

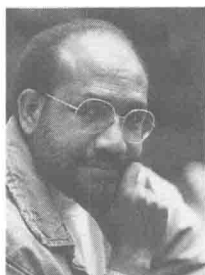
"A great book has been written . . . one with [a] melodic voice and amplitude of heart." —Derek Walcott, *New York Review of Books*

TEXACO

PATRICK CHAMOISEAU

A N O V E L

WINNER OF THE PRIX GONCOURT



PATRICK CHAMOISEAU

TEXACO

Patrick Chamoiseau lives in Martinique. His other books include *Creole Folktales* and *Solibo Magnificent*. *Texaco* has been translated into fourteen languages.



INTERNATIONAL

For Milan Kundera and Édouard Glissant—*O estimes!*



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by Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov
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Acclaim for PATRICK CHAMOISEAU'S

TEXACO

"Stupendously energetic . . . a powerful artist."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Chamoiseau is a master storyteller. The language of *Texaco* is absolutely, magically enchanting."

—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"A wonderfully rich, powerful and eloquent novel."

—*Times Literary Supplement*

"Chamoiseau is a writer of exceptional and original gifts. [*Texaco* is] a stunning, sensuous, ribald and riotous tale of Caribbean history. This is a book that signals discovery!"

—*The New York Times*

"A heroic venture, equally compelling in its aesthetic and ethical achievements . . . a remarkable success."

—*Boston Sunday Globe*

"Soars and tumbles in effortless acrobatics at times ribald, poetic, lyrical and lewd, it dances across the page. . . . Reminiscent of the works of Rushdie, Naipaul and García Márquez."

—*Seattle Times*

"One cannot help but notice the similarities in his writing to the work of Salman Rushdie."

—*The New Republic*

"*Texaco* throbs, pulsates, virtually explodes with life."

—*Dallas Morning News*

"Glittering . . . more exciting than 'the true-true' could ever be."

—*Atlantic Monthly*

Also by PATRICK CHAMOISEAU

Creole Folktales
Solibo Magnificent

What will the scribe recall, who through herself already tells of the stern destiny of all these women forever condemned to pregnancies, who, in order to foresee the day's weather and figure out what labors to take on, are expert at deciphering the prophecies of the wind, of dusk, or of the misty halo which sometimes seems to ooze out of the moon; these women who, while fighting—as much as men—to survive, made what is known as a fatherland, and whom calendars reduce to a few noisy holidays, to a vainglory after which streets are named?

HECTOR BIANCIOTTI

The city was the sanctuary of the word, of the gesture and the geste, * of struggle.

You, game . . . are nothing but a city-blackman: that's where you have to speak from! . . .

ÉDOUARD GLISSANT

TRANSLATORS' NOTE

In the original, the author's French translation usually follows any Creole sentence: wherever the author's translation diverges substantially from the meaning of the Creole, we have included our own footnoted version. We distinguish our footnotes from the author's by the use of brackets. Also, please note that an asterisk signifies the first appearance of a glossary item in the text.

CONTENTS

TRANSLATORS' NOTE ix

MILESTONES IN OUR ATTEMPTS TO CONQUER THE CITY 3

THE ANNUNCIATION

*(in which the urban planner who comes to raze the insalubrious Texaco Quarter
instead finds himself in a Creole circus and faces a matadora's word) 7*

The Christ's coming according to Iréné 11—The Christ's coming according to
Sonore 14—The Christ's coming according to Marie-Clémence 19—The Christ's
encounter with the old blackman of the Doum 21—The Christ's encounter
with myself 25

THE SERMON OF MARIE-SOPHIE LABORIEUX

(not on the mount, but over some dark rum) 29

BOOK ONE

AROUND SAINT-PIERRE

*(in which the slave Esternome, having embarked on the conquest of City,
brings back nothing but the horror of a barbecued love) 31*

THE AGE OF STRAW (1823[?]-1920) 33

Grandpapa of the dungeon 35—Grandmama laundress 38—
The conquest of the Big Hutch 43—The Mentoh and the carpenter 50—
The descent into City 58—Osélia's cream 60—
The libertied and the affranchis 66—A woman's blow 71—
Building City 74—Shoeless blackman 78—Sweet Ninon so sweet 83—
The mean chabin 86—The Word of the Mentohs 92—
Ninon's illusion 97—Headwork and troubles 105—
The Noutéka of the Hills 123—Doctor of Hutches 132—
Factory charms 135—An infernal serenade 140—Barbecued love 146

BOOK TWO

AROUND FORT-DE-FRANCE

*(in which Esternome's daughter, bearer of a secret name,
pursues the work of conquest and imposes Texaco) 159*

THE AGE OF CRATE WOOD (1903–1945) 161

- The Flying One 163—A quick look at Idoménee's musings 175—
Tears of light 180—Last love bites 193—The Word Scratcher to the Source 201—
Musicians with hungry eyes 202—City people 209—
The Made-in-France dresses and the four books 214—Basile at heart 225—
The muscles of civilization 232—The lonely watergrass 237—
Other City people 240

THE AGE OF ASBESTOS (1946–1960) 252

- Mad Season 254—The dream of leaving 262—Morne Abélard's Laws 274—
Law 35 277—Sweet painful bride 280—The last Mentoh 286—
Words of the old blackman of the Doum 291—The secret name 294—
Foundation stricken 299—Time biding its time 308—Christmas down here 312

THE AGE OF CONCRETE (1961–1980) 316

- Free soil 317—Writing-dying 320—The Word Scratcher to the Source 322—
The drifter 327—Roman goose 334—The lawyerly mulatto 341—
The sailors with visions 345—The Césaire effect 354—
The drifter's death 357—Writing-torn 359—The béké's swan song 362—
Medicine-poem 364—Hoping for the Messiah 368—The toll 370—
The last shark catcher 374—Christ's arrival 378—The secret name 381

RESURRECTION

*(not in Easter's splendor but in the shameful society of the Word Scratcher who
tries to write life) 383*

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 391

AFTERWORD: A WORD ABOUT BRINGING CHAMOISEAU'S WORD INTO

ENGLISH—BY ROSE-MYRIAM RÉJOUIS 393

GLOSSARY 397

TRANSLATORS' ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 403

TEXACO

MILESTONES IN OUR ATTEMPTS TO CONQUER THE CITY

To escape the night of slavery and colonialism, Martinique's black slaves and mulattoes will, one generation after the other, abandon the plantations, the fields, and the hills, to throw themselves into the conquest of the cities (which in Creole they call "*l'En-ville*").¹ These multiple assaults will end with the fractious creation of the district of Texaco and the ominous reign of a boundless city.

THE AGE OF LONGHOUSES AND AJOUPAS

At that time Caribs, Arawaks, French colonists, and the first African slaves lived in longhouses and shelters (called ajoupas) made from branches and leaves. Caribs and Arawaks are exterminated as slave sugar plantations appear and cities grow.

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 3000 B.C.E.
to 1492 | Galibis, Arawaks, Caribs occupy the Caribbean islands. |
| 1502 | Christopher Columbus arrives in Martinique. |
| 1635 | France definitively takes possession of Martinique and erects a fort, around which the city of Saint-Pierre will be built. |
| 1667 | Construction of Fort-Royal, which will bring about a second city: Fort-de-France. <i>Our great squatter districts will cluster around it. At this point the site of the future Texaco Quarter is but thickets and mangrove.</i> |
| 1680 | Mass importation of black African slaves. |

¹[Translators' note: Literally, "the In-city." Hereafter rendered as a proper noun, "City," as in "New York." See author's footnote on page 386.]

THE AGE OF STRAW

Once the slave plantations fall apart, marking the beginning of the reign of large central factories, sugarcane straw covers Martinican hutches.

- 18— *Probable time of birth of Esternome Laborieux, the papa of Texaco's founder-to-be; he is a slave on a plantation near the city of Saint-Pierre.*
- 18— *Probable time of birth of Idoménee Carmélite Lapidaille, the mama of Texaco's founder-to-be; she is a slave on a plantation near the city of Fort-de-France.*
- 1848 *April 27: Abolition of slavery decreed in the French colonies.
May 22: Slave rebellion in the city of Saint-Pierre forces Martinique's governor to decree the Abolition before the arrival of the official decision.*
- 1853 *The former slaves refuse to work in the fields and leave to settle in the highlands. Replacement is required for them: arrival of the first East Indian workers (coolies) into Martinique, to be followed by Africans (congos) and Chinese, and later (1875) Syrio-Lebanese merchants (syrians).*
- 1902 *May 8: Mount Pelée erupts, destroying the town of Saint-Pierre. More than 30,000 deaths.
Mass exodus toward Fort-de-France, where the first squatter districts appear.*

THE AGE OF CRATE WOOD

When the precarious reign of the large sugar factories rises atop the ruins of the plantation system, hutches stand on crate debris.

- 19— *Probable time of Marie-Sophie Laborieux's birth; it is she who will found Texaco.*

- 1914 *August 3*: Germany declares war on France. Caribbean conscripts are dispatched to the front: Somme, Verdun, Dardanelles . . .
- 1928 *Probable year of the death of Idoménee Carmélite Lapidaille, the mama.*
- 1930 *Probable year of the death of Esternome Laborieux, the papa.*
- 1938 *Establishment of the oil company on the future site of the Texaco Quarter.*
- 1939 *September 3*: France declares war on Germany.
September 19: Arrival of Admiral Georges Robert in Martinique, where he will enforce Vichy's repressive measures.
 Aimé Césaire publishes *Le Cahier d'un Retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*), the grand poetic roar of Negritude.
- 1940 *June 16*: France capitulates.
June 18: General de Gaulle calls on the Résistance, a call which Martinicans hear. Martinique, under blockade, is starving.

THE AGE OF ASBESTOS¹

As the sugar economy collapses, hutches are wrapped in asbestos.

- 1945 Aimé Césaire is elected mayor of Fort-de-France.
- 1946 *March 19*: Law establishing Martinique as a French province (*département*).
- 1950 *Marie-Sophie Laborieux's first settlement on the future site of Texaco, and her first police expulsion.*

¹[We use *asbestos* to designate what the author calls *fibrociment*, a cement mixed with asbestos.]

- 1959 *December 20–23: Riots in Fort-de-France.
New waves of rural exodus to Fort-de-France. The site of Texaco
is invaded.*

THE AGE OF CONCRETE

As the fall of economic production inaugurates the reign of the city, glorious concrete transforms shacks into villas.

- 1964 De Gaulle's trip to Martinique.
- 1980–83 *A road called Pénétrante West joins the neighborhood of Texaco
to Fort-de-France. Messianic arrival of the urban planner in Tex-
aco. Beginning of the rehabilitation.*
- 1985 *Meeting of Marie-Sophie Laborieux with the Word Scratcher, the
one who makes books.*
- 1989 *Death of Marie-Sophie Laborieux, who was "the Source."*

THE ANNUNCIATION

*(in which the urban planner who comes to raze
the insalubrious Texaco Quarter instead
finds himself in a Creole circus and
faces a matadora's* word)*

