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Abstract
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(1997 133). Whatever the text's reception beyond the Franco-Caribbean world, my own encounter with 
Chamoiseau's work has always been compromised; my encounter is always with a text in translation. This 
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However, Chamoiseau's distinctive blend of Martinique's linguistically privileged — or acrolectal — French 
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appropriate seriousness (21). Inevitably, the process of translation always risks a degree of appropriation:
MATTHEW MEAD

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There was a whole plain that they failed to take into account, a dimension which they did not fully understand.
(Pauline Melville, *The Ventriloquist’s Tale* 36)

I’ve never looked at a translation of a book of mine. What would be the point?
(Patrick Chamoiseau, ‘Return of the Creole’, n.p.)

The work of Patrick Chamoiseau has often met with a polarised reception; Annie Le Brun identifies the writer’s work as part of a ‘new exoticism’ (qtd in Bongie 343), while Derek Walcott effuses that the ‘elation’ of *Texaco* ‘cracked my heart’ (45). Richard D.E. Burton declares him the ‘leading Martinican writer of the new post-Césaire, post-Glissant generation’ (467), while others lament Chamoiseau’s rejection of filiation with Aimé Césaire, Fort-de-France’s long serving politician and poet and one of the founding fathers of Négritude (1997 133). Whatever the text’s reception beyond the Franco-Caribbean world, my own encounter with Chamoiseau’s work has always been compromised; my encounter is always with a text in translation. This would seem to begin with a redundant proposition, a statement applicable to much post-colonial fiction. However, Chamoiseau’s distinctive blend of Martinique’s linguistically privileged — or acrolectal — French and the less prestigious — or basilectal — Martinican Creole, would seem sometimes to exist at the margins of the translatable, especially if we treat what Maria Tymoczko calls the ‘dilemma of faithfulness’ with appropriate seriousness (21). Inevitably, the process of translation always risks a degree of appropriation:

An author can choose a fairly aggressive presentation of unfamiliar cultural elements in which differences, even ones likely to cause problems for a receiving audience, are highlighted, or an author can choose an assimilative presentation in which likeness or ‘universality’ is stressed and cultural differences are muted and made peripheral to the central interests of the literary work. (Tymoczko 21)

Thus for the assimilative or transparent text the cultural values as originally transmitted or rendered opaque by an author in a source language are always reckoned to exist beyond the ‘central interests’ of the text. Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco* becomes interesting here not simply because it is a text in translation — in fact a translation of an interlectal text — but because, through a mobilisation of
Edouard Glissant's 'relay', the novel can be seen not only to enact the processes of a creative translation, but also to critique them.

According to Celia Britton, Edouard Glissant 'discovers the “relay”': the principle that narrative is always multiple, decentered, and nonhierarchical' (7), not in his theoretical writings, but in the novel *Mahogany*. Indeed the term, while explicitly linked to Glissant's concept of Relation, rarely appears in either *Caribbean Discourse* or *Poetics of Relation*. Nevertheless, Glissant's consideration that 'Relation relinks (relays), relates' is suggestive of the dual narrative functions that emerge from the wider theoretical work of Relation under the title of relay (1997 173). Britton positions this same short citation ('La Relation relie (relaie), relate') at the opening of a chapter that deals explicitly with Glissant's use of relay (164), and in the absence of any explicit commentary from Glissant himself, it will be to Britton that I defer here.

The 'double significance' of relay is that it first presents us with 'a nonhierarchical diversity of narrative structure'; secondly, it acknowledges 'a break or spacing in the relation between subject and language' (164). In dealing with the former, this non-hierarchical system of narration is created at its simplest by the use of multiple narrators: the text is not dominated by the univocal authority of a single voice, but becomes the product of competing voices and versions of events. Thus, in attributing its chapters to different narrators Britton considers that Glissant's *Mahogany* generates a network of voices that exist in Relation (165). The diversity of voices presented by this technique is identifiable as a surface feature of the text; the arrival of each new voice can be tracked across the horizontal plane of the narrative. The presence of this quality within a text however is not a prerequisite for the appearance of relay in its other guise, which can exist in the imagined depths of a character or narrator's history; in the known and unknown influences of one voice upon another. Relay does not create a network of informants whose voices are always distinct, but works against 'the notion that individual subjects are the origin of their language' (Britton 164). Relay is the process by which words, phrases and stories are passed, or relayed, from one individual to another; it thus interrogates the assumption that 'language both expresses and is authenticated by a unique, stable identity' (Britton 164).

Within Chamoiseau's fiction this kind of strategy is most apparent in *Texaco*, where it seems that every narrative voice is necessarily reported through some kind of interpreter. By using the term 'interpreter' though, I am suggesting more than Glissant — or Britton — hopes to express through the mobilisation of relay. In fact, I argue that the process of interpretation is entirely antithetical to that of relay, though both are present in *Texaco*. The process of interpretation suggests, not the spacing between subject and voice generated through the passive relay of that voice from some other 'origin', but the active process of creation more easily associated with the act of translation. This is a distinction that will be made more forcefully once the functions of relay in *Texaco* have been identified.
Texaco, Patrick Chamoiseau's weighty third novel and winner of the 1992 Prix Goncourt, tells the tale of the eponymous squatters' settlement erected on the outskirts of Fort-de-France. Inheriting its name from the oil company that owns the land, the settlement becomes a site of contested power where the construction and control of both histories and homes are matters of survival. The oral family history of Texaco's founder, Marie-Sophie Laborieux, as reported to Chamoiseau's narratorial alter-ego, Oiseau de Cham, comes to critique the colonial and neo-colonial history of Martinique. Combining elements of traditional folktale, magic realism and metafictional devices, the novel stages negotiations between orality and the written word, essentialism and Créolité, official and fictional history.

The bulk of Texaco's narrative is generated by Oiseau de Cham's re-presentation of Marie-Sophie's voice; however, it is only one of many that 'complete' the narrative. In addition to Marie-Sophie's recollections, the text becomes more and more frequently interrupted by excerpts from her own notebooks, as well as the fractured musings of 'The Urban Planner's Notes to the Word Scratcher' (alias Oiseau de Cham). The novel opens with a letter to the Word Scratcher from Ti-Cirique, Texaco's resident intellectual (9), and elsewhere, excerpts of letters from the Word Scratcher to Marie-Sophie are reprinted (201–202; 322). The latter in particular reinforce the suggestion that the text is in some ways a provisional construction site—the result of a selective process whose assemblage is negotiable. Catalogued as letter numbers '647' (202) and '708' (322) they suggest a history that extends itself beyond the selective confines of the novel, and assert the text's status as a composite document.

Though the various fictional sources upon which Oiseau de Cham draws in the construction of Texaco are many, distinguishing between the various narrative documents is a straightforward process. Invariably those passages which might be considered interjections are assigned to a particular author and indented within the space of the text. Thus they would seem to conform to our first conception of the relay, whereby the use of multiple narrative voices might be mobilised to decentre the authority of a central narrator. Relay is also at work in its second guise though, serving both to generate a gap between the subject and that subject's speech, and to complicate our notions of authorship. During the first half of the book, in which Marie-Sophie narrates her 'papa's arrival on earth' (34), the founder of Texaco often seems little more than a cipher for the words of her father, Esternome. Indeed, according to Oiseau de Cham, she 'had all her life run after her father's word' (387). Thus, in evoking Esternome's words as they were spoken to her, Marie-Sophie often refers to herself in the third person. The disorientating effect of this on the ill-prepared reader is one of feeling lost in words suddenly detached from their subject. I refer initially to the first instance of this device, that being the sentence which reads, 'Allow me not to go into details about the dungeon, Marie-Sophie, because you see those things are not to be described' (36). Though it is unusual to do so, in describing the effect upon the reader it will also be
productive to reproduce my panicked note, hastily scrawled at the bottom of the relevant paragraph on my first reading of *Texaco*: ‘Who is talking?’ I asked; ‘Is it Marie-Sophie? Is it her papa? Is it both?’ The reader believes initially that she is listening to the voice of Marie-Sophie, as transcribed by the Word Scratcher: thus, as the first pronoun of the sentence is reached it is attached by reflex and without hesitation to the presumed speaker. However, the reference to the speaker in the third person which follows disturbs this certainty. The question ‘who is talking?’ is a pertinent one, and has resonance beyond the confirmation that it is indeed the voice of Marie-Sophie, for if her speech is but an echo of Esternome’s, in what way can she be considered ‘The Source’ of Texaco’s history, or of Oiseau de Cham’s story (201)?

It is here that the distinction between relay and interpretation, suggested above, must be made: beyond this function of the relay the reader also discovers that each document is a result sometimes of active negotiation between its author and others, and in other instances the result of unauthorised editing subsequent to the text’s creation. The most powerful example of this is without doubt the writing, editing, construction, reconstruction and even mal-fragmentation of Marie-Sophie’s notebooks throughout the pages of *Texaco*. Ostensibly an effort to ‘write down the skeleton’ of Esternome’s influence upon Marie-Sophie’s survival in Texaco (321), the evocation of a lifeless body becomes a fitting metaphor for both the creation of the notebooks and Texaco’s trajectory towards ‘The Age of Concrete’ (316). As Maeve McCusker suggests, the settlement’s development from straw to concrete, is paralleled in the text’s movement ‘from the tumultuous orality of the spoken word to the static solidity of the printed book’ (58). Writing, for Marie-Sophie, is analogous with ‘death’ (321). As she begins to transcribe what she can remember of her father, Marie-Sophie falters: ‘Each written sentence coated a little of him, his Creole tongue, his words, his intonation, his laughs, his eyes, his airs, with formaldehyde’ (321).

The analogy between the development of Texaco and the creation of Marie-Sophie’s notebooks can be taken further. Texaco’s trajectory from straw to concrete represents the fruition of neither the will of those who live there, nor the intentions of the city council. Texaco, the settlement, does not have one author, but many; it is the result of negotiation between parties. After his visit with Marie-Sophie the Urban Planner, whose initial instructions are to ‘rationalise space, and conquer the pockets of insalubrity’ (26), is believed by the inhabitants of Texaco to be ‘working for us’ (381). Indeed, the Urban Planner confesses that ‘Out of the urban planner, the lady made a poet’ (341). Through her narration of the tales that are eventually repeated to the Word Scratcher, Marie-Sophie convinces the Urban Planner of the value of Texaco, though at the same time the site becomes irrevocably altered by his intervention. Similarly, Marie-Sophie’s notebooks come about through a process of negotiation. Ti-Cirique is the first to influence the shape of the notebooks. Within the novel he represents an intellectual rival
to Oiseau de Cham, the latter seeing the Haitian with 'the head of a haggard teacher' as misguided in his employment of 'a perfect, finicky French' (323). Ti-Cirique's reaction to the Creole of Marie-Sophie's notebooks is thus one of disgust: 'My God, Madame Marie-Sophie, this tongue is dirty, it's destroying Haiti and comforting its illiteracy' (323). Thus, he begins to guide Marie-Sophie in her efforts to relay Texaco's history, 'correcting my horrors, giving sense to my sentences' (325). It seems fitting then, if these notebooks are to be the product of multiple, competing voices, that it is to Oiseau de Cham, Ti-Cirique's antagonist, that Marie-Sophie entrusts her 'innumerable notebooks' (387):

I numbered them, notebook by notebook, page by page, I taped the torn pages together, sewed back the loose sheets, and wrapped each one in a plastic cover. Then I deposited them at the Schoelcher Library. From time to time, I consulted them in order to compose what she had told me, to compare what I thought I had heard, and, if need be, correct a voluntary omission, a reflexive lie. (387–88)

Oiseau de Cham's initial response then is to order and repair the fragments which constitute Marie-Sophie's notebooks. Petrified in writing, her memories become as vulnerable to physical damage as the hutches of Texaco are to the 'destructive romp' (354) of the Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité or 'seyaress' (337). As the inhabitants of Texaco begin to reject asbestos, tin and crate wood in favour of the more permanent, 'more cumbersome', concrete, so Oiseau de Cham endeavours to preserve Marie-Sophie's volumes (365). However, neither the concrete hutches of Texaco, nor the reconstructed notes of its founder can be regarded as secure until they have been recognised and legitimised by official institutions; the former by Fort-de-France's city council, the latter by the Schoelcher Library.

By far the most significant moment in this passage however, certainly for our present reading, concerns the Word Scratcher's admission of composition. The authentic version of Texaco's history, even for Oiseau de Cham, is the one that is written down; the one that has been edited by Ti-Cirique and that he himself has reconstructed. It is always then through a series of interpreters, rather than relays, that the voices of Texaco are ultimately heard. As Lorna Milne has noted, 'The Marqueur [Scratcher] maintains overall control of the text and is able to have the last word on the enterprise' (163). What is of particular interest for the anglophone reader is that this is a process perpetuated through the translation of the text itself.

As an Anglophone I am arguably unqualified to discuss in too much detail issues concerning the transformation of a source text into a receptor language. However, my position does afford me a particular means of access to the text, worthy of examination by virtue of the very restrictions my position places on any possible reading. I would suggest in fact that any writing which concerns itself with the post-colonial condition must make itself conscious of the geographical, cultural and linguistic differences between a text's point of creation and its point
of consumption. Bassnett and Trivedi suggest that in both the translation of a text from source language to target language, and the writing of a post-colonial text ‘a distinction is always made between whether to take an audience to a text, or to take a text to an audience’ (14). In the case of Chamoiseau’s texts, fulfilling as they do the criteria of translated text and post-colonial artefact, these considerations are of double significance. In the first instance, the author of a ‘post-colonial’ narrative inscribes a text which exhibits a mixture of accessibility and opacity, whether located in the use of culturally specific lexis and syntax, or in the case of Chamoiseau, the elliptical phrasing of the Creole folktale. In turn, a translator who approaches the text works at the interface between integrity and accessibility, perhaps paralleling Oiseau de Cham’s own undertakings as interpreter.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, translation was generally regarded as something of ‘a secondary activity, as a ‘mechanical’ rather than a ‘creative’ process’ (Bassnett-McGuire 2). The view to the contrary has run concurrently however, and with the advent of deconstruction has become central to literary theory. Derrida suggests in ‘Letter to a Japanese Friend’ that ‘the question of deconstruction is ... through and through the question of translation’ (270). The process of translating a single word from a source language to a target language becomes disrupted by the play of differences within the source language which cannot be carried across — explained in Derridean terms by the concept of trace in particular. Thus, translation is perceived as ‘involving the same risk and chance as the poem’ (276): it can only be a creative act, as a verbatim transposition which retains the exact meaning of the original is not possible. However, as an anglophone reader this consideration, applied to Chamoiseau’s texts, exists beyond the realms of the examinable; I have access only to English, an insignificant degree of French and almost no Martinican Creole. To resort to this rhetorical figure alone, no matter how persuasive, would seem insufficient; it would legitimise my judgements only by negating the material process that I wish to examine. This does not refute Derrida’s argument, though it does demand that the questions asked be answerable.

What can be examined then are the processes through which publishers and translators tend to decrease the opacity of the original, and the implications of this for the anglophone reader’s interaction with Chamoiseau’s work. Glissant famously concluded Caribbean Discourse by declaring that for ‘all peoples’ opacity was nothing ‘but an expression of their freedom’ (255–56). Opacity is for Glissant the defence against universalising systems of knowledge intent on rendering every culture transparent; it is a resistance to constructing and understanding an/Other’s culture only as an object of knowledge. Yet, it is quite clear that in a number of ways the opacity present in Chamoiseau’s own texts has been reduced; recomposed much like Marie-Sophie’s notebooks. In the case of Texaco, the translators’ emphatic denial of betrayal is belied by the space given over to their plea: ‘Have we ... as translators betrayed the original book by actually
making it readable when it can strike so many as opaque?’ asks Rose-Myriam Réjouis in her afterword (393). She thinks not, and calls Chamoiseau himself as a witness for the defence, stating that ‘despite the Babelian ambitions of Texaco, Chamoiseau meant for his book to be readable’ (393). However, this does not necessarily agree with the views of the Créolistes, or Chamoiseau himself.

In the first instance, the translation of any work written by the Créolistes must necessarily compromise the specifics of the interlectal space carved out by their compression of basilectal Creole and acrolectal French. Burton, writing shortly before the publication of Texaco, described the complexities of Chamoiseau’s interlectal language, which I reproduce here in some detail in the absence of meaningful access to Chamoiseau’s French-Creole original:

Any paragraph in a Chamoiseau novel is likely to contain one or more passages in basilectal creole, sometimes a word or cluster of words, not infrequently a clause or entire sentence; ... on many occasions the exoteric reader must rely on context, etymology, or simple guesswork to deduce the writer’s meaning. Just as frequently, though, the rhythm and structures of creole will be cunningly simulated in French, or a creole expression will be infiltrated into the text ‘disguised’ as French, making of each sentence and paragraph a chain of convergences and divergences between French and creole, of momentary tangences [sic] followed by abrupt deviations, a coupling and friction of codes. (467)

Thus for Burton, Chamoiseau’s mobilisation of both French and Creole extends itself far beyond the simple juxtaposition of two distinct lexicons upon the page. It is rather that the syntax, idiom and rhythm of one might at any point mobilise the lexis of the other. How then might this interlectal space be reproduced for an audience reading Chamoiseau’s prose in translation? This question is negated by Réjouis, whose formulation of Chamoiseau’s style places it not in the sprawling complexities of interlectal space, but firmly in a ‘basic matrix of... largely standard written French’ (393), clearly moderating Burton’s analysis. These two examples would seem to polarise the debate: on the one hand the literary critic sees the syntactical and lexical métissage of languages as pervasive; on the other the translator, much to her advantage if correct, perceives the original as employing a relatively distinct and independent linguistic code.

It is possible that this analysis does Réjouis something of an injustice. After all, though reservations are expressed regarding the translation’s ‘stiffened colloquiality’, in reviewing the novel Derek Walcott was quick to acknowledge the ‘obvious delight of the two collaborators [Réjouis and Vinokurov] and their determination to make Texaco a gift’ (48). In truth, this debate would necessarily be produced by any act of translation which attempted to render the play between two source languages into a single target language. It is thus an unavoidable compromise perhaps brought about, as James Ferguson considers in his interview with Chamoiseau, by the original text’s status as an ‘untranslatable novel’ (n.p.).

While the interlectal qualities of the novels are unavoidably compromised in the process of translation, in other instances the translator (or publisher)
Matthew Mead

intentionally compromises the opacity of the text in the name of accessibility. The appending of glossaries, footnotes and appendices (‘paratextual commentary’) represents the unambiguous means by which the latter occurs, and in the case of Chamoiseau’s fiction would appear to run counter to the wishes of the author (Tymoczko 22). As is often the case, the origins of the decision to include such material are unclear. The process of tracing responsibility is complicated here by the material’s circuitous linguistic and geographical voyage from Martinique to the English-speaking West. Originally published by Editions Gallimard, the adaptation of the texts by various translators has been subsidised by both Nebraska University Press and by the French Ministry of Culture, before finally being published by Granta Publications (Ruth Morse 23). Thus, just as Marie-Sophie’s notebooks are the products of many interventions, so too Chamoiseau’s words reach the reader via multiple interpreters.

In interviews, both Chamoiseau and fellow Créoliste, Raphaël Confiant, have made clear their attitude towards the use of glossaries. In conversation with Lucien Taylor in 1997, the latter spoke of his concern of being ‘recuperated by the Parisian literary scene as a form of exotic literature’ (147). By way of resistance Confiant cites both Chamoiseau’s and his own refusal to ‘explicate the Creole in our writing’ by rejecting the inclusion of ‘glossaries or footnotes’ (1997 148). Yet translator’s forewords, afterwords, glossaries, footnotes and even appendices trouble and permeate all of Chamoiseau’s works in translation. While Chamoiseau insists, writing in the introduction to Strange Words, that ‘the Storyteller must take care to use language that is opaque’, this desire seems easily dismissed once the process of translation begins (xiii). Writing in the preface to Chamoiseau’s second autobiographical work, School Days, Linda Coverdale professes that while ‘Chamoiseau does not believe in glossaries’ one has nevertheless been included ‘to explain a few basic (or irresistibly choice) terms’ (ix). In the first instance, one might hope that the meanings of ‘basic’ terms might be suggested (though never rendered transparent) by the context in which those terms are placed. Beyond this, Coverdale’s subordination of responsibility for the opacity of the text to her own personal excitement at revealing that which is ‘irresistibly choice’ becomes an attempt to circumvent the preservation of respectful distance between self and Other. The text has become an object of knowledge, whose equivalence is locatable in the English lexicon. Fundamentally, Coverdale is exerting her will over a foreign territory; denying the specificity of Martinican Creole. As we are reminded by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin:

Ultimately, the choice of leaving words untranslated in post-colonial texts is a political act, because while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word, and thus the ‘receptor’ culture, the higher status. (65)

Inevitably, the question which presents itself is a Derridean one, for it concerns the presence of the ‘original’ author in the translated and therefore ‘secondary’ text. I have, of course, omitted a stage of the argument. If, as Derrida suggests,
'We are dispossessed of the longed-for presence in the gesture of language by which we attempt to seize it' (1992 78) — this attempt being the act of writing — then Chamoiseau’s presence in the ‘original’ is equally unsure. But while the metaphysics of Derrida’s philosophy will no doubt continue to interrogate all that is textual, our investigation must remain a more overtly political one, concerning as it does the nature of consumption rather than that of ‘origin’.

If in the glossing of individual words the opacity of Chamoiseau’s texts are disturbed, then at the level of the tale this opacity can be rediscovered. The microstructures, or detours, which constitute the narrative of *Texaco*, often present themselves to the reader as unreadable, the magic realism of the text ultimately instituting opacity as a narrative strategy.

Glissant considers that the Martinican Creole, faced with the prospect of assimilation, suffers from the absence of a pre-established cultural tradition into which to retreat (1989 102–104). The establishing of a ‘cultural hinterland’ is for Glissant a significant strategy in the development of opacity (103); thus the maroons retreat into the forest, and Papa Totone, the last Mentoh, ‘seemed to live outside, under the dome of the great trees’ (Chamoiseau 1998 287–88). But for those who have left behind their cultural authenticity, and are seen daily through the exterior vision of ‘transcendental Sameness’ a different strategy is required (Glissant 1989 102). Britton summarises Glissant’s strategy beautifully when she writes ‘Opacity therefore has to be produced as an *unintelligible* presence from within the *visible* presence of the colonised’ (25); this clearly conflicting with the ethnographer’s scopic drive. It is this play between seen and unseen that Estemome’s father exploits in evading the sight of the overseer, and it is in part the former’s own opacity that may provide shelter from transparency for Chamoiseau himself.

Marie-Sophie’s grandparents meet one day when her grandfather ‘jumped out of an allamanda bush’ to exchange a few words (39). He begins to visit her daily as she works by the river ‘careless of the overseer’s eye’:

*Kouman ou pa an travay*, So how is it that you don’t work? asked Grandmama all astonished. *Man ka bat an djoumbak la*, I haven’t left work, he would answer opening his eyelids wide around his eyes. And when Grandmama asked around, no one had ever seen him leave his post or sabotage his cutting. The overseer who accounted for the number of slaves at work never fell upon his missing backside. (39)

As the narrator suggests, this presents the reader with ‘a real nice mystery’ (39). The same mystery, I would suggest, that all of Chamoiseau’s works in translation present us with. Much as the overseer locates Esternome’s father’s presence in the cane fields, the author’s name, marked on the cover of each publication, seems to guarantee his presence in the target language. Perhaps though, as Esternome’s father neglects the site of colonial economic production, Chamoiseau, careless perhaps of the academic’s eye, is located elsewhere. For Esternome’s father the real mystery is to be found in ‘the only thing that ever came of his silences: his
inaudible Low Mass’ (37). And while Esternome’s father’s murmurings remain obscure to the Béké, ‘who thought he heard a witch’s song’ (37), the reader soon learns that ‘the impossible mute Low Mass had been only one long question. Until the end of his life the man had wondered how birds could be and how they could fly’ (38). It seems to be here that the process of translation critiques that very process, for as Réjouis and Vinokurov assert. Oiseau de Cham translates literally as ‘Bird of Shem’, but phonetically (emphasising Chamoiseau’s concern with orality) as ‘Bird of the Field’ (400). Esternome’s father’s inscrutability would seem to parallel that of the birds themselves, though ultimately the birds’ opacity suggests something unreadable about Oiseau de Cham, and perhaps Chamoiseau himself.

Derek Walcott’s demand, reprinted from ‘A Letter to Chamoiseau’ on the front cover of Texaco, dictates ‘You have to read this book’. It is easy to imagine that the subject of this sentence, printed as it is on the cover of the English-language version, is the anglophone reader. It is not. It is ‘every West Indian’ who must regard the text ‘as if it were a lost heirloom’ (45). Walcott too seems to find Chamoiseau’s alter ego located firmly in Martinique; the text belongs not to the anglophone reader in search of a new exoticism, but to

the vendors selling T-shirts and their children screaming in the shallows, one that has entered our vegetation, as familiar as the thorny acacias along the beach, one with the cemetery stones bordered with conches, one with the cooing of ground doves in the brown season, and one with the melody of the bird in the dogwood’s branches, common to Martinique and Saint Lucia, the champs-oiseau with its melodic voice and amplitude of heart. (48)

To appropriate a phrase from another Antillean writer, Antonio Benitez-Rojo, the process of translation surely reveals nothing more than ‘repetition’ as ‘a practice that necessarily entails a difference and a step toward nothingness’ (3) [emphasis added].

NOTES
1 Marie-Sophie is referred to as ‘The Source’ at various points throughout Texaco. Instances occur on pages 201, 202, 322 and 388. Marie-Sophie’s function as passive cipher is complicated however by Oiseau de Cham’s references to her as ‘my Source [emphasis added]’ (387, 388, 390) suggesting both a subjective account and relativistic relationship between Texaco’s saviour and the Word Scratcher; this is also supported by Marie-Sophie’s warning that ‘if it didn’t happen like that, that doesn’t matter’ (27).

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