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Creole Carnival: Unwrapping the Pleasures and Paradoxes of the Gift of Creolization

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Creole Carnival: Unwrapping the Pleasures and Paradoxes of the Gift of Creolization

Kevin Frank

I

In *The Pleasures of Exile* (1992), George Lamming identifies the colonizer's "gift of language" as a problem for all Caribbean critical traditions: "Caliban is his [Prospero's] convert, colonized by language, and excluded by language. It is precisely this gift of language, this attempt at transformation which has brought about the pleasure and paradox of Caliban's exile" (15). Lamming adds that while he is a direct descendant of slaves (Calibans), he is also "a direct descendant of Prospero worshipping in the same temple of endeavour, using his legacy of language [...] to push it further, reminding the descendants of both sides that what's done is done, and can only be seen as a soil from which other gifts, or the same gift [may be] endowed with different meanings." Another such gift, hinted at in Lamming's sense of dual ancestry, is creolization, a major interpretive model applied to Caribbean culture and Caribbean poetics. By poetics I mean something similar to what Paget Henry describes: "Strategies of symbolic and textual production, in particular to the ways in which concept, word, image, trope, plot, character, and other structural components of a work of art are brought together to create new meanings [...] also an ordering of meanings that is capable of shaping human behavior" (104).

The preponderance of evidence in Caribbean poetic texts from the late eighteenth century through the twentieth century suggest that what is presumed to be done regarding creolization is actually not. In his seminal study, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, Edward Kamau Braithwaite outlines the cross-cultural phenomenon: "Creolization [...] was a cultural process that took place within a creole

society—that is, within a tropical colonial plantation polity based on slavery” (306). Braithwaite presents ample proof of such creolization, and there is more than enough evidence within Caribbean culture and Caribbean writing of creolization as an ongoing practice that continues to this day. The occurrence of creolization, then, is not in question. What is in question, however, is whether or not creolization is the best critical model for imagining and interpreting Caribbean, postcolonial literature and culture because, presumably, it is a way of subverting old biases that underpinned colonial subordination and exploitation. Did or does creolization transform biased colonial legacies and endow different meanings to the Creoles? Persisting class/colour divisions, continued privileging of one side over the other (or others) in the creole mixture, and the carnivalesque function of creole as a mask for values and prejudices underlying such privileging demonstrate that the answer is no, at least not yet.

II

In his essay “Textual Error and Cultural Crossing: A Caribbean Poetics of Creolization,” J. Michael Dash correctly points to Édouard Glissant’s favouring of the creolization concept over “métissage,” in part because creolization suggests “a process of constant transformation” (165). This view of creolization is supported in Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourse*, indicating that Glissant is among those who see great potential in creolization to transform Caribbean poetics: “If we speak of Creolized cultures (like Caribbean culture, for example) it is not to define a category that will be opposed by its very nature to other categories (‘pure’ cultures), but in order to assert that today infinite varieties of creolization are open to human conception, both on the level of awareness and on that of intention: in theory and in reality” (140). Glissant continues:

Creolization as an idea is not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of a people: indeed no people had been spared the cross-cultural process. The idea of creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify ‘unique’ origins that the race safeguards and prolongs. In Western tradition, genealogical descent guarantees racial exclusivity, just as Genesis legitimizes genealogy. To assert peoples are Creolized is to deconstruct the category of “Creolized” that is considered as halfway between two pure extremes.

Richard Burton is of another camp: those who see creolization as a process that maintains many of the negative vestiges of the earliest

(slavery and colonial) stages in the creolizing process. Using a distinction suggested by Orlando Patterson, he contends, “What took place was a ‘segmentary’ rather than ‘synthetic’ creolization” (5), resulting in “a continuum of overlapping and competing cultural forms, all of them creole or creolized, that [he labels] ‘Euro-Creole,’ ‘Meso-Creole’ (the ‘middle culture,’ corresponding to the mesolect of ‘middle language,’ of the free coloured classes and certain sections of the slave elite), and ‘Afro-Creole’ (6).

Braithwaite’s own metaphor suggests one cause for questioning the transformative potential of the creolization model. Speaking of the area of creolization where “the greatest damage was done to white creole apartheid policy and where the most significant—and lasting—inter-cultural creolization took place” (303), namely, in sexual relations, he declares, “The visible and undeniable result of these liaisons was the large and growing coloured population of the island, which, in its turn, acted as a *bridge*, a kind of social cement between the two main colours of the island’s structure, thus further helping (despite the resulting class/colour divisions) to integrate the society” [emphasis added] (305). Wilson Harris also favours this notion of a bridge as a symbol of transfiguration. In *The Womb of Space* for instance, comparing Yeats’s *Sailing to Byzantium* to Césaire’s *Return to My Native Land*, he argues: “The ‘consumption’ of ritual organ, heart or lung, is the art of the Yeatsian ‘dying animal’ through which to throw a bridge across worlds and to make native and miraculously alive what is alien or apparently doomed” (122). The main problem with the bridge metaphor is that most people ultimately aspire (wittingly or unwittingly, or knowingly but without acknowledging so,) to one essentialist, segmented part or the other. Additionally, the basic laws of physics tell us that, without adequate support, too much weight on any part is apt to bring the bridge tumbling down. I am not being facetious about this. The evidence is that the side of the bridge most people aspire to is the dominant one.

Some of the very evidence cited by Braithwaite indicates that the African influence upon the creolizing process was seen pejoratively. For instance, he relays Edward Long’s negative view of the influence of Negro servants upon white Creole women of the Jamaican country areas:

‘We may see, in some of these places, a very fine young woman awkwardly dangling her arms with the air of a Negroe-servant, lolling almost the whole day upon beds or settees, her head muffled up with

two or three handkerchiefs [...]. At noon, we find her employed in gobbling pepper-pot, seated on the floor, with her sable hand-maids around her. [...] Her ideas are narrowed to the ordinary subjects that pass before her [...] the tittle-tattle of the parish; the tricks, superstitions, diversions, and profligate discourses, of black servants, equally illiterate and unpolished.' (301)

There is also, for example, Maria Nugent's view of the debilitating influence of the Creole language, associated mainly with Negroes:

'The Creole language is not confined to the Negroes. Many of the ladies, who have not been educated in England, speak a sort of broken English, with an indolent drawling out of their words, that is very tiresome if not disgusting. I stood next to a lady one night, near a window, and, by the way of saying something, remarked that the air was much cooler than usual; to which she answered, 'Yes, ma-am, *him rai-ly to fra-ish.*' (302)

Though old, these depreciatory views of one side of the white/black binary in the creolizing process persist in contemporary imaginations, including Creole imaginations, intimating that old biases have not been subverted.

The racial prejudice that lends to a sense of separate, superior and inferior, creolized cultures gives us pause in our valorization of creolization. Braithwaite asserts that "the single most important factor in the development of Jamaican society was [...] a cultural action—material, psychological and spiritual—based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and—as white/black, culturally discrete groups—to each other" (296). We may extrapolate that this cultural action applies to Caribbean society in general. Moreover, when he takes on the way this cultural action has been seen as a sign of pluralism he avows, "The acceptance and continuation of the idea of a 'plural' society, with the consequences and assumptions already outlined, has been [...] absorbed into the bloodstream of West Indian thought by the last of the 'orientations' listed above—the educated middle class, most finished product of unfinished creolization" (310-11). But, he adds:

For them [the educated middle class] the society is 'plural' in so far as it appears to remain divided into its old colonial alignments [...]. Unlike the Euro-creole elite, or the plantocracy of our period, they lack confidence, economic power, and the ability to create structures. In

this sense, then, the concept of a 'plural society' would appear to be a colonial rather than a creole contribution. The creole society of the period of slavery did not conceive of itself as 'plural,' but as made up of two *separate* (superior and inferior) cultures. (311)

As we will see in a moment, the biased mindset of Creoles during slavery remains salient and is cause for questioning how the concept of creolization really functions, not merely as a symbolic enterprise, but in actuality in Caribbean imaginations. In other words, we are not yet at the point where creolization is viewed with equanimity.

III

Set in Barbados in the 1790's, J.W. Orderson's novel *Creoleana* (1842) is a wonderful exhibition of the sort of disparaging colonial perspective of creolization seen in Edward Long above. It depicts the separateness of creole cultures, inferior and superior, the former mixed race or mulatto Creole, and the latter, presumably of pure European race and descent, born in the Caribbean. The story's heroine, Caroline Fairfield, a white Creole and the legitimate heiress of the Fairfield estate, is described in glowing terms:

Her countenance was the true index of a soul replete with intelligence, benevolence, and tenderness; her complexion of the most transparent whiteness tinged with a delicate roseate hue; her teeth like rows of pearl peeping between twin rosebuds pouting to be kissed, which her expressive dark blue eyes were like crystals illumined with rays of day-spring light. There was yet that diffidence and unobtrusiveness in her whole deportment, blending with the grace of unaffected gentility, that rendered her an object of irresistible attraction, captivating alike the heart and the understanding, by the loveliness of her person, the purity of her mind, and the fascination of her conversation. (32)

Caroline's half-caste stepsister, Lucy, the mulatto Creole daughter of an "unhallowed connexion" (26) between Mister Fairfield and a slave, is described oppositely: "Her countenance gave an expression of mirth and simplicity to all she said. With much levity she united a warm frankness of heart and a willing disposition to please; and she possessed a lively feeling of gratitude. The great error of her conduct, and which required correction, was that of too much flippancy of manner and a habit of familiarity unbecoming her situation" (33). In this contrast of countenances, whereas Caroline's lends to conversation deemed fascinating, Lucy's

lends to speech associated with mirth and simplicity. Among other things, the connotation of language in these descriptions is that Caroline commands interest because she is interesting or intelligent. Lucy, however, appears to be silly or unintelligent. These implied messages are a few ways of marking one type of Creole superior and the other inferior. Lucy's inferiority is further indicated in other descriptions of her. For example, she is "giddy and wild" (43), prone of embellishment due to "the fertility of her own imagination" (53). Thus, she is partly to blame for Caroline's precarious involvement with the Irish dandy Mr. Mac Flashby, and her apparently innate malignancies, her treachery and "characteristic duplicity" (88), for instance, make it unsurprising that she brings real shame and disgrace upon the Fairchild family through fornicating with Mac Flashby and having a stillborn baby, following which she dies.

To the other mulatto Creole in the novel, Rachael, are ascribed similar characterological flaws and a predisposition for deviance consistent with the degraded view of her creoleness. For example, the narrator describes her attempt to increase her influence over one of her benefactors, Captain Pringle:

She contrived to deceive him by assuming the appearance of that 'state which ladies who love their lords like to be in,' and went so far as to present him, on one of his returns from a cruise, with a smiling 'little cherub' as the offspring of their loves! Unluckily however, for Rachael's scheme, the real mother of the infant, feeling those yearnings which nature has so deeply implanted in the maternal breast, demanded back her child, and made such clamour and uproar, that the imposition coming to the Captain's ears, the child was restored to its rightful parent, and he consequently broke off all further intercourse with the faithless Rachael. (77-78)

Rachael is further described as "sly and cunning" (78), with an "unwieldy body" (79) due to her obesity, wherein her body's unwieldiness and, indeed, her obesity connote her lack of restraint. Her deviance is additionally marked in her relationship with her father, William Lauder:

Lauder's conduct to his offspring, is a damning proof how debasing to the human mind is the power given us over our fellow creatures by holding them in bondage! The ties of consanguinity were all merged in the authority of the master, and he saw but the slave in his own daughter! She was not a very fair mulatto, but had rather wiry than woolly hair, and in her juvenile days was a remarkably well made,

good looking girl, possessing altogether charms that touched not the heart, but awakened the libidinous desires of her disgraceful and sinful parent; who made many—but to her eternal honour be it spoken—unsuccessful attempts on her chastity. (76)

Here, what is in essence a diatribe against slavery is supported in part by an argument against one of the products of slave society, miscegenation, leading to a new type of Creole: the mulatto. According to the syntax of the last sentence just quoted (see "awakened" in particular), it is the mulatto Creole who begets the incestuous desire, suggesting further her debasement. Unlike the white Creole, Caroline, whose deportment captivates the mind and the heart, one form of "understanding" (see above), Rachael's deportment captivates a certain male body part.

IV

H.G. de Lisser's *The White Witch of Rosehall* (1929) represents the legacy of similar creole prejudice in the years immediately preceding the emancipation of British Caribbean slaves. The first point worthy of note in this respect is the false assumption of the would-be hero, Robert Rutherford, that to be "a man of wealth and power" (74), to be "wonderful" and "a person of mark," Millicent's grandfather must be white: "Is your grandfather a white man, Millie?" he asked. "After all, Millie is a mulatto Creole (more specifically, a quadroon) who is 'free and educated'" (74), and it is beyond Robert's scope of racial bias that she would think of any other than a white man with "reverence and awe." The second point of note regarding this sort of biased colonial view is the pervasive Creole aspiration towards the pinnacle of whiteness typified by Robert, the young, handsome, wealthy, Oxford-educated Englishman who has recently arrived in Jamaica to apprentice before inheriting a Barbados sugar plantation. In spite of Robert's attempts to wear the mask of a mere bookkeeper, his deportment and dress, among other things, apparently signal his real status and make him irresistibly desirable to the local women. Burbridge's housekeeper, Psyche, "light chocolate in complexion, and therefore a sambo" (20), grins as she looks Robert "over with an appraising and appreciative glance," declaring she will have no trouble finding a suitable housekeeper for him. The person Psyche has in mind is her cousin, Millie, who "carried herself with self-consciousness as a girl who had known admiration and had learned to estimate her charms at a high value" (43). In the absence of more compelling causes, it is safe to assume that Millie's high estimation of

herself is a function of her creoleness, her partly white ancestry. Her sense of her own worth and her valuation of Rutherford is clear when she boldly announces to him, "I saw you yesterday, an' I like you when I see you. A lot of the young bushas [overseers] on these estates want me, you know, but I don't have nothing to do with them. You are different" (44). In essence, feeling she deserves better than most because she is Creole, Millicent saves herself for the right white man. Her joy at the promise of success when Robert kisses her transcends the mere love triangle involving the white Creole, Annie Palmer: it signifies the potential realization of a biased racial ambition: "She stood stock still, thrilled to the marrow, exalted to the seventh heaven of delight. A triumphant glare shone in her eyes, the light of victory. Just when she had thought she had lost everything she glimpsed a prospect of ultimate triumph and success" (75).

The third, equally significant example in de Lisser's novel of privileging whiteness and depreciating blackness in the context of creolization is that of Annie Palmer herself, the white Creole, and white witch. The narrator attempts to set the record straight regarding her creole identity: "Annie had no desire to go the England, where her mother was born, or to Ireland, from whence her father came" (137). However, the rumours about her creoleness are important to her construction as a witch. In effect, her literal or associative links to blackness have greater implications for her being a white witch. This is connoted earlier when Burbridge, Rider, and Robert discuss her background. Rider tells the other two, "The story was that she came to Jamaica from Haiti" (127), and Robert's exclamation and question in response suggest he is still somewhat naïve, as he misses the connotation: "Haiti?" cried Robert; "then she is French?" The responsibility of unveiling the purport of Annie's Haitian background falls upon Burbridge: "Probably both French and Negro," suggested Burbridge; "I hear there is a lot of mixture of blood in Haiti; she may have some. That might account for her witcheries!" These lines point to both the prejudicial racial attitude that miscegenation, a feature of creolization, means the debasement of supposedly "pure" white blood and that there is a direct correlation between blackness, a tributary of creolization, and bedevilment. The strength of that message makes Rider's attempt to challenge such adverse racial predilections appear somewhat hollow: "There is hardly any need to find the blood of the Negro in every villain, male or female," chuckled Rider, "though that seems to be the fashion in the West Indies. The world is not divided into

back devils and white angels." Part of the point is the prevailing pejorative ethos regarding the Negro element of Braithwaite's creole society in the West Indies of the time. Obviously, the great irony in Rider's last statement is that the creole world of the plantation polity was so divided into a binary.

V

By the middle of the twentieth century, these racial beliefs continue to haunt the transforming potential of Caribbean creolization. In *The Middle Passage*, for example, V.S. Naipaul writes of the complex fluidity of Caribbean identity and identity politics: "As England receded, people prepared more actively for the West Indies. They formed colour groups, race groups, territory groups, money groups. The West Indies being what they are, no group was fixed; one man could belong to all" (13). This early passage hints at creolization's promise to transcend entrenched racial biases and boundaries. However, later in the text it becomes clear that those biases are still firmly in place. Having finished with Martinique, on his way to Jamaica via Antigua, Naipaul observes:

As soon as we were seated in the British West Indian Airways plane it was no longer of importance to be French, and it was chastening to see how within minutes some of the Martiniquan passengers declined from privileged mulattoes, Frenchmen, the cream of *café-au-lait* society, into fairly ordinary Negroes, the very word 'mulatto,' with its precise and proud racial connotation, being used less frequently outside the French islands. (219)

First, it is important to note that only some of the passengers avert the mulatto privilege, not all. Second, the opposition drawn between being *cream* and being *fairly ordinary* (read, regular black) suggests the racial assumptions of superiority and inferiority associated with the colonial and slavery period are still in place. The pride associated with mulattohood or creoleness makes the point that to be linked to whiteness is somehow to be better. The negative corollary of being linked to blackness goes without saying.

Even when used more contemporarily by well-meaning people, the creolization concept often bears the prejudiced, colonial residue of a hierarchizing signature, whereby creolized merely marks the ranked positions on the great chain of cultures, if you will, somewhere below the superior (of European origin), and above the inferior (of African origin).

The belittling views highlighted above indicate that creolization does not necessarily represent plurality of poetic vision or politics. Indeed, similar perspectives cloud the imaginations of well-established Caribbean writers, even while they project the ideal of creolization. For example, in an interview with Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock, the following exchange is prompted by Sam Selvon's statement of feeling that he has not yet written his best novel, and of his hope that the one he is working on at the time of the interview would be better than all the rest: "I keep talking about it so much, and it's been delayed because I write slowly, but certainly it's a very ambitious book. I want to explore the psyche of the Caribbean mind, and to find out if in fact the West Indians have not accomplished very much and are not capable of accomplishing much, as some people say. I want to explore why this is so, if in fact it is so" (109). Dasenbrock interjects, "You're responding to Naipaul's famous remark, "Nothing was created in the West Indies." Selvon replies: "Naipaul is pretty outright about it, but there are a lot of people who feel that we are not creative enough, we are indolent, and we just don't seem to care as much about literature and the fine arts. We're just happy-go-lucky kind of people, and I want to get to the psyche behind all this. *I want to really explore why, if it's because of the mixture of races there or what*" [emphasis added]. One may here note the underlying, perhaps unwitting, suspicion that if it is true that Caribbean people are not creative enough (a point to be vigorously contested, but not really at issue here), it may be due to creolization (race mixing). The assumption, of course, is that the indolence underlying such a lack of creativity is brought into the mix via the African vein.

Dasenbrock and Jussawalla's interview with Selvon sheds greater light on the complications manifest with the creolization model, including the lack of transformation of old biases and, thus, its failure to endow different significations to the Creoles. Dasenbrock queries: "You mention the mixture of races in the West Indies. Certainly one of the things one notices about the Moses books is that, of course, Moses is black, and you are of East Indian descent. Have you been criticized for that?" (109). Selvon replies:

No, not at all. In fact, I think that I am representative of what I always say is a third race in Trinidad. We talk about the blacks and the Indians being the two races there. But there is a third race who are people from my generation who grew up Westernized, who still

remain what they are because you can't change yourself, but who have adopted a way of life which tries to work and operate between the two races and who are Creolized, as it were, and who see themselves more as West Indians than as perhaps belonging to people who originally came from India. (109-10)

Jussawalla interpolates, "And they also see themselves as more Westernized" (110), and Selvon continues, "They are more Westernized and they are creating a nation out of this mixture. I'm not the only one. Very few people talk about that third race, but that is the race that exists. I know that it exists, and that is the race that I am putting my hopes on for any future for Trinidad." Indeed, out of this mixture has been created a way of fashioning and interpreting Caribbean poetics. But the pertinent issue is that here too we observe troubling underlying visions of that process: 1. the third race, the creolized race is seen as operating between two races that remain firmly in place; 2. being creolized here is visualized as being Westernized, which is not evidence of transcending hierarchies and polarities, but, instead, the risk of vivifying such modalities.

VI

The gift of creolization is connected to what, in his *Selected Essays*, Wilson Harris terms an "unfinished genesis of the imagination" (64). Speaking of the paradoxes of creoleness, he asks: "Does creoleness sanction new World tribes (unrelated to Carib, Arawak, Apache, Blackfoot, or other Native American peoples) who designated themselves now *African Americans, Irish Americans, Italian Americans, German Americans, and so forth?*" (239). Or, "does creoleness complexly, hiddenly, overturn tribal bias; does it involve a spiritual subversion of idols through symbolic portraiture of *blackness?*" (240). While Harris claims (disingenuously I believe) that he does not know the answer to these questions, my analysis intimates that while creolization has sanctioned new world tribes, it has not actually overturned tribal biases. Moreover, "the mask of the Creole" (Harris 239) is especially a problem when it functions as an attempt to avoid what Lamming appropriately identifies as a "terror of the African bush" (34). In fact, "masking" suggests immediately the masquerade or the carnival, which is another important aspect of Harris's poetic vision. But as to the subversive potential of the carnivalesque in creolization, we must be cautious. On this point Ella Shoat and Robert Stam's observation regarding carnival is meaningful:

Historically, carnivals have been politically ambiguous affairs, sometimes constituting symbolic rebellions by the disenfranchised; at other times fostering the festive scapegoating of the weak by the strong (or by the slightly less weak). Carnivals, and carnivalesque artistic practices, are not *essentially* progressive or regressive; it depends on who is carnivalizing whom, in what historical situation, for what purposes, and in what manner. (304)

VII

Set primarily in Port of Spain, Trinidad, between 1959 and 1971, Earl Lovelace's novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979) depicts in detail the stagnation of racial beliefs concerning creolization and its misuse in carnivalesque exploitation. The narrator describes Miss Cleothilda, a mulatto Creole: "Her nose lifted above the city, her long hair plaited in two plaits, like a schoolgirl, choking with that importance and beauty which she maintained as a queenship which not only she, but the people who shared the yard with her, had the duty to recognize and responsibility to uphold" (17). Miss Cleo's racial creolization is the basis of her upheld queenship. As the narrator observes further, "The Hill knew what she knew: that to her being queen was not really a masquerade at all, but the annual affirming of a genuine queenship that she accepted as hers by virtue of her poise and beauty, something acknowledged even by her enemies, something that was not identical with her mulattohood, but certainly impossible without it" (18-19). Moreover, Caroline puts the case effectively to Olive: "'You don't have eyes in your head to see that is because the woman skin lighter than yours and mine she feel she better than people on this Hill'" (21). While being queen is not a masquerade, Cleo's mulattohood is a significant source of her power over the other people in the yard and her ability to carnivalize them/to play mas on them: "But, now that it was Carnival season, Miss Cleothilda was getting friendly with everybody. In the same swirling spasm of energy that fuelled her earlier pose, she had become a saint almost, giving away sweets to the children, questioning them about their lessons, advising them against the perils of the Hill in a voice loud enough so that adults near by could hear" (18). That she makes sure she projects her voice so the adults could hear is one sign that her actions are purely performative, and given the objective of that performance, to maintain her power, it is a carnivalesque performance.

But Cleo's very power is relative given the racial hierarchy that continues in Trinidad, based on skin complexion: "Is seventeen years since she [Miss Cleo] place third in the Carnival Queen competition in Port of Spain: two white girls, one first, the other second, and the girl, a black girl who come in as Miss Ebony and who should win the whole thing, fourth, and she third'" (21). Those with dark skin remain at the bottom of the hierarchy, those with light skin remain on the top, and Cleo, with her "yellow red-nigger skin" (21) is situated between the two. In this scenario, Miss Cleo represents Braithwaite and Harris's "bridge" referred to earlier in this essay, and as a bridge she obviously inclines to the white side of her creoleness, which allows her to claim and to perform superiority as one of its meanings: "All year long she carried on hostile, superior and unaccommodating, refusing still from the height of her presumed gentility to give even recognition far less encouragement to Philo, the calypsonian across the street" (18). Equally important, "black as he is" (21), Philo is among those at the bottom of the hierarchy; but, like Miss Cleo, he bends to the presumed superiority of whiteness in creoleness. Hence what amounts to his quest for Miss Cleo: he, "by whatever miracle of endurance and shamelessness and hope, after seventeen years still nursed this passion for her" (18). Still, the larger point about the continuing meaning of race as the basis of power is underscored in a later passage which implies "white" does not necessarily mean racially pure or of strictly European stock: "These bands were the white bands: well-off, light-skinned boys from prosperous families and good schools" (63). These "whites" are really also Creoles, either racially or in the sense of being descendants of Europeans born outside of Europe. But, their European complexion permits the disavowal of their Creoleness, even while that European Creoleness reinforces their power. Therefore, John Belasco (Fisheye) rightfully laments, "White people were still in the banks and in the businesses along Frederick Street. The radio still spoke with a British voice" (66). In essence, the old biases underpinning colonialism have not been subverted by creolization. In fact, the text indicates the fluid nature of creolization allows for its (ab)use in maintaining the status quo based upon those biases.

In *The Dragon Can't Dance*, the starkest indication of the failure of the creolization mechanism to endow different meanings is arguably located in the character Pariag. He is of East Indian descent (i.e. originating in the subcontinent), and his feelings of alienation are a direct result of the territorialization of the term Creole as applicable to the Afro-

Trinidadians and, perhaps, mulattos who dominate the city landscape. That is, East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago maintain and are seen as maintaining a separate, unique, un-mixed identity and culture, associated with agrarian or country life, even while they participate in what is already an ostensibly miscegenated culture. This paradoxical sense of cultural uniqueness and mixture is marked, for instance, in Balliram, with whom Pariag works for a period of time collecting recyclable bottles: "Balliram was from San Juan. He liked to cuss and get on like Creole people. He was always boasting about his Creole girl friends and about the dances he went to" (83). The syntax of the second sentence, in particular "get on like Creole people," suggests Balliram is distinguishable from such people. To perform like them is an indication that when not performing he is, in fact, not like them. This point is reinforced when the narrator represents Pariag's thoughts further: "He had always wondered about Balliram, the boy who had worked on the bottles van with him. Balliram liked to pretend he was a Creole. He understood better now. But he, Pariag, was not a Creole, and he didn't intend to play one. But he wanted them to see him" (91-92). Here, Balliram's pretending or performance makes him inauthentic, and Pariag appears to insist upon maintaining the uniqueness of his Indian identity, his racial purity, if you will, by refusing to act like a Creole. The irony, of course, is that Pariag's refusal to act like a Creole functions more as a political posture since, really, to live in Trinidad and Tobago, especially in Port of Spain, is to live a creole life in one way or another. Still, the distinction between Indian and Creole is underscored when Pariag's wife, Dolly, scolds him when he tells her he gives money to Fisheye on demand because "he felt that it joined him more firmly to the Hill" (89). Dolly admonishes, "'You don't see that you is Indian and they is Creole.'" When he tries to impress upon Dolly the common humanity shared by the two groups, Pariag merely reinforces the idea of their separateness: "'They is people, girl. And we is people to them, even though they is Creole and we is Indian.'" The opposition reinscribes a binary between pure, unmixed Indians and mixed, impure Creoles.

Yet, also paradoxically, in Pariag's mind, Creoleness represents part of the cultural authenticity that he feels alienated from and desperately wants to be a part of. This alienation is clearly signified in the following passage: "On Sunday morning they had an all fours game down the street, in front Mr Alphonso shoemaker shop. He [Pariag] passed in front the place many times and stopped to look at them—Aldrick, Philo, a

fellow named Popie and, sometimes, Mr Gay—but they never invited him in" (87). The narrator continues:

For carnival he had seen the whole Yard wild, everybody getting set to play masquerade, everybody looking to buy costume, people going to calypso tent to hear calypsonians sing, people going to listen to the steelband practise. They never one day, not one of them say, 'Boya,' or 'Channa Boy' as some of them in the Yard called him, they never said, 'Channa Boy, come and go,' or, 'We going so and so place, come with us.'

The above lines represent Pariag's thoughts and feelings, and a central sentiment observable is his anguish at not being invited, at being excluded. However, it is immediately clear that Pariag's exclusion is equally a function of the actions (or lack thereof) of the other people in the Yard and of how the Indian sees those other people and sees himself relative to and separate from them:

In truth, he didn't know much about Carnival. He had never played masquerade, and he had never beaten a steel pan. In New Lands Carnival was just a few wild Indians and maybe a robber or two and a few stickfighters playing under Bholai shop. Only the stickfight battles held any interest for him, and one day, carried away by the drums, he had jumped into the stickfight ring, but Seenath had pulled him out. Real Carnival was a city thing, a Creole thing. (87-88)

Here, Carnival of the city is held up as authentic and opposed to that of the country areas. Equally important, the authenticity of Carnival is projected primarily as a function of being Creole. One result of this thinking is that any person perceived as non-Creole is seen as an inauthentic outsider, which is why Pariag feels so alienated.

In a sense, Pariag is the East Indian example of those who, as Harris admits, may don the Creole mask in a carnivalesque projection of purist racial ideology: "Clearly, one must confess, *creoleness* is a peculiar term. It may sustain a conservative if not reactionary purist logic. It may give a privileged aura to (so-called) pure-blooded settlers in the New World. In fact, not only may the descendants of Europeans in the New World wear the mask of the Creole, but so do Africans, East Indians, Chinese and others" (239). This ideology remains at the core of Pariag's bifurcated regenerative creole vision, heterogeneous yet homogeneous, through which he sees himself as having agency (the power to declare himself and to be seen as human by others):

I wish I did walk with a flute or a sitar, and walk in right there in the middle of the steelband yard where they was making new drums, new sounds, a new music from rubbish tins and bits of steel and oil drums, bending the iron over fire, chiseling out new notes. New notes. I wish I woulda go in there where they was making their life anew in fire, with chisel and hammer, and sit down with my sitar on my knee and say: Fellars, this is me, Pariag from New Lands. Gimme the key! Give me the Do Re Mi. Run over the scale. Leh We Fa Sol La! Gimme the beat, lemme beat! Listen to these strings. And let his music cry too, and join in the crying. (210)

The romance of melding diverse cultural instruments into the creation of new music representative of the new, creole society soon devolves into an insistence on remaining unmodified: "And he smiled, thinking of Miss Cleothilda and her All o' we is one. No. We didn't have to melt into one. I woulda be me for my own self. A beginning. A self to go in the world with, with something in my hands to give. We didn't have to melt into one. They woulda see me."

Pariag's return to Miss Cleo's motto and his apparent rejection of it really serves to demonstrate the failure of his vision. That is, his reifying response to it suggests he takes Miss Cleo seriously; he doesn't recognize the cliché as part of her creole, carnivalizing arsenal. From very early in *The Dragon Can't Dance*, the carnivalesque function of the trope is clear as Miss Cleo performs friendliness, saintliness, and sisterhood while solidifying her queenship:

'You hear rhythm, Miss Olive? You hear song? Carnival!' she would cry out. 'Bachanal! Trinidad! All o' we is one.'

And, with the eyes of the yard upon her, and just a bit breathless from her efforts, she would pause, assuming now a tone of seriousness, already intent on contradicting an unvoiced objection, and shout for the whole yard to hear: 'Miss Olive, we is all one people. No matter what they say, all o' we is one,' sanctifying this sentiment, expressed now in song year after year by the island's leading calypsonians. (19)

The intent to contradict objections before any are even registered and the sense that there are those who say and see differently—"no matter what they say"—are among the clues that the phrase is merely a propagandist tool serving the interests of those in power, including a Creole such as Miss Cleo, including the calypsonians who hope to profit from spreading

that hopeful, if untrue message, and including the promoters and profiteers of the larger tourist enterprise of Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago.

By way of concluding, let me acknowledge that, of course, there have been attempts to transform the vision of creolization beyond the sense of separateness and inequalities outlined above. In his essay "Caliban, Ariel, and Unprospero," Braithwaite elucidates his prismatic concept, of which creolization is the process (a project begun in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*, and furthered in works such as *Contradictory Omens* and *Kumina*):

The prismatic concept, on the other hand [that is, in contrast to the monolithic concept of society], conceives of all resident cultures as equal and contiguous, despite the accidents of political history, each developing its own life-style from the spirit of its ancestors, but modified—and increasingly so—through interaction with the environment and the other cultures of the environment, until residence within the environment—*nativization*—becomes the process (creolization) through which all begin to share a style, even though that style will retain vestiges (with occasional national/cultural revivals back towards particular ancestors) of their original/ancestral heritage. (42)

Others have suggested the kaleidoscope as the working symbol, and both of these underlie Harris's elaboration of his notion of "symbolic portraiture of blackness" with some further questions: "Does black hint at an involuntary association of many cultures? Does black reach beyond mere pigmentation along racial and tribal lines into densities and transparencies of tone, a layered wealth of tone—musical, rhythmic, poetic—in which diverse cultures may share? Does black puncture prescriptions of blandness masquerading as light?" (240).

This is the sort of visionary questioning which is seen in David Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991) in the black character Joseph. In a key moment of deconstructing Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and its conventional, academic readings, Joseph contests the narrator's interpretation of what the text is about, declaring, "'No, it ain't, is about colours [...]. The white light of England and the Thames is the white sun over the Congo that can't mix with the green of the bush and the black skin of the people. All the colours struggling to curve against each other like rainbow, but instead the white light want to blot out the black and the green and reduce the world to one blinding colour'" (98). The narrator's response to Joseph's question concerning the harlequin-like Russian

trader's multi-coloured clothing seems to suggest that Dabydeen is of the Harris school, sharing the kaleidoscopic or prismatic vision of creolization: "Why indeed had Conrad suddenly introduced a kaleidoscopic burst of colour in the novel, after a narrative of black, white, and green?" (99). Their exchange that follows echoes the vision contained in Harris's questions just above:

'Look at me,' Joseph continued, 'what colour I am?'

'Black?' I offered, for the first time unsure of what seemed an obvious answer.

'Hmmm,' he replied, deep in thought, 'right, you right, I black, no doubt about it, yes?'

'Yes,' I agreed [...] 'what's the problem?'

'Nothing,' he mumbled, 'it's just that sometimes I wake up middle of night to drink water and when I catch sight in the mirror, is nothing I see. Just blank mirror. And when I look again making a special effort, a black blob of face appear. Like a lump of coal. But how yellow and orange flame can come out of coal? And the coal turn white when it burn out to ash? How come I turn all different colours if you set light on me?' (100)

I am inclined to agree with Rex Nettleford, who observes: "The creolising process in fact continues. We are, in fine, the inheritors of a richly textured ancestry which in turn determines the claims to an indigenised 'Caribbean' ethos and informs the dynamics of contemporary Caribbean life" (185-86). However, as long as certain elements of that process of indigenization continue to be viewed with suspicion in terms of their detrimental effect upon the body politic, particularly until such time as the African element in the mix is looked upon without fear and loathing, we need to be wary of the ways in which we use the critical model of creolization, so that we can avoid replicating some of those same values that the concept is supposed to help overturn.

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