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IN EVERY CLIME:
Literary Notes around the Discovery of
Sranan-Tongo Creole

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The human mind is the same in every clime;
and accordingly we find nearly the same
process adopted in the formation of language
in every country. The [Suriname] Negroes
have been proved to be in no degree inferior
to other nations in solidity of judgment,
or fertility of imagination.

- William Greenfield, missionary linguist, 1830

One of the few English-related creoles remaining autonomous (that is, not part of a continuum back to English), Sranan Tongo or Taki-Taki plays a privileged role in the comparative study of creole languages and literatures. Not only is Sranan of pivotal importance in establishing the genealogy of Atlantic English creoles, but also, due to the series of incidents related here, its discovery by missionaries, travellers and early creolists marked a significant if neglected moment in "liberal" European thought. Sranan stands out in the roster of English creoles because it was and is still spoken in a Dutch environment, the brief English domination of Dutch Guiana having lasted from 1650 to 1667, when the Dutch traded up from the unpromising real estate of Manhattan to the lucrative plantations of Suriname.

This interlude was long enough to launch not one but several English creoles, coastal Sranan itself, as well as inland Saramaccan and Ndjuka and related dialects. Fierce defenders of national independence and liberty in their own polders, the Dutch were equally fierce and pitiless slave masters. Suriname became notorious for its cruel and rapacious planters, to the point that it was a crippled Surinamese Voltaire had *Candide* meet as emblem of human cruelty to humans, and this for the sake of sugar: *C'est à ce prix que vous mangez du*

sucre en Europe.

Consequently, Suriname was also synonymous with slave revolts and with massive maroonage, which made it a fascinating laboratory of creole creation and transmission. "Maroon" comes from Spanish *cimarrón*, "mountaintop". From the 1530s on the word referred to runaway slaves who took refuge and formed communities in jungle enclaves around the Caribbean, ideal settings in which a creole could develop, presuming its speakers survived. The fugitive Surinamese "Bush-Negroes," of which the Ndjuka and Saramaccan tribes are the largest, constitute a linguistically and culturally distinct people who still pride themselves, fiercely in fact, on having escaped Dutch tyranny long before the coastal Sranan-speaking creoles.

There is a surprisingly large quantity of literature in Sranan, the easiest approach to which in English is Voorhoeve and Lichtveld's bilingual *Creole Drum: An Anthology of Creole Literature in Suriname*. Apart from the proverbs, songs, folktales and biblical translations which comprise the usual foundation of creole literatures, there has been a proliferating written literature since the Second World War that some attribute to the pioneering work of the creolist educator J.G.A. Koenders, born in 1910, whose importance to the comparative history of creole literatures is his translation into Sranan of a poem by the "Shelley of Holland", Willem Kloos (1859-1928) - "he just wanted to prove that the arguments [against Sranan] were false" (Voorhoeve and Lichtveld 1975, p. 11) - a provocation familiar to anyone conversant with the earlier history of European literatures which also sought to distinguish themselves from Church Latin, or for that matter from Latin *tout court*. Also suggestive of the many parallels between nascent creole literatures and the canonic literatures of Western Europe was the forging of a new literary dialect in the 1950s by the poet Trefossa, who at one fell swoop transformed the awkward written Sranan of previous generations, itself based on a stilted pulpit dialect.

With one exception, however, it is the discovery of Sranan by Europeans and not Sranan writing itself which is my topic. Let me emphasize that the apparent euro-centricity of such an approach is a red herring. The history of Sranan literature proper should best be the work of Surinamese, or at least those more familiar with that language than this North American scholar could ever presume to be. What is significant about Sranan to non-Surinamese (more precisely, what was, since this time-frame stops around 1830) is instead how awareness of its existence as an autonomous language shaped the thought of European writers and missionaries, in particular the Moravian

Brethren missionaries who "discovered" Sranan in the 1730s, the Anglo-Dutch travel writer John Gabriel Stedman (1744-1797), whose text was enhanced by several of William Blake's most compelling engravings, and the Scots missionary linguist William Greenfield (whose articulate 1830 *Defence of the Suriname Negro-English Version of the New Testament* is a landmark in the history of creolistics). Implicit in this knot of figures and texts is the usually neglected importance of biblical translation for the rise of literacy, hence literature.

A polymath by all accounts, William Greenfield was orphaned at the age of two in 1801. Nine years later his maternal uncles put him out to apprentice with a London bookbinder, an appropriate vocation for a young man with no fortune and an obvious way with words. His uncles were businessmen with a predilection for classical quotation, and they imposed on their nephew the rudiments of Latin and Greek. An anonymous Jew who worked in the same shop taught him Hebrew.¹ Languages took a hold on Greenfield who was too intellectually restless to stick it out in the book trade, and who left business at 26 to devote himself entirely to the study of biblical languages. His Protestant reverence for the Bible as a "Pillar of Divine Truth" (as he termed it in a later work) was married to an exceptionally retentive philological mind. Within three years he published *A Greek Lexicon to the New Testament* (1829), which went into dozens of editions throughout the nineteenth century. He had an awesome capacity to absorb languages. After composing his *Defence of the Serampore Mahratta Version of the New Testament* (1829) in five weeks and with no prior knowledge of Marathi, he was hired by the British and Foreign Bible Society as superintendent of its editorial department. They must have thought of him as a troubleshooter, for in a scant nineteen months Greenfield produced studies of twelve European, five Asiatic, one African and three American languages, and as well acquired considerable knowledge of Quechua, Chipewyan, Berber and, our concern here, what was then called the Negro-English of Suriname. He had set out to write a comparative grammar of thirty languages when he was stricken with "brain fever" - small wonder - and died at 33. His obituary in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* read: "Considering his years, his attainments as a linguist were of the most extraordinary kind; his talents were diligently applied to the cause of sacred literature; and his piety was deep and sincere" (Reinecke 1987, p. 30).

Details about William Greenfield's personal life are scarce, but it is hard to imagine that he did not know the poems of William Blake,

neglected though the latter may have been, especially "The Little Black Boy", into whose mouth Blake put the following verses:

And thus I say to little English boy:
When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy,

I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear
To lean in joy upon our father's knee;
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him, and he will then love me.

Whether Greenfield knew those words or not, he was without a doubt aware of Blake's other talents, since the latter's name appears under the most striking of the many fine engravings, especially those depicting the agonies of torture, to be found in John Gabriel Stedman's 1796 *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Suriname*, a principal source of Greenfield's 1830 *Defence*. There is in any event something of the temper of "The Little Black Boy" in the philological argumentation of the *Defence*: ardent defence of the deprecated, trust that differences of race and colour melt away in the presence of the Absolute, affirmation of the universality of human thought through access to the Word. As for J.G. Stedman, what this young Englishman with a Dutch mother was doing serving with the Dutch military in Suriname is explained by the title of his book. He was there to quell the maroons.

There was a profound ambiguity in Stedman's relation with both the coastal Sranan and the inland maroons who were his redoubted but respected adversaries, an ambiguity recapitulated in the reception of his *Narrative*. On the one hand, it became a handbook for anti-guerilla combat in the tropics whose rules for marching and fighting in tropical swamps and sloughs anticipated those the British developed during the Ashanti campaign in the Gold Coast starting in 1824; on the other hand, it became a *cause célèbre* in the abolitionist movement. Stedman was not an abolitionist and after the shock-effect of the atrocities he had so thoroughly documented in his *Narrative* stirred up pro-abolitionist sentiment, he pleaded that Parliament ought not be moved by his own evidence to abolish slavery, only to mollify it. At the same time this loyal and steadfast soldier had enough sympathy for the revolt it was his duty to crush to have inserted his own cautionary verse on the dialectic of torture and revolt in the *Narrative*:

Some Afric chief will rise, who scorning chains,

Racks, tortures, flames, excruciating pains,
Will lead his injur'd friends to bloody fight,
And in the flooded carnage take delight;
Then dear repay us in some vengeful war,
And give us blood for blood, and scar for scar.

His portraits of the rebel chiefs Adoe, Araby, Boston, Baron and Jolly Coeur, show understanding and even sympathy for their position, given the wretched treatment dealt out to the slaves.

As far as Sranan went, once Stedman had gotten over the initial surprise at a language "totally unintelligible to me", he thought it "so sweet, so sonorous and soft, that the genteelest Europeans in Suriname speak little else", an estimation no doubt influenced by his passion for and eventual liaison with the mulatto maid Joanna, who nurtured him in sickness and bore him a son (Johnny, who accompanied his father back to Devonshire, joined the Royal Navy, but drowned in 1793 at 17 off the coast of Jamaica [Collis 1965, p. 217]). Like leitmotifs, Joanna's charms and virtues run through the *Narrative* in counterpoint to gruesome descriptions of torture, carnage and savagery, as does the narrator's anxiety over her fate unless he amass the impossible sum required to ransom her. As for the propriety of this love with a coloured slave, this literate soldier quoted Horace's poem to Phocius beginning *Ne sit ancillae tibi amor pudori*: "Let not my Phocius think it shame/ For a fair slave to own his flame." Even in the glancing account the *Narrative* provides, this story of marriage and tragic separation of European male and Creole female was compelling enough to engender a number of literary offspring, an 1804 play by Franz Kratter, *Die Sklavin in Surinam*, an anonymous romance published in London in 1824, *Joanna, or the Female Slave*, and a popular 1840 novel by Eugène Sue, *Aventures d'Hercule Hardi*. Stedman's *Narrative* thus set many of the terms for the exotic nineteenth-century image of the creole woman.

There are no direct references in the *Narrative* to the language in which Stedman and Joanna exchanged endearments, and the late nineteenth-century German creolist Hugo Schuchardt doubted Stedman knew the tongue well at all (though the former had access only to a French translation [Gilbert 1980, p. xxi]). In any event, whether Stedman preferred the English of his father or the Dutch of his mother is not clear; nor is the language in which Joanna was to learn to read, if Stedman had had his way. There is some evidence, however, of the linguistic state of affairs within such a liaison: the first recorded poem in Sranan, or at least partly so, "Een huishoudelijke twist" ("A

Domestic Tiff") composed by Henrik Schouten and published in 1783 in which a Dutch-Creole couple upbraid each other in their respective languages, in alternating verses (the Sranan and its translation italicized).

Kind lief, laat voort de Coffij geeven!
Tan Baija, jusno a sa kom.
Maak met de Slaaven dog geen leeven!
Den boojis den de toe moessie dom!
Spreek zagjes! waarom zoo te schreeuwen?
Te me no balie, den no doe.
'T was best jou bek maar toe te breeuwen!
Mekkie den tappou vo jou toe.
Kan een Creole smoel wel zwijgen?
Da orgrie te mie pikkie dan?

Dear child, come let's put the coffee out.
Wait just a minute, man anon it will be there.
Don't kick up such a fuss with the slaves!
These creatures are awful for sure.
Speak softly please, why bawl so loud?
If I don't yell, they don't do aught.
Better then to shut your trap!
Let them start at once with yours.
A Creole mouth can never stop!
Am I wrong if I answer?

(Voorhoeve and Lichtveld 1975, pp. 286-287)

Joanna seems not to have been as saucy as Schouten's consort, but she spoke the same tongue, and Stedman learned to understand and speak it.

Despite the winsome presence of Joanna, the incessant barbarity of the *Narrative* makes for heavy-going, as Stedman himself recognized, apologizing in the end for "all the horrors and cruelties with which I must have hurt both the eye and the heart of the feeling reader", and which this good liberal was at odds to explain, since there was, after all, more profit in a smoothly functioning and moderate dominion over one's slaves than the contrary. As one of the Saramaccan leaders himself had observed in 1760, "the Whites were cutting their noses to spite their faces [*sic*] by so mistreating their valuable field-hands that they forced them to seek refuge in the forest" (Boxer 1965, p. 271). For whatever reasons, and some have suggested that the gap between

Negro-English and Dutch ensured that masters and slaves in Suriname had even less in common than they had in the French and English West Indies, the planters had throughout the history of the colony resisted any policies which might mitigate the severity of their dominion - such as the propagation of Christianity.

To be sure, as in the mother country, religious tolerance was an important principle in Dutch Guiana. There was a large contingent of Sephardic and German Jews, a brief Roman Catholic mission in the 1680s, and at least a handful of *predikanten*, the Calvinist missionaries who followed in the steps of the Dutch East and West Indies Companies to counter the Jesuits and other Papists. Yet while in the French and Spanish possessions slaves were baptized by force, in Suriname conversion was not encouraged. The planters already had enough trouble with rebellious slaves, and it would not have done to hold up for the slaves' contemplation such egalitarian passages as "The last shall be first and the first shall be last." In any event, the planters were hardly known for their own piety. As one eighteenth-century governor of the colony remarked: "The conversion of the so-called Christians in the colony must be undertaken before there is any hope of converting the heathen" (Boxer 1965, p. 169).

Though he notes the presence of many religions in Suriname, Stedman does not mention the most interesting of them, a sect with which his *Narrative* was to have an interesting affiliation, albeit posthumously, and whose endeavours form the third side of the triangle inscribed in this study. In 1735 the Moravian Brethren, who owed their name to their association with Czech Protestantism, established a mission in Suriname. Much of the fervour which explains their choosing an environment so climatologically harsh and so socially uninviting can be attributed to their roots in an evangelical Christian association called the Unitas Fratrum, which dates back to 1457. When Luther appeared the Unitas Fratrum already embraced about 400 parishes with a membership of 200,000, and had their own catechism and hymn-book, as well as two printing presses with which to disseminate evangelical literature. The Counter-Reformation almost extinguished this church by 1620, though enough secret adherents outwardly conforming to Rome remained for its rebirth a century later, when a young Saxon nobleman, Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, met Christian David, a roving carpenter who had consecrated himself in the life of a Moravian Brethren evangelist. The meeting was salutary for the Brethren grouped around David, since Zinzendorf granted refuge, lands, and support to their congregations (Corwin 1895, p. 432 ff.; Stein 1986, *passim*; Holm 1988, p. 17 ff). A second fateful

encounter connects the Brethren to the history of creoles, and in particular to William Greenfield. In 1731 Count Zinzendorf, attending the coronation of Christian VI of Denmark, met an old slave named Andres from St. Thomas in the then Danish West Indies. Like Candide, Zinzendorf was deeply moved by the misery Andres described, except that the Count proceeded to cultivate Moravian missions first to St. Thomas in 1732, and then in 1735 to Suriname.

The essence of Protestantism is the direct and personal relationship between man and his God, and the words of God are inscribed in Holy Scripture, which renders their transmission crucial to any inculcation of the Faith. The Moravians were thus confronted with a momentous dilemma once they were outside Europe. A Moravian could not convert a heathen until he had also educated him or her to a biblical level of literacy, presumably in a standard European language. Experience showed this was going at it backwards, very few prospective converts being easily enticed, let alone allowed into, a classroom. Alternatively, the Brethren could themselves become fluent in the local idiom, translate the Bible into it, after which they would have only the burden of imparting literacy, not another whole tongue (which is what they did in Greenland and Labrador, inventing the script for eastern dialects of Inuktitut in use to this day). When the local language is a creole, as it was on the Virgin Islands and in Suriname, the issue is further confounded, since that creole may appear to be but a degenerate form of, say, Dutch, close enough for the first strategy, that of using the standard, to appeal. In fact, sometimes it happens that this first method works. In Sierra Leone, where the Wesleyan Mission Society started preaching in 1795, "mainstream Krio opinion has still not allowed the [Krio] language into religious ritual, except for instances of code-switching and code-mixing for special effects" (Johnson 1985, p. 92). The Bible remains English in Sierra Leone Krio society to this day, and this despite a strong Krio literary tradition. Similar cases in which formal religious expression was largely confined to the standard European language rather than the creole can be found in Cape Verde or Mauritius (Lang 1990) and Haiti (Fleischman 1984, p. 101).

To their credit, the Moravians, almost immediately upon reaching the Caribbean, construed Negerhollands (the now extinct Dutch creole of the Virgin Islands) and Sranan to be autonomous languages and the most useful vehicles of communication in those Dutch colonies. It helps, in order to tease out the separate threads of a creole and its entwined twin, to be ignorant of or at least indifferent to its lexical base, the language from which it draws most of its vocabulary.

Otherwise it may too easily appear to be a degenerate or bastard form of that base. That these German-speaking Moravians had no vested interest in Dutch may thus well explain why in the 1740s they wrote the first serious studies of creoles considered as systems independent of their lexical donors; or again, why it was competing Danish Lutheran missionaries who employed the white native speaker of Negerhollands Jochum Melchor Magens to write the first published grammar of that or any creole, *Grammatica over det Creolske sprog*, in 1770. In fact, the Moravian Christian Oldendorp had noted in 1777 in his history of the Virgin Islands missions that "Dutch is an impediment for many in learning [Negerhollands] correctly" (in Gilbert 1986, p. 6).

William Greenfield may or may not have had access to the published version of Oldendorp's history, which had been slashed to a third of its original length by an editor, but he would have appreciated much what can be found in the manuscript recently come to light in the archives of the Brethren in Herrnhut near Dresden. Many of Oldendorp's passages are not only valuable as documents in Caribbean history, but also as almost premonitory descriptions of creolization:

Used nowhere else but on these islands, [Negerhollands] may be regarded, with some justification, as a language in its own right, since it is something radically different from the European languages, even though it is really the mixed offspring of the European languages and has taken most of its words from them. (Oldendorp in Gilbert 1986, p. 7)

His words can be interpreted to fit a number of current theories, but his intention was clearly to justify the very existence of "Criole" as "a language in its own right." Apart from proselytizing, the Brethren also encouraged general literacy among the slaves, though patron Count Zinzendorf had to visit St. Thomas himself to pacify the planters, who were disturbed about the consequences of the spread of literacy. In the first decades of the mission there was in fact an outpouring of religious and secular expression, communion around a language new-born and a literate medium in which to preserve it, the distinction between missionary and slave momentarily dissolving in the presence of the Word. In the words of the creolist Peter Stein, who is largely responsible for unearthing this trove:

The small slave community which existed on St. Thomas from 1736 onwards soon increased, and many slaves were baptized and became members of the Moravian Brethren. From the very

beginning, the missionaries treated them not as slaves or inferior people, but as brothers and sisters, all members of the community.... Exceptional as this may have been in a slave society, however, this was not all, because some of the slaves were even taught to write. They learnt quickly and soon began to write letters. Fortunately, their letters, or at least some of them, have been preserved in the Universitäts-Archiv at Herrnhut, beginning with a letter from January 1737. The "Slave Letters" are now of inestimable value to us, because they are probably the first personal documents of slave life and sentiments which exist (Stein 1989, p. 154)

Of particular note in the history of creole literatures are the Christmas carols sung in 1754 and recorded in the Brethren archives, the first recorded creole song (Stein 1982).

At about the same time the Moravian Brethren were also laying a solid foundation for missionary translation in Suriname. During his seven years in Suriname, which overlapped with Stedman's last year, the Moravian Christian Ludwig Schumann compiled a Saramaccan (not Sranan) dictionary in German and translated several Old Testament stories into that tongue before returning to coastal Paramaribo and the study of Sranan. We do not know if Schumann and Stedman met, but the former's versions of the Bible from 1781 on (revised by a Wilhelm Treu) were the basis of *Da njoe Testament va wi masra en helpiman Jesus Christus*, which the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) had published for the Moravians slightly before hiring Greenfield.² Obviously, it was not against the Moravian Brethren that William Greenfield had to defend *Da njoe testament*, since they were, in a sense, its authors.

Greenfield's opponent was rather a respected Scottish theologian, one Andrew Thomson, a well-known proponent of immediate, not gradual abolition. Thomson bore not only the BFBS, but also the Brethren, a deep but inexplicit *odium theologicum*, charging the latter with an "instinctive propensity to go wrong on all matters touching the purity and dignity of the Bible". Thomson's critique was not directed at any particular linguistic deficiency of *Da njoe testament*, but at the very idea of "putting the broken English of the Negroes into a written and permanent form" and perpetrating "all its disadvantages and evil consequences by shutting them up to it as the vehicle of God's word". To Thomson, Negro-English was gibberish, a travesty or burlesque intrinsically inconsistent with that "decorous and seemly garb in which the Word of God should be presented to the public" (Reinecke 1987,

p. 24). In a word, the Bible belongs in good, not slaves' broken, English.

There are two radically incompatible visions of language in this polemic, as both the initial Moravian respondent to Thomson, the Rev. Ignatius La Trobe, and Greenfield himself must have known. According to the first, certain languages are privileged vehicles of higher thought, more subtle, more refined, and specially designated by the Lord as his media. According to the second, all languages are created equal, though not all are equally endowed with privilege. The BFBS was, by its very nature, in the second camp, but its directors preferred to battle the issue out on less absolute and more pragmatic grounds, despite the rivalry which existed between the BFBS and the Edinburgh theologians. Dutch, not English, La Trobe reminded the Edinburgh abolitionist in a first rejoinder, was the language of Suriname, so English was hardly an alternative there. Likewise, in the second round of the polemic, Greenfield preferred not to attack directly the racist presumption of his abolitionist opponent that the Lord preferred "decorous" languages, especially English, in his dealings with his servants, and valued an English soul, or at least a soul conversant with English, over the soul of a poor slave in Suriname. His refutation of Thomson turned, rather, around three points. First, he observed, Sranan is unintelligible to speakers of English and Dutch, as Stedman, fluent in both, discovered on his first night in Paramaribo. Second, and quite provocatively, Sranan offers "superior simplicity", relative freedom from inflexion, such that the same argument applied by some philologists to elevate English above Dutch and Spanish above Latin would place Sranan at a higher evolutionary level than English. Third, from the Christian perspective, if burlesque of Scripture there be, it was not found in the heartfelt and completely accurate expression of religious truth in *Da njoe testament*, but in Thomson's own ultraliteral mockery of it.

Leaving aside the details of Andrew Thomson's argument, which Greenfield demolished, what must have been the former's motives? He had not seen a copy of *Da njoe testament* when he wrote his attack on it, only excerpts someone else had had copied for him. Why, moreover, would an abolitionist so ardently oppose a biblical version intended to reach out to slaves? It turns out that Thomson had in fact been a BFBS member until 1827, when he resigned in protest against the publication of a Bible into which the apocrypha had been bound, thereby initiating the so-called Apocrypha controversy, whose flames he fanned from the pages of his *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, the same podium he used three years later. *Da njoe testament* was, by

implication, a similarly apocryphal text, a violation of more than propriety. This, of course, is an extreme form of the accusation often levied against creoles in general, that they are non-canonical, peripheral, beyond the pale. Against this charge, which amounted to that of blasphemy, Greenfield argued tellingly that each and every rule-governed language is canonical, sets its own centre.

All reasonings a priori from the apparent unfitness and incongruity of words founded upon any other language than that which is the subject of discussion must necessarily be erroneous and fallacious. The only true mode of judging is to ascertain whether a given word or expression be in accordance with the nature and genius of the language to which it belongs.... Therefore, the sacred Scriptures cannot be degraded and rendered ridiculous in the eyes of the Negroes, who are the only persons concerned by the [Sranan] version. (Reinecke 1987, p. 29).

Such a linguistic Declaration of Independence marks the threshold over which each creole must cross, else remain inextricably entwined.

One premise of Andrew Thomson's requisition was the mistaken assumption that *Da njoe testament* was intended for general use among the slave population in the British West Indies, to which was coupled the concern that Sranan would be seen as grotesque by educated English speaking whites and would thus reflect badly upon those blacks who aspired to speak "good English" and benefit from the respect that dialect conferred. Neither of these factors was of personal importance to Thomson, though he was able to weave them into his exhortation against desecration of the Bible. It is therefore logical to conclude, with the creolists John E. Reinecke and William A. Stewart, that one of the West Indians with whom Thomson corresponded in his struggle for abolition came across *Da njoe testament*, was offended by its implications, alarmed by the deleterious effect it might have on the prospects for abolition, and sent his annotations on the text and animadversions to his fellow abolitionist. This correspondent probably unknowingly found the right ally in Thomson, who had a axe to grind with his former colleagues in the BFBS. Neither the anonymous West Indian nor Andrew Thomson had reckoned with William Greenfield, whose *Defence* brought the polemic to an abrupt and conclusive halt.

About this incident John Reinecke remarked, sadly, that Greenfield had won the battle, but lost the war. "The *Defence* was soon forgotten and its arguments in defence of creole (and pidgin) language had to be

formulated by later generations, arguing against critics often more extreme than Thomson" (p. 29). Notwithstanding its 150 year disappearance from the public eye, the polemic and those around it are exemplary of the strands bound into early creolist thinking: a kind of *tableau vivant* starring characters of a drama common to the emergence of creoles as literary languages.

Stage right, English Bible in hand and denouncing both slavery and creoles, stands the Edinburgh theologian, next to him the faceless anglophile West Indian, even more firmly committed to abolition, but embarrassed by creole. Stage left: Greenfield, Schumann and Oldendorp, Christian creolists holding Sranan, Saramaccan and Negerhollands Bibles in hand. Arrayed behind them the Moravian missionaries and their sponsor, Count Zinzendorf, his eyes turned to the slave Andres at stage centre. The multitude of slaves and maroons of Suriname, the principal personae after all, must also be on stage, especially Joanna, Johnny in her arms, the Saramaccan warrior chiefs, as well as the planters and foremen who dominated them. Stedman is nearby, extending his hand upward to an angelic William Blake with a batch of sketches to engrave.³

Of course their chorus is cacophonous, an unintelligible babel, but at the moment we break in William Greenfield is citing his auspicious line: *The human mind is the same in every clime*. John Gabriel Stedman answers back, with a phrase William Greenfield had read in the conclusion of the former's *Narrative*: *We only differ in colour, but are certainly all created by the same hand*.

Perhaps the reader will recall the double quotes around "liberal" in the first paragraph. It is fashionable nowadays to denounce European thought in general and liberalism in particular. There are excellent historical grounds for doing so. How puny and insignificant Oldendorp's, Stedman's and Greenfield's texts are when measured against the slave system within which they must be considered. Yet the universalist tenets so forcibly expressed in Greenfield's words underlie the revision of the canon currently in process throughout Western universities. In fact, measured against the standard comparatist reference to Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, roughly contemporary but concerned as much with *Wert* as *Welt*, Greenfield's words resonate with renewed importance.

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NOTES

1. The late John E. Reinecke is responsible for having resurrected the reputation of Greenfield, and I am grateful for and indebted to his "William Greenfield, a Neglected Pioneer Creolist," in Gilbert 1987, pp. 23-33, and to the letter from William A. Stewart which appears in its appendix. Unreferenced information about Greenfield, Andrew Thomson and J. G. Stedman is from that article or in the respective items in the *British Dictionary of National Biography*.
2. See Corwin 1895, p. 432 ff., for the story of the Unitas Fratrum, Christian and Zinzendorf. Related information in John Holm 1988, p. 17 ff., and Stein 1986.
3. Voorhoeve 1957, and Voorhoeve and Donicie 1963 (esp. items 151-183) recount the early history of biblical translations in Sranan.
4. For Stedman's appreciation of Blake's work on the sketches Stedman had brought back from Suriname, see Collis (1965, p. 221).

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