purpose of the target audience. That purpose was for the profit of France, to satisfy a new sweet craving at a bitter price. Voltaire wrote that, "in 1757, French Saint-Domingue had about thirty thousand persons and one hundred thousand Negro and mulatto slaves, working on the sugar mills […] who were shortening their lives in order to flatter our new appetites, filling new needs that our fathers did not have…"[176] Chamoiseau and Confiant refer to their islands in the Caribbean Archipelago as "*terres amères de sucres*", a powerful and paradoxical description that reflects the irony of so many deaths for the purpose of supplying France with sugar, a "superflu devenu nécessaire."[177] France needed slaves; the productivity of the islands was entirely dependent on them, and on the continuation of the slave trade.[178] Cilas Kemedjio writes,

> "Working the land constitutes the ultimate justification for the suffering experienced by the African: from initial capture, to transatlantic crossing, to sale. *The African became a slave body for the sole and express purpose of cultivating the colonizer's land…* The slave body's identity and traits are determined by his or her insertion within the slave system – these are not inherent in the deported Black's physiological constitution. The network of slavery produced a physiological, moral, and mental identity for the slave body in order to legitimize the necessity not only of the slave body but of the mechanisms of enslavement." [179]

During the transatlantic slave trade, the slave had no identity or purpose outside of his role as a slave, the person he once was essentially ceased to exist. A slave captain by the name of Jacques Savary, speaking of the departure from the coast of Africa, warned other *négriers* of the need to sail away from the coast "as quickly as possible," as the despair felt when the slaves see that they are leaving their homeland forever "causes many deaths."[180] Once land was out of sight, they were much easier to "control". A symbolic and hasty 'sailing away', it would seem, from the *sens*.[181] The origins of the people aboard the slave ship were of no consequence to their new masters. All that mattered was the price they were bargained for and the potential profit to be made at the other end of the terrible

[176] Voltaire, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Garnier, 1883), 12, 416-17.
[177] Voltaire, *Oeuvres Complètes,*(12), 17.
[178] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 27.
[179] Kemedjio, "Rape of Bodies," 53 [emphasis mine]
[180] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 49.
[181] A term I shall use from here on to refer to both the 'meaning' that a text conveys as well as to the 'identity' of a person, the intangible inner character of a human being

voyage. For the slaves, they found themselves not only in a new land but in a completely different life as well, serving a purpose that was not their own.

II. REBIRTH

Some theorists would agree with José Ortega y Gasset that a translation of a literary text can no longer be considered the same 'work' as the original. It is not merely the original text with a different vocabulary.[182] Some stipulate that when a text is translated from one language to another, it becomes an entirely new creation due to the subtle differences inherent in each language, as well as the personal influence that the translator himself imposes on the text. Thus, it seems quite apt that the Middle passage has also been described as a cauldron, a process of melting down and total rebirth. The authors of *Lettres Créoles* poetically refer to the transatlantic voyage as "l'utérine traversée".[183] In his work *Poétique de la Relation*, Édouard Glissant introduces and defines his metaphor of the slave ship as a 'womb', outlining the specific destructive nature of the hold of the *négriers* and its systematic creation of slave bodies. He writes,

> "Le terrifiant est du gouffre, trois fois noué à l'inconnu. Une fois donc, inaugurale, quand tu tombes dans le ventre de la barque. Une barque, selon ta poétique, n'a pas de ventre, une barque n'engloutit pas, ne dévore pas, une barque se dirige à plein ciel. Le ventre de cette barque-ci te dissout, te précipite dans un non-monde où tu cries. Cette barque est une matrice, le gouffre matrice. Génératrice de ta clameur. Productrice de toute ton unanimité à venir. Car si tu es seul dans cette souffrance, tu partages dans l'inconnu avec quelques-uns, que tu ne connais pas encore. Cette barque est ta matrice, un moule, qui t'expulse pourtant. Enceinte d'autant de morts que de vivants en sursis." [184]

If one can accept that no translation can be considered the same as the original 'text', then it is possible that the Middle Passage was not only an act of translation of human bodies and identities but also a symbolic process of complete rebirth. The people and the cultures that were 'reborn' on the other side of the transatlantic voyage can be seen as new, fascinating creations. This is evident in the wealth and variety of Créole literature, music, dance and cuisine, all of which has emerged from a relatively small geographic space. However, although Ortega y Gasset argues that a translation is not the duplicate of the original, he also reminds us that a translation cannot be approached without reference to the original work. He maintains that a translation is a "path towards the [original]

[182] Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and Splendour of Translation," 61.
[183] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 81.
[184] Glissant, Édouard. *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard,1990), 18.

work".[185] Perhaps Créole languages and identities can be seen in this way – as hosts of the clues to their past, as paths towards the original story. Indeed all languages can be seen as "anachronistic instruments" and as Ortega y Gasset has observed, "When we speak, we are humble hostages to the past."[186] Although creole writers may embrace their identity today, they do not deny the desire to rediscover and recreate their past, and as we will see, they do so in an astounding way.

III. The Surgeon-Translator

In order for our metaphor to be complete, we need to identify a *translator* in this transatlantic system, an active agent in the process of forced translation, in the creation of slave bodies and slave identities. Thus far I have spoken vaguely of the colonial powers and slave merchants as the responsible parties. However there appear to be two sorts of characters whose particular professions may have played a more direct and definitive role. The first of these seem to have been employed both as common sailors as well as unofficial 'translators' on board the slave ship – the *negros ladinos*. The term *negro ladino* originally referred to a black slave that had spent some time in Portugal or Spain and had become 'cultivated' or 'Latinised', as opposed to the *negros bozales*; the 'primitive' Africans that had been freshly captured in Africa. These black 'slave' sailors, who could speak the language of the newly embarked captives (or presumably a similar dialect), were responsible for attending to the slaves in the hold, even 'comforting' them according to some accounts.[187] In the 18th century, their role was essentially to lessen the mortality rate on board the slave ship, even being paid one crown per slave delivered alive. We can assume that these black sailors would have also had to translate the commands hollered at the slaves by the ship captains, the slave traders, and the instructions given by the ship surgeons, thus acting as the first *linguistic* translators with whom the slaves would have come into contact. We meet such a *Negro ladino* in Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba Sorcière* (1986); a black slave sailor named Deodatus aboard the ship, *Bless the Lord,* transporting Tituba back to her homeland in Barbados. He tells Tituba of the awful *Traite* and the growing demand for slaves. He speaks of his part on the slave ships as both a sailor and an "interprète".[188] However, although these *negros ladinos* may have played an important role in the slave's first mental translation of what was unfolding around him, they did not hold any power of their own, they were simply privileged slaves and they too served the purpose of their masters. The

[185] Ortega y Gasset, "The Splendour and Misery of Translation," 61
[186] Ortega y Gasset, "The Splendour and Misery of Translation," 60.
[187] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 411.
[188] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorière,* 213.

very name of Condé's interpreter, 'Deodatus' – a French saint of the 7th century, invoked to prevent the plague, evil spirits and thunderstorms – implies his submission to his European colonisers. He clearly did not choose his name; he was named. This points to his insertion into the grand narrative and purpose of the coloniser, to the silencing of his own past. Thus, the *negros ladinos* could not have been ultimately responsible for the systematic and ideological translation of the captives' bodies and identities into slavery.

I propose that a second and far more influential 'translator' – one who was not at all preoccupied with the translation of language but with the translation of *bodies* – can be found in the figure of the ship's Surgeon. A surgeon is (supposedly) an expert on the human body and given that the slave trade specialised in the translation of bodies, it should not come as too great a surprise that the surgeon played an essential role. In his remarkable *History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, Hugh Thomas highlights the authority of the ship's surgeon, noting that he was in charge of all matters relating to health, and was always involved in major decisions concerning the voyage.[189] An Edict in 1681 stated that each slave ship should have on board two surgeons, accompanied by two assistant surgeons. Another Edict in 1767 officially established the profession of 'merchant marine surgeons'.[190] Cilas Kemedjio identifies three kinds of surgeons present during the Slave Trade and observes that, alongside the captains, the slave hunters and the African elite, it was the surgeons on African soil (the surgeon-courtiers), the surgeons on board the slave ships during the Middle Passage (the captain-surgeons), and those at the point of arrival in the Antilles (the official port surgeons), that played a determining role in the production of slave bodies.[191]

The slave trading system was upheld by the incredibly racist bias that 'blacks' were more 'hardy' than whites, but of inferior intelligence. The surgeon, with his "practical knowledge" and "studies in physiology" was employed to provide a scientific legitimation for the Trade, as well as to advise slave traders on the selection of the most "hardy and passive bodies." The courtier-surgeon's 'health report' for each slave on the coast of Africa determined not only the entry of the captive into slavery, but also his price. Indeed the slightest defect noticed by this particular surgeon could greatly diminish a slave's value. If the slave met all the surgeons' requirements, he was considered 'a piece of the Indies'. The French also adopted this term for the perfect *nègre,* deeming him a *pièce d'Inde,* to be paid for in full. Thomas notes that, although it was not always law to have a surgeon on board,

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[189] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 307.
[190] Kemedjio, "Rape of Bodies," 56.
[191] Kemedjio, "Rape of Bodies," 55.

the courtier-surgeon on the coast played an essential role on *all* European voyages, in the selection of slaves.[192] This primary examination, the intrusive, 'scientific' gaze of the courtier-surgeon, has been compared to an act of violence, a primordial rape; the ultimate display of physical domination upon the defenceless body of the captive. An English witness noted that, in order to ensure that none are infected with the pox, "our surgeon is forc'd to examine the privities of both men and women with the nicest scrutiny, which is a great slavery…" [193] The French surgeons were no less meticulous. Frantz Tardo-Dino describes the examination thus,

> "Attentif, le chirurgien explorait, parlait, tâtait, grattait, léchait parfois afin de découvrir dans le gout de la sueur certaines maladies. Il devait absolument dépister les moindres observations, les parasitoses (Ver de Guinée, gale) et surtout le pian. Au cours de cet examen toutes les parties du corps étaient examinées et les femmes ressentaient quelque honte devant les investigations du chirurgien." [194]

This primary symbolic act of rape opened up the way for many other forms of physical domination throughout the humiliating, soul-destroying process that produced slave bodies and docile spirits. Glissant describes the atmosphere aboard the slave ship as, "absolument fou… là où les hommes déportés sont annihilés physiquement, la femme africaine subit la plus totale des agressions, qui est la vie quotidien et répété d'un équipage rendu dément par l'exercice de leur métier".[195] In *Moi, Tituba Sorcière*, an English sailor rapes a woman on the Pont du Christ the King, and as Tituba laments in the opening paragraphs, "C'est de cette agression que je suis née."[196] Again, in *La Case du Commandeur,* (1981) Glissant describes a nameless woman – perhaps symbolising all women in the system of slavery – who bears a child after repetitive rape during the Middle Passage.[197] The degrading practice of coupling slaves together in order to make them reproduce for the sole purpose of perpetuating slavery on the plantations constituted another form of rape: the total dispossession of both the female and male body. In *Le Quatrième Siècle,* Béluse's function in the house of Madame de Senglis is to reproduce children destined to be slaves on her plantation, for the "Bel usage" as she calls it, hence the name she gives him; 'Béluse'. Men were stripped as Glissant writes, "de

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[192] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 308.
[193] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 394.
[194] Kemedjio, "Rape of Bodies", 57. The author quotes from Tardo-Dino, Frantz. *Le Collier de servitude: condition sanitaire des esclaves aux Antilles françaises du XVIIe au XIXe siècle.* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes/ ACCT, 1985)
[195] Glissant, *Discours Antillais,* 297.
[196] Condé, *Moi, Tituba,* 13.
[197] Glissant, *La Case du Commandeur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981)

l'élémentaire puissance qui chez les animaux distingue le mâle de la femelle: ne remplissant leur office qui est de reproduire librement."[198] These acts of rape and physical dominance served as one of the tools in creating submissive slave bodies. However, I argue that this widespread practice of rape during the era of slavery began with the primordial rape of the surgeon, which, as Kemedjio states, authorized and legitimized, with the help of 'science', all other forms of violence which contributed to the translation of the African captive into a slave body.[199]

It was perhaps the surgeon-captain or surgeon-slave trader on board the ship during the Middle Passage that played the defining role in the transatlantic slave system. Although his purpose aboard the slave ship may be considered somewhat humanitarian, we must remember that, ultimately, his job was to deliver living slave bodies, to conserve the ships merchandise. If he helped ensure the moderation of punishment for rebellious slaves, it was because a whipped or maimed slave would be worth less in the Antilles. Although he may have 'saved' the lives of some slaves, he did so in order to keep in bondage those who attempted to free themselves through suicide. In *Le Quatrième Siècle,* Glissant notes how the slave body does not even have the right to choose to die, describing the slaves who were being off-loaded in the Antilles as "tous ceux qui attendent la mort et qui cependant ne sont pas encore morts, qui n'ont pas eu la chance d'être déjà morts." [200]

IV. AN ART OF THE HUMAN BODY

Drawing from Michel Foucault's theory of a disciplinary society in *Surveiller et punir* (1975), Kemedjio argues that the surgeons profession, as well as other scientific disciplines of the 18th century, drew their techniques and philosophy from the changes that were taking place in the 'art of punishment' during that epoch, which aimed at moderating torture by replacing it by the repression of constant surveillance. Foucault states that "an art of the human body" was born at the moment that these scientific disciplines, including medicine, were solidified. He writes,

> "Le moment historique des disciplines, c'est là où naît un art du corps humain, qui ne vise pas seulement à la croissance de ses habiletés, ni non plus l'alourdissement de sa sujétion, mais la formation d'un rapport qui dans le mécanisme le rend d'autant plus obéissant qu'il est utile, et inversement. Se forme alors une politique des coercitions qui sont un travail sur le corps, une

[198] Glissant, *QS,* 70.
[199] Kemedjio, "Rape of Bodies," 61.
[200] Glissant, *QS,* 33.

> manipulation calculée de ses éléments, de ses gestes, de ses comportements. Le corps humain entre dans une machinerie du pouvoir qui *le fouille, le désarticule, et le recompose*." [201]
>
> [The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering into a machinery of power that *explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it*."][202]

According to Foucault's theory, this machinery of power or "machinerie de contrôle" was developed in order to hold the human body "in a grip of a permanent and meticulous observation." Kemedjio argues, and I believe correctly, that in the system of the Slave Trade, the "apparatus of observation is constituted by the competent gaze of the surgeon", and that, "in the totality of mechanisms at work in the production of bodies that yield to slavery, it is [the surgeon's] gaze that establishes the slave body."[203] Considering that the duration of the Middle Passage could range from two to three months, often even longer, there was ample time for this *machinerie de contrôle* – the constant, scrutinizing gaze of the Surgeon – to do its terrible work on the bodies of the captives in the hold. The surgeon used his medical knowledge to ensure the arrival of living slave bodies, by force-feeding those who tried to starve themselves, treating the wounds inflicted by punishment to prevent infection, and perhaps advising the captain against the use of torture so as to not 'scar' the merchandise. Not to mention turning a blind eye to the repetitive rape and other forms of abuse and physical dominance that the sailors and captains regularly carried out. In *Le Quatrième Siècle,* Glissant describes a scuffle amongst two slaves aboard the *Rose-Marie* as it arrives in port in Martinique, after which the captain informs their respective buyers that the slaves must be punished, but reassures them that they will not be too badly scarred since, "notre coq est un louable chirurgien."[204] A dark comment, insinuating that the role of the surgeon was often reduced to punishment and torture aboard the ship – just enough to instil mortal fear, but not enough to kill the human merchandise. On the same ship, Glissant describes some of the 'instruments' of both the surgeon and the crew; tools used to 'encourage' slaves to eat, to prevent them from swallowing their tongues. Two particularly sinister devices are described in detail. Firstly, *la tôle*; a rusty piece

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[201] Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir,* 139. [emphasis mine]
[202] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 137-8. [emphasis mine]
[203] Kemedjio, "Rape of Bodies," 56.
[204] Glissant, *QS,* 28.

of sheet metal heated by fire, on which the more obstinate slaves were forced to dance, "au rythme du feu". Secondly, there is *la corde*; a long thick rope that would be hoisted overboard with a rebellious slave or mutineer tied to weight it down, as if to measure the depth of the ocean. Glissant describes how the slaves "ne pouvait s'empêcher de la regarder longuement, et parfois avec une volontaire, pesante concentration."[205] These instruments were used to break the will of the captives and instil a fear that kept them submissive. They were mechanisms which would eventually render the body "d'autant plus obéissant qu'il est utile" – all of which were ominously present and constantly visible throughout the entire voyage. Glissant writes,

> "Mais tout avait été laissé sous la pluie: les fouets à plomb, les lanières roides, la potence aux pendus (en vérité plus impressionnante qu'un gros mât), et le bâton crochu qu'on enfonçait dans la gorge de ceux qui tentaient d'avaler leur langue, et le grand baquet d'eau de mer où les marins plongeaient la tête quand ils remontaient suffoqués des profondeurs de la cale, et le fer à rougir, fourchette implacable pour ceux qui refusaient le pain moisi ou les biscuits arrosés de saumure, et le filet par lequel on descendait les esclaves, chaque mois, dans le grand bain de la mer: filet pour les protéger des requins ou de la tentation de mourir."[206]

It is interesting to note that in the English translation of Glissant's *Le Quatrième Siècle* by Betsy Wing, she chooses to group these various instruments under the term 'apparatus', something that Glissant only implies – "but all that apparatus had been left out in the rain".[207] The systematic use of this apparatus under the meticulous gaze of the Surgeon-slave trader fits Foucault's description of a new "art of the human body", the "machinery of power" that acted upon the body, exploring it, breaking it down and recomposing it – a veritable *translation* of bodies for the purpose of slavery.

On the other side of the Middle Passage, the official surgeon at the port of arrival would perform the final assessment of the slave body, visiting each slave ship and authorising either the slave's debarkation or his quarantine in the harbour. This surgeon's final scientific 'stamp of approval' declared each African 'fit' for entry into slavery and marked the completion of the physical translation of their bodies and identities across the Atlantic Ocean. Given his presence in the historical narrative as well as in literary consciousness, I believe that the role of the Surgeon in the transatlantic slave trade cannot be downplayed. By his scientific backing of the institution of

[205] Glissant, *QS,* 21.
[206] Glissant, *QS,* 21.
[207] Glissant, *The Fourth Century,* Transl. Betsy Wing (London: University of Nebraska Press), 13.

slavery, his role in the production of slave bodies and docile spirits through his systematic observation and application of his 'medical knowledge', the surgeon can be identified as the ultimate 'translator' of slave bodies. Kemedjio concludes his argument stating with confidence that, "The surgeon's gaze produced bodies whose profit was defined by the slave system, that is, bodies that could be raped, chained, deported, or mutilated according to the wishes of the master."[208]

Before moving on to the literary analysis, allow me to recall my primary metaphor – a human being as a work of art, a *livre*. I cannot help but draw one last parallel between the Surgeon, the 'translator' of human bodies, and a translator in the literal sense of the word; the translator of written texts. Discussing the various skills required of a translator, Florence Herbulot writes that he must possess "un certain savoir". He must know the language of the original text; have an understanding of the subject, and a "maîtrise de la langue de redaction". Concerning the 'subject' of the text in question, Herbulot writes, "Pas besoin, dans la quasi-totalité des cas d'être ingénieur pour faire un bon traducteur – on ne nous demande pas de construire l''objet à expliquer, mais simplement de comprendre *comment il fonctionne.*"[209] Without any intention of criticising this theorist's definition and at the risk of taking it entirely out of context for my own purpose, it is nevertheless interesting to note that this level of understanding of the 'subject' is very similar to the *compréhension* required of the surgeon-slave trader with regards to his black captives. His primitive scientific knowledge must have left much desiring, but in his epoch, the surgeon-slave trader could have claimed with authority that he knew "*comment il[s] fonctionn[ent]*."

V. LA THÉORIE DU SENS

The trio of surgeons described by Cilas Kemedjio brought to mind a certain theory of translation, namely the Interpretative Theory, or the *Théorie du sens,* developed by Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer. It was inspired from the practice of live interpretation and rests on the idea that "la traduction n'est pas un travail sur la langue, sur les mots, c'est un travail sur le message, sur le *sens.*"[210] Their theory has been praised for its practical attributes, however some critics argue that in the case of literary texts, the *sens* cannot always be separated from the words of the original text, maintaining that the meaning is often strongly tied to the structure as well as to the

[208] Kemedjio, "Rape of Bodies," 59.
[209] Herbulot, Florence. "La Théorie Interprétative ou Théorie du Sens: Point de vue d'une practicienne," *Journal de Traducteurs* 49 (2004): 310. [emphasis mine]
[210] Herbulot, "La Théorie Interprétative," 309.

particular linguistic style of the author. I do not wish to offer an in-depth analysis of the theory, as many theorists have already done so, showcasing its usefulness as well as its shortcomings.[211] Rather, I would simply like to draw attention to the three phases specified by the *Théorie du sens* in the process of translating a text, which appear to parallel the work of our Surgeon-Translator during the slave trade, namely, "Compréhension – déverbalisation – réexpression".[212]

If we can entertain the idea of the surgeon as a 'translator' – and a bad one at that – an arrogant, self-interested translator, who translates the 'text' or human body with little or no *fidelité à la source,* then it would appear that Kemedjio's trio of surgeons corresponds aptly to the Interpretative Theory's three phases of translation. The first phase, *compréhension,* in which the translator must mobilise all his skill and experience in order to "saisir le sens" of the text and its subject, is a task that evokes the very first examination of the captive's body by the Surgeon-courtier, the surgeon on African soil. It corresponds with a 'bad' translator's initial confrontation with a literary text, his first hurried attempt to grasp its meaning. The Surgeon-courtier, with all his scientific and medical 'knowledge' proceeds to define the captive's *sens* or identity solely by his or her potential use in the system of the Slave Trade. Just like the bad translator who is only concerned with his own personal interpretation, he appropriates the text to himself. He becomes the author, the 'owner'. The surgeon-courtiers initial 'health-report', that is, his first attempt at 'understanding' the subject, confirmed the captive's entry into the Slave Trade and his title as a *pièce d'Inde*: property of France.

This first attempt at 'comprehension' of the 'subject' marked the captive's entry into a translation process that would transform him into a slave body, paving the way for the second phase: *déverbalisation*. According to the *Théorie du sens,* this phase is made possible by the fact that the meaning or message of a text is considered to be the 'non-verbal' invariant. This means that the *sens* lies somewhere beneath the words and can be conceived of as an intangible, abstract form, a 'deverbalised' idea. It is therefore possible to completely separate the *sens* from the linguistic framework of the language of the original text and replace it by that of the *langue d'arrivée*. This places the *sens* of a text entirely at the mercy of the translator. It must be said that this phase is incredibly useful for a 'good' translator who wishes to remain faithful to the original text, as it helps him avoid a *mot-à-mot* translation and allows him to approach the idea that lies beneath the words.

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[211] To name a few, Amparo Hurtado Albir, Guy Leclercq and Fortunato Israël in *Etudes Traductologiques: En Hommage à Danika Seleskovitch.* By Marianne Lederer, (Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1990)

[212] Lederer, *Etudes Traductologiques,* 77.

However this process consists of completely stripping the sense of its linguistic framework, deconstructing it and recomposing it, and for the 'bad' translator, it presents the perfect opportunity to slightly, or perhaps even drastically alter the meaning of the text for his own benefit. Thus the process of deverbalisation seems to correspond directly with the work of the captain-surgeon aboard the slave ship during the Middle Passage. Just as the message of a text is 'deverbalised' by the translator, the body and identity of the slave is deconstructed by the ever-vigilant gaze of the Surgeon and his 'instruments' of control, melted down in order to be reborn in the womb of the slave ship. In the words of Foucault, the human body enters into "a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it [le recompose]."[213] The surgeon's 'gaze' deconstructed and began recomposing the *sens,* the identity and purpose of the captives' bodies, translating them into slave bodies with docile spirits for the benefit of the powers he represented: *les planteurs* and *les colons* of France.

In the Interpretative Theory's final phase, that of *réexpression*, the translator must use his "savoir linguistique et extralinguistique… pour trouver les équivalences dans l'autre langue."[214] In a manner of speaking, once extracted from the original text and deverbalised, the *sens* is then dressed up, *habillé*, in the linguistic 'cloak' of the *langue d'arrivée*. Although this phase was already instigated aboard the slave ship by the surgeon-captain, it was finalised and officiated by the official surgeon in the port of arrival in the Antilles. As mentioned above, he would inspect the newly translated 'slave bodies' aboard the ship, deciding their final value, advising the *planteurs* on which slaves to select out of the newly arrived merchandise, and perhaps suggesting the work for which they would be best suited. Hugh Thomas writes that a price written on cloth would often be hung around each slave's neck after this inspection and advertisements would be drawn up and posted at the ports' slave markets – physical, written evidence, one could argue, of the final 'reexpression' of their identities at the completion of the Middle Passage.[215] In the words of Glissant, the captives "who were not lucky enough to already be dead", saw the completion of the Middle Passage, the "reexpression" of their identities, or rather their translation into 'slave bodies' for France. The 'text' was entirely re-appropriated by the surgeon-translator, as I shall call him, who then took credit and claimed ownership over it. Unlike the *Théorie du Sens,* whose ultimate aim is to remain faithful to the original non-verbal *sens* or message of a text and merely clothe it in a new linguistic framework, the Surgeon of the slave trade deconstructed and completely recreated the bodies of the captives.

[213] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 139.
[214] Lededer, *Etudes Traductologiques,* 78.
[215] Thomas, *The Slave Trade,* 330-51.

His goal was to break the captive's will, in order to create the passive spirit necessary to maintain a compliant slave body. He succeeded in doing this through acts of systematic rape and violence upon the slave body.

The arrival of the *Rose-Marie*, a slave vessel in Glissant's *Le Quatrième Siècle,* and the *ceremonie d'arrivage* in the port of Martinique reflect the final phase that I have outlined above. The "cérémonie de l'arrivage" consists of scrubbing and cleaning the ship and the washing of the slaves as they emerge from the hold, closely chained together and blinded by the light of day. As they come up out of the hold, they are doused with a bucket of sea water and scrubbed down by the sailors; "Un grand coup d'eau sous l'eau de la pluie, comme une baptême pour la vie nouvelle." Soon after this cleansing, which does little to mask the stench; a boat approaches, carrying the "les autorités du port", "les fonctionnaires" (amongst which we can safely assume was an official port surgeon), as well as two *planteurs*, La Roche and his "intime ennemi" Senglis. The boat moors itself to the *Rose-Marie* and its passengers come on board to carry out their inspections of the ship and its cargo. Meanwhile, the captain reviews the journey, counting his losses and congratulating himself on a successful voyage. After all, "les deux tiers, ça faisait une excellente moyenne."[216] The voyage had been wrought with troubles and, "Il avait fallu toute la *science* du maître de bord"[217] to ensure the safe arrival of the surviving cargo and crew. The use of the word "science" to describe the captain's good judgement and sea-faring experience in guiding his ship through the perils of the Atlantic crossing draws my attention. Although it can be used in French to mean "knowledge", it can also simply be translated as "science" or "art" in English. It complies with the euphemistic language used during the slave trade to downplay the horrific measures taken to ensure a safe crossing – torture, execution and the 'lightening' of the ship by throwing damaged 'cargo' overboard during storms – all reduced to a simple "science" of sea-faring. However, it also recalls Foucault's theory discussed above, concerning the changes that took place in scientific disciplines during the eighteenth century, when an art of the human body was developed, in order to control and manipulate it. I believe it is safe to suggest that the use of this word to describe the captain's leadership skills identifies him as an agent in "la machinerie du contrôle" that I have discussed in detail above.

All these events symbolically mark the completion of the Middle Passage, and the final stage in the translation of African identities across the Atlantic. Both the symbolism of baptism, by rainwater and sea, and the activities of the port officials on board the *Rose-Marie,* superbly reflect the final

[216] Glissant, *QS,* 20.
[217] Glissant, *QS,* 20. [emphasis mine]

stage of translation in the trilogy of phases I have described above, i.e. *la réexression.* The port officials and surgeons determine the final value of the slaves through their meticulous and humiliating inspections, whilst the two *planteurs* haggle for the best deal, deciding the slaves' fate. The metaphor of baptism places this passage in the realm of biblical epic and genesis, however it is not a rebirth to be celebrated. Instead of shouts of joy, "les hommes d'équipage se moquaient de ces gribouilles noirs et déments, deux fois trempés, par l'eau de mer et l'eau du ciel. La *Rose-Marie* épouillait son fumier."[218] In contrast to this mournful baptism, the washing of the ship itself by the crew and the rain, and the storing of its terrible instruments of torture is a far more glorious rebirth:

> "La tôle remisée, la corde innocente tel un agrès pour les manœuvres, le gibet à nouveau insignifiant: un petit mât sans potence ne crocs; les fouets dans la chambre d'armes, le fer à rougir aussi, et le filet toujours au même endroit, comme paré pour une pêche distrayante; le bateau ainsi débarrassé de ses signes d'enfer; un honnête navire marchand." [219]

The washing away of the filth and horror of the middle passage, disguising the *négrier* as an honest merchant ship, appears to mirror the exact moment when the slave 'voice' is eternally silenced in the colonial historical narrative. The *Rose-Marie* will arrive back in France*,* fully loaded with the sweet colonial products of the islands, leaving it's rotting human cargo in the Caribbean and carrying no trace of violence or death. It is no coincidence that at this very moment, an eerie silence – a literal silence now, opposed to the figurative 'literary' silence born from the suffering of the slaves in the hold – falls upon the captives. Captain Duchêne cannot understand their silence, "tout soudain" and explains that in all his ten years of slaving, at the moment of debarkation, he has never once heard the slaves shout, groan or even glance towards the land, "À croire que la fin du voyage est le plus terrible pour eux."[220] Chamoiseau describes the slaves' arrival in the New World as if they have been born into perpetual darkness; "Elles ont semblé non pas émerger de l'abîme mais relever à jamais de l'abîme lui-même."[221] This is because the negligent translation of their bodies is complete and just as the physical wounds inflicted during the Middle Passage have not yet healed; it is raw and excruciating. Silence is the only reaction: "en silence, on recompose lentement le monde."[222] "Le nettoyage avait été bien fait, l'odeur passerait" and France can proceed with a clean conscience.

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[218] Glissant, *QS,* 22.
[219] Glissant, *QS,* 23.
[220] Glissant, *QS,* 23.
[221] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 21.
[222] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 39.

Thus we can conclude that, "along with many other mechanisms at work in the production of slave bodies", the slave hunters, the captains, the *negros ladinos* and the slave merchants, "it was the surgeon's gaze that established the slave body."[223] What remains to be seen is if these individuals (who, grand metaphor aside, were still conscious, feeling human beings) would accept or reject this imposed translation. How would they interpret the tragedy that had befallen them? Would they choose to resist slavery to collaborate, or to adapt? As I shall discuss in my analysis of the texts I have mentioned, the various and complex reactions to their imposed translation into slavery greatly affected the historical consciousness of each slave and his descendants. Although the Middle Passage did indeed create slave bodies, it is arguable that it succeeded in creating docile spirits. The characters we shall meet in the novels discussed in this study will serve to show the remarkable capabilities of the human spirit.

But first, allow me to add one last observation on the parallel between the translation of a literary text and the translation of a human identity. When discussing the translation of literary texts, Fortunato Israël speaks of the important role of the reader in "la creation du sens", who also plays a part in translating the meaning of a text "à la lumière d'un bagage cognitif préexistant", in other words with "une somme de connaissances… liées à son expérience du monde sensible."[224] The Atlantic slave not only had to endure the forced physical translation of his body across the ocean, but he also found himself abruptly immersed into a world of strange languages and different cultures. Even the natural environment of the islands, the lush vegetation, tropical storms and humid heat must have been foreign, perhaps even terrifying. I would suggest, to adapt Fortunato Israël's theory if I may, that the transatlantic slave may also be viewed as the 'reader' of his own experience, having to 'interpret' or 'translate' the strange, new land according to his own "bagage cognitif préexistant". In the words of Christopher Miller, the "Atlantic slave was a person who had been translated and who had to, as a consequence, translate… Créole languages, vodun, Francophone literatures, and Caribbean forms of music all come to mind as active translations of African cultures in the New World."[225] However, as Chamoiseau and Confiant point out, those that endured the Middle Passage, found themselves in a situation where their name, their religion, their language, their values, their very understanding of the world was either completely invalid or no longer functional. "Tout était à

[223] Kemedjio, "Rape of Bodies," 56.
[224] Lederer, *Etudes Traductologiques,* 33-34.
[225] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 101.

refaire, à reconsidérer."[226] Although their "mental pictures" and experiences from the *Terre d'origine* (Africa) would have undoubtedly played a role in interpreting their new surroundings, the harshness and the extremity of the New World meant that much of what they knew was silenced and no longer useful. This is the result of such an extreme and careless translation: the birth of entirely new cultures, who lack the full knowledge of their own genesis. *La nouvelle terre* appears in silence, and "en silence, on recompose lentement le monde." Chamoiseau and Confiant pose the all-important question, "En quelle langue se noue ce mutisme? Et quelle est sa littérature?"[227]

VI. SUMMARY

The value of a human being was one of the key aspects translated when he or she was moved across the ocean. In fact, as Christopher Miller points out, the Atlantic triangle was a "vast system created to translate value"[228]. Slaves were worth far more in the New World than in Africa. What is a person worth? The response to that cold, hard question at the height of the slave trade would have been "one twenty-fifth of a horse" in Africa, and perhaps nine thousand pounds of sugar, once he or she had been transported across the Atlantic. [229] A slave's worth, his very identity, was tied to his 'body' and how much productivity it could yield. Working the land of a plantation was the ultimate justification for the suffering he experienced. His value was in the eye of another, it was decided by the ship surgeons, the captains, the merchants and the masters. As I mentioned above, the focus of this study is on the characters and their personal reactions to the forced physical and metaphorical translation of their identities in Glissant's *Quatrième siècle,* Patrick Chamoiseau's *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* and Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba Sorcière.* I shall argue that it is the choices that these characters make in resisting, accepting or adapting this imposed translation – that is, slavery – in a variety of different ways (violently or passively), that give them the power to determine their *own* value as people and their right to have their own 'history'. Of course, I do not seek to make an objective judgement on which slaves deserved to have a history; this would be far too simplistic. These personalities are fictive and reflect the personal feelings of the authors that created them. However, their symbolic, literary actions offer insights as to how twentieth century Creole francophone writers have interpreted the remains of the slave trade, the foundation of their societies

[226] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 81.
[227] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 39.
[228] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 101.
[229] Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle,* 16.

IV

RÉSISTANCE

> "Le fugitif – L'africain voué aux îles délétères – ne reconnaissait pas même le goût de la nuit. Cette nuit inconnue était moins dense, plus nue, elle affolait. Loin en arrière il entendait les chiens, mais déjà les acacias l'avaient ravi du monde des chasseurs ; et ainsi entrait-il, homme de grande terre, dans une autre histoire : où sans qu'il le sût, les temps recommençaient pour lui." [230]
>
> *Le vieil homme esclave et le molosse*
> Patrick Chamoiseau
> (Entre-dire d'Édouard Glissant, *L'intention Poétique*)

Thus far, I have discussed in detail the central metaphors of my thesis, namely the Middle Passage as a process of forced translation and the transatlantic slave as a living 'text'. In the last chapter I identified the three surgeons present during the Transatlantic Slave Trade as the most influential "translators" of slave bodies, paralleling their work in the slave ports and on the slave ship with the three phases in the translation of a literary text offered by *La Théorie du Sens*. The purpose of these metaphors, as I have mentioned, is firstly to highlight the various ways in which the literary characters in the works of Créole authors such as Glissant, Chamoiseau and Condé show their resistance to the forced translation of their bodies and identities into slavery. Several interesting parallels can be drawn between the translation of a human being from one cultural setting into another and the translation of a literary text into another language. Secondly, the resistance of these characters to the forced translation of their bodies and identities into slavery may represent the resistance of Creole oral tradition to a translation into French written narrative. Ultimately, the

[230] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 30.

insights these metaphors uncover may reveal how Créole authors have come to interpret their origins, from the gaping silences in the historical archives to the myths and legends that surround them.

The literary text stands apart from books on the natural sciences, newspaper articles or mathematics. It is a work of art, composed by an author with great skill, who aims to push the boundaries of ordinary language. As José Ortega y Gasset states,

> "To write well is to make continual incursions into grammar, into established usage, and into accepted linguistic norms. It is an act of permanent rebellion against the social environs, a subversion. To write well is to employ a certain radical courage."[231]

However, the translator, by the very nature of his profession is usually a shy, humble character, willing to remain in the shadows whilst the authors he translates receive the glory. On the other hand, he may also be a negligent, selfish character who appropriates and 'owns' the text as we saw in the example of the ship's surgeon during the Slave Trade. How will these translators deal with the rebellious text? As Ortega y Gasset points out, the humble translator, not willing to take too many risks, will usually translate the text into the stiff, ordinary linguistic framework of his own language. The bad translator may completely alter aspects of the text that he finds difficult, ultimately changing the entire meaning or *sens* of the original text. Already it appears that the literary text resists a true translation into another language. Besides the inadequacies of the translator, we must also consider the personal style of the original author, which consists, for example, of his slight divergence from the habitual meaning of a word. Each language also has its own unique linguistic style, what von Humboldt referred to as its own "internal form".[232] Ortega y Gasset goes as far as to argue that it is utopian to believe that two words from different languages – referring to the same object or idea according to the dictionary – can possibly mean the same exact thing. This is only natural, he continues, as languages (like human beings) develop and grow in different landscapes and environments, through different experiences with the world. As an example, he remarks that it would be naïve to assume that what a Spanish person considers a *bosque* is the same as a German *wald* – what the English call a *forest* – since, "an enormous difference exists between the two realities."[233] Thus, due to the internal form of the text, the author's own unique style and the incongruity between

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[231] Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and Splendour," 50.
[232] Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and Splendour," 51.
[233] Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and Splendour," 51.

languages, it appears that the literary text strongly resists a translation into another language. Translation remains an impossible exercise for Ortega y Gasset, who pessimistically remarks that,

> "Languages separate us and discommunicate, not simply because they are different languages, but because they proceed from different mental pictures, from disparate intellectual systems – in the last instance, from divergent philosophies. Not only do we speak, but we also think in a specific language, and intellectually slide along pre-established rails prescribed by our verbal destiny."[234]

Given that language makes up the fundamental aspects of our identities – it enables us to think, communicate and survive – it appears that a human being may resist translation just as forcefully, and in similar ways, to a literary text. Like a literary text, a person belongs to particular culture with its own particular habits, religion, history and, of course, language. He is born and raised in a specific environment, and has his own personal experiences and interaction with reality. Just as an author has a particular literary style, a human being possesses unique traits and his own personality. Like the translation of a literary text into another language, the transferal or forced translation of a human being into a completely different cultural and linguistic space, into a different environment, to serve a completely new purpose is thus highly improbable. The result during the Transatlantic Slave Trade was perhaps exactly what the negligent translators (the surgeons, the slave merchants and the *planteurs*), desired: docile spirits and slave bodies, stripped of their culture, history and identity.

However, with the forced migration of tens of millions of people throughout the Slave Trade era, as well as the continuous migration of millions of people today due to political and economic instability in many parts of the world, we can assume that some degree of 'human' translation must be possible. As I illustrated with the example of Marie de France's *lais,* even the origins of English and French culture are found through the clash of different people and languages. Caribbean culture itself is often described as incredibly vibrant, a melting pot of ethnicities, languages, music and customs. Thankfully, after highlighting the "misery" and essentially destroying any possibility of literary translation, Ortega y Gasset then goes on to speak about the splendour of the task. He draws inspiration from the theologian Schleiermacher, who stipulates that a translation can move in either or two directions. In the first instance, the author and his text are carried to the language of the *reader.* In other words, the text is simplified, altered and added to in order for a reader from a different linguistic and cultural background to understand it. This type of translation is merely a cheap imitation; there is no *true* translation. Alternatively, a translation may carry the reader to the

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[234] Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and Splendour," 59.

language of the *author.* In this instance, the text retains much of its foreign nature; it remains strange, perhaps even ugly in the reader's opinion, and forces him to move within the linguistic framework of language of the author. This, according to Ortega y Gasset, is the closest thing to a *true* translation.[235]

In keeping with the metaphor of the human being as a literary 'text', allow me to apply Schleiermacher's theory to the translation of the transatlantic slave. In the first instance, where the 'text' is carried to the language of the 'reader', the slave's body and identity is manipulated, fragmented, and successfully pacified. His body, the original 'text', is quite literally "carried" – through the process of the Middle Passage – to the 'reader', or the target audience for which he is being translated, namely, plantation slavery for the profit of France. Sadly, it may appear that this was the type of translation that transpired for much of the slave trade. However, if one considers the high rate of slave revolts and suicide aboard the ship, not to mention the unknown acts or thoughts of silent resistance that each slave would have concealed on the ship as well as on the plantation, we can also assume that many slaves were translated according to the second instance of Schleiermacher's theory. In this case, the slave is indeed translated across the ocean, into an entirely different culture, language and environment, under the oppressive mechanisms of slavery. However, he refuses to comply with the negligent, cruel and simplistic translation imposed upon him. Instead he resists. He exists in his new form, but retains aspects of his 'foreign' identity and culture; he remains strange, continuously displaying his rebellion against his translation into slavery. In short, he is a nuisance to the powers that translated him, he rebels, he speaks out, tells his own story like the *conteur,* or like the *marron,* he maroons into the hills and forests.

I. RESISTANCE & COLLABORATION IN GLISSANT'S *LE QUATRIÈME SIÈCLE*

Le Quatrième siècle (1964) was written as a prequel to Édouard Glissant's first novel *La Lézarde* (1958). It is thus the first (chronologically) of a series in which Glissant masterfully attempts to 'recreate' the history of his people's enslavement in Martinique. The history of Martinique stands out in the Caribbean archipelago. Unlike the other islands, which have swapped hands several times between different colonial powers, Martinique has been under French rule for an uninterrupted period of almost four hundred years since 1635. The autochthonous Carib people were almost entirely wiped out by waves of Spanish and French conquest and the island's population was

[235] Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and Splendour," 60.

replaced by an enslaved, "deracinated, culturally denuded population" from Africa.[236] It differs greatly from the British colony islands, where the official policy was to ensure a cultural and political distance from the *métropole.* Instead, policy dictated that the French possessions in the Caribbean were to be the "economic children" of France, completely reliant on the *métropole* but subordinate to France's interests. Richard Burton remarks that the history of Martinique has been so uniquely tied to that of the *métropole*, that almost every significant change in regime, especially since the French Revolution of 1789, has been the direct "by-product" of regime changes that took place in France itself. [237] Thus the history of the Créole people of Martinique seems to have suffered the greatest silencing in the written historical archives, made inferior to the more 'glorious' historical narrative of France. Édouard Glissant assumes the task of recovering it. He maintains that it is only *literature* and the sensitive writer that is capable of unearthing the voices of the real heroes of his people. As we shall see, he does so by evoking myth, in particular when addressing the creole intimacy with the land, *la terre*, which represents rootedness, liberation and a search for authenticity in Créole history. As I have already discussed, for Glissant, myth represents the fundamental link between history and literature and is thus an indispensible tool for the Créole author in his quest to recover and possess the lost history of the people of Martinique.

In *Le Quatrième Siècle,* Glissant recreates the history (or histories) of four generations in Martinique. It is the intertwining stories of two different families, descended from two 'primordial' ancestors brought as slaves to Martinique: Longoué and Béluse. Upon their arrival, Longoué and Béluse are sold to two different plantations, symbolising the beginning of two different, seemingly opposing narratives. That same day, we learn that Longoué maroons into the forest. He does so with the help of Louise, the black mistress of the La Roche, who is *maître* of the *Maison d'acajous.* Béluse, on the other hand, who is purchased by the *planteur* named Senglis, is immediately brought into the *maison* to be a sort of breeding 'stallion' for the delusional Madame de Senglis. He is coupled with a slave woman and ordered to carry out "son travail de reproduction."[238] The story is told from the perspective of an old *quimboiseur* called papa Longoué, the last of that family line, who speaks to a young Mathieu Béluse, a character we later discover is in fact papa Longoué's nephew. Papa Longoué tells Mathieu, the youngest descendent of the Béluse family, anxious and impatient to fill in the gaps of his past, the story of his ancestor, Longoué, also known as La Pointe.

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236 Burton, Richard D. E. "Comment Peut-on Être Martiniquais? The recent work of Édouard Glissant," *The Modern Language Review,* 79 (1984): 301.
237 Burton, "Comment Peut-on Être Martiniquais?" 302.
238 Glissant, *QS,* 98.

He refers to this tale as "sa propre histoire" – a claim he can make with confidence, due to the fact that his ancestor marooned into the forest and gave himself his own name. Thus, without further ado, allow me to introduce the passages I feel are most pertinent to my study, and which most clearly present the transatlantic slave as a 'translated text' and demonstrate his resistance to and collaboration with to the forced translation of his body and identity into slavery.

The Arrival of the *Rose-Marie*

The first incident I shall analyse takes place during the first few hours of the *Rose-Marie's* arrival in the slave port of Martinique and the primordial battle on board between the two ancestors, Béluse and Longoué, who are not yet named. In contrast to the novels predominantly obtuse, disruptive narrative, papa Longoué recounts this event in the most pain-staking detail, almost by the hour. He explains that he must note the events of this day in scrupulous detail because,

> "L'heure importe dans cette *cérémonie de l'arrivage* par quoi s'ouvrait l'existence nouvelle. Non pas l'existence, ho! Mais la mort, sans espérance. Et pourtant, l'espérance est à la fin venue… Et parce que les heures, leur lente appellation, étaient le seul recours jusqu'à la nuit, jusqu'à la fuite et l'ensevelissement dans les bois, devant les meutes de chiens et les chasseurs acharnés… Parce que les heures, après la longue nuit de la cale, étaient quand même un ornement, un luxe inouï pour ceux qui sans fin avaient respiré la mort, au fond de l'indistincte marée des vagues. Parce que les heures, de simplement passer dans le ciel flambant, ouvraient peut-être une trouée vers quelque chose, une autre chose, qui ne serait pas, qui ne serait plus la poutre basse et pourrie d'une cale." [239]

As if to emulate a biblical genesis story, time is slowed down, events are recounted in sequential detail, just as the biblical creation story is divided into seven distinct days, before history unfolds, multiplies and is fragmented in an increasingly rapid and confusing manner. The passing of the hours is also placed in striking contrast to the absence of time in the perpetual darkness of the "la longue nuit" in the hold of the *négrier.* The *ceremonie d'arrivage* takes place; the sailors and the rain scrub the ship clean, and the slaves are doused with a bucket of seawater, a baptism into their new lives. The port officials come on board along with La Roche and Senglis, two prominent *planteurs* of Martinique. With all its torture devices hidden and the sinister stench washed away by the rain, the *Rose-Marie,* papa Longoué explains, undergoes an incredible transformation; it will return to France

[239] Glissant, *QS*, 21-22. [emphasis mine]

"un honnête navire marchand."[240] However, papa Longoué demonstrates the power of oral tradition and myth, the stories past down to him by his ancestors – Longoué, Melchior, Apostrophe and Stéfanise his mother – in overcoming these historical silences as he thinks to himself,

> "Pourtant je la sens… Depuis si longtemps. Depuis le premier bateau, quand ce commerce n'était encore qu'une aventure dont nul ne savait si les profits seraient convenables, jusqu'à la *Rose-Marie*… oui, jusqu'à ce matin qui vit les deux ancêtres débarquer de la *Rose-Marie* pour commencer l'histoire *qui est vraiment l'histoire pour moi*. Je la sens, cette odeur, Stéfanise ma mère me l'a enseignée, elle la tenait de son homme Apostrophe qui la tenait de Melchior qui la tenait de Longoué lui-même."[241]

After establishing his authority as the possessor of the knowledge of his family history, papa Longoué has now set the scene for the confrontation that will take place between the two *nègres bossales* amongst the crowd of slaves on the deck of the *Rose-Marie.* "Les fonctionnaires entreprirent donc leur travail d'inspection" as the others joined the captain for a drink in honour of the fortuitous voyage.

> "À ce moment précis éclatèrent le tumulte, l'incroyable désordre dans le lot, qui d'abord firent croire à une mutinerie… et dont on vit tout aussitôt qu'ils n'annonçaient pas une révolte, ce qui eût été assez naturel quoique improbable en un tel moment, mais, pour stupéfiant que cela pût paraître, une rixe parmi les nègres, autant dire un règlement de comptes. […] Et le capitaine… demeura pétrifié devant cette constatation: deux esclaves se battaient, ils roulaient et boulaient parmi leurs compagnons. […] Mais il n'y a avait pas encore de Béluse ni de Longoué, du moins pas sous cette appellation toute nouvelle: il n'y avait que ces deux lutteurs…"[242]

Firstly, it is important to remark that this confrontation takes place "at the exact moment" when the officials are carrying out their inspections of the ship and the slaves, symbolically evaluating them and marking them as fit for sale – the final re-expression of their identities. It is at this crucial moment when the "other" – the officials, the surgeons, the captain and the prospective buyers – are deciding their fate that these two slaves break out into a fight, in order to settle a *personal* vendetta. In other words, they act out of their own will, for their own purposes, actions that are incongruous with slavery. At the exact moment of the final re-expression of their identities, one could say that they express their *own* identities. Their struggle is therefore utterly baffling to the captain and the

[240] Glissant, *QS,* 23.
[241] Glissant, *QS,* 23-24. (emphasis mine)
[242] Glissant, *QS,* 25-26.

crew; "les marins ne pouvaient pas comprendre, le capitaine tardait à réagir."[243] To them, these slaves are merely "bodies", translated for the purpose of slavery. "How did they have the strength to fight? What was their motive? For what reason?" These were the immediate questions that ran through the captain's mind. This battle between the two primordial ancestors of papa Longoué's tale plays a major role in determining their own fate; the confrontation attracts the attention of the two *planteurs,* resulting in the sale of the slave who initiated the fight, the one who will soon be known as Longoué, to the blue-eyed *colon* called La Roche, and the sale of the slave who will be called Béluse to the *bossu,* Senglis. This reaction upon their arrival in the Antilles can be seen as a primary rejection of the translation of their identities into "slave bodies", or at least an expression of their autonomy as human beings. Longoué will prove to be the primordial *marron* – a self-liberated slave that lives in the hills and forests. We learn that the *marrons* came to inspire fear not only amongst the masters, but amongst the slaves and the *mulâtres* as well. As Glissant describes, "le marron était pour les populations la personnification du diable: *celui qui refuse*."[244] Béluse, on the other hand, will accept his fate in the house of Madame de Senglis, tainting his family line as "collaborators" with slavery, setting himself in stark opposition to Longoué who continues to think of him as his "intime ennemi" throughout the narrative. Even as Longoué momentarily accepts the sale of his body to La Roche, Glissant writes that Longoué, standing face to face with the man who was already his master,

> "Regarda autour de lui, prit une aspiration profonde, leva le bras et sourit presque: comme s'il prenait son parti de l'histoire, avec un air de dire qu'il remettait à plus tard les règlements, après quoi il traça dans l'air un signe de menace contre le colon, d'un geste rapide et semi rituel."[245]

Later La Roche discovers that the gesture Longoué made is in fact a ritualistic symbol of a snake, a clear act of rebellion and a warning that he will one day have his revenge. The snake is also a recurrent motif, a symbol of resistance in the book that gives Longoué the aura of mystery and power for which his family line is so revered. In contrast, Béluse becomes comfortable in the house of Madame de Senglis, to the point where, "il s'était insensiblement attaché à la folie de la maîtresse. Il lui en venait un statut nouveau: celui de protecteur."[246]

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[243] Glissant, *QS,* 26.
[244] Glissant, *QS,* 129. [emphasis mine]
[245] Glissant, *QS,* 27.
[246] Glissant, *QS,* 114.

The Census: The Importance of a Name

The concept of naming is of central importance in the work of Glissant. The act of naming oneself or passively being named is symbolic of one's autonomy and identity. The two family lines in *Le Quatrième Siècle* and their intertwining histories demonstrate the antagonism, as well as the blurred lines, between these two modes of being. The slave trade took human beings and translated them into slave 'bodies,' essentially objects, nameless objects, to be bought and sold. As Loichot has remarked, during the slave trade, the name is either violently imposed by the *other,* such as a cowardly father, a rapist master, or the French administration, or it is violently reclaimed by the maroon who becomes his own master by choosing his or her own name.[247] The act of naming is one that has affected the entire region of the Caribbean extensively, from the naming of land to the naming of cultures, families and individuals. As we shall see, it is either in naming oneself – like the first of the Longoué line, whose name is derived from the *long oué* that he cries out to nature and to himself after marooning into the forest – or in accepting the imposed name like Béluse, but over time re-appropriating, re-adapting it that the slave symbolically and physically rejects the translation of his body into slavery.[248] Naming defines the slave as one who either 'resists' or one who 'accepts' and perhaps gradually 're-adapts'.

The theme of naming and renaming permeates *Le Quatrième Siècle* and culminates in the bizarre state census that takes place shortly after the French abolition of slavery in the narrative. Obviously, the slaves that were translated by the apparatus of the Middle Passage would have already had a name. But like the 'title' of a literary text translated by a negligent, selfish translator, his original name was erased and replaced by whatever the master, *planteur,* or slave merchant desired. Naming oneself or being named carries enormous symbolic weight in the context of this study: it symbolises the final re-expression of the slave's identity after the process of his translation into slavery. Choosing one's own name thus represents the ultimate display of rebellion and autonomy. In *Le Quatrième Siècle,* the reclaiming of a name – that is its rewriting and reinterpretation – is not only the rejection of the imposed translation but it is also the creation of a proper *history*, that which Créole authors and people so earnestly desire. Papa Longoué explains,

[247] Loichot, Valérie. "Renaming the Name: Glissant and Walcott's Reconstruction of the Caribbean Self," *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 3 (2002): 3.
[248] Loichot, "Renaming the Name," 5.

> "Celui qui porte un nom est comme celui qui apprend à lire; s'il n'oublie pas le nom, l'histoire réelle du nom et s'il ne désapprend pas de lire, il se hausse. Il se met à connaître une mère, un père, des enfants… Il quitte le trou béant des jours et des nuits, il entre dans le temps qui lui réfléchit un passé, le force vers un futur." [249]

The countries of America and the Caribbean have themselves been created by usurpation, by the erasure of a name, followed by a forced and artificial rechristening. The discovery of the islands by rival colonising nations lead to "waves" of naming as they came under different conquests. As Valérie Loichot has observed, these "waves of naming and unnaming, such christenings, take away any possibility of writing a static and permanent name."[250] The Saint Lucian poet, Derrick Walcott, compares the process of naming and renaming to writing in the sand of a beach, where the waves continuously wash the inscription away:

> "…And the foam foreclosed
> With nothing in our hands
> But this stick
> To trace our names on the sand
> Which the sea erased again
> To our indifference." [251]

The coloniser arrived in what appeared to him to be new, unexplored lands, despite the presence of indigenous peoples. As if enacting his own Genesis story, he named those things that were dissimilar to him. He took it upon himself to name the human beings he found as well, but only if he deemed them worthy to be thought of as such. Braithwaite has observed that the erasure of a name in the mind of the coloniser and consequently in that of the colonised, works as a kind of crossed out identity – "no name: no man: Red Skin, Bush Negro, Aborigine." [252] Loichot remarks that in the Caribbean,

> "Original names such as Karukera, "island of beautiful waters," former name of Guadeloupe, Guanahani for San Salvador, Martinino for Martinique were eliminated to make room for new Christian saints such

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[249] Glissant, *QS,* 180.
[250] Loichot, "Renaming the Name," 3.
[251] Walcott, Derrick. *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (New York: The Noonday P, 1986), 305.
[252] Brathwaite, "World Order Models," 57.

as St. Lucia, St. Vincent, St. Pierre, St. Croix, St. Martin which function as screen names *masking and erasing any previous reality*."[253]

Just as the slave's history and his "previous reality" were erased through the translation of his body across the Atlantic, so were entire histories of indigenous tribes erased with the renaming of the Caribbean islands as well as by the literal, violent erasure of entire populations by European conquest.

In *Le Quatrième Siècle,* papa Longoué makes it clear from the outset of his story that, "il y avait toujours une explication aux noms."[254] The significance of naming is contrasted between the Longoué and Béluse families. Longoué and his descendants, the *marrons* that live in the *mornes,* choose their own names, as papa Longoué explains to Mathieu Béluse, "Ceux des hauteurs choisissaient leurs noms: on ne les appelait Tel ou Tel, on ne prenait pas l'habitude de les appeler, ils choisissaient et ils disaient à la ronde: « voilà, c'est Tel mon nom. »"[255] Thus, when Longoué's first son reaches a mature age, (and after fondly being called Ti-La Pointe after his father up until then), he announces that he shall be known as Melchior from then on. Béluse, on the other hand, is named by the delusional Madame de Senglis, who has purchased him for the "Bel Usage" – reproduction for the sake of the plantation – and from this she derives his name. Béluse's first son is born in slavery and is oddly named "Anne" after the Connétable de Montmorency of France, symbolising his place in the coloniser's history with no historical initiative of his own.

The bizarre naming ceremony or "census" takes place after the final abolition of slavery in 1848. It appears as the last opportunity for France to place their final, irreversible mark of ownership upon the newly freed slaves of Martinique, an imposed name like a meaningless 'title' for the translated text. Two bored, drunken civil servants have been given the task of officially registering the families of freed slaves. As the slaves have no family name of their own – the slave trade denied them one as they were no more than objects – the civil servants carelessly assign them meaningless names; "Famille Détroi" for a family with three children, or "Tousseul" for a man on his own. After exhausting classical history with names such as "Cicéron" and "Romulus", and when the slaves are particularly insolent, they amuse themselves by inversing the names of their previous owners or plantations. Thus, papa Longoué ironically explains, "De Senglis en résulta par exemple Glissant et

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[253] Loichot, "Renaming the Name," 1. [emphasis mine]
[254] Glissant, *QS,* 16.
[255] Glissant, *QS,* 167.

de Courbaril, Barricou."[256] He describes the papers that are handed to them after this farcical ceremony as certificates of "existence" rather than identity documents. They represent a *lack* of identity, a lack of meaning or *sens*. However, the *marrons,* papa Longoué explains, stood out distinctively during this ceremony,

> "Les anciens esclaves des Plantations étaient là, y compris les femmes. Mais aussi, majestueux dans leurs haillons, traînant comme un parure de dignité leur boue et leur dénuement, et les seuls d'ailleurs à être armés de coutelas, les marrons."[257]

Rather than await the ridiculous names assigned by the civil servants, the *marrons* announce their own names, the names they have chosen whilst living in the hills and roaming through the footpaths of the forests, becoming enrooted in the island. This infuriates the two drunken *commis,* one of whom indignantly and significantly retorts, "d'abord, Liberté, ce n'est pas un nom."[258] Nevertheless, the *marrons* receive their papers, with the names that they have chosen for themselves. For Glissant, these are the men and women who have enrooted themselves in Martinique, those that have an infinite connection with *la terre,* and therefore the right to their own histories. As he explains in *l'Intention Poétique,*

> L'effort ardu vers la terre est un effort dans l'histoire. Il n'y a pas ici de matière donnée qui soit sauvé de la passion du temps. Vous me déportez sur une terre nouvelle (c'est une île), vous me ravissez de l'esprit et jusque du tréfonds de moi la science de la terre ancienne, vous m'opposez que la terre nouvelle n'est qu'à vous, et ainsi dois-je descendre les âges, loin de terre. Voici alors (à force de piéter) que je sens la terre sous mes pieds: je repousse aussitôt dans l'hier, je tâte les fonds du temps irrémédiable, j'ensable l'oubli et dévale l'an*, je reconquiers ma mémoire* et donne valeur à mon inspiration: c'est brasser la terre et planter son arbre." [259]

In contrast, papa Longoué describes the former slaves that remain below in the chaos of the towns, as confused, uprooted people. He explains they have learnt so easily to mistrust one another, they have forgotten their history and remain enslaved, "Comme si ce pays était un nouveau bateau à

[256] Glissant, *QS,* 178.
[257] Glissant, *QS,* 176.
[258] Glissant, *QS,* 178.
[259] Glissant, *QS,* 196. [emphasis mine]

l'ancre, où ils croupissaient dans la cale et dans l'entrepont, sans jamais monter dans les mâts sur les mornes."[260]

However, it is important to note that the act of naming is not firm and concrete for Glissant. As if to reflect the waves of naming of the Caribbean islands themselves – as well as the self-discovery of characters such as Mathieu Béluse, a young man searching to redefine himself according to his true history – his characters often change names or are named in indirect ways. Names, for Glissant, are tools that break through barriers of language, gender and race.[261] For example, the primordial ancestor and *marron* Longoué is actually known as La-Pointe for most of his life, due to his wonderings along the beach. Melchior names his daughter Liberté after his brother, destroying any sense of hierarchy between genders. She then renames herself Marie Célat after distancing herself from her father, beginning her own family history. The daughter of Anne Béluse, Stéfanise, runs away into the forest where Melchior Longoué takes her under his wing, teaching her the ways of a *quimboiseur*. She eventually marries his son Apostrophe, and from then on is known as Stéfanise Longoué the Powerful, and the mother of papa Longoué. By employing names in this way, Glissant effectively destroys the patriarchal nature of family names, as well as the chronological nature of family genealogy. He explains, "les vieux voulaient être des pères: « Je suis son père », là où les jeunes ne sentaient nullement des fils."[262] Without a father figure there is no patriarchal authority, only the new emancipated self. In addition, with the epic intertwining of the two families histories – Longoué and Béluse – it appears that Glissant undermines the distinction between slave and *marron,* whilst continuing to give the latter the glory he is due. He takes away the power of the primordial "hero" of the people of Martinique – the *marron,* he who resists – and enables those who still feel 'enslaved' by the colonial powers to choose their own identity. For the children of Martinique, the descendants of both slaves, indentured workers and *marrons,* their true identity can be found through searching out their past, the true history of Martinique. Rejection of the imposed translation of their identities into slavery is still possible. For Glissant, the power of renaming oneself is not only found in violently rejecting the imposed name and choosing a new one, like Longoué, but also in filling the shell of the empty name with new meaning, like Béluse and his descendants. He expresses this in his work *Le Discours Antillais,* stating, "Peu importe que je m'appelle X ou Glissant: l'important est que je ne subisse pas mon nom, que je l'assume avec et

[260] Glissant, *QS,* 212.
[261] Loichot, "Renaming the Name," 6.
[262] Glissant, *QS,* 140.

dans ma communauté."[263] The names that were bitterly bestowed upon to the newly emancipated slaves during the post-abolition census were empty of all meaning, like the negligent translator that bitterly omits, erases or tears out pages of the rebellious text that he is translating, leaving only the cover and a basic description. However the slaves and their descendants can reappropriate the name by refilling the book with their own history, their own *sens*. As Loichot has observed, the Caribbean name is alterable, crossing boundaries of language, gender or race. To borrow her analogy, it is like an empty shell, awaiting the *Bernard-l'hermitte* to inhabit it.[264] Thus, it is the reclaiming, renaming and rewriting of the empty shell or name – filling the empty cover of the translated text with new content – which makes it Caribbean.[265]

II. Feminine Resistance in Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba Sorcière*

Moi, Tituba Sorcière (1986) is inspired by the true-life events of the Salem Witch trials of 1692, in which a slave from Barbados by the name of Tituba testifies and admits guilt in practicing witchcraft on the people of Salem. At first glance, Tituba's story may seem a strange choice for Maryse Condé, a French Créole author from Guadeloupe. It is the story of a slave from the English-speaking island of Barbados who is transported to Boston, Massachusetts and haphazardly inserted into an utterly bizarre religious occurrence in Western history. Most writers, as Condé herself admits, tend to keep to their own islands. Condé instead advocates for a "West Indian identity, regardless of colonial language and political status," due to the fact that, "People of the Caribbean share a common history and are united by a common experience."[266] By choosing Tituba's story, Condé finds inspiration from the rare voice of an actual, historical female slave, whose full story has been largely omitted in the historical archive despite her pivotal role in an important event in history – one which has inspired several works of Western literature, such as Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), and stands as a crucial reminder of the dangers of theocratic government and the involvement of the Church in private life. By recreating Tituba's life through literature, Condé has the opportunity to discuss the hypocrisy of Christianity at the height of the Slave Trade, one of the key forces that helped justify the crime, as well as the plight of women across all cultures and races. More importantly, like the archaeologist obsessed with finding the true impression of *Gradiva's* footstep,

[263] Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais,* 285.
[264] A hermit crab, born without a shell and moving from one to the other as it needs or pleases.
[265] Loichot, "Renaming the Name," 11.
[266] Condé, "The Role of the Writer," 698.

Tituba affords Condé the opportunity to respond to the entrancing *mal d'archive,* the desire unto death to recover and possess the moments of one's origins.

In the novel, Tituba narrates her story in the first person. The narrative opens with the rape of her mother, an Ashanti woman from Africa by an English sailor on board the slave ship *Christ the King* as it sails towards Barbados, immediately highlighting the hypocrisy of Christianity during the Trade. It is from this act of violence that Tituba is born. Her birth is thus the result of one of the core instruments of control that aided in the creation of slave bodies: rape. She is conceived *during* the Middle Passage and is 'translated' and born quite literally into plantation slavery on the island of Barbados. Condé's novel differs quite obviously from Glissant's *Quatrième Siècle* in that the heroine is a woman and a *mulâtre,* a person of mixed race, a hybrid of culture, ethnicity and language; in a word: Créole. Unlike Glissant's characters who must search to feel their connection with the earth, Tituba feels strongly enrooted in the island of Barbados due to her wonderings as a child in the thick vegetation of the island after the tragic execution of her mother, and thanks to the guidance of Man Yaya, a female *quimboiseur* who takes care of her, teaching her the secrets of the forests. Unlike Glissant's characters, Tituba essentially begins her mature life in Barbados a free woman, a *marron* living in seclusion far from the plantation. However it is after her chance encounter with the handsome John Indien – a man with traces of the Arawak tribe in his blood – that she gives herself over to slavery in order to live with him as his wife on the plantation of Susanna Endicott. This decision will prove to be her downfall. Upon their mistress's death, the couple are sold to the Reverend Samuel Parris and transported to the cold, bitter town of Salem where Tituba's efforts to heal and comfort its inhabitants are distorted by a band of young girls into acts of witchcraft.

Tituba is a fascinating character when considered in terms of the metaphor of the transatlantic slave as a literary 'text'. It appears that the female choice in resisting the forced translation of her body and identity is twofold. Firstly, she must resist her imposed identity as a slave body, and secondly she must resist her translation into a second kind of 'slavery', namely the powers of control that define her sexuality and how she must act as a woman. As Florence Jurney has remarked, the enslavement of women during the Slave Trade entails a sort of "double attack". Commenting on the rape and captivity of Tituba's mother Abena, she writes,

> "Sa capture est ainsi une attaque contre sa couleur, l'homme blanc se posant en maître face à un être noir qu'il définit comme inferieur; quant a son viol, il est le résultat d'une oppression de l'homme sur la femme, l'un cherchant par tous les moyens à briser l'autre afin de la soumettre." [267]

Édouard Glissant illustrates the double nature of the female's experience of captivity in *Le Discours Antillais,* stating that after disembarking from the slave ship and being raped, "la femme [antillaise] a sur l'homme un inappréciable avantage: elle connaît déjà le maître."[268] In the first instance, Tituba certainly displays both an inward and outward resistance to her translation into slavery, from the curse that she casts upon her mistress Susanna Endicott to her brave refusal to testify in the farcical Salem Witch Trials – an action that leads to a brutal scene of rape, after which she finally capitulates to her master's demands. However in the case of the imposed translation of her identity as a woman, Tituba finds resistance slightly more problematic. Throughout the novel she openly displays her desire for the male sex, and the pleasure that she derives from it. At times, her open enjoyment of her own sexuality aids in the reclaiming of her feminine identity. However it is also her physical attraction to John Indien that causes her to enter willingly into slavery. Thus, in addition to the 'translator' I have already discussed – the surgeon and his apparatus of control on board the slave ship during the Middle Passage – Tituba finds herself 'translated' by the racist and sexist apparatus of Western Christianity at the height of it's puritanical period, namely in the figure of Samuel Parris, the self-interested Reverend of Salem, as well as by the masculine gaze of the men of her own race. In her narrative Condé appears to suggest that for the female slave a rejection to the forced translation of her body and identity can never be achieved through outward, violent resistance. As if contrasting her island to that of Glissant's Martinique, Tituba explains that, "La Barbade, mon pays est une île plate. À peine ça et là, quelques mornes,"[269] perhaps a subtle hint that in this story, there is nowhere to hide. Marooning – an action that embodies resistance and liberation in the works of Glissant, will be more difficult in her narrative. The excessive religious and social restrictions imposed on women at the time by both their white and black male counterparts, in addition to the Slave Trade's apparatus of control, made outward resistance virtually impossible. Throughout the narrative, her acts of resistance almost always result in rape, bodily harm and sorrow. When Tituba's mother Abena tries to resist, striking the master Darnell as he attempts to rape her, it results in her execution, in death. Tituba only truly finds peace and freedom in death, when she is allowed to become one with her island, Barbados. Her death is nevertheless a tragic one: execution for inciting a

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[267] Jurney, Florence Ramond. "Voix Sexualisée au Féminin dans "Moi, Tituba Sorcière" de Maryse Condé," *The French Review* 76 (2003): 1163.
[268] Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais,* 510.
[269] Condé, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière,* 19. Here on abbreviated to *MTS.*

slave revolt upon returning to her homeland, as well as for the crimes across the ocean, for which she has been falsely accused. However this does not deter her from expressing her autonomy, from resisting the forced translation of her identity. On the contrary, in *Moi, Tituba Sorcière,* Condé imaginatively recreates the story of a persistently passionate, rebellious woman.

Tituba's resistance to her translation as a slave is clear enough. It is a process that perhaps only truly begins during her voyage to America, her own personal Middle Passage, where she is baptised into Christianity by Samuel Parris, a religion that recognises her as inferior as both a woman and a slave. It is also on the slave ship that Tituba is officially married "in the eyes of the Church" to John Indien, which in the 17th century was arguably another form of slavery. Almost immediately, she openly displays her resistance to her translation as a slave, from the curse that she places on her Susanna Endicott that ultimately ends the mistress's life, to the long, painful scream that she cries out at the sight of a woman being hung in Boston. The figure reminds her of her own mother's execution and she laments, "Je hurlai et plus je hurlais, plus j'éprouvais le désir de hurler. De hurler ma souffrance, ma révolte, mon impuissante colère."[270] Her initial refusal to testify at the Salem Witch Trials, resulting in severe bodily harm and rape at the hands of Samuel Parris can also be seen as her ultimate resistance to the slavery that is imposed upon her. Her choices are placed in contrast to those of her husband John Indien who is "pareil à une marionnette entre leurs mains."[271] He has learnt to pretend, comply and appease his masters in order to survive. Sadly, he loses himself in the act, testifying against and condemning innocent people as they are put on trial in Salem.

As Jurney has observed, Tituba resists the forced translation of her identity as a woman by destroying the dichotomy imposed on her by a male dominated society, namely to be asexualised: the untouched virgin, or to openly express one's sexuality and be deemed a prostitute.[272] This is made clear through her physical relationship with John Indien. She describes her first night with him as a fight, "nos premiers moments d'amour ressemblèrent à une lutte," rather than an act of feminine submission.[273] In other instances she even takes on the more dominant role, ordering John Indien, "Tais-toi! Fais-mois l'amour!"[274] Her resistance is also demonstrated in her interactions with other female characters. Whilst in a Salem prison awaiting trial, when Hester her friend and cellmate tells her of her idyllic, hypothetical land where only women dwell, where men enter only briefly and out

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[270] Condé, *MTS,* 81.
[271] Condé, *MTS,* 118.
[272] Jurney, "Voix Sexualisée au Féminin," 1162.
[273] Condé, *MTS,* 42.
[274] Condé, *MTS,* 53.

of necessity, Tituba displays her dislike for the idea, telling Hester, “J’aime bien prendre mon temps!”[275] Again, when Samuel Parris’ wife Elizabeth expresses her sorrow and disdain for being born a woman, Tituba cannot understand her reasoning and exclaims, “Quoi de plus beau qu’un corps de femme?”[276] Finally, her decision to abort her first pregnancy for fear of bringing a child into a world of slavery and superstition in Salem, though tragic, displays the control that she possesses over her own body. However, it is also because of Tituba’s open sexuality as a woman and her outspoken physical attraction to the male sex that Tituba tends to submit to male definitions of her identity. After her first encounter with John Indien, who calls her a *sorcière* and tells her that she “could” be beautiful; Tituba becomes aware of the desire in the male gaze, and only then begins to think of herself as ugly. Her strong physical attraction and love for John Indien drives her to give herself up into slavery, despite the warnings of Man Yaya and her mother. Once a slave, she is introduced to puritanical Christianity and the fault of eve – the ideology that kept women in submission. Although inwardly she never accepts this ideology, it affects her identity, making her a shell of the woman she once was. It is her decision to enter into slavery that leads her to Salem where she is violently forced to “confess” herself as a witch, rather than a healer, symbolically labelling herself as everything the apparatus of slavery and male dominance wish her to be. Nevertheless, as Jurney has remarked, in proudly and consistently declaring her sexuality, Tituba expresses what Foucault has described as a “transgression déliberée”. In *Histoire de la sexualité,* he explains that,

> “Si le sexe est réprimé, c’est-à-dire voué à la prohibition, à l’inexistence et au mutisme, le seul fait d’en parler, et de parler de sa répression à comme une allure de transgression délibérée. Qui tient ce langage se met jusqu’à un certain point hors pouvoir; il bouscule la loi, il anticipe, tant soit peu, la liberté future.”[277]

Thus, by continuously expressing her desire and sexual pleasure in a culture where those topics were severely repressed, Tituba places herself outside the limits of the society that kept her mother silent, where slavery and patriarchy reigned. Jurney concludes that, “En faisant rentrer le sexe dans son propre discours, Tituba déstabilise la loi – qu’elle soit patriarcale ou coloniale – qui remet en cause sa conduite sexuelle.”[278] Thus we can conclude that although Tituba does not achieve the same level of autonomy and liberation as the characters of Glissant’s *Quatrième Siècle,* her persistent resistance to her translation as a slave, even in the face of danger and failure, and her destruction of the

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[275] Condé, *MTS,* 160.
[276] Condé, *MTS,* 72.
[277] Foucault, Michel. *Histoire de la Sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 13.
[278] Jurney, “Voix Sexualisé au Féminin,” 1166.

dichotomy that was imposed upon woman in her society, mark her as "she who resists", a woman who has a claim to her own identity and history.

III. Resistance & Re-awakening in Chamoiseau's *L'Esclave Vieil Homme et le Molosse*

The very first page of *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* opens with a question, "Le monde a-t-il une intention?" It appears to place Chamoiseau's novel in the category of a genesis story, questioning the very origins of the universe and humanity, and particularly the place of Creole people within that universal framework. The seven chapters by which it is divided appear to support this idea, reflecting the seven days of biblical creation, and roughly follow the phases in which the universe was created: *Matière, Vivant, Eaux, Lunaire, Solaire, La Pierre, Les Os.* However, considering that Chamoiseau shares Glissant's critical view of origin myths, namely that such myths often engender racialist, genealogical thinking in societies made up of diverse peoples that do not necessarily need a Genesis story, "because they do not need the myth of pure lineage," I would argue that more importantly than a myth of origins, *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* is a myth of the slave's ultimate act of resistance.[279] If it must be considered as a myth of origins, then it is one where the moment of "creation" stems directly from the slave's first act of resistance, from the repossession of his consciousness and body through escape or marronage. 'Creation' or 'origin' is thus a personal process that takes place as the slave reaches a point of self-discovery, and begins in the moment of marronage and liberation. The seven chapters can therefore be reinterpreted as the stages of re-awakening from the passive, trance-like state of the docile slave towards a reconnection with the inner self and with the world around it. However, in contrast to Glissant who elevates the militant nature of the maroon's resistance, Chamoiseau also valorises the survival strategies and the small acts of resistance of those who remained on the plantation, particularly in emphasizing the role of the *conteur* or storyteller.

L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse differs significantly from the works of Glissant and Condé, in that it tells the story of an old man who appears to have accepted the translation of his identity as a slave without a hint of resistance his entire life. He has no name except for, "un nom dérisoire octroyé par le Maître." His real name has become useless and lost, without him even realising it. He has no memory, no history of his own; "Sa généalogie, sa probable lignée de papa

[279] Garraway, Doris L. "Toward a Myth of Creole Origin: Narrative, Foundations and Eschatology in Patrick Chamoiseau's 'L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse'," *Calalloo,* 29 (2006): 152.

manman et arrière-grands-parents, se résume au nombril enfoncé dans son ventre."[280] He is thus the tragic example of the transatlantic 'text' that has been negligently and successfully translated for the sole purpose of plantation slavery, losing all previous meaning and identity. He is nameless, without ancestors or memory. He spends his life in silence and servility, expressing complete docility and acceptance of the imposed translation of his identity, "Sans parole, sans promesse. Compact et infiniment fluide dans les actes du travail qui seuls l'engouent d'une vie sans signe et sans visage."[281] However, one day without warning or forethought he escapes; "l'esclave vieil homme, (docile d'entre les dociles) a marronné."[282] Thus, it is indeed a story of resistance, although unlike Longoué who maroons "le premier jour" in *Le Quatrième Siècle,* or Tituba who displays resistance throughout her life as a slave, the *vieil homme* only displays an outward resistance to the translation of his identity at the end of his life. This act of resistance is no less powerful or meaningful for Chamoiseau, however. He illustrates this with quotations or *entre-dire* from the works of Glissant at the start of each chapter, placing his narrative in the same category of heroism and epic genre. Like Glissant, however, Chamoiseau does maintain that the moment of marronage or resistance is the moment when the slave's true history begins. With a quote from *L'Intention Poétique,* Chamoiseau introduces the second chapter of the novel,

> "Le fugitive – l'africain voué aux îles délétères – ne reconnaissait pas même le gout de la nuit… Loin en arrière il entendait les chiens, mais déjà les acacias l'avaient ravi du monde des chasseurs; et ainsi entrait-il, homme de grande terre, dans *une autre histoire*: où sans qu'il le sût, les temps recommençaient pour lui."[283]

The remainder of the narrative is dedicated to describing and examining the complex experience of the slave on his journey towards self-discovery in the hills and in the forests of Martinique. All the while, *le molosse* is on his trail, the Master's mastiff, a monstrous animal that represents all that held the old slave in slavery, a mechanism in the apparatus of control that kept him and the other slaves in submission. Strangely though, "il retrouve dans le molosse la catastrophe qui l'habite." Like him, the mastiff was also made to endure the middle passage, "il est l'âme désemparée du Maître. Il est le double souffrant de l'esclave." Thus the old slave's flight from the ferocious animal and their eventual confrontation in the forest symbolises both a final combat for his freedom, as well as a battle against his own fears and against the silences and uncertainties of his past.

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[280] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 22.
[281] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 23.
[282] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 25.
[283] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 30. [emphasis mine]

Le Papa-conteur: Resistance on the Plantation

Although the moment of the slave's physical liberation from the plantation is seen as the beginning of his self-discovery and his entry into "une autre histoire," for Chamoiseau, the small acts of resistance carried out consistently on the plantation are of equal, if not more value to Creole history. A central figure that initiates and cultivates these resistances can be found in the figure of the *conteur.*

> "Le Papa-conteur de l'Habitation était un bougre assez insignifiant (un nègre-guinée à petits yeux, au corps-planche et au dos un peu courbe). Il se transformait en prenant la parole (grands yeux, corps épais et dos à belle équerre). Il aspirait la vie autour de lui pour sustenter son verbe. Et de ce verbe, il éveillait la vie. Il parolait et faisait rire. Et le rire déployait les poitrines, les amplifiait. Les haines, les désirs, les cris perdus et les silences de tous s'exprimaient par sa bouche."[284]

Without drawing attention to himself, and usually under the cover of night, the *conteur* would unite the community of slaves living on the plantations – people from diverse cultures and languages – expressing their desires, fears and frustrations, through speech, dance and bodily gestures, offering them a common narrative, a common identity, stories of survival and resistance. In contrast to the *nègre marron* who according to Chamoiseau and Confiant, merely 'inherits' the frenzied scream, *le cri* of the first maroon, these authors describe *le conteur* as "l'artiste du cri, le réceptacle de sa poétique, le Papa de la tracée littéraire."[285] Whilst praising the heroism of the *marrons,* the authors of *Lettres Créoles* maintain that the central place where creolisation took place was the plantation, "un lieu d'exils culturels."[286] The African slaves were what Glissant has described as "migrants nus" in need of total redefinition, reinvention. Even *les planteurs* were essentially exiles from Europe. It is in this environment of colliding cultures and racist hierarchies of power that *le conteur* "devra rapidement, pour survivre et *déployer sa résistance*, se trouver son langage." He derives this language from the remnants of speech left by the native Carib people, from African dialects and even from the language of the *colons,* out of the necessity to survive as well as from the strange curiosity that the conquered develops for the culture of the conqueror.[287] Thus, *la parole* of the *conteur* is already rich with influences from Amerindian, African and European culture, in a word, "il est créole

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[284] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 43.
[285] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 43.
[286] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 45.
[287] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 46. [emphasis mine]

– c'est-à-dire déjà multiple, déjà mosaïque, déjà imprévisible."[288] Chamoiseau and Confiant explain that by the speech of the *conteur* and their nocturnal gatherings, the slaves would transmit from generation to generation "une culture créole de résistance."[289] In doing so, *le conteur* contributed far more to the production of culture and oral tradition than the *nègre marron.* Considering that oral tradition is now one of the most powerful tools of resistance for Creole authors against the oppressive narratives of the colonising nations, it is arguable that the constant resistance cultivated by the *conteur* on the plantation is of far more value to Creole authors than the heroic, militant rejection of the *marron* who remained in the hills alone, producing a history that was separate to that of the creole community.

L'Esclave vieil homme is nourished by the words of the *conteur,* and despite his inalterable, passive demure, "La parole du Papa-conteur l'emporte vers des confins étranges. Elle lui donne une chair dans la chair des autres, des souvenirs qui sont ceux de tous et qui les animent tous d'aphasiques lancinances."[290] The stories or *contes* told by the *conteur* during their nocturnal meetings give the old slave memory, history, and courage. We learn that the old slave has in fact experienced the chaos and fever of *la décharge,* the sickness or compulsive desire to flee that manifests as an involuntary bodily action, almost every day of his life. But instead of giving into the mysterious desire that would surely end in death, the old slave restrains himself, "nouant ses gestes et ses actes et ses émotions à dire des lianes autour d'un corps dément." He becomes docile, mastering his movements and deadening his spirit in order to control the "volées en décharges" that he experiences each day.

Thus in contrast to his appearance, the old slave, with the help of the *conteur,* has lived in constant resistance to the translation of his identity into slavery, but has remained on the plantation and restrained himself from expressing it physically. These small acts of resistance have not led him to escape, a prerequisite for claiming his own history. He appears to be in constant inner turmoil with this fact, as if at war with himself, a war that is brought to a boiling point by the old slave's interactions with the *molosse.* Unlike the other slaves who avoid the *molosse* at all costs for fear that he will catch their scent, the *esclave vieil homme* ensures that he passes by the dog's cage each day, confronting the beast that inspires such fear and submission, the very symbol of what keeps him in slavery. Chamoiseau writes that,

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[288] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 47.
[289] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 47.
[290] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 44.

> "Le chien réveille son tumulte dans des extrêmes qui l'échouent hébété. C'est sans doute ainsi qu'il eut le sentiment de la mort: la matière de son âme s'agitant, le chaos cherchant son cri, et son cri sa parole, et sa parole son dire. Il décide donc de s'en aller, non pas de marronner, mais *d'aller.*"[291]

The slave's flight through the dense vegetation of the forest is described in magnificent detail and exquisite symbolism. In the chapter entitled *Eaux,* the old slave loses his sight and senses his body becoming one with nature, the earth. In the fourth chapter *Lunaire,* he feels his sight returning, a reflection of his mental awakening, but blindfolds himself for fear of its sheer brilliance and the strange new world it reveals. In the chapter called *Solaire* he finally opens his eyes, fully acknowledging the world around him, using his speech to name the trees and plants, expressing a subjective point of view that signifies his re-entry into humanity. The chapter culminates in his encounter with *la source,* a deep pool created by a fresh spring where he falls and almost drowns. In its depths he finds the indescribable will to live and pushes himself out as if from a womb: rebirth. From this point on, the narration moves into the first person, the 'il' becomes a 'je' – "J'écarquillai les yeux pour mieux voir, et le monde naquit sans un voile de pudeur. Un total végétal d'un serein impérieux. Je."[292] Now rather than run from the *molosse,* he decides to *resist,* to stand and fight, a decision that fills him with a renewed, mad desire to live. Finally in the chapter entitled *La Pierre,* the *le vieil homme* finds himself face to face with a rock, intricately engraved with the symbols of the Amerindian islanders that dwelled there before him. As Garraway has observed, Chamoiseau insists on a Creole identity that includes the Amerindian past.[293] The mossy rock found by the old slave is symbolic of the actual ancient boulders inscribed with hieroglyphics found in the Montravail forest of Saint-Luce in Martinique and described as the foundations of Creole societies in *Lettres Créoles.*[294] The old slave cannot read the markings, but declares, "j'y devine des paroles fondatrices, des gestes sacrés et des conjurations."[295] The climactic moment of the slave's resistance and self-discovery is thus the realisation of an alternative narrative to that of the coloniser's history. It is the realisation and reclaiming of his own past, which, for Chamoiseau, includes the mysterious memory of cultural continuation between the Caribs and the slaves.[296] In their final confrontation, the monster is pacified and approaches the old man who is no longer a slave but a man with his own identity and

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[291] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 49.
[292] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 82.
[293] Garraway, "Toward a Myth of Creole Origin," 159.
[294] Chamoiseau & Confiant, *LC,* 15-20.
[295] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 118.
[296] Garraway, "Toward a Myth of Creole Origin," 159.

history. Rather than attack, *le molosse* licks him in an act of submission and respect – an interesting reversal of roles and the narratives they represent, I might briefly add, when compared to the act of submission shown by the werewolf of *Bisclavret* in the *Lais* of Marie de France.[297] The animal turns and leaves *le vieil homme* leaning against the sacred rock. He is badly wounded, and we soon learn that it will be his final resting place.

In the final chapter, *Les Os,* Chamoiseau reveals his inspiration for the tale of *l'Esclave vieil homme.* On an expedition to find the boulder engraved with the Amerindian symbols, with the help of a *vieux-nègre-bois,* the author comes across the bones of a man with a broken leg, hidden in the undergrowth, leaning against the boulder. The incident haunts him, and he cannot help but think who that man might have been. It becomes an obsession, and he is inspired to write the man's story; "Je sus ainsi qu'un jour j'écrirais une histoire, cette histoire, pétrie des grands silences de nos histoires mêlées, nos mémoires emmêlées." *Le molosse*, he explains in this final chapter, in addition to a symbol of the apparatus of fear and control that acted on slave bodies during the Slave Trade, represents our limited knowledge, our old certainties, and perhaps even the danger of unquestioned historical narratives:

> "Nous sommes tous, comme mon vieux-bougre en fuite, poursuivis par un monstre. Échapper à nos vieilles certitudes. Nos si soigneux ancrages. Nos chers reflexes horlogés en systèmes. Nos somptueuses Vérités."

Thus, after discussing the works of these three Creole authors, it is clear that each has their own unique interpretation of their histories and of the symbolism of resistance. For Glissant, the outward, physical and almost militant rejection of the imposed translation, as demonstrated by the *marrons* in *Le Quatrième Siècle,* is the most praiseworthy. For Glissant, *le marron* has earned the right to claim his history and is the creator and guardian of Creole oral tradition, as displayed in the character of papa Longoué. However, he acknowledges another way of reclaiming one's identity. Although he appears to condemn those who collaborate with the colonising powers and slavery, as in the character of Béluse, he admits that this is what the majority of slaves would have had to endure. But in adapting the given name and reinterpreting it, in filling the abandoned text with new meaning, Creole people can redefine themselves and their history. Chamoiseau takes a slightly different approach by assigning historical authority to the figure of *le conteur,* a slave who remained on the plantation, continually displaying resistance through the translation of

[297] See p. 41.

different languages, the telling of stories and the creation of alternative narratives from which the slaves could draw a common identity. Unlike Glissant, who would argue that resistance is a conscious decision, Chamoiseau describes it as an inevitable, bodily reaction to the translation of one's body and identity into slavery, a process he calls *la décharge.* Maryse Condé offers an analysis of the resistance(s) and mental experience of a female slave, who must resist her translation into slavery as well as the translation imposed upon her body as a woman. In order to claim her own identity, she must actively destroy the dichotomy offered to her in a male dominant society, namely the choice to either be asexualised as the "eternal virgin" or express her sexuality and be named a prostitute. For Condé, as for Glissant, the female experience of slavery is the most tragic, almost always ending in physical torture, sorrow and death. Despite their differences, however, all three authors agree that it is only through resistance, although displayed in various forms, that the transatlantic slave can claim his own history and identity.

IV. Translation as an Act of Resistance

In this chapter, I have discussed the various ways in which the characters in the novels of Chamoiseau, Glissant and Condé display their resistance to the translation of their bodies and identities into slavery. As a way of concluding, it is interesting to note that translation itself, when used to question historical narratives, can be seen as an act of resistance. In her study "Translation and Activism: Emerging Patterns of Narrative Community", Baker explores the ways in which translation and interpreting may be used as tools to challenge the dominant narratives of our time.[298] She mentions a number of professional and non-profit organizations that are emerging at an increasing rate in the world of translating and interpreting, organizations that believe in the power of narrative in cultivating a sense of common identity, as well as in its potential as a platform for political action. Some of the examples she offers include Translators for Peace (http://www.traduttoriperlapace.org), Babels (http://www.babels.org) and Traducteurs Sans Frontières. They share the belief specified by Somers and Gibson that, "People act, or do not act, in part according to how they understand their place in any number of given narratives."[299] As I briefly mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, minority or subjugated communities such as the French Creole people of the Caribbean are in danger of losing the memory of their past, the true history of their enslavement. Glissant has argued this point in *Le Discours Antillais.* He maintains that because of the colonial displacement of Creole peoples as well as their prolonged enslavement, they have not

[298] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 462-484

[299] Somers & Gibson, "Reclaiming the Epistemological 'Other'," 61.

been able to situate themselves by a "mythical chronology" of their land. Instead they have been forced to interpret their past through the oppressive chronology of French colonial history.[300] Without their own legitimate, recognised narrative, Antillean Creole communities will continue to act according to their place in the dominant and forgetful narrative of the coloniser. These existing patterns of domination, which manifest in global politics, economy and culture, cannot be undermined, Baker argues, through concrete forms of activism alone (public demonstrations, petitions etc), but "must involve a direct challenge to the stories that sustain these patterns."[301] Translation is therefore crucial in the creation of alternative 'stories' as narratives do not passively travel across linguistic and cultural boundaries, they do not develop into internationally recognised history or "global meta narratives" without the direct involvement of translators and interpreters.[302]

In the third chapter of this study, I briefly outlined Somers and Gibson's four categories of narrative, that is *ontological, public, conceptual* and *meta* or *master* narratives, as a way of breaking down the fatal distinction and hierarchy between oral and written tradition. I argue that Creole authors, such as those I have discussed in this study, can be seen as the translators of their own histories. Gleaning information from oral history, that is from *ontological* narratives (the personal stories we tell ourselves and our families or oral tradition) and *public* narratives (the stories passed down through communities and institutions) and even drawing what they can from *master* narratives such as the literature of the Enlightenment, translating this plethora of cultural information into *literature.* This in turn can be described as alternative, *conceptual* narratives (narratives developed by researchers or academics in their field of study). In doing so, they symbolically continue the work of their ancestors who resisted slavery, the imposed translation of their identities across the Atlantic Ocean by challenging the dominant and oppressive narratives of our time. In particular, they continue the work of the *conteur* who continually resisted slavery on the plantation by *translating* the languages and experiences around him into a common narrative from which the slaves could derive their identities apart from slavery. As Seifort has acknowledged, Creole authors have recognised the necessity of recovering and *renewing* Creole oral traditions, in an attempt to "update true memory."[303] This "true memory" for authors such as Chamoiseau, Confiant and Bernabé, as well as Glissant, refers to a past beyond the reach of conventional history, a history that is found in "codes of survival and resistance" preserved predominantly in oral tradition. These authors use literature as a

[300] Garraway, "Toward a Myth of Creole Origin," 151.
[301] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 471.
[302] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 267.
[303] Seifort, "Oral History and 'Creoleness' in Patrick Chamoiseau's 'Creole Folktales'," *Marvels and Tales* 16 (2002): 217.

primary means of preserving the oral tales. However, as I have discussed in the chapter on the *Lais* of Marie de France, the translation of oral tales into written form is difficult, and oral tradition will often resist such a translation. However, in recognising the central role of orality, and attempting to integrate the oral nature of Creole history into writing, Creole writers preserve the power and mystery of oral tradition, as well as initiate a revalorization of the Creole language. They do not achieve this with the exclusive use of Creole, but rather with a "play between several languages," and particularly between Creole and French.[304] For Chamoiseau, this is achieved by combining the attributes of the *conteur,* the obscure, unremarkable storyteller who would interactively and clandestinely tell stories amongst the slaves on the plantations, with the traits of a literary narrator. For example, in *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse*, the narrator or *conteur* highlights the unpredictable nature of the very language that conveys the tale, stating that, "notre parole se tourne de ce côté-là, comme dans l'axe d'une source dont le jaillissement encore irrésolu manque à cette soif qui nous habite, irrémédiable." He makes clear the difficulty, uncertainty and oral nature of the tale he is about to tell,

> "Ainsi, m'est parvenue l'histoire de cet esclave vieil homme. Une histoire à grands sillons d'histoires variantes, en chants de langue créole, en jeux de langue française. Seules de proliférantes mémoires pourraient en suivre les emmêlements. Ici soucieux de ma parole, je ne saurais aller qu'en un rythme léger flottant sur leurs musiques."[305]

The narrative continues in an extremely lyrical, rhythmic manner, with exceptional use of onomatopoeia and alliteration. It is oftentimes bizarre and contradictory in its descriptions, magical and vibrant with the insertion of words from the Creole language, and taking several liberties with French grammar, syntax and vocabulary.[306]

However one might argue that no person can stand outside all historical narratives, and therefore there can be no objective viewpoint from which to assess and judge different 'stories'. Some may dispute that in their attempt to balance out the inequalities found in existing historical narratives, Creole authors may overcompensate, creating alternative, conceptual narratives that are biased towards one particular community. However, as Walter Fisher has demonstrated in his influential narrative paradigm,[307] our "embeddedness" in narratives does not necessarily mean that

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[304] Seifort, "Oral History and 'Creoleness'," 217.
[305] Chamoiseau, *EVHM,* 18.
[306] Seifort, "Oral History and 'Creoleness'," 223.
[307] Fisher, Walter. "The Narrative Paradigm: In the Beginning," *Journal of Communication* 35 (1985): 74-89.

we do not have the ability to reason; one story is not as good as another. Baker argues that, in fact, as rational beings we are constantly reasoning and assessing different narratives, we do not just passively absorb the stories around us, but actively *choose* and elaborate those to which we subscribe.[308] We judge narratives on the basis of our good reason. However what we consider "good" reason may be called into question, as it is inherently determined by our history, culture and experience of the world. For Fisher, this problem is not as crippling as it appears. He maintains that not only do we utilise our "good reason," we also dispose of what he calls "narrative rationality." This is determined, he explains, "by the nature of persons as narrative beings – their inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity, whether stories ring true in their lives."[309] Thus, we instinctively test narratives for coherence; whether or not a narrative reveals contradictions within itself, or how a narrative relates to other narratives that deal with the same era or issue. More importantly, a narrative may be tested with reference to the "facts" that it downplays or omits, or the counterarguments that it chooses to avoid.[310] We also test narratives by analysing the credibility of its main characters, as well as the character narrating it, the storyteller. Finally, in testing a narrative for fidelity, Baker explains that we tend to evaluate the values that it explicitly or implicitly promotes. This means asking what effects would follow from adhering to that narrative, i.e. what effects it would have on the world, on our ability to maintain dignity and self-respect, as well as how the narrative may affect our relationship with other people and communities.[311] Thus, Baker concludes that as storytellers, we do more than simply choose from the dominant narratives in our societies. Instead, if we judge the moral consequences of a narrative to be negative, we have the ability to look elsewhere for "better" narratives, or perhaps through research and memory even elaborate stories of our own. As I have argued, this is the task that Creole writers have taken upon themselves. They believe that "another world is possible."[312] Like the translators and organizations mentioned above, they share the belief that narratives must be carefully scrutinized because unexamined narratives "conceal patterns of domination and submission, which exclude the experience of large sectors of society while legitimating and promoting those of the political, economic and cultural elite."[313] They display their resistance to the oppressive historical narrative of the coloniser and to the gaping silences in his archive through acts of *translation,* through the translation of oral history into written narrative or

[308] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 467.
[309] Fisher, Walter. "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Agreement," *Communication Monographs,* 51 (1984): 7-8.
[310] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 469.
[311] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 470.
[312] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 471.
[313] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 470.

literature, and through a rebellious translation and at times even insertion of Creole into French. In doing so, they create alternative narratives that portray what they deem to be the *true* histories of their ancestors whose histories and identities were also translated through the Middle Passage, across the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to the islands of the Antilles. These alternative, *conceptual* narratives in turn may gradually cultivate a sense of common identity amongst Creole communities as they begin to identify with these stories, providing a basis for meaningful political and social action.

VI

CONCLUSION

> “Le gouffre chante contre l’oubli
> en roulis des marées
> en mots de sel pour Glissant pour Walcott et pour Kamau Brathwaite
> (fascine des siècles dans l’infini de ce présent où tout reste possible)
>
> Celui de l’Atlantique s’est éveillé
> *clameurs en méditerranée !*”[314]
>
> Patrick Chamoiseau
> *Lampedusa : ce que nous disent les gouffres*

On the 3 October 2013, as I neared the end of my research for my thesis on the transatlantic slave trade, a 20-metre long fishing boat carrying over five hundred migrants from Libya to Italy sank in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Lampedusa. Out of the five hundred or so refugees from Eritrea, Somalia and Ghana, 155 were rescued and more than 360 declared dead. This tragic event brought all the horrors and devastation of the slave trade to life, reminding me of the real, modern day crises that stem not only from the trade, but from a millennium of crimes that we have committed against each other as human beings. The testimonies of those that survived the shipwreck are utterly harrowing and point towards an appalling system that can be described as a tragic ‘inversion’ of the slave ship and the Middle Passage. The testimony of a seventeen-year-old girl from Eritrea revealed that a large portion of the migrants on the boat that sank near Lampedusa had been held by Somali, Sudanese and Libyan traffickers in what has been described as a concentration

[314] Chamoiseau, Patrick. *Lampedusa: ce que nous disent les gouffres* (Lyon: Maison de Passages, 2013), 1.

camp, near an oasis in the Libyan Desert. The migrants from Somalia and Eritrea had already endured a long, dangerous trek across the Saharan desert just to reach the Libyan camp.[315] The girl told the Italian investigators that whilst held captive, any men that rebelled were tied up and tortured and almost all the women were raped. In order to leave the camp, the migrants were forced to buy their own freedom from the 'gangs' of traffickers, with sums as high as $3,500.[316] The captains that survived the shipwreck were charged with kidnapping, trafficking and sexual assault. The reaction from European governments was at first sympathetic, honouring the victims and vowing to increase funding for rescue efforts in the future. However the lack of meaningful reaction from most European countries besides those directly affected on her south coast, such as Italy, Greece and Malta, has lead to much debate on Europe's policies towards immigrants and asylum seekers. The prime minister of Malta, Joseph Muscat commented that, "As things stand we are building a cemetery within our Mediterranean Sea,"[317] echoing the words of Chamoiseau's recent poem *Lampedusa*,

> "Toute horreur crée son gouffre,
> ainsi celle de la Traite à nègres qui fit de l'Atlantique
> le plus grand oublié des cimetières du monde
> *(crânes et boulets relient les îles entre elles*
> *et les amarrent aux tragédies du continent)*"
>
> "Celui de l'Atlantique s'est éveillé
> *clameurs en méditerranée !*"[318]

This incident is by no means the first of its kind, with countless shipwrecks having been reported over the past decade – the high death toll of the recent disaster near Lampedusa simply caught the sustained attention of international media. Tens of thousands of refugees attempt to cross the Mediterranean each year, in search of political asylum and better economic opportunity in Europe. The UNHCR estimates that in 2013 alone 30,100 migrants attempted to reach Italy by sea. The majority of these refugees were fleeing from poverty, war and compulsory military service in

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315 "Lampedusa Disaster: Why Men Flee Eritrea," *BBC News*, Last Modified 5 October 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24413144
316 "Italy Shipwreck Migrants Raped, Tortured," *The Global Post*, Last Modified 8 Novemeber 2013, http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/131108/italy-shipwreck-migrants-raped-tortured
317 "Mediterranean 'a cemetery' – Maltese MP Muscat," *BBC News*, Last Modified 12 October 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24502279
318 Chamoiseau, *Lampedusa: ce que nous disent les gouffres*, 1.

regions of Africa and the Middle East, in particular from Syria, Eritrea and Somalia. Since 1988 the estimated deaths that have occurred at sea during these crossings is an alarming 19,142.[319] The EU's most notable reaction thus far has been to slowly review migration laws and increase funding for rescue and border control. However, human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and the UN Refugee Agency have expressed fears that Frontex, Europe's border patrol shows more effort in pushing migrants and asylum seekers back than in funding rescue missions.[320] Of course, criticism is also directed at the many African nations from which the migrants are fleeing. Recent economic surveys reveal that Africa on average is experiencing sustained economic growth, more so than many regions of Europe. However the profits of this growth do not appear to be trickling down to Africa's poorest citizens, and many experts point out that in fact, "income inequality may be worsening."[321] Despite considerable economic growth rates averaging 4.8% per annum, one in five Africans continue to experience deprivation of basic needs, such as clean water, food and medical care.[322] War, anarchy and compulsory military service in the Horn of Africa has left many utterly desperate and has been described as a way of life similar to slavery. Poor Africans find themselves trapped in an impossible position: their own governments corrupt and indifferent to the welfare of their people, and the borders of Europe's former slave trading and colonising nations closed off to those seeking safety and asylum.

> "L'absurde des richesses solitaires
> les guerres économiques
> les tranchées du profit
> les meutes et les sectes d'actionnaires
> agences-sécurité et agences-frontières
> radars et barbelés
> et la folie des murs qui damnent ceux qu'ils protègent"[323]

Thus one might ask, after more than a century and a half since the abolition of slavery, how much has actually changed? The conditions of the slave trade still appear to exist; only the actors, political factors, and migrant or 'trading' routes have been adjusted. To analyse who is at fault,

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[319] "Mediterranean 'a cemetery' – Maltese MP Muscat," *BBC News*, Last Modified 12 October 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24502279.
[320] "Lampedusa Disaster: Why Men Flee Eritrea," *BBC News*, Last Modified 5 October 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24413144.
[321] Dulani, 2013: 1
[322] Dulani, 2013: 2
[323] Chamoiseau, *Lampedusa: ce que nous disent les gouffres*, 1.

although useful, seldom leads to meaningful solutions or change, as no nation – African or European – is willing to accept responsibility. As Vergé has illustrated, this is especially true in France, where much of its wealth, strength and capitalism was built up by the profit of the slave trade and the work of slaves, whose descendants continue to live in poverty.[324] It is true that after hundreds of years of slave-trading off the coast of Africa, inciting violence and wars of 'kidnapping' amongst African tribes in order to supply their ships with merchandise, Britain, France, Belgium, Italy and other colonising nations then turned their efforts towards the battle for territory in Africa, imposing European infrastructure and systems that were perhaps incongruous with African customs. When colonisation and imperialism were criticized and no longer acceptable to humanity, the colonisers abandoned their colonies, but continued to syphon their valuable mineral resources – gold, diamonds, oil, etc. – whether through legal or illegal channels, in an economic system that continues to displace wealth to Western European powers and benefits only the political and economic African elite. This minority of privileged and often corrupt politicians continues to control the majority of Africa's wealth, and remain fundamentally indifferent to the suffering of the common people. I am of course generalising, and to correctly analyse the various facts and figures from each African country would require multiple theses. I would simply like to point out that the flow of economic gain set up and cultivated by the economic system of the slave trade has not drastically changed.[325] The disaster at Lampedusa tragically reflects the socio-economic inequalities created by the slave trade and by colonialism. In a tragic and sinister twist, the transatlantic slave trade has been almost completely inverted: poor Africans are held captive by African smugglers, and must buy their *own* freedom *out* of slavery. Their Middle Passage is a perilous voyage on unsafe boats and ships that are unwelcome in European harbours; a voyage that they themselves *choose* in order to have a chance at a "better" future across the Mediterranean Sea. Unlike the transatlantic slave trade, the prime investor in this 'commerce' is no longer the state. In fact, governments appear to avoid the question of immigration at all costs, directing funds towards its prevention rather than attacking the root of the problem. What we are witnessing is in fact the constant translation of human beings on a global scale, of cultures, identities and histories. It is no longer a strictly triangular commerce or a translation that takes place only from East to West, but a general diaspora from war-torn, poverty-stricken countries in Africa and the Middle East. The long-standing effects on cultures, languages and our conceptions of the past as these migrants are assimilated into the countries where they seek asylum are immeasurable.

[324] Vergés, *La Mémoire Enchaînée,* 84.
[325] See Chapter II, p. 19. According to Patterson, the European's gain was the African's loss in money, freedom and happiness. (Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death,* 8-9)

In this thesis I have discussed the metaphors of the Middle Passage as a process of forced translation and the human being as a living, literary 'text', which contains a wealth of cultural information, language and history. I placed these metaphors in the context of the French Caribbean, focussing predominantly on interpretations of Creole identities in the literary works of Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé and Patrick Chamoiseau. Although these authors differ in their interpretations, they are in agreement that the only way to rewrite and repossess their true history is by actively resisting, rejecting or re-adapting the imposed translation of their identities – in reclaiming the imposed name, or in naming themselves. The various resistances to slavery displayed by the characters in their novels reflect the resistance that Creole authors themselves exhibit towards the systematic silencing of their oral history in the oppressive, written narrative of the French empire. In order to complete my central metaphor, I identified an agent that was arguably the most influential translator within the system of the slave trade, a professional who specialised in the translation of human bodies; the surgeon. With reference to Foucault's "machinerie du contrôle", an apparatus of observation and power that acted upon the human body, making it more docile and compliant, I argued that amongst other actors throughout the slave trade – the slave hunters, the merchants and the African elite – it was the surgeons in African ports, the surgeon on board the slave ship, and the surgeon at the port of arrival in the Antilles that definitively contributed to the translation of human bodies into slavery for the profit of the colonising nations. Finally, I discussed translation as an act of resistance in itself, and identified Creole authors as the creators of alternative, conceptual 'stories' that challenge the dominant narratives that have kept their societies in subjugation to former colonial powers. Their work is invaluable to Creole communities. Like the communities of translators and interpreters cited by Baker that are working towards the cultivation of alternative narratives in the global community, Creole authors recognise that, "the concrete experiences of our lives cannot be changed without simultaneously changing the narratives that underpin them."[326] I argue that gradually, therefore, the alternative narratives created by Creole authors will hopefully become tools to unite the Antillean community, contributing to a common identity that in turn will become a platform for meaningful social change.

In conclusion, I would venture to suggest that the metaphor of translation that I have analysed in my thesis, and the insights it reveals on the translation of human identities and cultural knowledge, may be applied more broadly to the patterns of mass modern day migration as described above in the

[326] Baker, "Translation and Activism," 472.

example of Lampedusa. As I have demonstrated, to consider a human being as a literary ‘text’ is to acknowledge him or her as a unique, autonomous, intricate work of art, one that pushes the boundaries of common language, rebelling against the cultural boundaries placed on it by the narratives of dominant societies. The resistance displayed by migrants and asylum seekers to the various definitions imposed on them by media and governments, definitions such as “illegal immigrants”, as well as the rejection of racial stereotypes forced upon them by their host countries, may be seen to reflect their resistance to the translations of their identities, and are the defining factors in the survival of their cultures in new geographical and cultural spaces. On the other hand, like French Creole communities in the Antilles that must accept and adapt the identity or ‘name’ imposed upon them by the coloniser, the various levels of compliance and adaptation to these imposed translations may reveal the ways in which the migrant, like the translated text, becomes a new literary ‘creation’, as he or she is absorbed into the narrative of the host nation, adopting new languages, culture and history.

Largely due to the history of the slave trade and colonisation, the scale of human migration is greater today than at any other time in human history. As Baker has observed, “the intersections between the narratives of “our” lives and those of “other” peoples in other parts of the world are much denser and more heavily mediated today than any other time in history.”[327] Translation is thus of tremendous importance in the context of global migration. As more and more groups of oppressed minorities seek asylum in countries that may manipulate their story, the need for developing alternative narratives that express their perspective grows. But perhaps more important is the growing need for a common narrative that aims to include all corners of humanity fairly, a common ‘story’ that global society can intelligently subscribe to given that it promotes the respecting of all peoples, despite differences in ideology, religion or culture. Such a narrative barely seems possible, given the enormous cultural chasms created by the economic and religious wars that are raging around the planet. Such a narrative would have to challenge the many fundamental *master* narratives upon which powerful countries like America, Britain and the EU have built their strength and cultural identities. It appears to be nothing but a utopian idea, to borrow the terminology of Ortega y Gasset. However as he would argue, it is exactly because the task seems impossible that is also extremely meaningful, for in attempting it, “one glimpses a possible marvellous aspect of the enterprise of translating: the revelation of the mutual secrets that peoples and epochs keep to themselves and which contribute so much to their separation and hostility; in short – an audacious

[327] Baker, “Translation and Activism,” 472.

integration of Humanity."[328] Chamoiseau himself seems to have envisioned the outcome of such a narrative and the role of a new generation in challenging the existing 'world order.'

> "L'enfant a eu raison de mettre ses chaussures neuves
> ce qu'il arpente au delà de nos hontes
> c'est le tranchant des gouffres génériques
> qui signalent sous l'horreur
> et qui fixent sans paupières
> l'autre possible ouvert du meilleur de nous"[329]

And thus to borrow Chamoiseau's words, "chaussures neuves et crânes jeunes font exploser les vieilles concentrations!" The alternative to this outcome is bleak: the continued separation and misunderstanding between peoples and the perpetuation of religious, economic and cultural war. Just as the true history of the slave's experience was silenced in the archives of the Enlightenment, humanity may one day look back on this current period in history, searching for the lost voices of the oppressed and find none but the dominant, master narratives of the stronger, victorious nations. History shall repeat itself as humanity continually masks the embarrassing, shameful moments of its past, destroying any possible chance of learning from its mistakes. However, as the Creole authors I have discussed demonstrate, the abyss of historical silences, the "présences hurlantes" that inhabit their islands and the forgotten cemeteries in the depths of our oceans will continue to cry out to humanity, calling for a better way.

> "en ombres en foudres en aubes
> les gouffres enseignent longtemps
>
> *(toute douleur est apprendre et ce chant est connaître)*
>
> chant partagé d'une même planète."[330]

[328] Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and the Splendour," 57.
[329] Chamoiseau, *Lampedusa: ce que nous disent les gouffres*, 1.
[330] Chamoiseau, *Lampedusa: ce que nous disent les gouffres*, 1.

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