

## Writing Cultural and Gender Difference:

### Sylviane Telchid's *Throvia de la Dominique*

**Odile Ferly**

*Saint Lawrence University*

The fiction of the Guadeloupean Sylviane Telchid truly celebrates Creolisation. Her work displays a linguistic *métissage* characteristic of the French Caribbean movement of *créolité*. The *créolistes* see the storyteller, or *conteur*, as the founder of Creole culture. Yet they envisage the figure of the storyteller as almost invariably male, thereby excluding women from the process of the elaboration of a national identity.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the Caribbean, women have always played a major role in the oral transmission of culture, and storytelling in particular was often a female activity. For most writers of the area, including Nobel laureates Gabriel García Márquez and Derek Walcott, it is the childhood storytelling of the mother, grandmother, an aunt or any other *female* relative or next of kin that accounts for their training as writers. Paule Marshall (US-born but of Barbadian descent) and Edwidge Danticat (a Haitian residing in the US) likewise pay homage to their mother, while the Guadeloupean Gisèle Pineau acknowledges the profound influence of her grandmother.<sup>2</sup> In the Francophone area, Creole is therefore not simply the mother tongue of Antilleans, but also a *mothertongue*, the vehicle of a culture whose survival was until recently primarily ensured by women.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, as Ina Césaire explains to Suzanne Houyoux in an interview, while both men and women tell stories, there has traditionally been a division of roles. Storytelling in public occasions (such as funeral wakes) has been reserved for men, and private storytelling has been a predominantly female activity. She comments:

You know, during funeral wakes, women serve the food; they have to cater for forty to fifty people all night long. In addition, when the father comes back in the evening from the cane fields, he eats and goes to bed; he is too tired to tell stories.

Perhaps there is more to it than such practicalities, but then again perhaps not.<sup>4</sup>

Given this division of gender roles, what is highly revealing is that the *créolistes* should imagine the archetype of the founder of the regional culture as a *father* figure, thereby only acknowledging public, male storytelling. This minimises the contribution of the Caribbean woman in the emergence of a local culture: as Arnold puts it, the *conteur* ‘thus becomes the gendered ancestor of all creole culture’.<sup>5</sup> Thus, ironically, it is men – who until at least the 1950s had exclusive though limited opportunities of ‘escaping’ creolisation via education, power and emigration (that is, via an access to the ‘white world’, which women were virtually denied) – who are now envisaged as the primary founders of Creole culture. Vera Kutzinski likewise notes how across the region ‘[the] homoerotic masculinist paradigm [of Caliban nowhere acknowledges] women, let alone nonwhite women, as cultural producers’.<sup>6</sup> More crucially

perhaps, such a vision marginalises and even silences the woman writer, for in this oral society the storyteller is the ancestor of the writer. The woman writer is thus deprived of her historicity, her function being envisaged as exclusively male.<sup>7</sup>

Several women writers of the 1990s have thus sought to create a nation language while reinstating women as cultural producers.<sup>8</sup> The Guadeloupean Sylviane Telchid sets out to enhance the status of Creole in her fiction, either by writing directly in Creole, as in *Ti Chika*, or by writing in a French suffused with Creole lexicon and syntax, as in *Throvia de la Dominique*.<sup>9</sup> One of Telchid's merits in *Throvia* is that by mixing a creolised French with Creole, she avoids reproducing the conventional linguistic hierarchy between a high language (French) restricted to serious literary matters and superior characters, and a vernacular (Creole) that would be reserved for the comic element. Instead, her creolised style permeates the narrative, which helps to institute Creole as a literary language. Through the story of the teenager Throvia and her family, the novel tells the experience of the immigrant community from the Commonwealth of Dominica, the neighbouring Anglophone and Creolophone island.<sup>10</sup>

Creole impregnates the French of *Throvia* in various ways and to varying degrees, ranging from the most conspicuous to the most subtle. One method Telchid uses is the insertion of Creole lexicon followed by a translation in a footnote, or else by a paraphrasing sentence in French. Thus a Creole idiom drawing on the imagery of the game of dominos is subsequently clarified by a comment in brackets: 'Il y avait déjà un bout de temps que le double-six était mort

dans sa main (tout ça pour te dire qu'elle avait coiffé Sainte-Catherine depuis bien longtemps)'.<sup>11</sup> Often these Creole insertions are not accompanied by any translation or typographical marker, which achieves a greater fusion of the two languages, as can be assessed in the following examples: '[elles] passèrent ensuite le plus clair de leur temps à driver dans les champs',<sup>12</sup> or 'elle remercia ces deux bons vieux-corps'.<sup>13</sup> Here the meaning of 'driver' (to drift, wander), or 'vieux-corps' (elderly) is to be inferred from the context.

Secondly Telchid resorts to the technique of transposition. This occurs most often in dialogues or indirect speech, where the style mirrors the characters' speech patterns. For instance, an extract from a dialogue reads: 'Père Ben, pourquoi un *bel* garçon comme toi, *c'est l'abbé tu es allé faire?*',<sup>14</sup> rather than standard French 'Père Ben, vous qui êtes si beau garçon, pourquoi avez-vous décidé de devenir prêtre?' Similarly, Telchid transposes expressions such as 'tout partout' from the Creole *tou patou*, instead of standard French 'partout' (everywhere), or 'un lot de', from the Creole *on lo* (direct translation of the English 'a lot of'), for 'beaucoup de'. In the dialogue: 'Mes enfants, *je suis mêlée comme cendre et farine*, venez me démêler. Qu'est-ce que vous *achetez dans ma main?*',<sup>15</sup> the author transposes the Creole expression *mwen mélé kon sann é farin* (I am broke), as well as modelling the phrase 'acheter dans ma main' on Creole. Some of the expressions and proverbs transposed into French would remain hermetic to a French audience without further clarification: thus 'toutes ses patates douces avaient perdu leurs tiges rampantes', is translated by the footnote 'elle avait perdu tout espoir'.<sup>16</sup>

Thirdly, numerous creolisms (that is to say, lexicon or syntax correct in Creole but semantically different or ungrammatical in French) permeate the text. In ‘ceux qu’on crie ‘Négropolitains’ pour se moquer d’eux’,<sup>17</sup> for instance, ‘crier’ does not have the standard French meaning of ‘to shout’ or ‘to scream’, but the Creole meaning of ‘to call’, ‘to name’. In ‘les portes [...] se fermaient *vitement*’,<sup>18</sup> on the other hand, ‘vitement’ is incorrect in French, but not in Creole. Another creolism found in the novel is the phrase ‘pas ... encore’ to mean ‘no longer’, which in standard French would be ‘ne ... plus’, ‘pas encore’ meaning ‘not yet’. In other cases, she uses a Creole word with a close French equivalent but whose suffix is only correct in Creole, such as ‘tourmenterie’.<sup>19</sup>

Another typical feature of Creole that Telchid transposes into French is compound nouns. These can be divided into two categories. Firstly, compound nouns one of whose two components is redundant, as in ‘franche-vérité’.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, words that are in fact an adjunction of several nouns, ‘deux-mots-quatre-baisers’,<sup>21</sup> often without the articles, partitives, genitives or prepositions that would have been expected in standard French, as in ‘saison-Carême’,<sup>22</sup> ‘bancs-feignants’,<sup>23</sup> or ‘personnes-Guadeloupe’<sup>24</sup> – this last phrase being the exact calque of the Creole *moun Gwadeloup*, meaning Guadeloupeans. Such a feature is actually not restricted to nouns: it is found with adverbs too, as in ‘vitement-dépêché’.<sup>25</sup> These compound nouns and adverbs convey the rhythm of Creole speech, reproducing its concision.

Furthermore, some linguistic features specific to Creole are applied to French. A good illustration is the use of ‘même’, an emphatic Creole interjection derived from the French adverb

*même* (as in *quand même*) and best rendered in English by ‘very’ or ‘really’. For instance, in: ‘On te fait partir? Tu pars. Mais tu trouves un canot qui te ramène une fois même’,<sup>26</sup> the expression ‘une fois même’ could translate as ‘right away’, ‘même’ increasing the notion of haste contained in ‘une fois’. Similarly, in: ‘Ne va pas chez les quimboiseurs nouvelle vague, ils ne sont pas bons même, même, même’,<sup>27</sup> the ‘même’ adds intensity, to mean ‘[not] at all’. As evidenced in this last example, Telchid also draws from Creole the emphatic repetition of adjectives or adverbs. This device reaches comic proportions in story-telling: ‘Cette femme, grande, grande, grande, maigre, maigre, maigre, blanche à en paraître translucide.’<sup>28</sup> The expression ‘cette enfant-là’ (p. 103) likewise reproduces a feature of Creole speech, where ‘là’ does not function to distinguish ‘cette enfant-là’ (that child) from ‘cette enfant-ci’ (this child), but is purely redundant: standard French would have simply said ‘cette enfant’.

Telchid also transcribes a number of Creole interjections, such as ‘alors’: ‘Tu ne sais pas alors, que les hommes sont des fruits-à-pain, quand ils tombent, ils sont finis.’<sup>29</sup> Another example is ‘on’: ‘C’est pas lui [le Bondieu] qui est le maître de toutes choses on?’<sup>30</sup> Both interjections are used in interrogations to indicate a certain degree of surprise, indignation or annoyance on the part of the enunciator. Onomatopoeia is a final way in which Creole leaves its imprint on Telchid’s text. There are numerous occurrences of it, such as: ‘[les] têtes des dormeurs, qui parfois se cognaient bok!’,<sup>31</sup> or ‘le car entier rit kra kra kra’,<sup>32</sup> or even ‘elle ne fit que le larguer blip’,<sup>33</sup> ‘blip’ suggesting a quick and sudden action.

Together with interjections and onomatopoeia, the use of the second person singular in the narrative confers orality on the text. The narrative voice switches abruptly from third to second person, as if the narrator suddenly materialised and addressed the reader directly: ‘Petite et grassouillette, elle débordait d’énergie et allait d’un bout à l’autre de la salle avec la légèreté de l’oiseau fufou. Son entrain décuplait ton énergie, sa chaleur te descendait tout droit dans le coeur.’<sup>34</sup> This sudden materialisation of the narrator recalls, of course, the convention whereby the storyteller concludes the tale with a phrase that explains how s/he arrived in front of the audience to tell them the story.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, imagery and proverbs play a most important role in Telchid’s elaboration of a creolised text. Even common French expressions such as ‘une cage à lapin’ (a rabbit hutch), ‘le chant du coq’ (the cock’s cry), or ‘faire une salade’ (to get confused) are replaced by Creole equivalents such as ‘une caloge à poules’ (p. 17), ‘le chant de l’oiseau sucrier’ (p. 28), ‘faire une soupe-à-Congo’ (p. 15). As for the imagery, it draws on the local flora and fauna, so that, even without landscape descriptions, the text constantly evokes the Caribbean: ‘Aussi vivement que la Marie-Honteuse derrière ses feuilles, Pétrolina cacha sa pudeur en émoi sous ses paupières’,<sup>36</sup> or ‘pareil aux racines du figuier-maudit, le chômage étendait ses ramifications d’un bout à l’autre de la Dominique’.<sup>37</sup> Some imagery reflects the Creole psychology, as in the following example where life is animated and seen as treacherous: ‘Elle m’aide de toutes ses forces à supporter les *croche-pieds de la vie*.’<sup>38</sup> The same personalisation or animation of an abstract concept is found in the following metaphor: ‘cette angoisse qui, tel un chatrou, s’agrippait à son estomac.’<sup>39</sup> Standard French is thus systematically challenged, undermined,

adapted to a Caribbean reality. In a metaphor such as ‘des économies aussi étiqes que vache Grande-Terre en saison-Carême’,<sup>40</sup> creolisation is achieved at two levels, first in the simile itself, whose full understanding requires a knowledge of the topography and climate of Guadeloupe, and secondly in the language, since the omission of articles and partitives reproduces Creole speech.

The numerous proverbs are directly transposed from Creole. Many are inserted in the narrative, such as: ‘L’anoli ne peut donner que le peu de sang qu’elle a, pas vrai?’<sup>41</sup>; ‘chacun savait que dans les situations difficiles une main ne peut se laver sans l’autre’ (from the proverb *sé yon lanmen ka lavé lot*);<sup>42</sup> or ‘le cabri fait des crottes en pillules, ce n’est pas pour autant qu’il est pharmacien’.<sup>43</sup> Other proverbs are inserted in interior monologues or dialogues. Thus Pétrolina reflects: ‘La deveine est une femme folle, elle frappe n’importe où, n’importe comment’ (note once more the personalisation of an abstract concept);<sup>44</sup> or even ‘on n’a jamais vu la rivière remonter à sa source, n’est-ce pas? Alors, il ne servait à rien de regretter l’absence d’un défunt’;<sup>45</sup> or she tells her man: ‘Colosse, dans une calebasse, il n’y a que deux couis, alors à toi de choisir.’<sup>46</sup> As for Throvia, she reflects: ‘Le ravet n’a jamais eu raison devant la poule.’<sup>47</sup> Here Telchid draws on the Creole subtext, allowing her to say more than what is actually spelt out. The full proverb goes *ravèt pa ni rézon douvan poul. Tèlman i sav i pa ni rézon, i ka obliyé i ni zèl!* (The cockroach facing the hen is always in the wrong. So much so that it does not think of flying away). By recalling this proverb, the text suggests that the situation that Throvia is facing (expulsion because of her illegal immigrant status) is actually an injustice. At the same time, it implicitly states that French law never favours the weak, in this case the



Guadeloupeans (or many Dominican and Haitian immigrants) steeped in the oral Creole culture and largely illiterate in French.

Telchid thus succeeds in elaborating an *écriture métissée* in *Throvia*. What is more, this linguistic *métissage* is shown in the text to originate mostly from women. The novel thereby presents women as cultural producers and transmitters. Indeed, because the author/narrator and main characters of the novel are female, this culture passed on through proverbial wisdom is naturally associated with women in the text. In fact, there is a sharp contrast between the female and male characters regarding their attitude to and use of language. Pétrolina's own attitude towards language and culture is ambivalent: although she is primarily Creolophone (p. 15), she insists that her children speak English at home (p. 16, p. 76), thereby hoping that they could retain the official language of their native island, while acquiring at school the official language of their adopted island, that is to say French. So Pétrolina, like many Caribbean women, clearly understands that official languages and cultures are the key to social mobility. However, the fact that the custom of speaking English at home is gradually lost attests to the artificiality of the measure; indeed, after living in Guadeloupe for ten years, Throvia finds that she can hardly speak English. Although she subsequently decides to practice English with her mother Pétrolina, it is clear that their natural means of communication is the vernacular common to both Guadeloupe and Dominica, Creole. So all the dialogues in creolised French in the novel are actually meant to be carried out in Creole.

Yet not all Caribbean women are shown as upholders of the official culture and language in the novel. Pétrolina's attitude contrasts with that of Throvia's schoolmistresses, obvious fictional *alter egos* of the author herself. These adopt a very different stance towards their dual heritage and find another way to accommodate the diglossic predicament of the island. Indeed, they use Creole as the foundation on which to build the children's learning of French, which when they start school is a foreign language to them. Significantly, the teachers' approach to bilingual education is justified by a Creole saying: 'La Parole dit: "Quand le petit chat a perdu sa mère, il tête la chienne". Alors les maîtresses n'eurent plus qu'une chose à faire, laisser les enfants libres d'utiliser leurs éperons naturels. Mieux, elles s'en servirent: la classe se fit donc en créole d'abord et le français, à pas prudents, fit son entrée dans le petit poulailler' (this extract makes a passing reference to a second proverb: *kréyòl sé zépon natirèl an nou*, 'Creole is our natural spurs').<sup>48</sup> Even when women are defenders of what is official, like Pétrolina, their role is ambivalent, since along with a respect for the official culture, they transmit Creole culture to their children. That Pétrolina, who communicates with her children primarily in Creole, passes on Creole wisdom to Throvia is clear when, for instance, the latter recalls a Creole proverb that she has often heard from her mother, translated in the text as *le cabri libre dans la savane ignore ce que souffre le cabri attaché*.<sup>49</sup>

The Guadeloupean socio-linguist Dany Bébel-Gisler notes the traditional association between Creole language and the womb. She quotes the Creole saying: *kréyòl sé grenn vant an nou* (literally Creole is the seed of our womb, which she broadly translates as '[le créole, c'est] notre patrie intérieure').<sup>50</sup> She then explains: 'Implanted in the "existential womb", Creole

language is an intrinsic part of ourselves, it is the premise on which we discover the world and the others, “thus the site and *milieu* of a sense of belonging based on the body, and of a communication system”’.<sup>51</sup>

Later she reports how the Creole saying *pawòl vant* (literally, ‘words of the womb’) means ‘essential words’ (p. 107). Although Bébel-Gisler does not comment on this aspect, it is significant that both these images used to express the relationship to Creole language should refer to the relationship to the mother. Women – and here it should be remembered that the primarily Creolophone sector of Francophone Caribbean societies is largely matrifocal – are thus seen to play a pre-eminent role in the transmission and production of Creole language and culture in these sayings. The vision of the role played by women in the cultural process that transpires from the Creole popular tradition is thus radically different from that of the *créolistes*, who envisage the male story-teller as the nearly exclusive progenitor of French Caribbean culture.<sup>52</sup>

Telchid’s text certainly reinforces this close association between women and Creole language and culture, if only implicitly. Indeed, neither of the major male characters, Colosse and Burton, is shown as an important producer of Creole speech – and, by extension, of Creole culture – in the novel. Colosse is particularly laconic, so there is hardly any direct or indirect transcription of his language in the novel. The one time he is seen to use a proverb ‘les affaires du cabri ne sont pas celles du mouton’,<sup>53</sup> the reader later finds out that he did not actually utter those words, but that these were a product of Throvia’s imagination (in a nightmare). So here it

is actually a female character who is associating Colosse with a proverb. All the other sayings and proverbs associated with Colosse are reported by the narrative voice.

Like Colosse, Burton acts as a father figure for Throvia (being, like her, Dominican), but his is more the role of a spiritual father. He is for her a mine of knowledge on Dominica and Guadeloupe. Yet, here again, Burton is not so much associated with the Creole culture as with the official culture (whether that of English or French), since he acts as Throvia's informal English teacher (p. 73). That Burton's culture belongs more to the written word is clear in the story he once tells Throvia, about slaves buried by their masters after digging a hole to hide their treasure. The French used in this story – flawless, like Burton's English – is very standard: 'Après l'esclavage et pendant des années, il s'est passé des faits inquiétants sur l'habitation. Des animaux tombaient malades sans raison, des épidémies décimaient les troupeaux. Des ouvriers qu'on avait vus la veille forts et bien portants mouraient subitement...'<sup>54</sup> Significantly, too, the information Burton is disclosing is about the white, official world: so that this world is mostly associated with men in the novel.

As mentioned above, the natural means of communication between Throvia and her mother is Creole. French is a foreign language to Pétrolina, as it was to her children on their arrival in Guadeloupe. As the text explains, Pétrolina never had any communication problem in Guadeloupe because she communicates primarily in Creole. Her elder children, on the other hand, faced enormous difficulties at school, because French is the language of instruction. So

Pétrolina's world is predominantly that of the oral, Creole cultures (and language) common to Dominica and Guadeloupe. Significantly, the novel opens on an episode of storytelling, where the storyteller is Pétrolina and the audience Throvia, eager to hear how her parents met. Thus while collective wisdom is passed down through proverbs, the family history is passed down through stories. In either case, the continuity is shown to be ensured through the bond between mother and daughter. In this respect, it is also interesting to note the ending of the novel. Pétrolina and her youngest two children are expelled from Guadeloupe because of their illegal status. What is significant about the episode, however, is the context of Pétrolina's expulsion: it is a written act that triggers it, a letter sent by an envious neighbour to the authorities. The importance that the written word takes on for these primarily oral communities is underlined when the neighbourhood recognises the gravity of such a gesture: 'Écrire! Awa! Si la parole, c'est du vent, l'écrit ça laisse des traces. Il y a des jeux à ne pas faire.'<sup>55</sup> The text thus seems to signify that Petrolina's world and culture are endangered by the official world, not only in legal terms, but in cultural terms too. Here it is also worth noting that Throvia, originally expelled with her mother, manages to survive in the official world (she returns to Guadeloupe to pursue her studies) precisely because of her determination to master both of her official cultures (those of French and English) while remaining attached to the unofficial, Creole one (notably through her relationship with her mother).

Women are therefore implicitly portrayed as major – if not the primary – producers of Creole language and culture in Telchid's novel. Challenging the male *créolistes'* representation of the *conteur* as invariably male, Telchid thus reinstates Caribbean women as storytellers. She

turns the linguistic complexity of the region into an advantage, succeeding in elaborating an *écriture métissée*, a hybrid language with countless possibilities of invention. Telchid's linguistic project thereby coincides with that of the male *créolistes*; yet, unlike these writers, the author concerns herself more with the promotion of Creole as a literary language, than with the renovation of French through the injection of Creole. Her fiction also breaks the silence around women's participation in the elaboration of French Caribbean culture commonly found in her male counterparts.

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<sup>1</sup> 'C'est lui [le conteur] le seul producteur de littérature audible, une littérature articulée dans l'ethno-texte de la parole, et qui, dans la parole, se forge un langage soumis aux ambivalences de la créolisation, à l'opacité du Détour pour survivre, et à l'inédit insoupçonné de la culture créole'. Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres créoles: Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature (Haïti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, 1635-1975)* (Paris, Hatier, 1991), p.41, emphasis added. ('He [the storyteller] is the sole producer of audible literature, a literature rooted in the ethno-text of the oral word and which, within the world of orality, forges a language subject to the ambivalences of creolisation, the opacity of the roundabout route taken in order to survive, and to the unsuspected novelty of Creole culture' (my translation). A. James Arnold discusses the sexism of the *créolité* movement in 'The Gendering of *Créolité*: The Erotics of Colonialism', in *Penser la créolité*, ed. by Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris, Karthala, 1995), pp.21-40 (pp.27-35). Gisèle Pineau and Sylviane Telchid both expressed their feeling (in interviews

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granted respectively on 6 January 1998 and 29 April 1999) that Simone Schwarz-Bart's pioneering prose, for instance, did not earn her full recognition, largely, it seems, because she was a woman.

<sup>2</sup> Afro-American writing displays the same characteristic, and Alice Walker makes it the very basis of her own type of cultural feminism, womanism.

<sup>3</sup> Susheila Nasta uses this spelling in *Motherlands: Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* (London, Women's Press, 1991), and in 'Motherlands, Mothercultures, Mothertongues: Women's Writing in the Caribbean', in *Shades of Empire in Colonial and Post-Colonial Literature*, ed. by C.C. Barfoot and Theo D'haen (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA, Rodopi B.V., 1993), pp.211-220.

<sup>4</sup> 'Vous savez à l'occasion d'une veillée funéraire, les femmes font le service; elles ont quarante ou cinquante personnes à nourrir toute la nuit. D'autre part, le père, quand il rentre le soir des champs de canne, il mange et se couche; il est trop fatigué pour raconter des histoires. // Il y a peut-être autre chose que de simples contingences matérielles mais ce n'est pas sûr'. Suzanne Houyoux, 'Entretien avec Ina Césaire', in *Elles écrivent des Antilles*, ed. by Suzanne Rinne and Joëlle Vitiello, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp.349-357 (p.356).

<sup>5</sup> Arnold, 'The Gendering of *Créolité*', p.30.

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<sup>6</sup> Vera Kutzinski, 'The Cult of Caliban', in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Vol.3*, ed. by A. James Arnold (Amsterdam (Philadelphia), J. Benjamins, 1997), pp.285-301 (p.288).

<sup>7</sup> None of the writing of Raphaël Confiant or Edouard Glissant features a female storyteller (Glissant's Papa Longoué and Mathieu are two versions of the *conteur*). The same is true of Patrick Chamoiseau's first two novels. In *Chronique des sept misères*, the narrator speaks in the name of the *djobeurs*, who are all men. *Solibo Magnifique* focuses on the *conteur* Solibo, envisaged as the father of the community. If the author attempts to rectify such gender bias with Marie-Sophie Laborieux in *Texaco*, the first part of the novel is narrated virtually directly by her father, while paradoxically his female story-teller is 'masculinised', described as 'négresse à deux graines' (with two balls). So for Chamoiseau too, story-telling is a male prerogative.

<sup>8</sup> Simone Schwarz-Bart was among the first to challenge this eviction of women from cultural production in her fiction. As Smyley Wallace shows, the metaphor land/woman is pivotal to *Pluie et vent*. Since Creole culture is in turn rooted in the land, Schwarz-Bart's text thereby establishes a strong connection between women and Creole culture. See Karen Smyley Wallace, 'Créolité and the Feminine Text in Simone Schwarz-Bart', *The French Review* (March 1997), 70/4, pp.554-561. On the land and Creole culture, see Dany Bébel-Gisler's *Le*



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*Défi culturel guadeloupéen: devenir ce que nous sommes* (Paris, Editions caribéennes, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Paris, L'Harmattan, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Dominicans are, together with the Haitians, the main two immigrant communities in Guadeloupe. This community from the Commonwealth of Dominica should not be confused with the Spanish-speaking community from the Dominican Republic, also well represented in Guadeloupe.

<sup>11</sup> Telchid, p.65: 'She had long been left with the double six at the end of the domino game (I mean to say that she had long ago been left on the shelf)'. All translations are my own.

<sup>12</sup> Telchid, p.36: 'They spent most of their time wandering in the field'.

<sup>13</sup> Telchid, p.41: 'She thanked these two good 'old-bodies'.

<sup>14</sup> Telchid, p.58, italics added: 'Father Ben, how it is a handsome man like you became a priest?'

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<sup>15</sup> Telchid, p.13, emphasis added: 'I am broke, please help me out. What are you going to buy from me today?'

<sup>16</sup> Telchid, p.41, a direct translation would be: 'the climbing stems of all her sweet potatoes had died'.

<sup>17</sup> Telchid, p.46: 'Those nicknamed "Néropolitains" [a play on the words *métropolitains*, that is, people from the metropole, France, and *nègres*, blacks] to make fun of them'.

<sup>18</sup> Telchid, p.70, a direct translation would be: 'The doors shut up *fastly*'.

<sup>19</sup> *Telchid*, p.16, the equivalent of the Anglophone Caribbean term 'botheration'.

<sup>20</sup> Telchid, p.9: 'honest-truth'.

<sup>21</sup> Telchid, p.10: 'two-words-four-kisses.'

<sup>22</sup> Telchid, p.9, refers to the dry season in the Caribbean.

<sup>23</sup> Telchid, p.31: 'layabout-benches'.

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<sup>24</sup> Telchid, p.98, Guadeloupe-people, i.e, Guadeloupeans.

<sup>25</sup> Telchid, p.12, a direct translation would be 'quickly-hurried'.

<sup>26</sup> Telchid, p.43: 'They ask you to leave? Then, you leave. But you find a boat that brings you back quick'.

<sup>27</sup> Telchid, p.75: 'Don't go to those new-style obeahmen (or sorcerers), they are no good at all, at all, at all'.

<sup>28</sup> Telchid, p.60: 'This tall, tall, tall woman, all skinny, skinny, skinny, so pale she looked transparent...'

<sup>29</sup> Telchid, p.39 : 'You don't know men are like breadfruits, when they fall, that's the end of them?'

<sup>30</sup> Telchid, p.83: 'Isn't God the master of all things?'

<sup>31</sup> Telchid, p.38: 'The heads of those who had fallen asleep from time to time banged against the wall *bok*'.

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<sup>32</sup> Telchid, p.39: ‘the whole bus burst out laughing *kra kra kra*’.

<sup>33</sup> Telchid, p.87: ‘she just dumped him *blip*’.

<sup>34</sup> Telchid, pp.8-9: ‘Short and plump, she was full of life, going from one end of the room to the other as swiftly as a humming-bird. Her enthusiasm would boost up your energy level, her warmth touched your heart’.

<sup>35</sup> This framing device, whereby the narrator introduces and concludes the story, is a convention inherited from African storytelling. However, it is also found in 19<sup>th</sup>-century European storytelling, for example in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

<sup>36</sup> Telchid, p.7: ‘As quickly as the sensitive plant behind her leaves, Petrolina hid her embarrassment behind her eyelids’.

<sup>37</sup> Telchid, p.8: ‘Like the roots of the cursed ficus, unemployment stretched out its ramifications from one end of Dominica to the other’.

<sup>38</sup> Telchid, p.7, emphasis added: ‘She helps me with all her might to face the tricks of life’.

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<sup>39</sup> Telchid, p.41: 'this anguish that clung to her stomach like a *chatrou* (octopus)'.

<sup>40</sup> Telchid, p.9: 'savings as meagre as a cow in Grande-Terre during the dry season'.

<sup>41</sup> Telchid, p.11: 'The lizard can only give the little blood it has, can't it?'

<sup>42</sup> Telchid, p.50: 'Everybody knows that in hard times one hand cannot get washed without the help of the other'.

<sup>43</sup> Telchid, p.71: 'The goat's droppings are in the shape of a pill, that does not make it a pharmacist'.

<sup>44</sup> Telchid, p.27: 'Bad luck is a mad woman, she strikes anywhere, any how'.

<sup>45</sup> Telchid, p.28: 'Have you ever seen a river run back to its spring? So there was no use in moaning over the absence of a dead one'.

<sup>46</sup> Telchid, p.88: 'Colosse, a calabash can only make two bowls, so you will have to choose'.

<sup>47</sup> Telchid, p.48: 'The cockroach facing the hen is always in the wrong'.

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<sup>48</sup> Telchid, p.16: ‘The saying goes: “When the kitten is left motherless, it suckles the bitch”. And so there was only one thing for the teachers to do: to let the children use their natural spurs. Even better, they put them to use: so the class was held mostly in Creole at first, and French cautiously entered via the backdoor’.

<sup>49</sup> Telchid, p.46: ‘The goat who runs freely in the savannah does not want to know what the tied goat endures’.

<sup>50</sup> Bébel-Gisler, pp.22-23.

<sup>51</sup> Bébel-Gisler, p.23, my translation: ‘Logée dans la ‘matrice existentielle’, la langue créole fait partie intégrante de nous-mêmes, est constitutive de notre découverte du monde et des autres, “lieu et milieu donc d’une appartenance corporelle et d’une communication” ’.

<sup>52</sup> This implicit association of Creole primarily with the mother is further reflected in Bébel-Gisler, when an interlocutor comments: ‘My reference, as far as an authentic expression of Creole is concerned, would be my mother, my grandmother, or my grandfather [note that the mother and grandmother come first]. When I found out that they were going to teach Creole at university, and that it wouldn’t be my mother, or yours, who would teach it, it made me laugh.’ (Ma référence, pour une véritable expression du créole, serait ma mère, ma grand-mère, mon grand-père [note that the mother and grandmother come first]. Quand j’ai entendu qu’on allait

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enseigner le créole à l'Université et que ce ne serait pas ma mère, ou la tienne, qui enseignerait, je me suis mis à rire' (*Le Défi culturel guadeloupéen*, p.31).

<sup>53</sup> Telchid, p.81: 'the goat's business is not that of the sheep'.

<sup>54</sup> Telchid, p.74: 'After slavery, and for years, worrying events occurred on the plantation. Animals would get sick without reason, epidemics wiped out the cattle. Workers who had been seen strong and healthy the previous day would die suddenly...?.'

<sup>55</sup> Telchid, p.90: 'To write! *Awa* [no]. If the spoken word is wind, the written word leaves prints. There are things you just don't do'.