

Excerpts from Obituaries on Edouard Glissant

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'Eloquent defender of diversity and métissage, the great Caribbean writer Edouard Glissant died on February 3 in Paris, at the age of 82. Poet, novelist, essayist, playwright, thinker, [and exponent of the concept of] creolization, he was born in Sainte-Marie (Martinique) on September 21, 1928 and conducted studies in Philosophy and Ethnology in Paris.'

Some excerpts of the obituaries:

Glissant debuted as a poet in 1953 with *Un champ d'îles*. In his essays and theoretical studies, Glissant's topics varied from Eurocentric cultural imperialism to multilingualism and the creolization of cultures and values. For example, the epic poem *Les Indes* (1956, The Indies) retraced Columbus' voyage to America and its consequences. The slave trade, argued Glissant in *Poetics of Relation* (1990), caused the deterritorialization of African languages and contributed to creolization in the West. "This is the most completely known confrontation between the powers of the written word and the impulses of orality. The only written thing on slave ships was the account book listing the exchange value of slaves." Glissant saw that the clearest symbol of creolization is a creole language, open to multilingual influence. Thus the arrogant monolingual imperialism is challenged by the Tower of Babel. "Creolization carries in itself the adventure of multilingualism along with the extraordinary explosion of cultures."

In contrast to Césaire's culturally unifying concept of *négritude*, Glissant criticized "fake universality" and emphasized cultural fragmentation in the Caribbean. Struggling to come in terms with the fragmented heritage of Caribbean writers, Glissant replaced the monolingual concept of root-identity with the concept of the specific rhizome-identity (*antillinité*), which maintains the fact of rootedness but rejects the idea of a totalitarian root. Originally the metaphor of the rhizome was introduced by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

The creole is at the same time "absolutely original" and growing like a rhizome without fixed roots – the process is global. Glissant extended it from Caribbean and the Atlantic identity to embrace the *tout-monde* (whole world) of human interculturalism. In his second novel, *Le Quatrième Siècle* (1964, *The Fourth Century*), which won the Charles Veillon Prize, exemplified the idea through tracing the intertwined genealogies of two Martinican families to two enslaved Africans, duelling on board a slave ship. The Longou's are the fugitive slaves, and the Belouses, the plantation slaves, accept their fate.

Glissant's other important theoretical concepts include that of "relation" (la Relation), the nonhierarchical principle of unity, a relation of equality with and respect for the Other as *different* from oneself. "In Relation the whole is not the finality of its parts: for multiplicity in totality is totally diversity." In a global framework it is manifested in the relations between languages. Glissant rejected the need for a lingua franca. The opposition between spoken language (*langage*) and written language (*langue*) became a central issue in his writings in the 1970s. As an act of resistance from within the language, he also urged Antillian writers to break up the colonial French, and stated that it is absolutely necessary to violate the language at the written level. Relation is in constant movement; Glissant associated it with "chaos-world", a concept derived from scientific chaos theory.

In his novels Glissant's recorded the anticolonial revolt, liberation of Afro-Caribbeans, and the lost history of his country. In 1958 he was awarded the prestigious Renaudot Prize for the novel *La Lézarde* (*The Ripening*), about young revolutionaries and murder. The story, based on the events of 1945, follows the flow of the river Lézarde down from the hills to the sea, and at the same time records the journey of the hero, Thael, and his relationship with his surroundings. Thael is a member of a revolutionary group, his mission is to kill a traitor. *The Fourth Century* was the partial sequel of *La Lézarde*.

Monsieur Toussaint (1961), drew on the life of Toussaint Louverture (1746-1803), the famous Haitian revolutionary leader, who has inspired a number of writers, among them Aimé Césaire. The original version of the work was not designated for a theatrical production, but its stage version was published in *Acoma* in 1978. *Malemort* (1975) was meant to shock and disorient with changing perspectives, drifting characters, violent shifts in style and backward narrative, looking for the mythical figure of Odonno transported from Africa. Martinique is portrayed as the land of the happy *malemorts*, who are neither alive or dead. At the end "la bête longue" swallows one of the working class characters.

As a Martiniquan, Glissant became torn between two worlds: administratively the island is part of France, whereas geographically it belongs to the Caribbean region; the official language is French, but the vernacular is Creole. Resisting the notion of unique origins, Glissant regarded the Antillian's identity, culture and history primarily as a product of multilingualism and multiracialism. After visiting William Faulkner's home in Oxford, Mississippi, Glissant wrote: "Whatever attitude he adopts in his rapport with the Other and whatever global vision of the Other he had formed, the writer has no choice but to disturb this vision through his work, even after expressing it in the work. Because finally he must renounce indivisibility and terrifying unity." (from *Faulkner, Mississippi*, 1996)

For further reading: *Myth and History in Caribbean Fiction: Alejo Carpentier, Wilson Harris, and Edouard Glissant* by Barbara J. Webb (1992); *Edouard Glissant* by J. Michael Dash (1995); *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* by Celia Britton (1999); *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing: Césaire, Glissant, Condé* by Jeannie Suk (2001)

Source: <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/glissan.htm>

Edouard Glissant Passed Away Today

Although I knew that he was ailing, I was still stunned to learn that another great mind of the 20th century was extinguished today. Philosopher/poet/novelist Edouard Glissant passed away today (February 3, 2011) in Paris at the age of 82. Many thanks to Kevin Meehan for this obituary from *Le Monde*. [The obituary is followed by a link to the original.]

Eloquent defender of diversity and *métissage*, the great Caribbean writer Edouard Glissant died on February 3 in Paris, at the age of 82. Poet, novelist, essayist, playwright, thinker, [and exponent of the concept of] creolization, he was born in Sainte-Marie (Martinique) on September 21, 1928 and conducted studies in Philosophy and Ethnology in Paris.

His success upon winning the Prix Renaudot in 1958 for his novel *La Lézarde* made the general public aware of this intellectual, who never separated his literary creation from a militant reflection. Influenced by the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, he construed the history and geography of the Caribbean politically, demonstrating his revolt against racisms of any

type and evoking the indelible mark of slavery on the relationship between France and Africa and all overseas territories.

Opposing any imposed systems and any rejection of the other, Edouard Glissant has been champion of *métissage* and exchange, formulating in his essays gathered in the "Poétique" series his theses on *Philosophie de la relation* [philosophy of relation] and *Poétique du divers* the [poetics of the diverse]. He refused to be constrained by single genre, moving constantly between the novel, essay, and poetry, even within a single work.

Novels Directed towards the Imaginary

Edouard Glissant, who shared at once a respectful and conflicting relationship with Aimé Césaire, the other great personality of the Caribbean world, also expressed his concern for literary parentage, through writers and "disciples" [I would rather translate this as supporting scholars] such as Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, or Ernest Pépin.

His novels, from *Quatrième siècle* (Seuil 1965) to *Ormerod* (Gallimard 2003), are geared towards a mythical and imaginary world, far from any naturalism, but also imbued with picturesque elements specific to certain Caribbean novelists.

After having created a center for research and teaching in Martinique, as well as a review named *Acoma*, Edouard Glissant founded in Paris the Institut du Tout-monde, aimed at putting into practice his humanistic principles and to allowing for the dissemination of "the extraordinary diversity of the imaginaries of the people."

Photo: Edouard Glissant in 1958 (*Le Monde*)

For the original obituary (in French), see

http://www.lemonde.fr/carnet/article/2011/02/03/l-ecrivain-edouard-glissant-est-mort_1474457_3382.html

Read a beautiful tribute (in French) here: http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/la-mort-d-edouard-glissant-03-02-2011-1291602_3.php

For another wonderful tribute article (in Spanish), see

<http://vidatraducida.wordpress.com/2011/02/04/edouard-glissant-ha-pasado-a-traduccion/>

For full biography, see

<http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/paroles/glissant.html>

See more on the Glissant's poetics at

<http://thefunambulist.net/2010/12/17/philosophy-poetics-of-relation-by-edouard-glissant/>