

The Oral Heritage and Linguistic Heteroglossia of Post-Colonial Writings: Bob Marley and the Anglophone Caribbean as a Case Study

Elena Barreca

Abstract:

In Caribbean literature the discourse on identity is stressed by a state of diaspora: the memory of slavery must be transmitted together with the African cultural heritage. However, this necessity is marked by the impossibility of a fixed and enrooted cultural definition: as exemplified by the Caribbean, the post-colonial identity emerges in a multicultural, ever-changing space, creating new, vibrant transcultural forms. There is a constant dialogue in Caribbean writings between several voices: European languages become saturated with the African model, western aesthetical frameworks are opened up in a constant attempt to express the historical reality of a polyglot, problematic and overwhelming identity. Elements that Mikahil Bakhtin found as characterizing for the ever-changing novel have now become central in post-colonial writings: heteroglossia, the social reality of language can not be further avoided; hybridity becomes a transfiguring power, which challenges colonial linguistic centralization and textual narratives. The interrelationship between orality and literacy creates a continuum between extempore oral performances and formal scribal texts: therefore any study of Caribbean literature must take into account native musical forms, as Calypso and reggae, and their role in the African diaspora. Deeply influenced by the post-colonial reality reggae lyrics present us with an outstanding example of linguistic restructuring and aesthetic creation.

The article explores the relevance of Mikhail Bakhtin theories for post-colonial literature, taking the Anglophone Caribbean as a case study: a first part will provide a theoretical overlook, whereas the second part would go into the detail of textual analysis.

Keywords: Caribbean – heteroglossia – reggae - hybridity - literature