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A Tribute to Norval Smith

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> *Nobody knows more about Surinam Creole phonology and word derivations than Norval* (Derek Bickerton 2008: 180)

Pieter Muysken: Derek has got a point! Norval became a creolist during a joint seminar we organized on creoles in Amsterdam in the 1970s, looking at different structures each week, each with a different language. It was a regular class with students, but also a working group, with people like Hans den Besten, Catherine Snow, and Guus Meijer participating as fellow staff of the Amsterdam linguistics department. It was great fun to compare notes on patterns in different creole languages, and not just to delve into books but also to profit from the presence of many speakers of creole languages, including very gifted students, from regions with which the Netherlands had a (post-)colonial relationship. Actual fieldwork, though not the very daring kind. Saramaccan without tears, Mervyn Alleyne called it years later. Out of these efforts came the series of working papers, *Amsterdam Creole Studies*, (co-edited by Norval and myself). To our surprise this series became a success from the first issue in 1977 onward, and *Amsterdam Creole Studies* has gone through 12 issues, with others such as Hans den Besten sharing the editorial work. From then on, Norval and I have been partners in crime, as it were, with several books co-edited, such as *Substrata versus Universals in Creole Genesis* (1986) and jointly with Jacques Arends, *Pidgins and Creoles: an Introduction* (1994), and a research project that we have finally just completed, 'The Benin-Surinam Trans-Atlantic Sprachbund.'

For me linguistics always was syntax, but Norval opened my eyes to the power of phonology and the possibility of using phonological relationships and developments to reconstruct the history of the Surinam creoles. The origin and history of coastal Sranan and the maroon languages Ndyuka and Saramaccan is very complex, as the readers of this journal know. What was the role of Portuguese (creole)? Was there an English-lexifier pidgin already brought to Surinam? How and when did Ndyuka split off from Sranan? All these questions, Norval has argued, can be answered on the solid basis of historical phonological developments. Although also deeply interested in the study of the external history of the Surinam creoles, Norval maintains that linguistic facts are historical facts in their own right, and often more reliable than archival data. The phonological shapes of words have their own truth. Consider Table 1.

Table 1. The treatment of /*v/ in the Surinam creoles (after Smith 1987: 197)

origin	Surinam creoles	Saramaccan example
English	/b/	líbi < 'live'
Portuguese	/v/ ~ /b/	baí < varrer 'sweep'
		véntu < vento 'wind'
Kikongo	/v/ (> /f/ in Sranan)	vulá < mvúla 'rain'
Gbe	/v/ (> /f/ in Sranan) some /b/ preceding /i/	aviti < avìtì 'trap'

The historical development of /*v/ > /b/ in all English and most Portuguese items is, Norval points out, unexpected: 'The fact that both Gbe and Kikongo speakers had /v/ in their phonological systems, and therefore did not need to substitute another sound for it (…) suggests also that both the English and Portuguese items with /b/ have an origin external to Surinam'. This argument formed the starting point for a series of articles on the historical connections between Surinam and Pernambuco — more on this below.

Margot van den Berg: Yeah you are very right! This is actually one of the things that impressed me most about in Norval, who was co-supervisor of my PhD dissertation (2007) at the University of Amsterdam, in the context of the Trans-Atlantic project that Pieter mentioned. When I started, I knew Norval only from his extensive (almost 500 pages hand-typed) dissertation on the genesis of Sranan and Saramaccan: an impressive book with charts listing phonological variants in these languages, manually collected from various historical sources — painstaking work. So one thing I felt I had to confess, if our PhD student-supervisor relationship was to amount to something, was my complete indifference to phonology. He responded gracefully, and kindly let both me and Enoch stay in his office while

waiting for our own. In the subsequent years, it became clear to me that he was an expert not only in phonology, but also in the morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics of the Surinamese languages, as well as other languages such as Delta Yokuts. And for someone who finds linguistic facts more reliable than sociohistorical and demographic facts, he has vast knowledge of the latter, and often articulates thought-provoking views on seemingly concrete and unambiguous data. Take for example the debate on the source of the Portuguese elements in Saramaccan in *Spreading the word. The issue of diffusion among the Atlantic Creoles* (1999). While Arends, Ladhams and Jennings argue, on sociohistorical and demographic grounds, that these elements could not possibly have derived from the Portuguese Jews in Pernambuco (the short-lived 17th century Dutch colony in northern Brazil), Norval argues that a Surinam — Pernambuco connection is not inconceivable: Some of the Pernambuco Jews (and their slaves!) may have entered Surinam via Cayenne or another route. Proof is found, of course, in the phonological pudding. For instance, the Saramaccan reflexes of Portuguese /esC/ clusters show retention of /s/ in some cases only. As table (2) shows this pattern is found in several other Portuguese-origin creoles as well. Such parallelism can only be accounted for by invoking a connection between the West-African Portuguese Pidgin and a form of Pidgin Portuguese that emerged in Pernambuco and which subsequently was brought to Surinam, via Cayenne.

   Norval is a bit of a rebel, of the kind that makes you think. He recently came forward with a variant of the abrupt creolization scenario named *Very Rapid Creolization*, which has it that creolization was essentially completed within the space of a few years (Smith 2006). He argues that Sranan was a fully formed creole around 1665, when most of the English left Surinam (see Arends 2002 for an alternative view). I am not exactly sure what he means by a 'fully formed creole', but my findings show that 18th-century Sranan displays several features that resemble

Table 2. The development of Portuguese esC- in various Creoles (Smith 1999b: 288)

Portuguese	Proto-WAPP	Saramaccan	1778	Papia-mentu	São Tomé	Prin-cipe	Angolar
escorregar 'slide'	(S)kVroGA	koogá	krokka		klɔga		kɔlɔga
esfregar 'rub'	(S)fVriGA	feígá, feegá	frigà, frikà	frega	flɛga	fɛga	fɛga
estrêla 'star'	(S)tVRЕla	teéa, teéja	teréja	stréja	stléla	téla	
escuro 'dark'	SVKUru	zugúu, suguú	sukru	skur	kúlu	ukúru	
espelho 'mirror'	SVPEi	sipéi	sipéi	spil	supé	supé	θupe

L2 rather than L1 Sranan. An example is the use of the imperfective aspect marker *de* in Early Sranan. It appears to be optional rather than categorical; its occurrence seems linked to other elements such as adverbials, as well as its function of highlighting the duration of the event. This use of *de* is very different from the use of its modern form *e* in natively spoken Sranan, but resembles the ways in which contemporary Surinamese who did not grow up speaking Sranan in their homes use the Sranan imperfective marker *e* (Van den Berg 2007, Migge & Van den Berg 2009). Throughout the 18th century, Sranan appears to have been a highly dynamic and polylectal linguistic system, different from contemporary L1 Sranan in a number of ways.

Enoch O. Aboh: What Margot says shows that Bickerton's point about Norval reflects only a fraction of Norval's interests. One facet which often goes unnoticed is Norval's eagle eye for hunting words. Not any words, but the ones that hide an uncommon history and can take you on an exciting linguistic journey. And with the dissection of the word come his subtle intuitions about what the morphosyntactic analysis, however sophisticated, should aim at. This is what fascinates me about him. Well, I met Norval in 1997. As a PhD student in Geneva, I attended the Africanist Colloquium held annually in Leiden, and presented a paper on focus constructions in Gungbe and other Gbe languages. Now, one of the properties of these languages is that they allow constructions with a focus marker, *é* in Ewegbe, *yé* in Gengbe, and *wɛ̀* in Gungbe and Fongbe. So in Gungbe a sentence like 'I phoned the WOMAN' with focus on 'woman' will be *náwè lɔ́ wɛ̀ ùn tɛ̀ kàn xlán* (lit. woman the FOC I straight rope at). Similarly a question like 'what did you cook' will be *étɛ́ wɛ̀ à ɖà* (lit. what FOC you cook). Now compare these to Saramaccan: *Di mujɛɛ wɛ mi bi bɛl* (lit. The woman FOC I phoned), and *andí wɛ i bói* (lit. what FOC you cook). You will have figured out by now that Norval spotted the 'Voodoo chile' *wɛ* in Saramaccan and traced it back to its roots in Fongbe (Smith 1996, 2001)! Most of us would be very happy with this clear case of substrate transfer. But not our linguistic Sherlock Holmes, who further demonstrated that *wɛ* did not work its way alone into Saramaccan. Instead, it came with a cluster of comrades found across Gbe and presented in Table 3: *andi* 'what' (< Fongbe *ànì* 'what') and *mɛ́* 'who' (< *mɛ́(nù)* in both Fongbe and Gungbe). Then my academic infatuation and friendship with Norval began, a relation which later brought me to Amsterdam when I was offered a position in the Trans-Atlantic project. By then, I had become a specialist in cartographic approaches to the Gbe languages and my task was to study information-structure-related constructions in Gbe and the Surinam creoles. One thing I quickly learned from Norval over a cup of coffee, is that substrate influence is never straightforward and that the Creoles are actually more mixed than they appear on the surface. In the case of this marker *wɛ*, we observe

Table 3. The Gbe origins of the Saramaccan words for 'who' and 'what' (Smith 2001:70)

	Saramaccan	Fon	Gen	Ewe
who?	ambé	**mɛ̀**(ɛ́)	**am**ɛ-ké	**am**e-ka
what?	andí	**aní**, é-té	nú-ké	nú-ka

some kind of pattern transmission that involves focus constructions (including questions). But looking at the nominal domain, it is obvious that there is no syntactic substrate influence there. The Gbe languages are of the type noun-adjective-demonstrative-determiner, while the Surinam creoles are the exact mirror image (like English): determiner/demonstrative-adjective-noun. Instead, substrate influence here seems to reside in the way the determiners are used in the creole and in the interpretation of bare nouns. So here we seem to have English syntax which somehow embeds a Gbe semantics. I won't tell you how much coffee Norval and I had over these questions, but at the end of the day, on our way back home on the same train (where passengers listening to our conversations probably thought we were Martians, or maybe useless academics) we would both agree that creole business is very exciting and incredibly complex! If you are going there, you need a good deal of love for the stuff and I think we both have that.

Tonjes Veenstra: The story about the focus marker *wɛ* reminds me of Freddy Pokie (one of my most important Saramaccan informants). It was with him that I elicited the focus example (*Di mujɛɛ wɛ mi bi bɛl, naa di womi*) that you just mentioned and it was Freddy who told me that the marker *wɛ* has a contrastive interpretation in such contexts. That's how I discovered that *wɛ* serves to mark contrastive focus in Saramaccan. But the fun part of it is that this 'fieldwork' session took place after I got back from Surinam, and was done via the phone in the graduate student room in the linguistics department. It was one of the last conversations I had with Freddy on a university landline, because soon after the administration found out someone was receiving collect calls from Surinam. Norval came to my rescue and told the relevant person that the costs of these calls were peanuts in comparison to what it would cost for me to go back to Surinam to collect additional data.
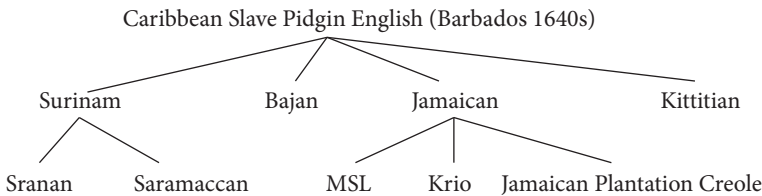
Derek Bickerton turns up several times in Norval's professional life. I got to know Norval because Derek came to Amsterdam to work on the syntax of the Surinam creoles, and I decided to take his class on theories of creole genesis as well as the one on creole syntax. The whole gang of Amsterdam creolists was present, and the discussions were very intense. It was during these classes that Derek finally accepted that there was a possibility of substrate influence, due to Norval's seminal work on Berbice Dutch. And this is also how I got into creole studies. The open discussions were very attractive, and one had the feeling that the next discovery was just around the corner (actually, in the Bijlmer — the southeastern district of

Amsterdam where many Surinamese had settled). A first inkling of Norval's sense of humor I got at the workshop following his Ph.D defense. While Pieter Seuren and Derek Bickerton were having one of their legendary fights, Norval dryly remarked — 'as long as they are at each other's throats, I can sit back and relax'. In the class on creole morphology the year after, I teamed up with Norval and started to work on agentive nominalisations in Saramaccan. Norval took me with him on my first Saramaccan fieldwork session with Frans Vorswijk. Ever since I have been hooked on these people and their language. The nominalisations are interesting from different perspectives. In a formal sense, they are a clear case of phrasal affixation. From a creolist perspective, they show that creole languages are not just a collection of continuities from different languages present in the original contact situation. The creators of Saramaccan were original and highly innovative. We presented our material on at least six or seven different occasions over 15 years, but never managed to write it up. The other project we shared, that actually made it to publication, was our edited volume in Benjamins' Creole Language Library. After a while we did get on Kees Vaes's nerves, but when Norval got the news that he had serious lung problems, we developed such a drive that the proofs were done before he had to go to hospital. Apart from our common interest in the structure and genesis of the languages of Surinam, we also share musical interests, in particular as leidenschaftliche Jimi Hendrix fans!

Adrienne Bruyn: What Enoch says about creoles being more mixed than they appear on the surface is also illustrated nicely by Norval's dubbing Saramaccan 'a doubly distilled creole' in his 1987 dissertation. He argues that Saramaccan, starting from an English-based pidgin, was first creolized, and then partially relexified toward a Portuguese-based creole of Brazilian origin. Pairs of forms with similar meanings such as *béɛ* and *baíka*, both meaning 'belly', one derived from English (*belly*), the other from Portuguese (*barriga*), may represent an intermediate stage. Interestingly, such doublets were invoked earlier by Voorhoeve (1973) in support of relexification in the opposite direction: from Portuguese to English. So, indeed, ultimately the linguistic facts are decisive, but only in the context of a larger story, such as the one Norval has been working on over the years.

At the time, I was working on my MA thesis on Schumann's Sranan dictionary from 1783. I mustered up my courage and asked Norval if he could spare a copy of his thesis. As it happened, one had just been returned by mail as undeliverable, and without hesitation Norval passed it on to me. Since then, it has been like a Bible to me. Yes, it is full of phonology and tables with variants and derivations, but it also deals with other aspects of the formation of the Surinamese creoles, which became part of my own research interests: the provenance of function words; the relationship between the different creole varieties within Surinam; the

Gbe and Kikongo substrate; the mysterious Ingredient X (lexical items of various African origins shared by English-based Atlantic creoles); and the relationships between an early form of Sranan, Sierra Leone Krio, and the Maroon Spirit Language (MSL) of Jamaica. In 1987, Norval assumed, with Bilby, that MSL descended from Proto-Sranan. In Smith (1999a), he considers MSL rather a descendant of early Jamaican Creole without a significant contribution from Surinam (and assumes that a Jamaican Maroon variety influenced Krio rather than the other way round) (see Figure 1). Needless to say, he sketches a plausible scenario including demographic facts alongside a thorough comparison of vowel systems. However, my own research on question words suggests that the MSL question particle *(h)u* or *(h)o* is likely to have come from Surinam. But then, as Norval would be the first to agree, any influence of Proto-Sranan on MSL need not have been equally strong at the lexical, phonological, and morpho-syntactic levels.

Caribbean Slave Pidgin English (Barbados 1640s)

Surinam   Bajan   Jamaican   Kittitian

Sranan   Saramaccan   MSL   Krio   Jamaican Plantation Creole

Figure 1. Interrelationships among English-lexifier creoles (after Smith 1999a: 170)

It has always been inspiring to me to read Norval's scenarios, and, even more so, to discuss particular details with him in person and try to catch up with his latest ideas. Once he hinted vaguely that he had a plausible story for the origin of the general preposition *na*, found not only in Surinam but also in other creole languages of various lexical stock. He was not really keen to go into it; apparently, he preferred to save it for some presentation or publication. Let us hope that Norval shares the solution to this riddle with us and continues to write down the ideas and stories he has in his mind.

James Essegbey: Like Enoch, I was offered a post-doctoral position in the Trans-Atlantic Sprachbund project to work on argument structure and semantics. This marked two important milestones in my life. I begin with the non-academic part. By the time I completed my Ph.D studies, I had been married for two years. However, Dutch immigration would not allow my wife to join me. I was therefore compelled to maintain a long-distance relationship with the help of occasional trips to Ghana through Sofia because the Bulgarian airline 'Balkan Airways' was the only airline I could afford to get me home. This unhappy state of affairs changed when I started my new job and approached Pieter, my boss in Leiden. In no time my wife had joined me and within a year of starting on the project, we had our first

baby girl, Sika. So it was to be that I produced my first baby even before my first paper for the project! Not long after Sika was born I took her to visit Norval and his wife Marieke. As with all babies, she wanted to grab anything near to her and put it in her mouth. This continued till Marieke went and got an old toy of one of their kids. I think it was then that we had a conversation about the 'eat'-verb. Sranan has the words *beti* 'to bite' and *nyan* 'to eat', and Norval suggested the latter was from Wolof (we later discovered that it's from a Fulani language — to eat in Wolof is *lɛk*), and I pointed out that Ewegbe has just one verb, *ɖu*. But there are, nevertheless, striking parallels between the meanings of Sranan *nyan* and Ewegbe *ɖu*. For instance it is well known that there is a whole lot of things that Sranan speakers *nyan* but which speakers of English, the superstrate, do not eat. Wilner (2007: 109) writes that *nyan* means 'eat in a figurative sense of use up or spend': *A nyan fakansi na bakrakondre* [3SG eat vacation LOC whiteperson-country] 'He spent his vacation in the Netherlands'; *A nyan ala en moni* [3SG eat all 3SG.POSS money] 'He wasted all his money'; *A e nyan pina*. [3SG IMPF eat hardship] 'She suffers need'. Sranan speakers even *nyan* people, through the power of witchcraft. Yet while all these collocations occur in the Gbe languages, they occur in a lot of other languages as well, including Akan and Kikongo, with minor variations. In fact the literature suggests that this is a more widespread phenomenon, found also in languages outside of Africa (see, for instance, Bonvini 2008).

The second milestone was that the project introduced me to the exciting world of creole linguistics and the fantastic places where creolists go for fieldwork and conferences. One such place is Semoisi in Surinam where Enoch and I discovered that the Saramaccan way of asking 'how are you' is *i weki nou*, which literally means 'are you awake now?' We rubbed our hands with excitement because, with the exception of the Gbe languages, in which *èfɔ̀à?* has the same literal meaning and structure, we didn't know of any other language (either superstrate or substrate) that uses such an expression as a greeting. Yet, there was ample material pointing to the wisdom of Norval's position that substrate influence is not straightforward — as illustrated by the case of the different uses of *nyan* above. As such, one cannot simply say, as one confidently can for *i weki nou*, that the *nyan*-collocations are from Gbe. This is the more so since a lot of the collocations in these languages did not make it into the Surinam creoles. Substrate influence is a complex matter.

Silvia Kouwenberg: It was that 'eagle eye' that Enoch mentions for words with special stories to tell which led to Norval's discovery of Eastern Ijọ as the substrate language of Berbice Dutch — a discovery which was to form the basis for my research on Berbice Dutch and later on Kalabari (one of the Eastern Ijọ-lects). My first encounter with creole linguistics came when, in the final year of my Master's in Social Sciences, I wandered into the Institute for General Linguistics and saw the

working papers series Pieter mentioned, *Amsterdam Creole Studies*. I discovered that Papiamentu, a language which I had recently learned, uses tone. Furthermore, that tones could be formally represented, and that I had in fact mastered these tones subconsciously (Römer 1977). A minor in linguistics followed, including an introduction to phonology with Norval. I remember how he seemed to use his hands to model the sounds discussed. Years later he observed one of my phonology classes at UWI, where my students asked me if my visitor had come to study phonology with me. More recently, one of our Master's students called me 'the best phonologist in Jamaica'. Although that designation may be debatable, Norval's request that I give him an article on tone in Papiamentu for inclusion in a special issue of the *Journal of Portuguese Linguistics* (2004) on creole phonology made me feel like I amounted to something. In fact, one of the remarkable things about Norval is his talent for making people feel that way, setting an example which I have been trying to emulate in my own relations with my students.

Norval has almost single-handedly developed the study of creole phonology, and has done so in a manner accessible to the non-specialist even though his work is obviously informed by his expertise as a theoretical phonologist. This meant, of course, that the *Handbook of Pidgin and Creole Studies* could not possibly have gone forward without Norval's chapter — despite the fact that he missed the deadline by more than a year, and even then submitted a very drafty draft. Fortunately, the final product was worth the wait, not only covering many topics in creole phonology, but also presenting Norval's views on such sticky matters as English dialect contributions, African substrate continuities (see Table 4, which illustrates Norval's finding that the continuity of marked substrate phonemes has been accompanied by much innovation, so that these phonemes can be found in words of both superstrate and substrate origin which did not originally have them), and the extent to which phonology has something new to offer to the study of creole languages. He concludes that 'phonology will help make creole studies more dynamic for the foreseeable future' — a prediction which he continues to work hard to make come true. For even though the facts of historical phonology may not be

Table 4. Innovated nasal-stop clusters (after Smith 2008: 112)

Saramaccan	gloss	source	orthographic	phonological	gloss
mbéti	'animal'	EME	meat	/me:t/	'meat'
mbéi	'make'	EME	make	/me:k/	'make'
ndéfi	'knife'	EME	knife	/nəif/	'knife'
andí	'what?'	Fon		/aní/	'what?'
ambέ	'who?'	Fon		/mɛ̌/	'who?'

EME: Early Modern English

exciting in and of themselves, at least not for the nonphonologically-inclined, the stories that Norval extracts from them are. The first clear demonstration of his story-telling abilities is his 1987 dissertation, which I had the good fortune to be allowed to review for the *JPCL* — surely the only review ever published in that journal which approaches its subject as a fairy tale: 'Once upon a time, there were two creoles…' But such is the power of the stories Norval tells.

Rocky Meade: I too experienced Norval's knack for making students feel like they have something to contribute. It started in 1993 in Mona, Jamaica, when Norval, invited by Silvia in her third year of teaching at the UWI, observed the presentation of my MA phonology paper (Meade 1996). Apparently impressed by the fact that I dared to (successfully) challenge a position taken by the senior phonologist at Mona (Devonish & Seiler 1991, McCarthy & Prince 1993), he, with the grin of a child with new toys, showed me two 'hot off the press' manuscripts that he was reading (Prince & Smolensky 1993). With the detective-like approach that Adrienne mentioned he said, 'you appear to enjoy solving phonological problems, I am sure you will find these useful'. That was my introduction to Norval and to Optimality Theory (OT).

By the time I got to Amsterdam a couple of years later, with Norval as one of my PhD supervisors, he was already merging some principles of the US-originated OT with his 'minimalist' phonology (Smith 1988), based on the European model of Dependency Phonology (DP). This is another of Norval's qualities: cross-disciplinary merging of ideas to solve whatever problems he encountered. I immediately thought that Norval's DP/OT approach to minimal phonological features (Smith 2000) would provide a good account of the Jamaican Creole acquisition data I was working with. His idea was to take DP to the extreme where all place of articulation features, for example, could be captured by dependency relations between just three features, which can be informally referred to as [A] ([low]/[dorsal]/[RTR]), [I] ([front]/[coronal]/[ATR]) and [U] ([back]/[labial]/[round]). These minimal features would then work more seamlessly in OT algorithms.

It turned out that his model works for adult data, but was less efficient with child data. However, I was able to propose a modified model that accounts for both adult and child data, using the detective-like skills he helped me refine. The idea was to de-link [back] from [labial], link [low] to [radical] instead of [dorsal], and to recognize that both [labial]/[round] and [low]/[radical]/[RTR] were 'Peripheral' [P] (my first feature). The second feature [B] more intuitively linked [back] and [dorsal] with the final feature [F] being much like Norval's [I]. This idea is illustrated in Figure 2.

P is interpreted as Peripheral, which subsumes P1 Labial/Round and P2 Radical/RTR; F is interpreted as Coronal/Front, B as Dorsal/Back.
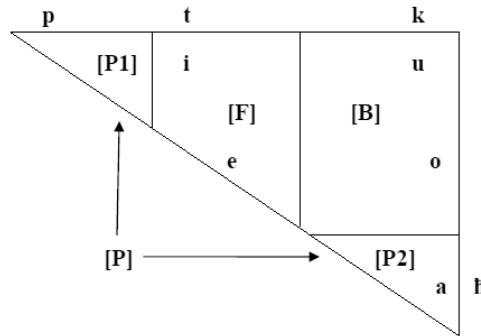
Figure 2. Extract from Meade (2001: 193) Schematic of the proposed place features.

There is no doubt that many students have benefitted from Norval's multidisciplinary investigative eye for detail and from that disarming ease of his that makes you feel both somewhat inadequate but also (and more importantly) empowered in his presence.

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