

OBITUARY

HERMAN CHRISTIAAN WEKKER 1943–1997

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On January 20, 1997 the inevitable took place: Herman Wekker, English scholar and creolist, passed away after a period of terminal illness that had lasted a few years. There had been flickers of hope during that period, when it was thought that he might, after all, make it. But it was not to be. By mid-1996, he, his family and his friends knew that the end was nigh. He died peacefully and totally prepared, in harmony with himself and his loved ones.

Herman Christiaan Wekker was born on March 26, 1943, in Paramaribo, into a harmonious Roman Catholic creole family. When he was eight years old, the family moved to Holland, where Herman's father made a career in law. Stimulated by his loving parents, Herman had the best schooling available. He went to the Jesuit-run grammar schools in Amsterdam and Nijmegen, and then to Nijmegen University, where he studied English language and literature (1961–1968). His PhD (the dissertation was entitled *The Expression of Future Time in Contemporary British English*) followed in 1976, also at Nijmegen University. In 1969 he became an associate professor of English at Nijmegen. In 1987 he was appointed to the chair of English Language at Groningen University, an office he fulfilled till his untimely death at the age of 53.

Having achieved professional status in academia, he felt the need to revert to his roots, Suriname, that is. Around 1975 he relearned Sranan, the language of his early childhood, but practically forgotten after his emigration to the Netherlands. He started reading about Sranan and other creole languages, and about the history, with all its uncertainties and unmapped areas, of the creole peoples and their languages. It was in this context that I got into closer contact with him, having myself developed, at that time, a vivid interest in creole languages. Jointly we started, in 1981, the Institute for

the Advancement of Surinamese Studies (IBS), a foundation which, amongst other activities, publishes *OSO*, a Dutch-language biannual journal with articles on the history, language, and culture of Suriname. Also jointly, we published the book chapter "Semantic Transparency As a Factor in Creole Genesis" (1986).

Besides other creolistic papers and reviews (some of which were co-authored by his sister Gloria), he published the fascinating article "Aphra Behn and the Royal Slave Oroonoko" (1982). A few years ago he started work on a *Handbook of Creole Studies*, a work which he very much wanted to finish before his death. Unfortunately he was unable to do so. The book is now being continued by the well-known creolist Jacques Arends. During the last few months, when it was clear that the end was not far off, he wrote a number of short stories, largely based on Surinamese oral folk literature, and partly also on dreams. A collection of these, entitled *Paulines Hemelvaart* ("Pauline's Ascension to Heaven"), is due to be published by Bert Bakker, Amsterdam, during the course of 1997. Through his publications, but even more through his active personal engagement, Herman became a well-known and respected personality among the Surinamese in the Netherlands as well as in Suriname, promoting their cultural and educational emancipation. Although the bulk of his academic activities lay in the field of English grammar and second language acquisition, he became well-known also in creolistic circles, not only by his publications and conference papers but also by the guidance and stimulation he gave to junior students of creole languages. He was a wonderful colleague, full of inspiring insights and a treasure of knowledge. He was also a dear friend, with a warm and forgiving heart, one who always tried to detect the best in others and bring that to fruition. He will be badly missed.

[EDITOR'S COMMENT: I was very saddened to learn of Herman's death. For the historical record, let me point out that the very existence of JPCL was his doing. The journal — and our science — stand very much in his debt. He and Pieter Seuren wrote the proposal addressed to the Dutch National Science Foundation (ZWO) that allowed me to come to the Netherlands during 1984–1985 for a 12-month sabbatical leave in Nijmegen. In effect, they were my sponsors. It was during that time that I became acquainted with the Amsterdam creolistics group (Pieter Muysken, Norval Smith, Hans den Besten, and others) as well as with Mervyn Alleyne, who was likewise spending his sabbatical year in Holland. It was a memorable event in my

life to be able to take part in the conference in Amsterdam on substrata versus universals in creole genesis. This environment, with the continuing encouragement, support, and new ideas of Herman Wekker and Pieter Seuren, the support of John and Claire Benjamins, and the inherent fascination of the creole world induced me to take the plunge into the founding and editing of this journal. But the initial stimulus was provided by the intervention of Herman Wekker and Pieter Seuren, without whom there would undoubtedly have been no JPCL. — Glenn Gilbert.]

Publications*

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* [Note: We have used the reference style supplied by the author. He has cited only those publications on pidgin and creole topics. — Editor]

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