



Aimé Césaire, *And the Dogs Were Silent* /*Et les chiens se taisaient*, translated by Alex Gil

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In recent years, genetic criticism has drawn increased attention to the organic processes of writing and translation. Rather than viewing texts as fixed products, this approach uncovers the layers of textual development and agency, revealing how works evolve over time. With the publication of*And the Dogs Were Silent* /*Et les chiens se taisaient*, a critical edition translated and introduced by Alex Gil, Duke University Press offers a unique opportunity to explore the genealogy of one of Aimé Césaire's lesser-known texts. Originally written in 1943 in Vichy Martinique, this three-act drama on the Haitian Revolution and the death of Toussaint Louverture was initially included in Césaire's early poetry, *Les armes miraculeuses* (1946). This new edition provides scholars of Caribbean studies, as well as readers in English and French, with valuable insight into the composition of Césaire's work and its historical context.

This is not the first Caribbean literary text to be examined through the lens of genetic criticism, an approach that studies the evolution of literary drafts and their production contexts. Gil, a specialist in the work of Césaire and the translator of*Et les chiens se taisaient*, has been a leading figure in digital-humanities projects focused on Caribbean literature and its genealogies of production and circulation. His work has significantly contributed to uncovering the *avant-textes*—manuscripts, rough drafts, and notes—that underpin published works. Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* is a prime example. The poem has been the subject of various studies highlighting its palimpsestic nature, often revisiting its original 1939 version and examining the impact on its (re)translations, particularly in the English-speaking world.¹

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In tracing the genealogy of*Et les chiens se taisaient*, this edition not only illuminates the composition of Césaire's drama but also provides a fascinating examination of Haiti's central role in Césaire's literary project. Gil's careful analysis highlights the deep connections between Césaire's portrayal of Haiti and *Louverture*, resonating with contemporary struggles against colonialism. The drama exposes France's republican ideals as a mask for colonial domination, drawing rich parallels with the literary trajectory of C. L. R. James, among others.

The volume features a forty-two-page introduction by Gil titled "The Making and Remaking of*Et les chiens se taisaient*," in which he discusses his findings from consulting the Yvan Goll Papers at the Saint-Dié-des-Vosges municipal library in France in 2008. Through a detailed analysis of the 1943 typescript found in the Goll Papers, along with letters between Césaire and André Breton housed at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet in Paris, Gil identifies "several distinct stages of composition and revision" (34). These revisions, marked by changes in temporality, plot, themes, and *dramatis personae*, provide invaluable insight into Césaire's creative process. Notably, Gil and Brent Hayes Edwards (the latter in the foreword to this volume) highlight the excision of explicit references to violence and the Haitian Revolution in the 1946 version, making the later edition far more abstract than the original 1943 drama. This shift, particularly after Césaire's time in Haiti in 1944, marks a transition towards a focus on the tragic hero rather than on the collective rebel struggle.

One of the most important discoveries in this edition is that Césaire turned to drama much earlier than previously thought. Through his meticulous translation, Gil not only sheds light on Césaire's innovative approach to drama but also offers valuable reflections on the process of translating terms such as *nègre* and *noir*. His translation decisions, especially as they relate to the history of Césaire's translations into English, offer an insightful contribution to ongoing debates in the field. Gil's translation, described as "plainspoken" (35) yet "volcanic" (30) (an apt description, given Césaire's fiery language), is complemented by detailed endnotes that help contextualize African and Haitian references, guiding readers through Césaire's complex intertextuality.

In addition to the print edition, the 2019 digital version of*Et les chiens se taisaient* created by Gil provides a deeper understanding of the text (Césaire,*et les chiens se taisaient*). This version includes downloadable images of the typescript and a transposition of the text composed of two versions: a "diplomatic edition," which highlights changes made by Césaire in different font colours, and a "reading edition," which incorporates all the author's changes without flagging them. The digital edition highlights the complementarity of print and digital media, allowing scholars to engage with the text on multiple levels. While the print edition's decision to feature the translation before the original text is noteworthy, some readers may have preferred a side-by-side comparison to facilitate a

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more direct engagement with both versions. Such an approach might also have offered a clearer understanding of the translator's thought process, perhaps through the inclusion of different drafts, making the translation's organic nature even more apparent.

Another compelling feature of the translation is its attention to Caribbean multilingual resonances. In instances like Louverture's declaration "Toutes les morditures et tout l'espoir au dos des mains, au creux des mains des feuilles de caïmitiers ne me consoleront pas" (220), Gil opts for the Spanish term *caimito* rather than the English *star apple* for the French "caïmitier." This subtle choice reflects a deep engagement with Caribbean specificity, reinforcing the idea that Césaire's work resists monolingual readings and cannot be confined to a single linguistic paradigm. Through his translation, Gil reminds us that the Caribbean text—and Césaire's work in particular—must be understood as part of a dynamic, multilingual, and ever-evolving tradition.

Gil's archival work and careful translation breathe new life into Césaire's previously lost play. Through this bilingual edition, scholars and readers alike gain access to a rich and multifaceted text that extends beyond the confines of any single language or version. The book's publication, both in print and digital formats, invites readers to engage with the play as an ongoing, transformative process. After all, as Césaire's title suggests, while the dogs may be silent, they are never truly quiet—they continue to bark with their tails.²

Notes

- ¹ See, for example, Glover and Gil, in which the authors present a digital collaborative translation project of the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* by using an online annotation tool.
- ² This is an allusion to Estelle-Sarah Bulle's *Là où les chiens aboient par la queue*, translated by Julia Grawemeyer as *Where Dogs Bark with Their Tails* (Bulle). The title comes from a Creole expression ("Cé la chyen ka jape pa ké") that is used to describe a remote location, a place behind God's back.

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Works Cited

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Glover, Kaiama L., and Alex Gil. “Une traduction contrapuntique du *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* d'Aimé Césaire (1939).” *Revue italienne d'études françaises*, vol. 12, 2022, pp. 23–51. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rief.9849>.