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Norman R. Shapiro. *Creole Echoes: The Francophone Poetry of Nineteenth-Century Louisiana*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004. 234p.

CÉCILE ACCILLEN  
COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

*Creole Echoes: The Francophone Poetry of Nineteenth-Century Louisiana* problematizes and brings to light the complexity of the term Creole through poetry. This book inserts itself not only in the Francophone literary tradition but contributes to American and Southern studies. As the field of American Studies is being redefined and revisited, this collection will be an important testimony to the place of Louisiana Francophone literary traditions in the field of American Studies.

The collection depicts the rich cultures of Louisiana, a mix of African, European, and Native Americans influences. The volume truly represents Gary B. Mills' definition of a Creole being "anyone who says he/[she] is one." The term "Creole," an elusive term to say the least, has been and continues to be the subject of debates where issues of race, class, and culture intersect. What is obvious and interesting though is that the issue of Creole is not black and white.

Louisiana is a crossroads in American and Caribbean cultures both geographically and historically. Long before terms like transnationalisation and globalisation became buzz words, Louisianians were living in a transnational context, as is evident in the poems through the diversity of their themes and through the influences of styles and languages. Louisiana's history of wars, revolutions, rebellions, and migration testifies to its importance in world history and in U.S. history. Louisiana plays a crucial role in the expansion of the United States with the Louisiana Purchase. It is truly one of the most unique states in the U.S. This volume presents the richness of Francophone Louisiana's cultural and literary history, one that is not well enough known to scholars outside of Francophone Studies. This anthology is an *avant-goût* (a foretaste), an appetizer of sorts, inviting the reader on a journey to explore the great richness of Louisianan/Southern literature that has not yet been discovered by the English-speaking public. This collection serves as a poetic trip for scholars and lovers of history and culture. The trip will take you to real places such as the bayou with its flora and fauna, to various places along the Mississippi, to the levee, to the wilderness, and to Jackson Square. By the time you are done reading the volume, you will want to physically go on a New Orleans journey to experience this richness of cultures.

The volume will add to translated works such as *Les Cénelles: A Collection of Poems by Creole Writers of the Early Nineteenth Century* by Gleason Adams and Régine Latortue. This collection of poems leads the reader through a historical

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journey, for the poems between the lines tell the stories and history of Louisiana and its connections to Saint-Domingue (Haiti), Cuba, Martinique, Canada, and France. The collection brings together the works of thirty-two poets from different backgrounds, including Michel Seligny, Camille Thierry, Georges Dessommes, Charles Testut, and Louis Boise. Although there is only one woman represented, Léona Queyrouze, this is more than likely due to the fact that women's poetry from this era went largely unpublished.

This bilingual edition informs the reader about each poet's background. From love poems to social protests, poverty, abolition of slavery, to poetry about fables and animal tales, it presents the social, political, religious, and artistic life in New Orleans in the 19th century. The volume is important as well for those who question the validity of the Creole languages as being literary languages. Jules Chopin, a first-generation immigrant whose parents were both French and who was a professor of French language and literature at Tulane University, wrote some fables in Louisianian Creole. In "The Oak and the Reed," he writes,

Pas fait gros vene, ain jour ta vini plat;  
Gros papa lion ça peur ain ti dérat....

[Don't go make boast, one day you go lay flat:  
Big Papa lion, him scared of little rat....] (22-23)

What Shapiro has captured is the essence of Francophone Louisiana poetry. He remains true to the poems and the poets while translating the richness of language and style. He portrays the "Creoleness" of the poets and the poems through the "creolized" language and culture to form a "Louisianian" quality where everything mixes together into a true gumbo culture, which is what Louisiana truly is. But Louisiana then and now, is also very segregated. The culture/s may be mixed fundamentally but the legacy of slavery remains in racial segregation. Nevertheless, the reader is invited to explore Louisiana's complex cultures and proclaim:

O belle Louisiane, ô vatses cyprières,  
Où m'égaraiet jadis des courses solitaires;  
Où j'allais, tout enfant, ainsi qu'en un saint lieu,  
Oùir, déjà rêveur, la grande voix de Dieu!  
Où j'écoutais, ravi, de vagues harmonies;  
Où je m'entraînaï avec des doux Génies!  
O mon ciel d'Occident, d'où tombait autrefois  
La poésie en pleurs dans les blonds lis des bois!

[O fair Louisiana! O you vast  
Cypress groves where, alone, in days long past,

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My footsteps strayed—a dreamer then, although  
But a mere lad!—and where I used to go,  
As in some holy place, a-wandering, awed,  
To listen to the mighty voice of God;  
Where I would hear vague harmonies, and let  
Myself converse, in sacred tête-à-tête,  
With gentle Spirits! O my New World sky,  
Where poetry once rained with tearful cry.]  
(56-59) ✱