

The Creole Imagination

BLST 461/ENG 491

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Books Jean Bernabé, et. al., *In Praise of Creoleness* (Gallimard); Patrick Chamoiseau, *School Days* (Nebraska); Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* (Vintage); Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Riverhead); Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Michigan); Jamaica Kincaid, *Mr. Potter* (FSG); Derek Walcott, *What the Twilight Says* (FSG). All books are available at Amherst Books in downtown Amherst, except *Mr. Potter* (available through the English department).

Nature of the course What would it mean to write in the language in which we dream? A language that we can hear, but cannot (yet) see? Is it possible to conceive a language outside the socio-symbolic order? And can one language subvert the codes and values of another? Questions like these have animated the creolité/nation language debate among Caribbean intellectuals since the mid-1970s, producing some of the most significant francophone and anglophone writing of the twentieth century. This course reads across philosophy, cultural theory, politics, and literature in order to consider the claims such works make for the Creole imagination. We will engage the theoretical and creative work of Édouard Glissant, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, Patrick Chamoiseau, Jamaica Kincaid, Junot Díaz, and Edwidge Danticat. We also will consider how these writers transform some of the fundamental ideas of psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and critical historiography. At stake in our readings will be the various aesthetic and political aspects of postcolonial struggle—how to think outside the colonial architecture of language; how to contest and subvert what remains from history’s violence; and how to evaluate the claims to authenticity of creolized New World cultural forms.

Our main task in this course will be reckoning with difficult primary source materials on the theory and practice of creolism. This means understanding the diversity of critical terms, political aims, and historiographic strategies in the creolist movement. As well, this means reading the literary tradition that has grown out of the movement – a tradition both critical and affirming – in terms of a new model of aesthetic and cultural practice.

Method of evaluation You are expected to attend every class session and participate in discussion. Upon receiving your third absence, you will see your final grade fall by 1/3 with each subsequent absence. Please prepare for class by reading and thinking critically about the material. 20% of your final grade is based on your participation in class.

Two essays are required, both 8-10 pages in length. Each essay comprises 25% of your final grade.

In addition to the essays, you will contribute to both a blog project (10% of grade) and a collective glossary project (20% of grade). The blog (creoleimagination.wordpress.com) is an open space for continued discussion, as well as a cluster of short assignments. The glossary project is an ongoing group project that will include both clarification of terms discussed in class and an assessment of secondary sources. (Details in separate document).

Reading Schedule : you are expected to have read all of the assigned material before we meet to discuss. Also, keep in mind that the material will be difficult at times, even seemingly opaque, but keep reading anyway.

23 January

Introduction to the course: what is *creole*?

25 January

(e)Todd, *Pidgins and Creoles*, Chs. 1/3/4

Recommended: (e)Devonish, *Language and Liberation*, Chs. 1/3/4

30 January

(e)Stewart, "Creolization"

Recommended: (e)Baker and Mühlhäusler, "Creole Linguistics"

01 February (end of Add/Drop)

(e)Smith, *Creole Recitations*, 23-65

Recommended: (e)Thomas, *Theory and Practice*, Intro and pt. IV

06 February

(e)Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Ch. 1

08 February

Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*

13 February

(e)R. Cobham-Sander, "Colin Ferguson, 'Me,' and 'I'"

(e)Claude McKay, two poems

15 February

Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 1-42.

(e)Walcott, "Sea is History"

20 February

Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 45-85.

22 February

Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 131-179.

(e)Benítez-Rojo, selection from *The Repeating Island*

27 February

Bernabé, et al, *In Praise of Creoleness*

29 February

Bernabé, et al, *In Praise of Creoleness*

(e)Bernabé, et al, "Creolité Bites"

05 March

Chamoiseau, *School Days*

07 March

Chamoiseau, *School Days*

12 March

Walcott, "A Letter to Chamoiseau"

(e)Chamoiseau, selection from *Texaco*

14 March

Discussion

19 March . spring break

21 March . spring break

26 March

(e)Brathwaite, "History of the Voice"

28 March

(e)Brathwaite, selected poems

02 April

Walcott, "The Muse of History"

(e)Walcott, selected poems

04 April

Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory"

09 April

(e)Harris, "Creoleness: Crossroads of a Civilization?"

11 April

(e)Harris, "The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination"

16 April

Kincaid, *Mr. Potter*

18 April

Kincaid, *Mr. Potter*

23 April

Danticat, *The Dew Breaker*

25 April

Danticat, *The Dew Breaker*

20 April

Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

02 May

Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*