"A Different Kind of Creature":
Caribbean Literature, The Cyclops Factor,
and The Second Poetics of the Propter Nos

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In their 1993 book on Aimé Césaire, Roger Toumson and Simone Henry-Vallmore define the Creolist literary movement which began in Martinique in 1989 with the publication of Éloge de la Créolité (In Praise of Creoleness) as one of "ideological métissage, which is to say of seduction." Targeting the earlier movement of Césairian Negritude, it marked the return in force of an "exoticism of the diverse" which was and is a denial, a refusal of "radical alterity" (230). This essay has its point of departure in their definition. It proposes that the central dynamic of twentieth century Caribbean literature and thought has centered on assumption or rejection of the identity and perspective of "radical alterity," a perspective defining of Césaire's Negritude as distinct from, for example, the perspective of "ethnicity" or of multi-ethnicity that is defining of the Creolist movement of Martinique—itself a sub-version of the post-sixties "reterritorializing" strain of the multicultual movement which has occurred in the United States and Canada (Godzich, Intro. De Certeau xi; Wynter, Do Not Call Us 16-18).

To emphasize the meaning that I shall give to the concept of radical alterity, I have defined it in my title by a term taken (like that of the Sisypheus and Eldorado of the collection's title) from the Imaginary of the now globally hegemonic yet still (as many have observed) local culture of the West: the "Cyclops factor." By "Imaginary" here I mean that magma of images and encoded premises which, while providing collective values and unitary meanings, are themselves logically unprovable (Castoriadis 150-1). I also suppose that it is this Imaginary that in all cases institutes the modes of Carpentier's "marvellous reality" (lo real maravilloso), and so of the modes of the Real that are specific to all human cultures, up to and including that of our contemporary Western and Westernized own; even though the central ideological strategy of the latter is to represent and see itself, in terms of its own Imaginary, as not being a culture at all but rather a supracultural reality-in-itself.

Why adopt the lineage of the Cyclops rather than the genealogy figured in Orlando Patterson's Children of Sisyphus? Why adopt the quest demanded by this lineage and its legacy, requiring assumption of alterity, rather than the quest of Eldorado engaged in the Cuban Alejo Carpentier's The Lost Steps or the Guyanese Wilson Harris's Palace of the Peacock? as Benítez-Rojo notes (187). Further, if we see the quest of Eldorado as still linked in conceptual—imaginative terms to the quest of Homer's Odysseus rather than to the as yet still unexplored nature of what must be the quest of the Cyclops, how is this choice of lineage and of legacy linked to the character Trumper's discovery (in George Lamming's classic In The Castle of My Skin), that the "Rights of Man" did not and can in no way include the "Rights of the Negro"?
'Tis a tremendous difference… One single word make a tremendous difference, that's why you can never be too sure what a word will do. I'm a niggar or a Negro an' all o' us put together is niggers or Negroes. There ain't no "man" an' there ain't no "people". Just niggar or Negro…'tis the blacks who get affected by leavin' out that word "man" or "people." That's how we learn the race. 'Tis what a word can do. Now there ain't a black man in all America who won't get up an' say I'm a Negro. …I'm going to fight for the rights o' the Negroes, and I'll die fighting. …He ain't got no time to think 'bout the rights o' Man. People… it's the rights o' the Negro, 'cause we have gone on usin' the word the others use for us, an' we are a different kind o' creature… If the rights o' Man an' the rights o' the Negro was the same same thing, 'twould be different, but there ain't, cause we're a different kind o' creature… (Lamming 333-

This is despite the fact that the Rights of Man had been the fruits won, both by the French Revolution of 1789, as well as by the successful slave-revolution of Haiti which was its corollary, and yet which had to be fought, not only against the royalist slaveholders of the island, in order to secure their freedom, but also subsequently against the troops of Napoleon, heir to the French Revolution, who had then attempt to reenslave the former slaves freed now by their own efforts. What, therefore, from the Cyclops perspective of alterity, had been the taint in that original conception of freedom, and of Rights, that had then led, not only to the failed attempt to reenslave the former slaves of Haiti, but also to an even more far-reaching paradox? To the paradox of the large majority of today's black Haitians, as well as of all peoples of African descent (i.e. Negroes), coming to find themselves stigmatized not only as Trump's "different kind of creature," but also as Brathwaite's "homeless nigger" ("Where then is the nigger's home?" Arrivants 77), an Walcott's "middle passage inheritors" who awoke to find that they had merely exchanged the chains of slavery for those of poverty.

"It huddled there," Walcott wrote in Laventille, "steel tinkling its blue painted metal air, tempered by violence, like Rio's favelas" (Collected Poems 85). Caribbean slums, Brazilian favelas, inner city ghettos of the US, all now reoccupy the place of the slave ships, quarters of new barracones no less cramped, when the Cyclops, physically unchained, is as firmly fixed to the place assigned it by the narrative necessity of the text of our present imaginary as were its ancestors:

where the inheritors of the middle passage stewed,
five to a room, still clamped below their hatch,
breeding like felonies,

whose lives revolve round prison, graveyard, church...

The middle passage never guessed its end.
This is the height of poverty
for the desperate and black...

...lives fixed in the unalterable groove
of grinding poverty. (Collected Poems 86-8)

If the link between our projected quest and that of the binary opposition between the Rights of Man and the Rights-of-the-Negro as a "different kind o' creature" is that of a shared kind of alterity of the radically "impious" and outsider Cyclops figure of Homer's Odyssey with the figure of a population group or
human hereditary variation (the Negro) that was to find itself, in the wake of the abolition of slavery and the triumphant paean of the Haitian Revolution and Boukman’s “insane song” (Césaire, Collected Poetry 369), swapping the role of forcibly coerced slave antithesis to free, rational and non-dependent landed slavemaster Self for that of a conceptually coerced “different kind o’ creature” to French Revolutionary Man, how does this relate to the clash between the tendency of Caribbean literature that defines identity in terms of an acultural ethnicity and another tendency that defines it in the always culture-specific yet also transcultural terms of radical alterity? Why, further, would the quest for the assumption of alterity and so of its counter-perspective, and whose revelatory or Koranic poetic text was to be Césaire’s 1939 Notebook of a Return to the Native Land, necessarily call for what I have defined in my title as the “second poetics of the propter nos”? — a poetics able to negate yet carry over and complete what Fernand Hallyn has defined as the (first) poetics of the propter nos.

Elaborated by the lay humanists of Renaissance Europe, this poetics’s revalorization of the “natural fallen man” of medieval Judeo-Christian Europe and frontal challenge to Scholasticism’s theocentric concept of God (according to which God had arbitrarily and contingently created “fallen” man for His own glory rather than for humanity’s sake — propter nos homines, as humanists would have it) was to lay the basis for the epochally new, because secular or increasingly degodded, poesis of being and its sixteenth century invention of Man (in the reoccupied place of Christian). While it was to be in terms of the Imaginary embedded in this poesis and correlating with this invention that the West was to effect its global expansion — beginning with the founding of its post-1492 Caribbean polities — and thereby initiate the single history with which we all have come increasingly to live. (I have presented and argued this at length in Wynter, “Columbus.”)

Why in addition, should such a second poetics, and its Cyclopean quest for the assumption and revalorization of the being and perspective of alterity, be able at one and the same time to negate, yet carry over so as to complete, the central thrust of that first poetics? Finally, why should the perspective of alterity defining of this second poetics be compelled to effect as radical a discontinuity from the acultural premise of the present order of Western thought, its “epistemological locus” and biocentric mode of the Imaginary, as the humanist elaborators of that first poetics, from Pico della Mirandola to Ficino, had been in their time compelled to do with the premise of atemporalism that founded mainstream Scholastic thought and its theocentric mode of the Imaginary (and so of the Real) to which late medieval Europe had come to feel itself just as captive as we now find ourselves to be to our own biocentric one? Thus Walcott ended Lavantille:

some crib, some grill or light
clanged shut on us in bondage, and withheld
us from that world below us and beyond,
and in its swaddling cerements we’re still bound. (88)

Defined firstly as terra nullius in the theological terms of the Pope’s Apostolic authority (Mudimbe 45) and as such, as non-Christian lands that were justly expropriatable by Christians, the Caribbean polities were to be born out of the very process of transformation by which the expanding states of the West were to make the papal Apostolic Authority and its theological concept of terra nullius into a function of their own new political ethic of “reason of state.” Within the terms of this shift, enabled at a broader level only by the terms of the new civic humanist Imaginary (Pocock 85-7) and its correlated poetics of the propter
nos, not only was hegemony gradually transferred from Church to state, but the new polities of the post-Columbus Caribbean were eventually to be grounded on a new juridical premise. This premise was that a “natural” difference of degree between the rational natures of Christian Europeans and indigenes (Page 38-9) which legitimated, in strict rather than papal terms, expropriation of the latter and their territory by successive European states. The new Caribbean worlds were thereby instituted as the first secular answer to the question of the source of evil (to the unde malum) as soon as not theology but firstly natural history and secondly biology/evolution became the new ground of knowledge.

With this transumption, Western behaviors in the public sphere would come to be motivated no longer by the Augustinian postulate of mankind’s enslavement to Original Sin as “the significant ill” or malum (Girardot 6) to be “redeemed” or “cured.” Rather (although the replacement was not immediate), the new postulate was to be the political one of mankind’s enslavement to the irrational aspects of its nature, growing differential degrees of such enslavement being ordained by Natural Law as the Judeo-Christian God’s agent on earth. This led to a central change. Where the Augustinian postulate had been actualized in the medi eval category of the Laiy as Other to the Redeemed in Spirit category of the Clergy (because voluntarily celibate), the new postulate was now to be embodied in a new category of “Human Others” (Pandion 2:3) that of indios and negros (i.e. natives) whose “enslavement” to ostensibly irrational polytheistic religion and ways of life was now made to actualize the new answer to the unde malum question and its postulation of a post-religious mode of “significant ill.” Simultaneously, Christian Europeans came more and more to embody the ostensibly rational category of Man, of “us humans.” The origin of today’s Caribbean thus lies not only in the context of a specific “local culture” but specifically, too, in the context of that culture’s first secularizing transformation of its religio-cultural field, of its until then supernaturally guaranteed poesis or mode of being.

If we see today’s Caribbean as having its source, then, in the intellectual revolution of humanism and its poetics of proper nos which revalued the “sinful being” of the Christian by reinventing it as the “rational being” of Man, and therefore in the mode of history to which its hybridly religio-secular transumption of the matrix Judeo-Christian culture Narrative would then give rise, then it was not, as the Créolistes propose, the “yoke of history” which determined the terms of the coexistence of the peoples of the Caribbean. Rather it was the yoke of a specific culture, conception of being, and mode of the Imaginary that were to function as the hegemonic “ground” of this history in its actual unfolding. These furnished the pre-nineteenth-century hierarchical terms in which the three founding groups, indigenous peoples, invading Europeans, and enslaved Middle Passage Africans, were to be “united on the same soil.” They furnished them, too, for their association with later groups who came to the Caribbean in the wake of slavery’s abolition, coming to be united with the others under the same “yoke of culture,” even though it had itself been transmuted by the nineteenth century intellectual revolution of Liberal or economic humanism and its reinvention of Man and its Imaginary in new and now totally degoded because biocentric terms.

Only in these terms is the acultural conception of Créolité and its premise of cultural métissage or mestizaje thinkable. Now, too, the equally acultural—purely biocentric—concept of Man given by the transmumed Malthusian/Darwinian answer (Blumenberg 222-5) to the question unde malum leads to the prescriptive definition of Trumper’s Negro as a “different kind o’ creature.” He belongs to a category that together with Césaire’s series of condemned Others, Brathwaite’s “homeless” nigger, and Walcott’s “Middle Passage inheritors,” is made into the bearer of the new mode of Cyclopean alterity instituting our contemporary mode of the Real:
As there are hyena-men and panther-men, 
so I shall be a Jew man 
a Kaffir man
a Hindu-from-Calcutta man
a man-from-Harlem-who hasn’t got the vote.

Famine man, curse man, torture man, you may seize
him at any moment, beat him, kill him,—yes perfectly
well kill him—accounting to no one, having to offer an
excuse to no one

a Jew man
a pogrom man
a whelp
a beggar. (Césaire, Return 47-9)

In light of all this, we may extend a central point made by V. Y. Mudimbe, enabling us to distinguish
two modes of difference: one of ethnicity or multiethnicity which functions within the “rhetoric of power”
of the victor/the Same (however oppositionally); one of radical alterity, as the mode of “vast difference”
which Lamming’s character must confront and deal with outside the victor’s or the Same’s (i.e. Man’s) rhetor-
ic power. Drawing on Foucault’s claims in The Order of Things, Mudimbe observes that an epistemolog-
al mutation occurred during the twentieth century that would change the terms of Western scholarship’s
representation of Africa. Within “the framework of the epistemology still current in the early twentieth cen-
tury, all discourses on alterity” could only be made as “commentaries or exegeses on excluded areas: primi-
tive experience, pathological societies, or non-normal functionality, understood in terms of a biological
model from which the determining terms—function, conflict, signification—emerged as classifiers with
the power of measuring the social, individual, or psychological distance vis-à-vis the model.” Because
there was only one model, that of the Same, anthropological as well as missionary studies of primitive
philosophy were centrally concerned with “the study of the distance from the Same to the Other” (Inven-
tion 81).

The mutation that Mudimbe observes as having occurred in the course of the century resulted from
universalizing the properties of the Same by representing them as those of an ostensibly self-contained
culture. This would now enable “the very possibility of a grid which, using new criteria—rule, norm and
system—could eventually account for the universality and the particularity of each cultural organization
according to its own rationality and historical strategies” (Invention 81). A multiplicity of Others could
now claim, on the model of the Same in its new guise, their own ostensibly still self-contained cultures/
multicultures.

Hence the paradox that it was in terms of the premises of the Same, the now globalized “local cul-
ture” of the West, that from the 1950s onwards a new way of speaking about other cultures, of their theodicies
and cosmogony, arose, in which their differences could be used to “grant a regional coherence and at the
same time witness to properties of the human mind and its universal potentialities.” Hence the paradox
that, its existence imagined in the very terms of the “universal” Western culture against which it states its
alleged self-contained and autonomous particularity, the Créolité movement (like all other variants of con-
temporary multiculturalism) must use the properties of that Western same to claim its ostensibly unique particularity. The dynamic fueling emergence of Creolism in 1989, born from opposition to the Negritude movement, must therefore be understood in terms of an epistemological mutation internal to Western culture. This itself was responding to the changed geopolitical situation of a post-World War II era marked global anti-colonial struggles and movements toward political independence by the non-West, moves, which, although begun in the 1920s, culminated only in the fifties and sixties.

Negritude, however, as Mudimbe further points out, had arisen as part of the struggle against the earlier conception according to which African cultures and expressions in the post-Middle Passage Diaspora were defined not just as distant from the europhone same, but as the most distant, and so as the utmost lack of the same.

Up to the 1920s, the entire framework of African social studies was consistent with the rationale of an epistemological field and its sociopolitical expressions of conquest. Even those social realities, such as art, languages, or oral literature, which might have constituted an introduction to otherness, were represse in support of theories of Sameness. Socially, they were tools strengthening a new organization of power and its political methods of reduction, namely assimilation or indirect rule. Within this context, négritude a student movement emerged in the 1930s in Paris...[which] mostly used poetry to explore and speak about their difference as blacks. (Invention 85)

The idea of speaking about “difference” is however a post-modern one and more appropriate to the contemporary movement of Créolité. In the dynamic of its first creative phase, Negritude had arisen, rather to protest representation of black peoples in the “ghostly narratives” of the victor West (Quint 8-9) as it ultimate loser Lack, redeemable to human status only by assimilation to the Same—to a blanchitude that a now wholly biologized nineteenth-century concept of the human took as isomorphic with “normal” Man Negritude, especially in its Césairean Caribbean form, attempted to assume the actual perspective of the loser-as-bearer of alterity, to transvalue—as in Césaire’s Cahier or his poem Mot/Word—the negative value of the signifiers of alterity imposed on the physiognomic being of all peoples of African descent as the transsumed form of medieval signifiers of otherness and by the logic of the likewise transsumed, because now biologized, form of the original answer to the unde m...lum question.

According to this last, Trumper’s category of the Negro to which the Creolists refer decisively in the original French (if not in the English) version of their Éloge as the Nègre with a capital N: 20 was now made to actualize the new transsumed conception of evil, malum, as sited in humankind’s enslavement to the random and contingent processes of Natural Selection, occupying the place (at the level of public existence) of humankind’s enslavement to Original Sin. The contemporary imaginary therefore stigmatized all attributes of this Other category’s abode of origin, Africa, in the name of another life and its ideal concept of the human, man, as lawfully as the Imaginary of medieval Europe stigmatized the Earth as the abode of fallen humanity in the name of another life and ideal concept of the human, Christian. Césaire exactly captured this stigmatization and its implications:

In the Martinican carnival, for example, our carnival devil with its horns, its red body and its constellation of mirrors had always puzzled me. Once, as I was in Africa with [André] Malraux and Senghor attending village festivities, all of a sudden I saw emerging from a path my Martiniquan mask. There it was, indeed. “Fantastic! Oh you have it too,” I said to a Senegalese. “what do you mean: we have it too? It is our
mask... It is the mask worn by our initiated," he replied.

Over there it is the mask one wears when one is initiated. All this is very symbolic and does have meaning. The oxhorns are the symbol of wealth and plenitude...

Extraordinary! That mask became here in Martinique the devil because we are a Catholic country, and as we say here: the god of the vanquished became the devil of the vanquisher... (Cézair, “Interview” 367-8)

The Negritude intellectuals and writers were however trained in this present mode of the Imaginary. Via their Western education, as Walcott wrote of his own case, they received it as a natural inheritance ("Muse of History" 25). Césaire's Negritude, therefore, could ostentatiously reject neither the canonized "other life" of the Western culture in which he had been educated nor indeed its great heresies, Marxism and Surrealism, as exteriorities. Rather, selected elements of this Imaginary gave him the ideas and influences, poetic and imaginative strategies, with which to go further than they had done, and effect a radical conceptual discontinuity in order to assume alterity, to create the "uncreated features of his face." This meant a face that had hitherto been made seeable only through the prism of its negative signifying function: as happened with the devil that the oxhead mask had become in the europhone Catholic Imaginary. For the positive meanings of symbolic birth and initiation into "true" being that it had in its original autocentric cultural sphere and that it kept, if in transmuted forms, in the underground of the popular Afrophone counter-cultural Imaginary had been the object of systematic repression within the terms of the hegemonic culture and its mode of Walcottian "Another life" ("Muse of History 25). Such repression was the condition both of the flowering of the hegemonic Imaginary and of the enactment of the Western bourgeois poiesis of being. Man in the reinvented terms of its second conception as a genetically selected Self: eugenic rather than, as before, rational. Of this Self, Trumper's Negro must necessarily be the genetically dysselected or non-evolved Other, embodied idea of a bio-evolutionarily determined different "kind o' creature," of a genetically inferior kind of human being. For this Imaginary, "realization of the rights of Man" necessarily excludes the Rights of its Other, the "Negro," as well as those of all other oppressés de la terre (Fanon's damnés, condemned of the earth) assimilated to the represented mode of Cyclopean alterity that the "Negro," as a "different kind o' creature," is made to signify and actualize.

Consequently, while the African négritude of the Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor (the négritude of one whose ancestors had not undergone the Middle Passage and whose cultural historical origins so did not lie in the trans-Atlantic slave trade) sought to define itself as a difference complementary to Europeanism, limited even to denotations of the terms Négritude and Négro-Africain, Césaire's post-Middle Passage Négritude, whose found ancestory indeed lay in the slave trade, spoke not of a difference of ethnicity between cultures but of the "vast difference" of alterity (Lamming, Castle 555), as prescribed by the terms of the now globalized "local culture" of the West. My proposal here is that if the late-medieval humanists' return to their untill then paganized and stigmatized Graeco-Roman conceptual heritage enabled them to conceptualize the new mode of political reason on whose basis the lay world would be enabled to free itself from the mode of difference in which the category of Laity (as associated with the earth and malum) was necessarily ontologically subordinate to that of Clergy, négritude's return to an even more stigmatized African conceptual heritage can enable us to use the original meaning of the oxhead mask to conceptualize a new mode of cultural reason. There, the "vast difference" of alterity will be identified and defined in transculturally applicable terms. Such terms will let us differentiate between Créolité's ethnicity as a "prop-
ertainty of the same' and an *alterity* that in order fully to enact itself must effect a "radical discontinuity" in the Same and its properties.

Many have have shown how institutions of initiation central to all traditional African societies mark *symbolic birth* by means of which young men and women break with their pre-initiate selves and with primarily biological attachments, in favor of loyalty to their *symbolic kin*. Cultures thereby enact and signiﬁcantly entrench the institution of specifically human forms of life. This is but one form in which all cultures represent human social life as always and only a mode of *symbolic life*. The initiation of this mode of course simultaneously enacts a culture's mode of Lack, alterity, or *symbolic death*. In the case given, everything associated with pre-initiate life will be marked negatively, with initiate life, positively. All cultures have their own forms of such symbolic life and death, codes that enact their poiesis of being, or positively marked criteria of symbolic life, only by the negatively marked mode of symbolic death or alterity.

We propose, then, that within the code enacting our present biocentric and bourgeois conception of the human, *Man* (one of whose signifiers of alterity or Human Other, the "Negro," is the category of all peoples of African descent), Trumper's discovery that the "Negro" is "a different kind of creature" from "Man" lets us deﬁne the "vast difference" he has come to experience as an *ontological difference* that is always a property of the code. This deﬁnition allows us to depict the tendency of "radical alterity" in Caribbean literature quite speciﬁcally as a tendency analogous to that of an earlier epochal Renaissance lay humanism (enacted in its poiesis of the *propter nos*). It seeks to re-code the code, to transvalue the negative value placed on the Negro as signiﬁer of alterity, human embodiment of the Cyclopean Other, with all other categories assimilated to its mode of Otherness, being negatively marked in terms speciﬁc to our global cultural order and its Imaginary. These include such markers as those of supposed less or non-evolution, of economic poverty, scarcity, idleness, and other forms of defectiveness.

Gézaire assumes this *alterity* via at least two such terms. One is that of the Negro as "genetically defective" because dissected (according to the bio-evolutionary criterion that the hegemonic Imaginary takes as deﬁning of *Man* in its now purely biologized conception): Let us suppose, he said in a recent interview, "Blacks (les nègres) had not been, let us say, a conquered people, indeed, an unfortunate and humiliated people; reverse history, make of them a conquering people. As far as I am concerned I believe there would have been no ngritude" (Tousson and Henry-Valmore ?). A correlated assumption is that of the category of alterity as actualized in *poverty* (the Poor and jobless embodying *Natural Scarcity* as the socioeconomic form of the new purely secular "significant ill" in the transumed place of Original Sin), which Man-as-homo economicus, and therefore breadwinner, must master if he is not to be swept away by Malthus's "iron laws of nature." It appears, in the the derivative terms of the *Éloge*, as the "opprimeés de la terre". It is this same expendable category, however, also embodied in Walcott's "Middle Passage inheritors," that is summed up in Gézaire's series of alterity figures.

In *Omeros*, Walcott catches something of these meanings, with his use of the Cyclopean metaphor, transferred from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean:

Only in you, across centuries
of the sea's parchment atlas, can I catch the noise
of the surf lines wandering like the shambling fleece
of the lighthouse's flock, that Cyclops whose blind eye
shut from the sunlight...

and the blind lighthouse, sensing the edge of a cape,

paused like a giant, a marble cloud in its hands,
to hurl its boulder that splashed into phosphorous
stars; then a black fisherman, his stubbled chin coarse

as a dry sea-urchin's, hoisted his flour-sack
sail on its bamboo spar, and scanned the opening line
of our epic horizon... *(Omeros 13)*

Or again:
And Achille himself had been one of those children
whose voices are surf under a galvanized roof;
sheep bleating in the schoolyard; a Caribbean

whose woolly crests were the backs of the Cyclops's flock,
with the smart man under one's belly. Blue stories
we recited as children lifted with the rock

of Polyphemus. *(Omeros 323)*

Because the epic feat narrated is the epic feat of the poem itself, however, these touches are incidental, reminiscences of the Cyclops, not the figure itself. It is in Césaire's *Cahier* that the Cyclops figure appears as a loser Other to a new mode of the Odysseus victor, a loss now defined by the alterity accoutrements of both his Blackness and his poverty, and set in the powerful episode of the poet's confrontation with a choice of options, a test of allegiance. Recounting it, he shows himself to have failed. But at the same time, by writing the poem, responding to the challenge of imaging the cause of alterity, of the loser, outside the terms of the victor's strategic projection, he performatively marks out the parameters of what the Cyclopean quest, the Other's narrative from its own perspective, must necessarily be. Let us call this episode *Encounter with the Cyclops on a Paris Tram*:

And I, and I,
I who sang with clenched fist
You must be told the length to which I carried cowardice.
In a tram one night, facing me, a Negro.

He was a Negro tall as a pongo who tried to make himself very small on a tram seat. On that filthy tram seat he tried to abandon his gigantic legs and his starved boxer's trembling hands. And everything had left him, was leaving him. His nose was like a peninsula off its moorings even his nectaritude was losing its colour through the effects of a perpetual tanner's bleach. And the tanner was Poverty. A great sudden long-eared bat whose claw-marks on that face were scarred, scabby islands. Or perhaps Poverty was tireless workman fashioning some deformed cartridge...
He was an ungainly Negro without rhythm or measure.
A Negro whose eyes rolled with bloodshot weariness.
A Negro without shame, and his big smelly toes sniggered in the deep
gaping lair of his shoes.
Poverty, it has to be said, had taken great pains to finish him off.
She had hollowed the eye socket and painted it with a cosmetic of dust
and rheum.
She had stretched the empty space between the solid hinge of the jaws
and the bone of an old, worn cheek.
On this she had planted the shiny little bristles of several days' beard. She
had maddened the heart and bent the back.
And the whole thing added up perfectly to a hideous Negro, a peevish
Negro, a melancholy Negro, a slumped Negro, hands folded as in prayer
upon a knotty stick.
A Negro shrouded in an old, threadbare jacket. A Negro who was comical
and ugly, and behind me women giggled as they looked at him.
He was COMICAL AND UGLY.
COMICAL AND UGLY, for a fact.
I sported a great smile of complicity... (Return 68-9)

Lamming's account of how he came by the title of In the Castle of My Skin makes clear that the same
assumption of alterity was the dynamic imperative behind his novel as well:

I first came across the phrase, "castle of my skin," in a poem by the West Indian poet, Derek Walcott.
In a great torrent of rage inseparable from hate, the poet is addressing some white presence, and the as-
sault is stated: "You in the castle of your skin, I among the swineherd." This phrase had coincided with my
search for a title, and I remembered that night and knew that in spite of his Age, meaning Skin, Pa could
never possibly see himself among swine. Nor could the village. So I thought it was correct, and even nec-
nessary to appropriate that image in order to restore the castle where it belonged. (Pleasures 228)

Lamming's classic anti-colonial novel depicts the political and social movements by means of which the
Anglophone Caribbean island of Barbados won its political independence from Britain. But it also por-
trays the limits of that independence. For the novel shows how the people of one of the small villages, en-
couraged by the old man, Pa, shares in that struggle, only to find that in the wake of independence the new
nationalist bourgeoisie, speculating with land in the overall goal of "development," is responsible for up-
rooting them from the housespots they had traditionally occupied over the years. Pa must therefore leave
the village to spend his few last years in the Almshouse. In other words, since the logic of the bourgeois
Imaginary and its "Another life" involves the rights of Man to accumulate more and more property and
cannot include Rights of the Poor (who must be made to actualize the malum and its "significant ill" as the
leper/leprosy had been made to actualize the malum of Original Sin in pre-Renaissance Europe) the end
of the novel logically shows the dispossession of the non-property Pa and the rest of the villagers as the
inevitable by-product of the ostensible "common good" of "national economic growth."

For this narrative, therefore, as long as Man is defined as the masterer of the malum of economic
scarcity, and as such homo oeconomicus, on the basis of his ownership of mobile property, or capital, the
non-propertied villagers including the old man Pa, are inevitably the losers, as Trump's negro is inevitably a "different kind o' creature." Both categories serve as the actualizers of alterity in our present biocentric Imaginary of the human as a genetically selected and purely biologized mode of being whose origins lie, unmediated by culture and the Word, in the purely extrahuman process of Evolution. They serve, that is, in the same way as had the category of the Laity as actualizer of alterity to the medieval order's theocentric conception of the human as an arbitrarily created contingent being whose negative legacy of Original Sin had left him hopelessly enslaved to his fallen flesh, redeemable only through the sacraments of the Church.

Lamming's expropriation of the image of the castle, and his restoring it to where it belonged—to the non-propertied—is, like Césaire's Negritude and its daring to say, I, the Nigger, I, the non-selected human, therefore constitutes as deep a challenge to our present conception of Man, to its biocentric notion of human being, and to its correlated answer to the question unde mulum, as the lay humanists' poetics of the propter nos had to the medieval order's theocentric Imaginary and conception of being. That first poetics and its assumption of alterity set in motion the processes of the degodding of being and secularization of human knowledge on whose basis Caribbean politics and the modern world system were laid down. The assumption of alterity at work in Lamming's novel as in Césaire's work, opens the frontier onto a parallel possibility.

This is that of a second poetics of the propter nos, able to call in question the present human's ostensibly purely biologized mode of being, and so our present answer to the mulum question as a matter of human enslavement to random and arbitrary processes of bioevolutionary natural selection and of imperative adherence to an ostensibly obligatory order of a bioevolutionary cosmos. Really at issue is our not-yet conscious subordination to the hegemonic Imaginary as generated from this answer (its prescriptive code of symbolic life and death) and to the order of consciousness to which its poesis of being gives rise, Walcott's "shared imagination" of "another life", viewed by Césaire as the mulum de désêtre (Toumson and Henry-Valmore 212). In its terms, we have seen, two categories—Trump's "Negro" (the Creolists' capital-N Negro), experiencing himself as a "different kind o' creature," and the non-propertied Pa, representing the Poor and jobless oppressed of the earth—must continue to be dispossessed, the Others of a victorious elite whose ownership is symbolically authorized by the "other life" of their Imaginary.

For such alterity figures, condemned always to lose in the victor's narrative, the choice or refusal to assume the perspective and cause of alterity is choice or refusal of the Cyclops factor. To choose to assume the loser's perspective is to image its cause (prospectively forging a new Imaginary), and so call in question the "memory," the dominant Imaginary and its "other life," whose exclusion of its Human Others (Negro and non-propertied jobless Poor) from the Rights of Man is as much prescribed by its laws as was the execution of Captain Cook by those of the Imaginary of the then culturally autocentric Hawaiians: at first accepted as the god Lono, he had breached the ritual proscriptions of the logic (Sahlins 38, 46, 79) of their governing code of symbolic life and death (Wymter, "Beyond" 641).

In his Introduction to Michel de Certeau's Heterologies, Wlad Godzich observes how the great sociopolitical upheavals of the late fifties and sixties, especially those in the name of decolonization and liberation, had a deep and challenging impact on Western ways of knowing. However, decolonization was soon to be followed by a reterritorialization, a reinforcing, in new terms, of these old orthodox ways of knowing. In this context the Creolist movement can be seen as moving to reterritorialize, since the late eighties, the assumption of alterity that had come out of the Negritude movement of the Francophone Caribbean from
the 1930s on and out of the anti-colonial movements of the Angophone Caribbean of the late 1930s through the 1950s. These movements had led to the emergence of a literature, exemplified in Césaire's *Cahier* and Lamming's *Castle*—indeed in the range of their work, marked by an aesthetic power and force that was not to be approached by later post-colonial writers. For this had been a literature fuelled above all by the dynamic of alterity, the imperative to deconstruct the overarching *unde malum* premise of our present Imaginary, which Elsa Goveia aptly identified as the status-organizing principle of Caribbean societies: the premise that "the fact of blackness is a fact of (racial/genetic) inferiority" ("Social Framework" 9-14).

The Creolists sought not only to contain, but to displace and negate this earlier thrust. They wanted to replace its imperative to deconstruct the transformation of *meaning* with a new "imperative": usage of the Creole language as basis of a supposedly authentic mode of being. Trying to make Creole vernacular the linchpin of an ostensibly in-itself Creole cultural authenticity, they therefore begin their manifesto (itself written in French) with the issue of Creole language use, posed as the touchstone of Martinican writing. They argue that although Gilbert Gratiant (an early collaborator of Césaire, but also antagonist in "métissage" and Marxist argument) had attempted to create a Creole literature by writing a novel in Creole and so was a "founding father," because this literature had not been developed then truly Martinican and Caribbean literature yet existed. Their *pays natal* literature that should have followed Gratiant's novel had been blocked by the "emergence of a multi-dimensional phenomenon" that although said to "have had its origin in the Creole genesis" had for "several generations" overshadowed this genesis. The phenomenon was Aimé Césaire's *Nègritude*. Although in the context of a "totally racist world" Negritude had restored mother, matrix Africa, "black civilization," and given "Creole society its African dimension," it had also had a negative effect. It had made a situation in which the ("authentic") literary line of descent from Gratiant, "visionary of our authenticity," with a few other writers of his time, had been submerged ("In Praise" 887-8).

A rhetorical sleight of hand here enables the reality of two cultures (that of sixteenth century Western Europe, symbolized by the Cross and the Pillar as markers of the expropriation of non-Christian lands to European temporal and Christian spiritual sovereignty, and that of West Africa, symbolized by the Oxhead Mask) and of the two language complexes giving them expression—Creole emerging from their syncratic interaction—to be repressed. In the end, this repression serves entirely to eliminate the West African pole. They canonize Gratiant by defining him as an author who, placing his "writerly expression on the poles of both languages, both cultures, French and Creole, had magnetized from opposite directions the compasses of our consciousness." The Creole language, now supposed to have come into existence sui generis, displaces the West African matrix.

Gratiant's novel in Creole had set on foot exploration of "the vocabulary the forms, the proverbs, the mentality, the sensibility, in a word, of the intelligence of this cultural entity in which we are attempting, today, a salutary submersion." Gratiant and others writing as he did come to be "the precious keepers of the stones, of the broken statues, of the disarranged pieces of pottery, of the lost drawings, of the distorted shapes: of this ruined city which is our foundation." The maudlin rhetoric's pathos, paradoxically trying to imitate Césaire, matches the thought's poverty. But the politico-cultural purpose is consistent—reterritorialization of Negritude's radical alterity to replace it with a Western bourgeois identity-system of a supposed "Creole" ethnicity: hence the choice of Gratiant's Creole novel as the founding text and displacement of Césaire's *Cahier*. The line from Gratiant, they proclaim, however submerged, had enabled today's Creolist writers to "achieve" their "return" to the native land: without it "there would have been no signs or support of any kind" ("In Praise" 888). The Negritude movement should thus be seen as having served
to close off the path of their island’s return to the **authentic or true path of its Creole language and culture.**

I have been agreeing fundamentally with those who urge that meaning and being are coeval. Transformation of being entails one of meaning—resemanticization of the Imaginary, of culture’s self-conception, and so of the Real. Language is thus a function of meaning, of being, subordinate to the “governing code”—the meaning of whose transformation Césaire recognized in that illumination we saw. The Oshead Mask that in its auto-centric West African cultural field of Origin had been a marker of successful symbolic rebirth of youths into full humanity, in its Western cultural *Manhood* variant had been made into the marker of symbolic death, into the negative sign of the Devil, its meaning wholly inverted to a Judeo-Christian conception of being and non-being in both its religious (spiritual) and secular (biological) variants.

In this context the clash between Creolists and Aliterists can be seen as one not only between the primacy of language and the primacy of meaning, but centrally as a clash over the nature of being and, further, as one over their respective answers to “the source of evil” (unde malum) question. For Césaire the “source of evil” lies in the désêtre or alienation of the Martinican subject, induced to deny the part of himself that had been semantically stigmatized by the dominant culture as “la part maudite” (cursed, doomed or ill-fated part), as the signifier of “symbolic death” or of Cyclopean alterity (in much the same way as medieval Laity had been forced to deny its “fallen flesh” as its part maudite or the Senegalese initiate his/her pre-initiate self).

The Creolists answer the unde malum question in terms of language; so in those of a “property of the same.” Reenacting the premise of European nineteenth century Romantic paradigms (as they do in their fiction, where, James Arnold shows, they reenact the narrative cum ideological strategies of a George Sand: “Créolité” 5), the Creolists propose that the multiple ills and crisis situation of Martinique is due to the “desolidification” of its writers and thinkers from their “native” Creole language as the substrate of their Creole culture and being. Repeating another Romantic cliché that distinguishes between volkisch concrete particularity (good) and abstract universality or “cosmopolitanism” (evil), they propose that this detachment from their “native” language and culture had been initiated by Césaire’s Négritude. Although protesting against French colonization, it had done so, they claim, “in the name of universal generalities thought in the Western way of thinking, and with no consideration for our cultural reality.” As a result, those following the path of Césaire’s négritude had been exhausted by indulgence in “a really suspended writing, far from the land, far from the people, far from the readers, far from any authenticity except for an accidental, partial, and secondary one” (“In Praise” 889).

This volkisch “blood and soil” usage of “authenticity” as a value-term shows the mimetic nature of Creolist “particularity,” the “exteriority” of the paradigm through which Creolism imagines itself. In his *Order of Things*, Foucault defines this paradigm in the course of analyzing nineteenth century philology and in the overall context of then new “fundamental arrangements of knowledge” whose disciplinary discourses instituted our present conception of the human *Man*. Breaking with the earlier classical discipline of general grammar, for which “language arose when the noise produced by the mouth or the lips had become a letter, it is accepted from now on that language exists when noises have been articulated and divided into a series of distinct sounds,” so that “the whole being of language is now one of sound.” The new discipline of linguistics was foundational of this second and Liberal humanist reinvention of *man* on the biocentric model of a purely natural organism and on the cultural model of pre-discursive being. This new concep-
tion of the nature of language as one of sound explains the interest, from the nineteenth century on, of European scholars and writers in "non-written literature, in folktales and spoken dialects." Only these could now count as signs of pristine and authentic being/presence. In consequence language "is sought in its most authentic state: in the spoken word," while the word is considered "dried up and frozen into immobility by writing." Here the mystique that still governs the Creolists manifesto is being born, one in which by "mean of the ephemeral and profound sound it produces, the spoken word accedes to sovereignty" (Foucault 286).

Sound, speech, becomes for the Creolists the touchstone of concrete particularity. Writing, presented as marking abstraction, becomes the vulgar sign of a cosmopolitan universality, mark of "inauthenticity." Negritude, cosmopolitanism incarnate, say the Creolists, had seduced young writers from their "Caribbeaness" (whose touchstone of authenticity is use of Creole speech, or, Arnold notes, of "Creolized" French). So if, as Borges brilliantly observed, the Koran has no camels, then the Koran of the Creolists' Caribbeanness demands the presence of camels, defined by writers' use of "touches" of Creole speech verifying the Western bourgeois mystique through which the "spoken word" accedes to metaphysical "sovereignty" and, with it, to the sovereignty of Man's meanings, albeit in its Caribbean Creole variant: sovereignty of a familiar imaginary whose governing code prescribes Cyclopean alterity in the terms of Trump's Negro as its symbolic death.

The claim that use of Creole speech signifies "authenticity" and the use of this claim to attack Césaire, both in the Éloge, are further elaborated by one of the most prominent Creolists, Raphael Confiant, as prelude to his more general accusation that Césaire had chosen to refuse the "concrete particularity" of Martinique's "native" Creole reality in exchange for an "abstract universality" based on the exteriority of Negritude's self-assertion and cause—of the capital-N Negro and the (Fanonian) oppressed of the earth. In his book-length study of Césaire, especially in the section on "The Creole Paradox," Confiant charges that although Césaire had grown up on a Basse-Pointe sugar plantation, where he had inhabited a linguistically Creolophone world (daily life and work all taking place in Creole), his whole life he was to have a "strange relation to Creole speech." While in public radio addresses Césaire might now and then use a semiphrase of Creole, he would quickly revert to speaking "the language of Racine" (never mind that Confiant is himself accusing Césaire in the "language of Racine")! Going on to attack what he defines as Césaire's Creolephobia, Confiant focuses on part of an interview Césaire had with Jacqueline Leiner in 1970. Confiant cites Césaire: "For me it's simply that writing is tied to French and not to Creole." But he tendentiously takes the statement out of the wider context of Leiner's question to which it replied. This decontextualization lets Confiant interpret Césaire's reply as indicative of his reflex contempt for Creole (Confiant 96).

Leiner's question was whether as a Caribbean writer he too had experienced the problem about which the Arab writer Malek Hadad had written: that as a writer of Arab extraction who could not express himself in Arabic he yet felt himself a prisoner of the French language, since he was unable to use it to express his Arab sensibility. León Laleau, she remarked, had also spoken of the difficulty he had had in having to use French words to express the sensibility of a heart from Senegal. How did he, Césaire, confront this problem? It was in this context that Césaire pointed out that he had never felt himself to be a "prisoner of the French language" because for him, growing up on Martinique, writing had been as tied to the French language, as everyday speech had been tied to Creole. In consequence, all his efforts in his writing had been directed to inflecting the French language, transforming it so that it could be made to express "ce moi, ce moi-nègre, ce moi-créole, ce moi-martiniquais, ce moi-antillais." Indeed, his interest in poetry stemmed from the fact that "it is the poet who makes language." Césaire's answer, then, that for him writing
is tied to French, had nothing to do with being Creolophobic. Indeed earlier in the same interview he explained to Leiner that while Creole made use of a largely French vocabulary, it is in fact structured on an African-derived grammar and phonetics (Leiner xvi). Both French and Creole were his "natural inheritances."

The really interesting point of Césaire’s answer is that he implies a fundamental difference between the Caribbean subject that he is and Arab and Senegalese subjects. This difference is that French, as the language of the elite or the official high culture of the Caribbean, was no less “natural” to him than Creole, for, unlike the once linguistically-speaking auto-centric worlds of Laleau and Menmi, the new worlds of Caribbean politics (ones no longer those of the indigenous Arawaks and Caribs) had not pre-existed the sixteenth century expansion of the West. Nor had the West, as secularized transform of Latin-Christian Europe, pre-existed its relation with those post-1492 Caribbean politics. Rather, because these island worlds can be said to have been born out of that process of intellectual and imaginative revolution by whose poetics medieval Europe had reinvented itself, so a new West and the Caribbean had come into existence as inseparably linked as Prospero and Caliban were in Shakespeare's play, and as they are, tellingly, in Césaire’s adaptation, A Tempest. For post-1492 Caribbean societies, there had been, as Gisant also points out, no before, no outside to the Text of the West, to which there could be a return.

There had been, however, another Text which, like that of the West, was to initiate its own expansion. This Text, carried inter alia by the Ochend Mask on the slaveships of the Middle Passage, was one that bore other meanings. It is the processes of syncretic interaction between the two, as well as clash and conflict, the one as the Text of the victorious dominant elite, the other as the Text of the elite’s dominated Other, the loser, each with their mode of “another life,” that therefore define the cultural and linguistic matrix of the Caribbean. Just as, Jose Luis González points out in a decisive analysis, elite europhone and popular afrophone cultures daily interact with and influence each other in Puerto Rico (González 18, 25-30), so in Martinique an official French interacts with a vernacular Creole of which popular forces are the bearers (not the Creolists’ new literary academic caste). An example is the new afrophone musical form of zouk. For Césaire growing up in Martinique, the two languages would, as he observes to Leiner, have permeated each other to such an extent as to be inseparable places on a continuum. There are Martinicans, he said, who speak Creole thinking they are speaking French, and vice versa. At the same time, Creole itself, born from French and largely West African languages, may be defined indifferently as neo-European or neo-African. The frontier between them (as in the Anglophone Caribbean between English and Creoles) remains indeterminate. If Creole was his vernacular, the language of immediacy, of folklore, of intense feelings, so French served (as it now does for the Creolists in their Éloge) when a more universally communicable medium of conceptualization was called for. In such a situation it is clear that the issue of “sensibility” for the Caribbean subject cannot be the same as for an Arabic or Senegalese writer.

A paradox of the Creolists’ linguistic position emerges here. The hierarchy that does exist between French and Creole is one that can only be dealt with from a perspective of “radical alterity” and from its challenge to the inferiority/superiority rule or status-organizing principle of Caribbean social structure, where, Goveia has pointed out, the “fact of blackness must be seen as a fact of inferiority” (14). The negative value meanings set on Creole language and its use are not primarily due to its Creole nature. Rather they are set as part of the reproduction of social power instituting Caribbean societies. In terms of their Imaginary, because the Negro category must function as marker of Human Otherness (of Cyclopean alterity) to our present conception of the human, Man, so all items associated with Africa, as the marker of this
alterity's culture of origin, must be negatively marked.

It is a parallel and culture-specific inferiority/superiority status-organizing rule, then, that prescribe not only that the facts of Blackness, Poverty, and joblessness should be facts of an ostensibly bio-evolutionarily determined genetic inferiority, but also that all Caribbean Creoles should be stigmatized, not only a languages reflecting a supposed inferiority of the original African linguistic matrix but also the second social-class and racialized inferiority of the mostly popular forces who were and are its bearers, principal inventors, and everyday users. In other words, the Caribbean Creoles are stigmatized as a fact of their alterity status, not as signifiers of ethnicity. The Creolists, with politically correct Creole "touches" in their largel French essays and fiction, represent Creole in terms of ethnicity to propose that the issue is engagement with the use of the Creole language, rather than with meaning and the governing code of the hegemonic culture of Man, its memory, and Imaginary. The choice confronting Caribbean writers, for the Creolists, is therefore that of writing or of not writing in Creole or, more specifically, of making use of rhythmic intonations or even quotations from the language—as Walcott does in the brilliant tour de force that is his poem Omeros:

When cutlass cut smoke, when cocks surprise their arseholes
by shitting eggs, he cursed, black people go get rest
from God; at which point a fierce cluster of arrows
targeted the sore, and he screamed in the yam rows. (21)

For the Creolists, this supplants the choice and task of assuming alterity. But it is in the latter's term that Caribbean writers must seek, like the Renaissance lay humanists, to transform meaning and revalorize the human away from its conception as a mode of being enslaved to the extracultural, extrahuman, and random processes of bio-evolutionary Natural Selection; as a being whose contingency and expendability is actualized in the negation of Trumper's Negro, in the expendability and degradation of the non-proper tied and Jobless Poor—both trapped in their imposed roles as Cyclopean Other to our biocentric conception of Man. Our task is to resemanticize meaning/ being from the perspective of alterity. So Césaire has consistently tried to do, refusing what he calls the Creolists' desolidification with Africa, defining it as the cursed and negatively marked part of themselves, with this the fundamental attribute of the "malum" of their/our désir, alienation from ourselves, our consciousness.

Just so does his poem "Mot" first image all the negatively marked Cyclopean signifiers of symbolic death:

and let me be nailed by all the arrows
and their bitterest curare
to the beautiful center-stake of very cool stars

the word nigger
sprung fully armed from the howling
of a poisonous flower

the word nigger
all filthy parasites...
the word nigger
a sizzling flesh and horny matter
burning, acrid
the word nigger

like the sun bleeding from its claw
onto the sidewalk of clouds
the word nigger
like the last laugh calved by innocence
between the tiger's fangs... (Cé saire, Collected Poetry 229)

Then, in a decisive move, he re-images, resemanticonizes these negations as the opening onto a New Grand Narrative of Emancipation, of Trump's "Negro as a different kind o' creature," of the dispossessed non-properied Pa on his way to the almshouse (the Creolists' mocked opprimés de la terre, Fanon's precisely defined damnés). It is a new narrative of emancipation whose expropriation of the image of the human, with its restoration to where it belongs, I have here defined in terms of both continuity and rupture as that of the second poetics of the propeter nos. This poetics is the harbinger not now of the natural sciences as was the first but of Cé saire's proposed new science of the word—a science whose equations can at last make our human world(s) intelligible ("Poetry and Knowledge" xlix):

and as the word sun is a cracking of bullets
and the word night a ripping of taffeta
the word nigger
hardened don't you know
with the summer thunder
expropriated
by incredulous freedoms (Collected Poetry 228-30)

Before Cé saire, before Fanon, Jacques Roumain of Haiti had prophesied these "incredulous freedoms," and had done so in a victor's narrative no longer Odysseus's, but the Cyclops's. From the perspective of alterity, it plots the quest to control the governing codes of symbolic life and death and their Imaginary, whose victor's narratives have hitherto governed us:

car nous aurons choisis notre jour
le jour des sales nègres...
des sales hindous...
des sales juifs....
Et nous voici debout
Tous les damnés de la terre
("Sales nègres," Ebony Wood 44-57)

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Caribbean Literature, The Cyclops Factor and the Second Poetics of Propter Nos


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