

Nationalism and Creole Identity

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Francophone Louisiana: Difference and Language in a North American Post Colony

Authors from Chateaubriand forward have romanticized the complex organism of New France. In an instance of geographical irony, nineteenth-century American writers, both Anglophone and Francophone, practiced these same exoticizing techniques in their portrayals of Southern Louisiana.

One of the long-standing groups inhabiting this region, the French Creoles, furnishes writers with a key example of the region's exotic quality. Alfred Mercier and George Washington Cable both focus on the Creole lifestyle in their works *L'habitation Saint-Ybars* and *Les Grandissimes*, respectively. Mercier, a French Creole himself, offers a favorable view of Creole plantation society, even depicting harmonious relations between master and slave, while Cable presents quite a different story. An Anglo-American from the Northeast, Cable feels no sympathy for his French-speaking compatriots and paints a more brutal picture. Though their focus is the same, these writers compose in different languages, Mercier in French and Cable in English.

My paper juxtaposes Mercier's and Cable's portraits of French Creole society to demonstrate the difficulties nineteenth-century French-speaking Americans face in defining their identity. A comparative look at these two novels attests to the postcolonial politics of language and subjectivity at work in the literature of nineteenth-century Louisiana.

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L'honneur des békés: sexualité et nationalisme chez les blancs créoles martiniquais au XIXe siècle

Dans *Eloge de la créolité* (1989), Raphaël Confiant et Patrick Chamoiseau affirment que les romans coloniaux martiniquais appartiennent à une pré-littérature aliénée qui ne peut représenter la Martinique. En effet, les auteurs blancs et leurs émules de couleur imiteraient pitoyablement le modèle littéraire métropolitain. Cependant, notre examen de l'écriture créole blanche établit que déjà au XIXe siècle, les békés utilisent la littérature dans les îles pour promouvoir ou défendre un particularisme insulaire. Ces auteurs construisent et déconstruisent le mythe nationaliste de la famille à travers le corps féminin. Cette déconstruction ne se fait pas toujours de façon linéaire et passe souvent inaperçue.

Cette communication s'intéresse au roman *Les amours de Zémédare et Carina* (1806) de Prevost de Sansac, Marquis de Traversay, oeuvre reléguée dans la littérature blanche coloniale antillaise, parmi les innombrables pâles copies de *Paul et Virginie* (1788/89) de Bernadin de Saint Pierre. Cependant, l'analyse de l'imagerie sexuelle construisant *Les amours de Zémédare et Carina* démontre que le royaliste Prévost de Traversay s'inspire de *Paul et Virginie* pour subvertir ce modèle littéraire français. L'oeuvre du créole martiniquais articule un discours en marge de la Métropole, une réplique voilée qui vise à déstabiliser les stéréotypes sexuels nationaux français

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afin d'exprimer de subtiles vellétés nationalistes. La valorisation de la culture créole qui diabolise l'appétit sexuel du Français pour la femme créole articule la métaphore voilée de l'individu féminin en île et en nation.

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Créolité Nineteenth Century Style: Lafcadio Hearn's Vision

This essay's goal is twofold: first, it proposes to examine nineteenth century journalist, writer, and traveler Lafcadio Hearn's influence on Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, and Patrick Chamoiseau's *Éloge de la Créolité* (1989); second, it focuses on Hearn's racial vision of Martinique. I intend the word *vision* both as anticipation and as hallucination.

I argue that the characteristics of *créolité* --a praise for the culturally and racially mixed, a defiance of the pure, an eroticization and exoticisation of the people of Martinique, and a suspicious racialism under the cover of an embracement of diversity-- are already contained in Hearn's *Esquisses martiniquaises* (1890). In short, the novelty of *créolité* is unmasked as the repetition of a nineteenth century exotic fantasy.

After revealing the links between Hearn's travelogues and the *Éloge*, I turn my attention to Hearn's *vision*. In spite of having one blind eye and the other severely myopic, Hearn gives an extremely precise visual image of Martinican people. Through his erotic cataloguing of Martinican "phenotypes," which he considers as the ultimate model of beauty because of their *métissage*, Hearn creates a racial philosophy privileging "mixed race," and dismissing both black and white "races" as respectively degenerate and sickly. Hearn fears not the disappearance of the pure but the disappearance of the mixed. This racial (and racialist) theory, in clash with most nineteenth century theories privileging a pure "white race," such as Gobineau's, announces the model of diversity of Bernabé, Confiant, and Chamoiseau. Like the nineteenth century traveler, the three Martinican proponents of *créolité* fall into the trap of turning the praise of diversity into a new form of essentialism.