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# Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel, by Adlai H. Murdoch

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## Peer Reviewed

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is not often written about. *La Semaine sainte* (1958) is about life in France during the week in 1815 when Napoleon returned to Paris and Louis XVIII fled. These great historical events and figures remain in the background, however, since Aragon's focus is on the reactions of the common people to them. The truly significant movements of history are made by the collective meshing of the destinies of individuals. This conclusion is arrived at by Aragon's hero, the painter Géricault, who decides to devote his art to depicting the miseries but also the dignity of the people.

Bernard Alazet defines Marguerite Duras's art of writing as an effort to rescue people and events from the oblivion in which they have already begun to dissolve in the "ombre interne" (as she calls it) of her memory (121). The world exists as a mass of signs waiting to be read, written, and perpetually rewritten by the writer. Even within the universe of her novels, the protagonists set out to decipher and rewrite a previously existing narrative.

Also worthy of note are Philippe Le Touzé's study of Bernanos's uses of the orirical in *Monsieur Ouine* to capture in words the nothingness of modern life; Olga Nedbaeva's analysis of reader participation in Butor's *La Modification*; and Elena Kaganovskaya's brief exploration of Marcel Aymé's use of irony to express his derisive view of humanity. The last essay, by Tatiana Chtcherbyna, presents an interesting look at the influence of French authors like Zola, Proust, and Anatole France on early twentieth-century Ukrainian writers.

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James P. Gilroy

MURDOCH, H. ADLAI. *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2001. ISBN 0-8130-1835-8. Pp. 320. \$55.00.

Starting with Columbus as the originator in the New World of the ethnic and cultural synthesis that will become the symbol of our modernity, Adlai Murdoch explores the complexities of the creole figure in contemporary French Caribbean discourse. Based on a close reading of the narrative strategies of five novels by Martinican and Guadeloupean authors, Murdoch reveals and analyses the doubling patterns and divisive contradictions of creole identity that appear to characterize the "in-betweenness" of this region's postcolonialism. In the introduction, he summarizes the violent colonial history of the Caribbean, and reviews its post-colonial present, focusing on the geopolitical and sociocultural paradoxes of the French Antilles still tied to France's governing power. In trying to define specifically the French Caribbean difference, Murdoch investigates the unstable notions of caribbeanness, creoleness, creolization, hybridity and *métissage* that lie at the core of Caribbean cultural pluralism and the complicated and shifting nature of creole identity. He reexamines such concepts as *antillanité* and *poétique de la relation*, developed by Edouard Glissant in the 80s, and *créolité*, articulated in the 1990 manifesto *In Praise of Creoleness*, as the theoretical framework for his study. Chapter one discusses *La Lézarde*, Edouard Glissant's first and most celebrated novel (1958). The narrative addresses the social and political implications, for Martinique, of the 1946 *loi de départementalisation* that resulted in reproducing the colonial relationship with its hierarchies and contradictions. Murdoch shows how, in Glissant's narrative, "the intrinsic doubleness and ambiguity . . . innate in the departmental moment" extends from colony to metropole and contributes to the "fracturing" of the Martinican psyche (8).

Chapter two deals with Maryse Condé's *En attendant le bonheur*, in which the female protagonist, searching for her African roots, reveals a doubly colonized position from both her French and Guadeloupean connections. The novel's narrative structure, Murdoch argues, is "a discursive dyad" that reflects a political and historical vision marking the main character as "both product and symbol of a hybrid Caribbean culture" (98).

Chapter three examines how language in Daniel Maximin's *L'Isolé Soleil* and *Soufrières* subverts colonial discourse using narratives of resistance. Murdoch shows that Maximin, by rewriting the his/stories of the Caribbean through an interplay of multiple narrative structures and characters, contests the colonizer's monolithic authoritative vision of history, and creates a counterdiscourse that reflects the dualities of postcolonial identity.

Chapter four explores the subjective strategies of two métis sisters in Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie's *L'Autre qui danse*. The sister's twin trajectories—one exiled in the Métropole, the other anchored in the DOM—expose the double Caribbean problematic of ethnicity and identity. Murdoch claims that Dracius-Pinalie's discourse creates a "space for the métis female voice" that helps "to redefine Caribbean womanhood" (195).

Finally, chapter five focuses on Patrick Chamoiseau's *Solibo Magnifique* in which the role of the *conteur* mirrors the heritage of the maroon slave. This link between *conteur* and *nègre marron* "draws its figural power of contestation from the strategic doubling of dissimulation and difference" (203). The creole storyteller, combining deception and derision, gives voice to the voiceless, peacefully subverting metropolitan power by inscribing its counter-values. If, at the end, the *conteur's* social role becomes culturally irrelevant because of the passage from oral to written expression, the heterogeneity of the Caribbean discourse reflecting creole multiple identities remains.

Murdoch's comprehensive study based on solid scholarly research adds an important dimension to our understanding of creole identity in the French Caribbean discourse. The author's well-reasoned discussions of the theories of other specialists in the field are particularly stimulating. However, this book is not easy to read, and not solely because of the complexity of the subject matter. The reader's comprehension would be enhanced if the author used clearer language, less jargon, and simpler sentence structure.

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HAIG, STIRLING, ed. *Resonant Themes: Literature, History, and the Arts in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1999. ISBN 0-8078-9267-X. Pp. 213. \$27.50.

The scope of this volume honoring Victor Brombert is remarkably broad: if "literature, history, and the arts" were not comprehensive enough, consider that Europe (not just France) and both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are represented here. But in fact, these thirteen essays, which "range over a variety of critical stances, of periods, of national literatures, and of genres" (10), are no less diverse than the writings of Brombert himself. The varied nature of the contents does not mean, however, that the essays are unrelated, as is sometimes the case in *Festschriften*. On the contrary, there are striking "resonances" between studies that may appear to have little in common.