

# The French Review

*From the Editor's Desk*

Special issues always require close collaboration from many quarters. This one, devoted to Martinique, where the AATF will hold its annual meeting in July, and Guadeloupe, which many of us will visit, is no different. In fact, this will be our second trip to Martinique (the first one came in 1979), but the first time a special issue has been devoted entirely to the Caribbean.

I am especially indebted to Thomas Hale of Pennsylvania State University and Bernard Arésu of Rice University. Though both of these fine scholars and Assistant Editors for the *French Review* are overburdened with responsibilities as chairs of their respective departments, they responded enthusiastically when I asked them to serve as readers for this special issue. The task turned out to be an imposing one as nearly thirty articles were submitted with only one month in which to make the selections. On the other hand, the treasure trove was so great that instead of putting together an issue presenting a variety of Francophone countries and their literatures and cultures, we were able to restrict it to articles on just Martinique and Guadeloupe, lending greater focus to this anthology. This speaks well for the health of current scholarship on the literature and society of these two French Overseas departments.

Thomas Hale, in the piece that follows, furnishes the historical context for this scholarship. He also explains the difficulties faced by Martinique as a marginalized island department of France (Martinique and Guadeloupe became French departments in 1946).

I also want to thank Muriel Wiltord, Director of the U.S.A. Martinique Promotion Bureau, who went to great lengths to have the photo made of the Bibliothèque départementale Schœlcher, the historic library that graces our cover and welcomes us to Martinique. It was also Muriel Wiltord who made me aware of just how important the Schœlcher Library is for Martinicans. Victor Schœlcher (1804–93) was the Under-secretary of State for the provisional government of France after the February 1848 revolution. He was the driving force behind the decree delivered on 27 April 1848 that abolished slavery in the colonies. From 1848–51 he served as the *député* for both Guadeloupe and Martinique. Schœlcher was exiled to England during the Second Empire, but returned to France after Napoleon III abdicated in September of 1870. He was then reelected as deputy for Martinique in 1871 and named Senator for life in 1875. His ashes were moved to the Pantheon in 1949.

The library owes its existence to Schœlcher's wish to leave his personal library of 10,000 volumes to Martinique. Though many volumes of the collection were either stolen or destroyed during a large fire in Fort-de-France in June 1890, plans for the building went ahead. While the foundation was being built, the pavilion was under construction in Paris and was sent piece by piece to Martinique. The library, built in the Art Nouveau style, was completed in 1897. It shows elements of both Byzantine and Egyptian architectural styles. Today the Schœlcher Library is on the historical register and contains 180,000 volumes as well as collections of maps and photographs. It also serves as the main exposition hall of Martinique.

The importance of the Schœlcher Library goes far beyond its material presence. For Martinicans it is tantamount to a statue of liberty and symbolizes freedom from slavery. By virtue of its style it is also seen as a Martinican Eiffel Tower. In fact, the Eiffel workshops

displayed a model of the library in 1889 near the Arc of Triumph. It was also the Eiffel workshops, under the direction of Henry Pic, that built the metal edifice that supports the glass cupola. I encourage all of you to visit this inspirational historical landmark and symbol of freedom. I thank J. Moss Hartt, Director of Communications Services at Montana State University, Bozeman, for executing the cover through the wizardry of graphics. Without his expertise we would not have the handsome cover you see when you pick up the volume.

Though the articles in this volume speak for themselves, I would like to make a few remarks about them. While the shape of a special issue is limited by the manuscripts received or articles commissioned, we are fortunate to be able to offer a balance between Martinican and Guadeloupe literature and culture. We have one interview with the Martinican writer, Suzanne Dracius and another with Gisèle Pineau of Guadeloupe. We also offer an article devoted to Pineau's *La Grande Drive des esprits*.

The volume begins with a consideration of collective identity and *créolité* in the Caribbean through the writings of Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphael Confiant. Another article considers minority cultures and Indian cults, especially Hindu beliefs in Martinique and Guadeloupe and how they are portrayed in literature. Ultimately, the author is able to demonstrate how Asian beliefs mixed with those of Europe and Africa to form a kind of Hinduism unique to the Caribbean.

The second article considers a novel, *Le Temps des madras*, by the Martinican Françoise Ega. The author shows how Ega offers a counterpoint to the masculine point of view of Joseph Zobel, one of the most famous of early Martinican writers. This essay also presents an attractive introduction to the flora and fauna of Martinique as described in the novel.

A series of four articles including one on Pineau and the other three on the Guadeloupe writer, Maryse Condé, consider gender questions and the rewriting of history in both the novel and drama. There is also an essay that shows how Martinique and its people might be introduced at the elementary level. Additionally, you will notice that our review editors made a special effort to publish a large number of book reviews dealing with francophone works and topics.

I cannot close without offering special thanks to Clyde Thogmartin, Managing Editor of the *French Review*. Clyde's eye for detail and his painstaking copyediting have resulted in a highly readable and attractive volume. Ronnie Moore, our intrepid typesetter and the owner of WESType Publishing Services, has once again put it all together.

We are especially honored to have a message of welcome and hope from Aimé Césaire, the world-renowned Martinican poet. A descendant of slaves, Aimé Césaire helped to found the movement known as *négritude* and went on to become first a *député* to the French National Assembly and then Mayor of Fort-de-France. Best known for his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Aimé Césaire continues to breathe life into the struggle for freedom and universal justice. We are privileged to visit Martinique and to share in the values espoused by Césaire.

Christopher P. Pinet

## *Guest Editorial by Thomas A. Hale*

This special issue of *French Review* devoted to Caribbean literature offers a multipaned window on French-speaking societies that are better known in the United States for their climate and beaches than for their writers. Thanks to the efforts of authors from Césaire to Condé, however, the peoples of these islands have in the last few decades raised a higher profile on the horizon of French instructors and researchers. The regionally-oriented articles on literature, society, and pedagogy presented here contribute significantly to the long-term goal of broadening our perspective not simply on the region but on the entire Francophone world. It has been a pleasure for me to participate with Chris Pinet and Bernard Arésu in the process of selecting the articles.

While *French Review* has published special issues of this type before, for example the May 1982 issue on "Literature and Civilization of Black Francophone Africa," this number is the first devoted entirely to the Caribbean and it therefore constitutes a landmark for the AATF, one that prompts me to look back at another landmark, the Association's meeting in Martinique in 1979.

I remember in particular at that meeting the tremendous response of the audience to "La Martinique telle qu'elle est," the vibrant keynote speech of Fort-de-France mayor and legislator Aimé Césaire on 25 June 1979 (*French Review* 53.2, December 1979). In a careful manner, Césaire sketched the problems of life on the island and his hopes for the future. Some of those problems were addressed in the decade that followed as the regime of François Mitterrand allowed greater freedom for local government under a program of regionalization. But Martinique remains in many ways, as Césaire described it, a marginalized island: "La Martinique n'est pas un EN-SOI mais un POUR AUTRUI" (185).

Césaire's lifelong concern, as evidenced by both his speeches and other writings, has been to help Martinicans achieve greater freedom from both the psychological isolation they have experienced as the descendants of slaves and the more complex separation they encounter in the contemporary version of the *exclusif*. This is the colonial-era term for an economic relationship with the *métropole* that limits the freedom of the colony to trade with other societies outside the confines of the empire. For Césaire, Martinicans must be able to engage the world beyond the shores of their island and outside the restraints imposed by neocolonial systems of economics and government.

Just as Césaire has helped Martinicans to rethink their relationship with the external world (see Fanon's essay in the February 1955 *Esprit* on "Antillais et Africains" for a local view of Césaire's impact), since the 1970s *French Review* has been helping AATF members to reconceptualize their understanding of the Francophone world by publishing more articles on topics rooted in lands beyond the frontiers of the *métropole*. Toward that end, as we learn more about the peoples and cultures of distant parts of that diverse Francophone world, we would do well to frame our own studies in wider contexts not limited to the French element. These contexts include the relations of particular French-speaking societies with other peoples in nearby parts of the world who have different linguistic and cultural traditions. Just as peoples in the Caribbean seek to build bridges not simply to France but more importantly to other areas of the world, in the same way, scholars in French need to understand the links of Francophone peoples to those with different cultural and linguistic traditions. In other words, we can no longer afford to view the Francophone world through the lens of the French cultural *exclusif*.

*French Review* will no doubt continue to publish special issues on Africa, Asia, Europe outside of France, and North America as well as on such complex and controversial subjects as *francophonie*. Members who have not had the opportunity to study Francophone peoples and cultures outside of France will be able to rely on these publications as a first line of research leading to the longer-term goal of gaining a truly global understanding of French in the world. More importantly, however, one hopes that this focus on the particularities of authors and societies in these diverse parts of the French-speaking world will not

narrow our focus but will instead give us the means to situate these societies in the wider context of the Anglophone, Germanophone, Lusophone, and Arabophone peoples who share the world with them. By learning today not simply about the particularities of the Francophone map, but also about how and where the Francophone world fits into a rapidly changing global society, we will be better equipped to understand the alliances and conflicts that will shape events and societies tomorrow.

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*Message d' Aimé Césaire, poète,  
maire de Fort-de-France de 1945 à 2001*

Mesdames, Messieurs les congressistes de l'AATF,

Merci d'avoir choisi la Martinique!

Je vous souhaite un congrès réussi, placé sous le signe du dialogue et de l'ouverture afin qu'en cette période de ténèbres, nous ayons la force de regarder demain.

Aimé Césaire

