H. Adlai Murdoch

Creolizing the Metropole: Migrant Caribbean Identities in Literature and Film.

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H. Adlai Murdoch's *Creolizing the Metropole* posits for itself a significant remit, the exploration and articulation of migrant Caribbean identities in both French and British diasporas, and across the mediums of literature and film. This ambitious approach results in a significant contribution to both the fields of Caribbean literature and film and British and French cultural studies; its theoretically and historically grounded exploration of national, ethnic, and cultural identity is of particular note. In the opening chapters Murdoch provides a comprehensive contextualization of the term diaspora and the specific resonances of this in the context of the Caribbean. He skillfully navigates and draws together a range of theorists, including Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Rex Nettleford, Édouard Glissant, and in particular Homi Bhabha, providing an academically rigorous foundation for his literary analysis.

As Murdoch's discussion of Caribbean identity straddles both the diasporas of the Anglophone Caribbean and the French Antilles, the opening chapters are attentive to the different histories of colonization and circumstances of migration from these regions. Noting that migrants to Britain came initially as colonial subjects, as opposed to the French Antilleans who were classed, though not necessarily treated as, citizens, he accounts for the resonances that these different legal statuses had on the migrant populations and the subsequent effect of this on the articulations of Britishness and Frenchness they encountered and re-inscribe. *Creolizing the Metropole*, however, does not provide a similarly nuanced and specific exploration for the groups within these two larger migrations. While exploring at length the idea of a plurality of Caribbean identities that arise from a fragmentary region with its multiplicity of ethnicities, races, cultures, and languages, Murdoch offers only cursory comments on the differences within these groups of migrants. For example he states that "an Antiguan will recognize [in] a St Lucian or a Trinidadian at least a fellow traveler if not a compatriot, one perhaps marked by difference but also certainly by greater quotient of similarity, particularly in the context of exile or exclusion overseas" (p. 44). A sustained exploration of national and internal differences, and distinctions within the discussion of the British and French diasporas, would have added productively to his critical overview.

In the chapters that follow Murdoch takes in turn a pair of texts, either dealing specifically with one of these locations, as in Chapters 3 and 4, or as in Chapter 5 discussing examples from both the French and British Caribbean diasporas. This fifth chapter, the only one to draw on filmic examples, discusses

Horace Ové's 1986 film, *Playing Away*, alongside Pascal Légitimus's *Antilles-sur-Seine* (2000), focusing on the patterns of otherness and exclusion that are paralleled in these films. *Antilles-sur-Seine*'s use of stereotypes is recast by Murdoch as a representations strategy that "compels us to confront the debasing, reductionist nature of stereotypes" (p. 346). This "tropicalizing" strategy, Murdoch notes, is a risky one, arguably not wholly successful, and constrains the ability of the film to address the wider discourse of racial stereotypes. A particular strength of the close readings in *Creolizing the Metropole* is the discussion of the representational strategies used in the novels and films, and the ways these shape the identitarian discourses, for example Zadie Smith's use of analepsis and prolepsis in *White Teeth* (2000) through which she "deconstructs the discursive structures and assumptions undergirding inscription of colonial history" (p. 194). This approach to reading, attentive to the symbolic and material level of the stories, Murdoch argues, can uncover the ways in which texts creatively disrupt and remake concepts of identity; this in turn "can lay the discursive foundation for writing—and reading—differently" (p. 195). Through its discussions and the model it provides, *Creolizing the Metropole* demonstrates the possibilities of postcolonial literary criticism and its contribution to contestations and discourses of identitarian politics.

The literary texts that *Creolizing the Metropole* discusses are grouped by location—London in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Andrea Levy's *A Small Island* (2004) in Chapter 3, and Paris in Maryse Condé's *Desirada* (2000) and Gisèle Pineau's *Exile according to Julia* (2003) in Chapter 4. In Chapter 3 Murdoch constructs a narrative that traces the changes wrought on, and by, the *Windrush* generation in Levy's *Small Island* through to the multicultural London of Smith's *White Teeth*. Though his analysis of the ways in which the diasporic communities in London both transformed their own and British identity stands firm, the choice of *Small Island* as indicative of this earlier period of migration is interesting. Murdoch argues that these texts are the site of identity formation, not merely reflections of this, and that they enact political, cultural, and linguistic interventions; this point, however, can seem less convincing by his choice of a novel written in 2004 which reimagines this period, and at times seems overly deterministic in its plot, highlighting its own retrospective construction. The structuring of the later chapters of *Creolizing the Metropole* enables a detailed and sustained exploration of the ways in which the respective texts and films reflect and shape notions of Caribbeanness, Frenchness, and Britishness. However, the excellence of the textual analysis is confined within any one chapter to two texts. Further sustained discussion of complementary or contradictory examples would have enabled a broader understanding of the ways in which the cultural production challenges, shapes,

and articulates Caribbean diasporic identity. This does not, however, distract from the importance of Murdoch's text. *Creolizing the Metropole* is a significant contribution to scholarship.

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