

Gordon Collier and Ulrich Fleischman, eds. *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean*. New York: *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society*, Numbers 27–28, 2003. Pp. v, 550.

On the back cover of *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean*, there is an admission that the Caribbean, though not the oldest or largest Creole locale, is by “virtue of its history of colonialization and cross-cultural contact . . . the most pertinent example.” Arguably, Caribbean language is creole, the food is creole, the people are creole—the culture is creole. Both the scholar and the layman should approach this collection, edited by Gordon Collier and Ulrich Fleischmann, as a text not just of the creole in the Caribbean, but of the Caribbean itself.

The collection is gathered from a conference—the obvious problems and pleasures of such an enterprise are glaring and glowing. Some of the most useful voices in Caribbean créolité scholarship are missing, making this text a hard one to present alone to those unfamiliar with creole scholarship. The text might be a stretch for uninitiated graduate students, to say nothing of undergraduates. Carolyn Cooper, Velma Pollard, Kenneth Ramchand, Gordon Rohlehr and others are mentioned in the text and footnotes of many essays but, presumably, they did not attend the conference and thus did not author individual essays. However, due to the variety and fresh scholarship conferences often yield, there is a great amount of diversity and ingenuity in *Pepper-Pot*’s 550 pages.

The introductions by both the editors, while quite useful, are somewhat misleading in their heady tone. The *Pepper-Pot* essays are short, to the point and generally chatty—much more like conference papers than extended essays.¹ The tone serves to make this long collection more approachable while aptly justifying the length—not for individual grandstanding but for inclusiveness. Keeping this in mind, this reviewer recommends saving the introductions, beginning instead with the “Closing Discussion.” This is an incredible transcript of many of the contributors bashing it out on what appears to be the final day of the conference. Editor Fleischmann reveals a leaning towards examining the influence of Africa in Caribbean créolité and one contributor’s paper specifically. Other contributors battle that paper’s actual centrality, change directions, pick up new threads. The reader sees the contributors doubt honorably, proclaim their truths and admit to having learned and been proven wrong. We see the complexity of the creole in their emotion, pride, disdain and disgust. This discussion is much like the collection itself. It demonstrates the lovely lack of one-sidedness in the text. One of the pleasures

of an edited piece is that there often will be many different opinions and many different angles of interest being explored. If anything best tells of what is to come, it is this boxing match/round table discussion. A pepper-pot indeed.

Fleishmann's introduction is still necessary for readers beginning their studies in creole culture. It presents an account of the manifestations of the term "creole" throughout history and various cultures. Originally a term used to describe European whites born in the New World, it has been transformed into something much more complex: a creole individual might now be anyone born in the New World, excluding persons from the United States and Canada—the exception being that some North American blacks, such as those from Louisiana, are creole. The complexity represented here mirrors the diversity of ways the term creole has been imbibed into New World cultures and then changed over time. This may leave one unclear on what the term actually means or, more specifically, what the term means to this collection. The definition assumed by the introduction and even by the back cover of the text, is the creole as a fusion of pre-existing unique cultures. The Caribbean is presented as a new culture being born and (because of continued globalization) reborn before our eyes and therefore remaining constantly creole.

A few articles stand out not only for their mix of accessibility and scholarly depth but also for their general weight of contribution to the discussion of creolization in the Caribbean. Léon-Francois Hoffman in his "Creolization in Haiti & National Identity" demonstrates Haiti's difference in any discussion of the Caribbean creole. While this entire collection attempts to show the Caribbean's general contribution to the idea of *créolité*, Hoffman points out that, because of its unusual history (during and after their revolution all Haiti's non-blacks were run-out or killed), Haiti did not undergo the same level of creolization as other Caribbean locales. Haiti's creole was New World African welded with Old World African, not the Chinese, Indian, European, African mix found across the Caribbean. When Haiti took on French culture it was conscious and intended, not the more unconscious (or often conscious but out of necessity) adoption by other New World Africans in the Caribbean. Thus, the Haitian idea of creole is different. This essay sets up an intriguing possibility: that every country, each with its unique history, may have a very different type of creole. To this end, Armin Schwegler, in the essay, "The Linguistic Geography of 'criollo' in Spanish America: A Case of Enigmatic Extension and Restriction" provides a well-documented map of the different meanings of *criollo* in various Latin American countries.

Alternatively, Pascale De Souza's "Creolizing Anancy: Signifyin(g) Processes in New World Spider Tales" offers a unified Caribbean creole via the Caribbean Anancy figure of the African inherited folk tales. De Souza dem-

onstrates that the African Anancy is the trickster playboy who is usually punished for his misdeeds. In the New World, however, Anancy is tricky but he goes unpunished, as many of his misdeeds are against the master or ruling power. The connection is drawn that the African Anancy is a teaching tool offered up to children in morality tales, showing that punishment follows bad behavior. In the Caribbean, the Africans, now slaves, used Anancy's trickery as motivation to defy the master. Anancy also manages, in the New World, to be a figure of hybridity himself. Sometimes he is human with spider characteristics, sometimes a spider with human characteristics, sometimes s/he is even female. In some Caribbean locales all native stories are called Anancy stories, even those in which Anancy does not appear. De Souza's essay is entirely inclusive, using Anancy examples from almost every Caribbean community, to prove its thesis.

Bettina E. Schmidt's "The Presence of Vodou in New York City: The Impact of a Caribbean Religion on the Creolization of a Metropolis" goes another step, claiming that the Caribbean itself is now doing the creolizing. Many of her examples come from personal interactions and her own observations, excluding the bookish tone that would make her essay more scholarly. At times, the essay comes across as gossipy—which, of course, lends an enjoyment of its own. The article, among the most chatty in the collection, does not lose for its lack of a scholarly voice. It shows well that Vodou is indeed making its way into the New York City identity via artistic avenues—dancing, music, visual art—so that many non-Haitian art students or art lovers find themselves attracted to Vodou as a viable way of life. Schmidt also states the important point that Vodou is still exotified even by these artistic and presumably aware folk. In a large production of Vodou art, important persons in New York's own Vodou world are ignored, as more "authentic" representations from Haiti are desired.

Editor Gordon Collier presents two novels that bring the Caribbean and Vodou entirely into the metropolis in his "Spaceship Creole: Nalo Hopkinson, Canadian-Caribbean Fabulist Fiction and Linguistic/ Cultural Syncretism." Collier shows Hopkinson to be a writer interested in science fiction/fabulist fiction, her genre of choice, but one whose roots are in Caribbean magical realism. He demonstrates how the worlds Hopkinson creates in *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Midnight Robber* are fully Caribbean spaces, Caribbeanesque—as if the Toronto of the future is one creoled Caribbean. This is an example of literature serving as a fictional proof of Schmidt's aforementioned thesis that the metropolis is being Caribbeanized.

Bénédicté Ledent's "Creolization in Robert Antoni's *Blessed is the Fruit: A Linguistic Analysis*" breaks through the all embracing texture of creole iden-

tity to remind us that, though creole may be the Caribbean's contribution to the world, it is one that the world forced. It was a violent creation, something that was birthed out of the ugliness of slavery, indentured servitude and continued colonialization. Yet, the world celebrates it, yet Caribbean scholars and Caribbean people in general celebrate it. Perhaps this too is Caribbean: taking the violent and making it beautiful. Perhaps this is the necessity of the creole—when cultures clash there will be violence of some kind; the welding will not come without the fire. Ledent discusses two of Antoni's characters—one black, one white—both converging on creolization. Both are trying to leave behind a self they hate and to take on the other/Other, thus creating something new and welcomed in the odd, painful and, originally undesired, merger.

Many of the most intriguing takes on creole come from literature, an idea disputed in the aforementioned 'Closing Discussion.' One contributor makes an interesting point that literature, particularly by woman writers, may be the ideal space for studying creole culture. Sylvia M. Schomburg-Scherff in her "Women Versions of Creole Identity in Caribbean Fiction: A Cultural-Anthropological Perspective" states that the female Caribbean novelist distrusts the usual binary of white/black, colonizer/colonized as too reminiscent of her own subjugation under the binary man/woman. Schomburg-Scherff holds up Caribbean novels as a space of anthropological study, something echoed by scholars of Caribbean writing. In a recent lecture at the University of Houston (April, 2004), Kenneth Ramchand stated that Caribbean writers generally seek to write a community even when they write an individual. This is so different from the Western writing model of focus and linearity. Schomburg-Scherff sets up Caribbean women novelists as De Souza's aforementioned *New World Anancy*. They must trick, destroy, create their own rules and exist to give the story. Caribbean women novelist are often embodiments of the creole's "betwixt and between" (371).

The introductions by the editors are informative and should not go unread altogether. Collier's introduction is specifically literary, giving additional fuel to Schomburg-Scherff's position that Caribbean literature is a useful space for Caribbean anthropological study. Here Collier compares the two luminaries of Caribbean letters that have been repeatedly juxtaposed: Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott. Collier admits that his early contact with the two led him to the generally accepted view of Walcott as the all-embracing creole and Brathwaite as the narrow pan-Africanist. Collier now presents an interesting argument opposed to this usual binary. In fact, it can be gleaned from Collier's essay that Walcott's creole consists of bringing in Classical western models with already creoled Caribbean ones. Brathwaite is perhaps an even

truer creole because he seeks to invoke Africa primarily. Brathwaite's position then as a New World African automatically makes him creole. Both editors independently admit some ignorance in dealing with the Caribbean creole. The admission is needed because, as the collection proves, there are myriad approaches to the Caribbean creole.

As an editor of *Pepper-Pot*, Collier admits a fear of self-exotification and chauvinism; Caribbean people thinking of themselves as something so wonderful (xlili). This reviewer, a Caribbean woman writer herself, admits a fascination with the Caribbean region and its creole identity. *Pepper-Pot*, happily, did nothing to alleviate this. Like Ledent's description of Robert Antoni's baroque mirror in *Blessed is the Fruit*, *Pepper-Pot* does allow for narcissism—though via an interesting and useful perspective. *Pepper-Pot's* cohesive claim is that the Caribbean is this always new and incredible thing. This anthropological wonder: a culture becoming. The ideas presented in this collection serve as useful reflections for all Caribbean enthusiasts. It proves ideal for anthropological and sociological study, while selected pieces are useful for a study of Caribbean literature, women's studies, linguistics and Caribbean history. There is quite a bit of repetition, with many contributors giving similar historical timelines of the word creole and all its various linguistic manifestations. This makes *Pepper-Pot* most useful for the discerning reader.

Note

- 1 The exception to the chatty tone are the essays in the section entitled "The Marketplace." This section is reserved as a taste of other *Matatu* collections and unrelated to the *Pepper-Pot* theme.

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