

Patrick Chamoiseau et le Gwo-Ka du chanté-parlé

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In the following essay I will examine Martinican author Patrick Chamoiseau's 1988 novel, *Solibo Magnifique* (*Solibo Magnificent*). It will be my contention that in this text, which recounts the death of a traditional storyteller, Chamoiseau explores a particularly vexed aspect of the West's construction of sameness and alterity—one that has, I believe, been overlooked in the theoretical explorations of this topic. More specifically, while it has consistently been noted that grasping the relationship of oral versus literary traditions is fundamental to any understanding of the Caribbean (or more broadly, African diasporic) tradition, I, in turn, would like to elaborate on this opposition between the spoken and written word.¹ I will be proposing that Chamoiseau's *Solibo Magnificent* takes the relationship between writing and speaking away from a conventional dialectical opposition by introducing the realm of the musical into the equation.

This study will therefore have two parallel aims. The first objective will be to add to the already abundant critical attention paid to Chamoiseau's fictional and theoretical writing and to the process of "créolité" associated with his work.² The second will be to explore this one novel, *Solibo Magnificent*, as a way of understanding how and why the Western literary and intellectual traditions regiment the relationship between the musical and the literary. In combining these two objectives, I will begin to explain how this particular work is exemplary of the strategies certain non-Western texts employ to disentangle themselves from the

epistemological traps of literature and music's opposition. Ultimately, I will hope to have uncovered how *Solibo Magnificent* charts a tenuous path through the shoals of a tragically binding order by systematically confusing the two categories of music and literature as distinct media.

In his 1994 study, *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhaba posits that:

The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, the mercantilist and the Marxist, but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics. (25)

Bhaba addresses a number of charged questions—not the least of which is how to preserve the inherently political nature of writing (the very *act* of writing) while ensuring that it will not perpetuate a hegemony whose articulation and maintenance has historically been its primary task. As Bhaba makes clear, writing's investment in that task has always relied on the cultivation of a series of powerful oppositions (generally referred to as binaries) of which he gives a brief but exemplary list. Bhaba calls this reconceptualization of Derrida's *différance*, "negotiation" in counter-distinction to the dialectical process of negation posited by Hegel.

Yet, is such a move possible if we don't first take into account what writing itself annexes in order to maintain its hegemonic position with relation to other modes of expression? Chamoiseau's work shows us that this "oversight," as I hope will become apparent, is not an error in thinking, but the effect of writing itself and the double bind its Western incarnation imposes. Language—more precisely writing—has, as Hegel so insistently posited, always granted itself the privilege of theorizing.³ And since at least Nietzsche, writing, whether philosophical, literary or otherwise, has increasingly also written against itself, has tried to dislocate itself from the world of contingencies which it produces while retaining the relevance that it promises itself. This would indicate that the revolutionary writing that Bhaba offers has been at-

tempted before in other guises. In turn, what Chamoiseau's novel suggests is that there could be another discursive mode that would not reify writing's hold on the political—or might at least begin to erode its dominance.

Nietzsche, in his "attempt at a self-criticism," critiques his first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, by stating that "it should have sung this 'new soul'—and not spoken" (20). Thus, for Nietzsche, arguably the first of the post-metaphysical philosophers, there was already something suspicious about writing, something that it doesn't do, or does excessively. And yet, even in his case, the *force* of a certain Western discursive model remains. It should have sung, but it didn't. Just as Nietzsche strives to move elsewhere, he is perennially remanded to the European tradition, straining against—but shackled to—the history of the rhetoric of "master and slave," "of mercantilist and Marxist" mentioned by Bhaba.

It may nevertheless be useful to turn to the alternative of "song" that Nietzsche introduces—an alternative that isn't arbitrary. Already, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche had posited the West's historical pitting of music against the verb, or more specifically, the literary. Indeed, despite the occasional reversal of values of which Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are two noteworthy examples, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe states in *Musica Ficta*, "music has barely had any luck with philosophy" (86). Lacoue-Labarthe, in this 1991 study of the figure of Wagner in philosophical discourse, adds that:

It would not be an exaggeration to propose . . . that nothing really has happened . . . in two thousand years between music and philosophy, and that the history of their relationship is . . . rather dull. Ultimately, the philosophers who have spoken of music are rare (compared to the volume of discourse dedicated to the "plastic" arts and above all, to literature). (85)

As did Nietzsche, Lacoue-Labarthe sees the history of philosophy as marked by its refusal to address music, by its attempts to detach or abstract the musical from the literary or, conversely, by its coercive reinvestment of the musical back into the literary from which music has first been radically divorced. In Nietzsche's reading of tragedy, this battle is articulated through the figures of

Dionysus and Apollo, the former being (Barbarian) nature/madness/music and the latter being (Greek) culture/rationality/writing. In Greek tragedy these archetypal figures are made to coexist synthetically even if the Dionysian musical is subjugated by Apollonian writing. The literary may be the medium of mastery, of domination, of rationality, of sameness against music as the medium of alterity—of the barbarian, of the feminine—of nature. They nevertheless fuse in the tragic scene. But even this tenuous coexistence is rejected with the banning of any music but military in Plato's Republic. Since that time, except its most tightly regulated incarnation, music has been relegated to the secondary status of "mood accompaniment," a reminder of the spiritual beyond.

In response to Nietzsche's profound insight and this long tradition of music's association with difference, which I can only begin to hint at here, I now turn to Patrick Chamoiseau's *Solibo Magnificent*. In so doing, I am trying to ascertain the degree to which this multifaceted phenomenon of music and literature's confrontation has influenced, not only white writers (as we have already seen in the example of Nietzsche) but writers of African descent. More specifically, I would like to begin a musico-literary reading of the Martinican Chamoiseau's novel because he provides us with a particularly rich meditation on the tripartite relationship between music, writing, and race.

Using this second novel of a writer who went on to win the prestigious Prix Goncourt for his *Texaco*, I underscore one way in which the question of music and literature's relationship represent a particularly wrenching problem for authors of the African Diaspora. I see this as being true for them both because, as Paul Gilroy shows in *Black Atlantic*, music is often an integral and celebrated part of one's African heritage; but also because that musicality has been recuperated and exploited by the West as an over-determined racial signifier. In a word, while preserving or recreating one's racial heritage through music, as a person of African descent, one is also confronted with the danger of reproducing and therefore amplifying a racial stereotype. As I have shown elsewhere, not the least of what the Black writer may be risking is his or her status as a writer.⁴

In the epigraph to *Solibo Magnificent*, Chamoiseau hints at the strategies that he will employ to find a new voice that reconciles music and language. Here, he cites three artists. After author Edouard Glissant and musician Althierry Dorival, he gives us a Western writer, a member of the canon, whom, the epigraph assumes, we all recognize: Italian novelist Italo Calvino. The passage states that, "what is at the center of the narration for me is not the explication of a strange fact but the order that this strange fact develops in itself and around itself: the drawing, the symmetry, the network of images which assembles around it, as in the formation of a crystal" (viii).

By citing these lines, Chamoiseau appears to insinuate that the Western writer privileges an immediate structural coherence that binds writing to the rigorous rationality of the Western project. For Chamoiseau, Calvino's writing strives for the ideal of the crystal: transparent, ordered, and yet paradoxically visible.⁵

Following Calvino there is a line from Haitian singer Dorival who calls out: "Mé zanmis ôté nouyé" 'Oh God my friends! Where are you?' Calvino's crystalline language now stands in sharp contrast to this Creole voice whose Western reader looses all bearings other than an uncanny sense of alterity, or the "exotic." Unlike the case of Calvino's crystal, no specific image stands out. Rather, one experiences the physical strain of attempting to get one's mouth around this foreign tongue whose "strangely familiar" closeness to recognizable French only adds to the sense of unease. The appearance of a literary transcription of the Creole also underscores the evanescent musicality of a language whose community doesn't write. How could we find it anymore than it can find us?

Finally (though it is first in the text), uniting these two apparently opposed articulations is Martinican theorist, novelist and poet Edouard Glissant, one of the inspirations for the movement and concept of *Créolité*. Calvino might remind us of the West's will to rationality, and Haitian singer Dorival that of rationality's antithesis. Glissant instead chooses to, "evoke a synthesis, a synthesis of the written syntax and of the spoken rhythm, of writing's 'acquiredness' and the oral 'reflex,' of the loneliness of writing and of the participation in the communal chant—a synthesis which seems to [him] interesting to attempt" (viii).

The oral and the literary, the literary and the musical, Black and White, are reorganized into a new medium that is a product of their respective energies. Of equal importance is the counter-imperative tone of, "interesting." The order and precision, the policing instinct that one might perceive in Calvino's language is replaced by the paradoxically *disinterested* implications of "interest." Likewise, the evanescence and "pre-cultural" aspect of the oral tradition are merged, thereby highlighting Calvino and Dorival's proximity rather than their irreconcilable difference.

Solibo Magnificent will therefore be a *disinterested* synthesis in which Chamoiseau inaugurates a new type of writing where Being is celebrated through a (con)fusion of music and language, the oral and the literary, and in which the absolute boundaries of racial differentiation are also challenged. If there is something at stake here, it is precisely the reinvention, the re-positing, the re-positioning of a means of signification that the Western world has increasingly found itself reluctant to embrace as a possibility. Chamoiseau's novel chooses to stand at the interstices, the in-between place that Homi Bhaba is striving for in his *Location of Culture*, yet he is taking Bhaba one step further by challenging the assumed supremacy of the literary (or a particular understanding of what constitutes it). This place is at the cross-roads of the West and its "other" and at the limit of a Diasporic oral past that is rapidly being lost and a future in which the Western literary model exemplified by Calvino's crystalline prose, rigorously and grimly holds sway.

Chamoiseau's tale is framed as a crime novel. In it, we follow the police investigation of Solibo the storyteller's "suspicious" death.⁶ On the one hand we have the police who try to establish the "true story," following the strict guidelines of a consistent narrative following a "universal" timeline. On the other, we discover the storytelling community that refuses rationalization and any strict adherence to roles, rules and borders. Ignoring the Bourgeois clock, this group listens to Solibo, responds to him and drinks all night. The ultimate proof of this alternate sense of temporality lies in their inevitable answer to the relentless questions the police pose concerning their whereabouts in the previous

weeks and the period leading up to Solibo's death; to the Chief inspector's increasingly exasperated queries about each participant's schedule and whereabouts, they provoke his ire with the quizzical response, "what's time inspector?" (97).

The Chief of Police persists in dutifully striving for a time specific reconstruction of events that accounts for everything concerning Solibo's "murder." This reconstruction, the Chief Inspector's "*procès verbal* (written report—literally 'verbal trial')," is the first version the reader gets of the story. Following Calvino's logic, the report is desperate to provide a logical explanation for Solibo's death. Unfortunately, because everything about the rag-tag witnesses to Solibo's demise is the antithesis of the narrative the inspector expects, the police increasingly resorts to torture in questioning them only to get ever more incoherent versions of Solibo's last night. Solibo's entourage is, we quickly discover, the antithesis of "law and order." Yet, despite their incoherence to the inspector, it is precisely from these ramblings that we as readers constitute the bulk of the novel—that we as readers learn that the storyteller and his audience are the upsurge of a final gasp of alterity, the oral tradition, in an increasingly acculturated French Colony.

We learn that those listening to Solibo's tale are poor and largely illiterate (with the notable exception of the character "Patrick Chamoiseau"). Their professions include street vendor, "djobeur" 'odd jobber,' storyteller, and street musician, sherbet and sweets saleswomen.⁷ Neither their stories nor their employment fall within the Bourgeois categories authorized by Martinique's official "evolved (évolué)" aspirations. Instead, these occupations hark back to a musical-oral pre-modern past which France and the Martinican bourgeoisie are trying to eradicate. For this reason, Solibo's audience's challenge to the reigning order draws the attention of the law and triggers its instinctive urge to discipline. Significantly, this expresses itself as a contending narrative. To the anarchy and *indiscipline* of Solibo's tale, the law opposes the rigor and precision of the "report" in which characters, roles, times and places are carefully parsed and accounted for.

In stark contrast to the "*procès verbal*" that begins the novel, Solibo's own account ends it. This final chapter, "After the word," is a celebration of the storytelling practices that Solibo incarnates. Where the police attempts to keep people and events distinct, Solibo's narrative is a sonic tapestry in which people merge as do modes of communication. Indeed, as the novel concludes, we begin to see how Chamoiseau's novel taken in its entirety resembles Solibo's tale. Chamoiseau, in an interview conducted by Michel Peterson, sees his project in the following terms:

From *Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows* to *Texaco*, through *Solibo Magnificent*, there is a loop . . . I learned . . . not only that there might be several small historical strands, but also that the temporality might not be the same for each strand. Every community has its own notion of time. And one realizes that there is no linear time in Creolization that would be the same for all. We have/there is rather a chaotic temporality. To get a vague sense of time in the phenomenon of Creolization, one would have to refer to the notion of rhythm. One would have to listen to a drum concert to understand how this could have functioned. The idea of rhythm is fundamental if one wishes to attain any understanding of the process of Creolization.⁸

For Chamoiseau, different means of expression converge to constitute a narrative community which takes on tangible form as an Event such as the one that precedes Solibo's death. This synthesis involves, among other elements, the call-and-response that is one of the hallmarks and common grounds of the African Diasporic tradition. Implicit in this process is the merging of the various strands, or histories that Chamoiseau refers to in the above passage. Chamoiseau also claims that it must also incorporate the Gwo Ka, or Ka drum, that intertwines with the speaker's voice to provide the punctuation that Solibo's flowing monologue—what Chamoiseau calls the "discourse without commas"—invites. Chamoiseau, we have seen, insists that this drum is essential to any understanding of the process of Creolization, the process that his novel attempts to reproduce in written form. Indeed, the drum serves as a reminder of the common ground in the rhythmic core of both the musical and the linguistic. It also emphasizes the elective process by which the two modes of representation can be

allowed to merge together just as do the various histories of otherwise disparate participants in the rite of storytelling.

In addition, Solibo's story moves back and forth from the Creole to the French, intersperses nonsense words, and repeats lines for their rhythmic quality. Throughout, he invites the listeners' participation through interjections to which the audience offers a ritualized response. Thus, Solibo's polyphonous conversation with the drum and his audience merges the musical and the proto-literary into a mode of expression which combines musicality and the verb.

Likewise, if Solibo's tale is, in a sense, both musical and literary, Sucette the drummer's accompaniment functions in the same way:

He used the extra hands that drum men keep hidden, and they quickly turned and turned in mountainous echoes, crystalline crashes . . . communicating to anyone who could hear (whoever opened himself before it) the expression of a rummy voice, superhuman but familiar. (14)

The drum and drummer, Sucette and his Ka, tease out the rhythm-story for those who have freed themselves sufficiently from the tyranny of writing to hear the verb it also vehicles. It should be noted in passing the association of the Sucette with the crystalline quality of writing advocated by Calvino in the epigraph to the novel.⁹ And just as the drum beats out a rhythm, melody, and verb, Solibo's voice provides a rhythmic accompaniment to the voice of the drum:

His voice whirled, ample, then thin, broken then warm, mellow, then crystal or shrill, and rounding off with low cavernous tones. A voice splitting with caresses, tears, enchantments, imperial sobbing, and shaking with murmurs, dipping, or fluttering along the limits of silent sound. (107)

Solibo's voice, in its oscillating delivery, provides a vocal rhythmic counterpart to the sound of the drum, thereby achieving a verbal musicality. In trading functions, the drum and the voice weave through each other and across the mediatic boundary. Similarly, Chamoiseau's work as character/narrator provides the same

conjunction of media. If the verbal quality of his novel as a novel is obvious, the rhythmic is present throughout it as well. The movement from Creole to French, the toying with the sonic possibilities of language, the onomatopoeitic rendition of Sucette's drum solo at the start of this final chapter, and the structure of the novel itself all lend a powerful musicality to the text. In duplicating the same performance he ascribes to his main character, the author not only breaks down categories within the novel, but he also speaks across the border separating himself *from* his characters. This relentless referential erosion allows the novel to self-reflexively challenge its own paradigms just as it simultaneously questions—and proclaims—its own status within the greater literary context.

Perhaps one of the most significant expressions of this double agenda is the rocking rhythm of the “ii” sound of each of Solibo's calls and the “aa” sound of the audience's response. There are numerous names for this practice. In the Anglophone Caribbean it is called “crick-crack” and “krick-krack” or “yekrik-yekrak” in the Francophone Caribbean.¹⁰ This is also closely related to the African American tradition of signifying.¹¹ During the performance, at select moments, the storyteller finishes a line with a word (drawn from a handful of acceptable possibilities) that ends in “ii,” for example “misticrii.” To show their approval of the story and their participation in the event, the audience will respond with a word that ends with “aa,” in this case “misticraa.” As a group, and through this rhythmically driven exchange, they, including Chamoiseau both as a member of the audience and as the author of the novel, as well as ourselves as readers, are carried into a realm in which identities move in and out of focus and/or merge. All those involved with and in the novel are responsible for the verbal and musical quality of these ritualized sounds that serve to remind us that the ritual is first and foremost the communal—a “Being Together” that doesn't depend on exclusion.

In addition, Solibo refuses to exclusively occupy neatly delineated place on the historical temporal continuum. Instead, he navigates a broad field whose boundaries are vaguely defined by a trauma of a shared past in slavery, the specificity of a history and geography, and the storytelling guild of which all the participants

in this story are made members (as are, ultimately, the readers of the novel). With respect to this latter process of inclusion, a particularly striking moment in his tale occurs when he speaks of literacy. Here, Solibo contrasts himself with a member of his audience, the elderly Congo who can only speak Creole. Congo is both a member of the group, just as are Chamoiseau and Solibo. Like them, he is also an archetypal figure. Congo beckons to the Diaspora's African past and this past has been marked by the West as pre-literary:

Kongo pas sav l'A.B.C.D. et il est risible mais il n'est pas au garde-à-vous sur la montagne que devant le ciel et le soleil tandis que nous nègre à l'A.B.C.D. sommes debout à l'évangile devant le A devant le B devant le C devant le D oui patron merci patron et moi-même Solibo qui ka kalé djol mwen je crie Vive De Gaulle le 14 Juillet . . . (235)

That Kongo dunno his A.B.C.D. and we can laugh but on the mountain he stands at attention only before the sky and the sun while us blackmen with the A.B.C.D. we stand before the gospel with the A before the B before the C before the C yes boss thank you boss and I myself Solibo who can talk in the mouth I yell *Vive De Gaulle* on July 14th. . . (165)

Solibo instead sees himself as part of a continuous movement away from the rupture of a specifically African past, not Africa's last representative. He is already a figure of transition and change, living a time signature that, while temporal, refuses the policing of Westernized historicization. Yet, lest we believe that Solibo or Chamoiseau simply displace alterity, one might recall that even Congo, as a speaker of Creole rather than an African language, is part of this process of change rather than a fixed figuration of some putative origin. Ultimately, following the novel's logic, Africa itself is a place and product of change (just as the West is) rather than a place of stasis that guarantees Western historicity.

Nevertheless, if Solibo sees the futility of combating the West's conception of Being through writing, he also recognizes the disciplinary instincts of writing. Writing, particularly for the other, is indoctrination. If writing, the A.B.C.D. is the "New Testament"

before which one obediently stands at attention, just as a Martinican, one cries out "vive De Gaulle" on the 14th of July, the irony of the gesture doesn't go unnoticed.

That is why, in making Solibo consciously occupy an oral, yet also literary, if not literate realm, Chamoiseau makes sure that the narrative space he creates does not become another Sartrian glorification of an exotic musical other.¹² Instead, he argues that this hybrid expression is aware of its own insertion into the overarching structure that it inhabits. The fluidity of mediatic borders allows Chamoiseau to enter into the novel as a character without displacing or exploiting the oral world that he argues is being violently invaded by the literary. That is, while there is undeniably (and not unproblematically) a latent nostalgic subtext to the novel, Chamoiseau explores the ways in which his writing can continue the ontological project that Solibo has begun.

This continuation, exemplified by the "novel *Solibo Magnificent*" takes us from the "procès verbal" that opens the novel to the "After the Word" that ends it. By the end of the story, the opening *procès verbal* has been an operative play on words that it takes the whole novel to realize: this text is about a double trial of the "verb." Inspector Evariste Pilon's fruitlessly quest for a monoglossic text that he will be able to transcribe into his notebook is contrasted with the counter narrative that includes all of the stories that constitute the novel, including the *procès verbal*. The combination of all the voices into one text is the result of an improvisatory musico-linguistic flow in which there is no "final word," one which draws as much from a musical and oral storytelling tradition as it does a literary one.

It does not, however, exclude the literary. Rather, it reminds us that all writing (and reading) is the result of an endless and hybrid process of performance. Chamoiseau's text thus provides the substance of the novel while meticulously avoiding the violent policing of the borders he loosely erects as a temporary structure for his novel. Rather than demanding the removal of the oral, whose most radical expression is the musical, from the literary, rather than keeping the police distinct from its victims and himself apart from his characters, Chamoiseau chooses instead to

perpetuate the fluidity of the boundary that separates these categories, to found and maintain what in the novel he calls "an interlectal space" (22).¹³

Somewhat surprisingly, this means humanizing the police by showing their ambivalent status vis-a-vis the laws they represent just as Solibo himself is not immune to the orders given by what he calls the ABCD. Thus, there is a re-creation of oral and literary categories within the police that is expressed in the policeman Bouaffesse's translation of the Creole for his Frenchified boss, Evariste. Likewise, in a pointed critique of his boss's hypocritical progressivism, Bouafesse asks Evariste, why, if Creole is a full-fledged language as he claims, he write up his reports in French?

Chamoiseau questions the divisions of class and medium across and within each of the categories he simultaneously maintains. In so doing, he refuses the categorical imperatives in which each character would neatly fall into a preordained niche. That is, Chamoiseau *refuses* the literary policing of his characters, whatever role they might temporarily occupy. The primary reason he refuses to specifically assign blame is that he understands the dangers in having his own narrative reproduce new, subtler paradigms of alterity. This careful maneuver explains why neither Congo nor Solibo are entirely African: it would be precisely this type of historico-racial determinism that he is refuting. What Chamoiseau advocates instead is a mode of expression which takes into account the variable modes in which humans, to paraphrase Nietzsche, "become what they are."¹⁴ He invites the Western reader to concede that music and language are equally constitutive of Being, that is, that the dialectical progression towards Being can take place in a communal process in which music and language, writing and orality are of equal importance and mutually inform each other. More precisely, while it may sometimes be useful to oppose music and literature, it is by no means clear where and how such a clear division might take place. In refusing such binary distinctions, Chamoiseau also refuses any clear binary opposition between Black and White, which oppositions such as that between music and literature serve to inform and natural-

ize. Even if race rarely explicitly comes into the picture—it is always lurking in the wings.

In conclusion, though Chamoiseau's text examines a particular place and time, he is also a Western writer. And if he laments the inevitability of a certain replication of the very processes that he is challenging, I believe that he is also asking us as his readers to reconsider the extent to which writing itself, in all of its incarnations, is ever abstracted from the oral and, by extension, the extent to which music is ever entirely divorced from literature: Perhaps that is what we should mean when we speak somewhat hygienically of "text." In other words, what he might well be indicating is that alterity is always-already in the interstices of any text, straining the seams of the rational and that it is our job, in the words of Homi Bhaba cited at the beginning of this study, to "open up a space of translation: a political object that is new, neither one nor the other." That, Chamoiseau tells us, is the only possible way to get through the "Great Case of the Spoken/Sung" that is his novel: remain attuned to the musico-linguistics of writing in an open-ended communicative performance.

Notes

1 See for example Lydie Moudileno's *L'écrivain antillais au miroir de sa littérature*, Delphine Perret's *La créolité: espace de création*, Pascale de Souza's "Inscription du créole dans les textes francophones," and of course Chamoiseau's own critical works.

2 The writers of *Créolité* propose to turn their backs on what the *créolistes* see as the assimilationist tendencies of poet and politician Aimé Césaire and the "francocentric" model of the arts (particularly literature) that they think he follows. In its place, *créolité* proposes a return to the "folk roots" of Creole culture while simultaneously looking ahead and elsewhere for new models of communication. For more on *Créolité* see Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant's 1993 *Eloge de la Créolité*.

3 See Hegel's *Aesthetics*.

4 See Francis ("Pim") Higginson's "Disenchanted Race." This conundrum has been explored in works by members of the Diaspora as diverse as Nicolas Guillen, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Richard Wright, and Chester Himes to name but a few. I have chosen to speak of Patrick Chamoiseau because, as a contemporary Francophone author, he addresses phenomena that a number of French thinkers have theorized with particular poignancy. In addition, I hope to show how his treatment of this topic is specifically relevant to Francophone literature and literary studies inasmuch as many of the questions I am raising here come strait out of the French literary and philosophical traditions which Francophone literature so often addresses more or less directly.

5 It should be clear that Chamoiseau is using this quotation within a specific strategy. The fact that Calvino could be misrepresented might be of relatively little importance to him.

6 By using the popular "paraliterary" crime genre, Chamoiseau reconfirms the distance between his project and the exclusionary tendencies of "high literature;" and, by writing a crime novel, he communicates his reluctance to reproduce the policing effects that D.A. Miller, in his *The Novel and the Police*, identifies as one of the modern novel's primary impulses. Here, Chamoiseau's novel constantly undermines itself as a coercive potentiality. Instead, in *Solibo Magnificent*, the radical opposition between the oral and the literary reflects and is reflected in the two opposing communities the novel depicts: Solibo's oral storytelling and the apparently literary world of the police for whom there can only be one true narrative. Yet, as we will see, neither side can claim a monopoly on truth nor are they as distinct as might at first appear.

7 This is the world that he will explore in his first novel, *Chronique des sept misères* (*Chronicle of the Seven Sorrows*).

8 My translation of an interview of Patrick Chamoiseau by Michel Peterson.

9 It should also be noted that Calvino himself expands on this idea significantly in his last work, *Six Memos for a New Millennium*. From the following, we can see that for Calvino, the crystal is already an "in between place:"

The crystal with its precise faceting and its ability to refract light, the model of perfection that I have always cherished as an em-

blem, and this perfection has become more meaningful since we have learned that certain properties of the birth and growth of crystals resemble those of the most rudimentary biological creatures, forming a kind of bridge between the mineral world and living matter. (*Six Memos*, 70)

10 For a novel of the Anglophone Caribbean directly inspired by this performance practice see, Merle Hodge's *Crick crack, monkey*.

11 For a lengthy discussion of signifying see Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s. *The signifying monkey: a theory of Afro-American literary criticism*. I am here referring to *La Nausée* in which the black woman jazz singer becomes the incarnation of existential plenitude that has been lost to Western Man.

12 I am here referring to *La Nausée* in which the black woman jazz singer becomes the incarnation of existential plenitude that has been lost to Western Man.

13 "Un espace interlectal" (45).

14 See Friedrich Nietzsche. *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*.

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