

Edouard Glissant's and Edward Braithwaite's Appropriations of Colonial Languages

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Abstract:

Martinican writer and anticolonial voice Frantz Fanon wrote in *Peau noire, masques blancs* that language is intimately linked to one's culture and language. If language is central to culture and civilization, then it is central to identity, and, particularly in (post)colonial contexts, could present a significant site of internal and external conflict and trauma. Two more recent Caribbean writers have reflected on language at least as extensively as Fanon, and from a different perspective, not so much anticolonial as postcolonial. Edward Braithwaite, in his essay "History of the Voice," and Edouard Glissant, in *Le Discours antillais*, in particular the essay "Langue, multilinguisme," reflect in similar ways on the linguistic situations in which they find themselves. Glissant seeks to "relativise" the French language in order for it to enter into "la relation multiple au monde," questioning language specifically in relation to nation. In his Martinican context, this results in what he calls a forced poetics in another essay of *Le Discours antillais*. Braithwaite, in his essay, specifically relates his concept of nation-language to Glissant's forced poetics. Both writers thus seek to reclaim colonial languages for their own situation, a situation of postcoloniality that does not necessarily face the black and white choices (independence or subjugation) that Fanon saw a few decades earlier. This article juxtaposes Braithwaite and Glissant in order to show what different Caribbean writers, languages, and societies have in common without trying to portray them as equivalent, and thereby to demonstrate how Caribbean literature can be comparative literature.

Keywords: forced poetics, nation language, langue and langage, Caribbean post-colonialism.