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# Bilingual and Bimodal Expression: The Creolization in Edwidge Danticat's Oeuvre

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**Bilingual and Bimodal Expression: The Creolization in Edwidge Danticat's Oeuvre**

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Department of English  
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“Full knowledge of Creoleness will be reserved for Art, for Art absolutely.  
Such will be the precondition of our identity’s strengthening”

–*In Praise of Creoleness* (1990) Jean Bernabé et al.

In the 2007 podcast “The Dating Game” with *The New Yorker*, Edwidge Danticat explains her experience as a diasporic writer: “People often miss the complexity of our particular community... a lot of us came into our creativity at the same time we came into this other language and this [bilingual writing] is a product of it.” For Edwidge Danticat, a Haitian-American author living and writing in the United States, language is inherently tied to community, creativity, and identity. Language, therefore, bears significant consequences for the representation or misrepresentation of postcolonial authors, like Danticat, who write in two or more languages. Aware of these stakes, Danticat deliberately and artfully crafts a bilingual and bimodal writing style that corrects the misrepresentation of Haitian voices. Ultimately, her attention to language confronts the conflict between written and oral traditions to make a space for creole identities and subsequently creates a new literary tradition that blends Kreyòl and English with textual and oral expression.

### **Danticat: Creole in Conversation**

Danticat's work has been situated and discussed among a myriad of literary traditions. Caribbean literature scholar Michael Dash ascribes Danticat's writing to a historically bound tradition of protest fiction typical of post-occupation<sup>1</sup> Haitian authors. Authors during this period pushed back against a traditional idea of a national Haitian identity and instead conceptualized a pluralistic identity. Jacques Roumain, Jacques-Stephen Alexis, and René Despestre—authors that Dash lists as Danticat's "literary ancestors"—began to tell the stories of everyday Haitians as opposed to more traditional narratives about Haiti's heroes. Drawing connections to these narratives, Dash cites some of Danticat's works such as *The Farming of the Bones* and *The Dew Breaker* and he argues that "the ground on which Danticat situates her narrative is neither of absolute belonging nor that of postcolonial placelessness, but the in-between spaces of the displaced Haitian nation" (34). In other words, Dash recognizes a tension between plurality and nation present in Danticat's fiction, similar to the questions of identity that Haitian authors Roumain, Alexis, and Despestre address. However, although he situates Danticat deep in the Haitian literary tradition, Dash concedes that her work is not so easily categorized.

Similarly, Régine Michelle Jean-Charles argues that Danticat's work belongs in the Black Feminist literary canon, but also admits that "her belonging to multiple traditions is abundantly apparent" (53). Additionally, Carine Mardorossian writes, "one of the defining features of [Danticat's] fiction is precisely its ability to simultaneously inhabit a category such as Caribbean women's fiction while stepping outside the category to expand its premises" (40). Attending to

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<sup>1</sup> On July 28, 1915 President Woodrow Wilson sent troops to Haiti, in what would become a 19-year occupation, to secure American commercial and political influence after the assassination of Haitian President Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam (Danticat, "The Long Legacy of Occupation in Haiti").

themes of female relationships, trauma, memory, the female body, healing, silence and voice, Danticat contributes to the Black Feminist tradition. Yet her stories and characters consistently complicate concepts of blackness, nationality, citizenship, and identity beyond current representation.

Danticat's work has therefore been associated with Haitian, Caribbean, African, African American, and American literary traditions without fitting neatly into any of these categories. Danticat herself explains that she identifies as African-Haitian-American, a dilemma in which "one is neither always or only Haitian nor always or only U.S. American" (Jean-Charles 52). She explains, "you're told you don't belong to American literature or you're told you don't belong to Haitian literature. Maybe there's a place on the hyphen" ("The Art of Not Belonging"). This in-betweenness that Danticat's work inhabits is not only a consequence of her position as a diasporic writer, but is the product of a longer history of globalization and creolization. In so many ways, Danticat's writing is an outgrowth of her postcoloniality.

### **Globalization, Creole, and Kreyòl**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "globalization" as "the action, process or fact of making global; *esp* (in later use) the process by which business or other organizations develop international influence or on an international scale, widely considered to be at the expense of national identity" ("globalization, n."). Based on this understanding of the term, European colonization could be considered as one of the first, and most influential, examples of globalization. As European countries built their first colonies on foreign land, they began to set up a sophisticated economic system on an international scale that distorted traditional conceptions of nation and identity.

This is especially true in the Caribbean, and Haiti in particular, which was a hyperactive site of globalization. Because of Europe's conquest and colonization of Haiti, populations of native islanders, Spanish and French settlers, and African slaves were forced into cohabitation. In this way, Haiti became a crucible for the cultural intermingling known as creolization (Hall 30).

As early as 5000 BCE, the territory that would later become Haiti was inhabited by indigenous peoples including the Arawak and other native Caribbean tribes. This population spoke Taíno and thrived by farming and fishing, and participated in inter-island trade involving jewelry, pottery, and other goods (Lawless et al.). This lifestyle was soon interrupted by European explorers and colonizers. In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on the island. Convinced that the island was rich in gold reserves, the Spanish conquered Hispaniola and enslaved the Arawak (Corbett). When the Arawak began to die from excessive labor and European diseases, the Spanish imported slaves from Africa to work on plantations. The Spanish left when they exhausted the island's gold mines and then in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the French took over, implementing an agricultural, plantation-based colony. Approximately 32,000 French settled permanently and more than 500,000 slaves were imported from Africa. During this time, Kreyòl developed among the slaves as a mixture of French, Spanish, Taíno, and a variety of West African languages. However, French remained the official language for hundreds of years.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note that the term "Creole" itself is most commonly used in reference to "the vernacular form of language which has developed in the colonies and become the 'native tongue' of the majority of its inhabitants, through the combining of European (mainly French)

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<sup>2</sup> Today, Kreyòl is also an official language of Haiti. However, French is the language of all business, education, and government in Haiti.

and African languages”<sup>3</sup> (Hall 27). Additionally, it is important to recognize that the term has been used to describe several colonies, not just Haiti. For example, “creole” can be used to describe Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Trinidad. And “Creole” can be used to describe the language of each of these countries. Though, the term is used almost exclusively in reference to the Francophone world.<sup>4</sup>

In the broadest sense, creole can be understood as the descriptor of cultural and linguistic mixing, which arises as a result of “the entanglement of different cultures in the same indigenous space or location, primarily in the context of slavery, colonization and the plantation societies” (Hall 28). Stuart Hall remarks that the term has been used to describe European settlers and their descendants who remained in the colonies and “acquired many ‘native’ characteristics” with time (27). Creole has also been used to describe slaves who have lived in the colonies for several generations, in contrast to those who had been born in Africa and only recently transported to the Americas (28). Therefore, creole was used to describe people who had become acculturated to the language and culture of a shared, diverse space; and creolization became understood as the process by which this acculturation occurs.

More contemporarily, the term has developed racial signification, as it is sometimes used to describe the intermingling between white European colonists and black African slaves. However, as Hall makes clear, “creole” has not historically been used to refer to a person of “mixed blood” (28). In its traditional sense, the term is much less concerned with racial impurity, and much more concerned with cultural, social, and linguistic mixing (Hall 28). Hall coins the phrase “cultural miscegenation” to illustrate this; he makes it clear that creole represents the

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<sup>3</sup> Kreyòl is the Creole language specific to Haiti.

<sup>4</sup> The use of “creole” can also be seen in reference to the Anglophone Caribbean, *esp.* in St Lucia and Dominica, where “the French influences remain strong” (Hall, 27).

colonial anxiety about the inter-mixing and reproduction of an impure culture, which may have even seemed more threatening than interracial reproduction at the time.

All of that being said, the scholarly debate about Danticat's place in multiple literary traditions highlights the creole nature of her craft. Dash stresses Danticat's allegiance to "folkloric identity," Haitian history, and questions of class inequalities grounded in Haitian literature. Meanwhile, Jean-Charles suggests that Danticat's female protagonists belong to an American, black feminist tradition that affirms those voices that have been marginalized because of race and gender. And Mardorossian argues that her work is also tied to the cultural traditions of the Caribbean that redefine the idea of nation in addition to the concepts of class, race, and gender. Their work reveals that Danticat reconceptualizes, not only contemporary literary traditions, but also "the workings of the sexual, racial, class, and national concepts through which postcolonial studies has traditionally configured difference" (Mardorossian 40). Therefore, what scholars have identified as unique in Danticat's work is her ability to demonstrate the intersectionality of identities and the intermixing of cultural and literary traditions that characterize creolization.

Yet, this work is not complete: the ways in which Danticat explores creole identities has not been fully acknowledged by scholars. Dash, Jean-Charles, and Mardorossian represent a body of scholarship that has attempted to uncover creole culture through a textual analysis of Danticat's complication of class, racial, sexual, and national differences in her work. However, scholars have overlooked Danticat's complex representations of linguistic differences. For example, Jean-Charles remarks, one factor that distinguishes Danticat's work from other African American literature is her "use of a [Haitian] proverb, an expression, or a Kreyòl word" (55). She therefore opens up a discussion about linguistic difference in Danticat's work, but she does not

pursue this observation further. Similarly, Mardorossian recounts the story of the Parsley Massacre of 1937 in *The Farming of Bones*—during which Dominicans murdered Haitians who could not pronounce the Spanish word for parsley—but her analysis falls short of acknowledging language as stand-alone marker of difference. While both of these scholars recognize that Danticat uses Kreyòl in meaningful ways, neither explore her use of language as an important site of creolization or an important facet of creole identities.

Understanding language is critical to understanding a community’s culture. In her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba explains how the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure ties language to the heart of postcolonial identities: “words need a community with shared assumptions to confer them with meaning; conversely, a social group needs signs in order to know itself as a community” (53). Simply put, Kreyòl is the result of a shared French, African, and Caribbean community that is Haiti; conversely, this creole community in Haiti needs this shared language in order to sustain its cohesive, yet mixed identity. This is especially true for diaspora, as members of the Haitian diaspora partake in another layer of creolization while living in a different culture abroad. It is therefore imperative to recognize and deconstruct Danticat’s use of language in order to better understand the underlying communities and ideologies that are implicated in her bilingual and bimodal approach to writing.

In choosing to study the ways in which Danticat constructs linguistic difference between English and Kreyòl, I am wary not to reduce creolization to “its mere linguistic roots” (Barnabé 83). I recognize that the work that previous scholars have contributed to understanding the creole-character of Danticat’s writing has provided incredible insight into contemporary diasporic writing. However, I hope that my work reveals that an investigation of Danticat’s language can add to previous scholarship and consequently clarify the complex interaction

between cultures and identities that is present in her fiction. Moving forward, I will analyze Danticat's bilingual expression, considering the way that she uses Kreyòl and translation. Then, I will explore the ways in which Danticat uses a bimodal writing that synthesizes written language and spoken language. Finally, I will consider the implications of these forms of expression, especially as it pertains to the Haitian diasporic community and the realm of literary discourse.

### **Bilingual Expression: Kreyòl and Translation**

Edwidge Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti during the Duvalier dictatorship in 1969. At the age of four, her parents moved to the United States for work and left Danticat and her brother in the care of their uncle in Haiti. During this time, Danticat attended a private school at which she learned French and she developed a love of writing stories, though, at home, her family only spoke Kreyòl. She considered French as “an outside language, the language of books,” whereas Kreyòl was reserved more intimately as the language with which she could communicate among relatives (Munro 16). After moving to the United States at the age of twelve, she really began to develop her writing skills and “English became a ‘neutral’ language in which to write” (Durrani). In another interview, she elaborates, “I came to English at a time when I was not adept enough at French to write creatively in French and did not know how to write in [Kreyòl]<sup>5</sup> because it had not been taught to me in school, so my writing in English was as much an act of personal translation as it was an act of creative collaboration with the new place I was in” (“An Interview with Edwidge Danticat”). For much of her life, Danticat has been translating between geographies as much as the languages associated with each. In the words of

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<sup>5</sup> Note that I have changed Creole to Kreyòl in this sentence. This excerpt was taken from an interview that was published later online and the text version uses Creole instead of Kreyòl.

Christina Kullberg, “translation is as much a cultural as a linguistic concern” (113). Therefore, part of this “personal translation” that Danticat describes pertains to the bilingual fusion of English and Kreyòl which permeates all of her works. Part of her translation is also very cultural and deeply connected to Danticat’s sense of identity and community. Being trilingual, Danticat's expression is greatly influenced and sometimes dictated by her choice of language.

Today, Danticat has written fourteen books, all of which were originally published in the United States. For each book, multiple editions have been translated and printed internationally; editions can be found in France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Japan, and elsewhere. However, none of Danticat's works have been translated into written Kreyòl or printed in Haiti.

Under the circumstances of Danticat's writing and publications, two questions emerge. First, how is Danticat using English and Kreyòl in her writing? Second, why and for whom is she writing this way? The way that Danticat navigates language will reveal the ways in which she is also navigating culture, identity, and audience.

The first thing that English readers will notice about Danticat's bilingual writing is that it is not difficult to understand; just as Danticat has mastered the English language, she has mastered the art of graceful in-text translation. This is especially true of Danticat's use of narration. Often throughout her works, Danticat will use a Kreyòl word or phrase in a passage and then shortly after, if not immediately, provide an English translation in the narration. For example, in *Krik? Krak!* the narrator describes a young journalist who “was wearing a pair of *abakos*, American blue jeans” (Danticat 109). Also in *Krik? Krak!* a character asks his father, “Papa, could you play *Lago* with me?” And immediately after, Danticat utilizes the narration to illustrate what *Lago* means: “Lili lay peacefully on the grass as her son and husband played hide-

and-see” (62). In this example, the translation is not instantaneous, but Danticat manages to divulge the word's meaning to the English reader.

Danticat's use of narration to translate Kreyòl into English may not seem like a remarkable discovery, but it can actually tell us a lot about the ways in which Danticat navigates between Haitian and American spheres. For instance, the two examples of translation from *Krik? Krak!* that I've highlighted above are interesting because both American blue jeans and hide-and-see are two easily recognizable references among Western audiences. In this case, why should Danticat use a Kreyòl word for a word that already exists in English? When asked about her use of Kreyòl, Danticat says, “If I can't say it in any other way, that's what I do. Sometimes people will read it and they think I'm just throwing it in for spice. But for me, my use of it is when there's no possible translation” (Ukani). Yet, in these two examples, there is a possible translation, and both translations are fairly straight forward. So how is this translation really functioning? In the above examples, it is significant that Danticat proves that jeans and hide-and-see exist within the Haitian culture—in fact, both have Kreyòl words assigned to these seemingly Western concepts. She is not inserting the Kreyòl words as “spice” for her assumed English readers, rather Danticat is fighting against the orientalizing of Kreyòl. The Kreyòl does not serve the English text as an exotic addition. Rather, *abakos* and American blue jeans, *Lago* and hide-and-see exist simultaneously and side-by-side in Danticat's mind. In this way, she asserts the need for English and Kreyòl to contextualize her world, a realm in which American and Haitian culture collide, yet Haiti and Kreyòl remain distinct cultural and linguistic entities.

Another way that Danticat uses narration to reveal her bicultural perspective is to translate Haitian proverbs into English in order to communicate their meaning, but reserving

their original essence for Kreyòl speakers. For instance, in *Krik? Krak!* the narrator recounts a proverb that her mother often used: “Ma liked to say that they were *one head on two bodies. Tèt koupé*” (177). In this example, the English translation of the Haitian proverb precedes the original Kreyòl. On the surface, Danticat's incorporation of the Kreyòl phrase could be understood as a kind of foreign “spice” to entertain the Western tastes of her English audience. However, like with her use of *abakos* and *Lago*, Danticat insists that English and Kreyòl play an equally important role for her audience. The saying itself suggests that two people are so similar that they could have the same head, as Danticat's translation illustrates. However, the Kreyòl phrase is not directly translated. *Tèt koupé* literally describes a head being cut into two identical halves. However, the phrase itself is used in Haiti as an idiom that means “And that's a fact.” Therefore, the narrator of this passage offers a pseudo indirect translation, but the meaning of the idiom is lost to Anglophones. Danticat provides enough information so that the English reader will understand the Haitian proverb, but uses enough variety so that “the [Kreyòl] speaker [does not] feel like they're reading the same word twice” (Ukani). By doing this, Danticat appeals to English readers, teaching them something about Haitian culture, but she also accounts for her Kreyòl readers, by avoiding redundancy and preserving the original Kreyòl.

It is important to note that not everything in narration is translated or can be translated. Some words and phrases are written in Kreyòl without an English translation provided. In these cases, Danticat demonstrates that some things are geographically, culturally, and linguistically bound. Food, drinks, animals, and religious practices are some examples of things that are impossible to translate across cultures, and even more difficult across languages. Therefore, in these cases, Danticat does not attempt to translate and leaves these Kreyòl words untouched. In *Claire of the Sea Light*, “the other fisherman sat on the warm sand next to her,

drank *kleren* and played cards” (Danticat 28). English readers understand *kleren* in its context, but its exact definition remains unknown because *kleren* itself does not exist outside of Haiti. Likewise, when Danticat describes “a tiny red *koki* lodged between the rocks...a baby frog,” English readers are unable to fully know what *koki* means because most English readers have never seen this Haitian breed of frog (*Claire of the Sea Light* 58). In another example, Danticat writes, “if I knew some good *wanga* magic, I would wipe them off the face of the earth” (*Krik? Krak!* 7). *Wanga* magic provides a cultural contextualization that English readers can recognize, but what *wanga* magic is exactly remains unclear. Some may assume that *wanga* magic is somehow related to or involved in Voudou practice, but without a translation or explanation, its meaning is reserved for readers who have the linguistic and cultural frame of reference unique to Haiti's borders. In other words, some things in Danticat's work cannot be translated because some things are uniquely Haitian.

Notably, Danticat's bilingual writing exposes the untranslatability of conversational Kreyòl dialogue. Across all of her texts, Danticat uses dialogue to spotlight the Kreyòl language. Many authors use dialect to deepen setting and character development and so this technique is not uniquely exercised by Danticat. However, the way that Danticat navigates the translation of dialogue is significant. In many cases, Danticat treats dialogue like she does Haitian proverbs, by providing indirect or rough translations for the English reader, but reserving the original meaning and essence for Kreyòl readers. Though, Danticat approaches conversational Kreyòl differently: words and phrases that are used in colloquial conversations do not get translated. For example, simple things like the way a woman or man is addressed as “Madan” or “Myse” are written in Kreyòl without a translation or explanation. The same is true of greetings, “Allo,” or short

responses, “Oui” and “Non.” These kinds of Kreyòl words or phrases that are common to vernacular spoken communication are never translated into English.

This kind of colloquial language is easy enough to understand for non-Kreyòl speakers; yet Danticat uses this technique with Kreyòl dialogue that is much less accessible to English readers. For example, in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, two women have a conversation about what is new in their lives. One character asks, “*Sak pasé, Atie?*” and the second responds, “You're what's new” (Danticat 159). The colloquial phrase *sak pasé* literally means “what's up” or “what's new,” but Danticat does not provide this information for her readers. Rather, she lets the conversation do the talking. Though English readers may not know the exact meaning of the phrase, they may understand it contextually; nevertheless, the Kreyòl remains untranslated.

In other instances, Danticat provides even less context for conversational Kreyòl. This is true in *Krik? Krak!* when a man buries his dead rooster. The passage follows: “‘Ayibobo,’ the man said, chanting to the stars as he dropped the bird into a small hole” (Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* 132). For most American readers, this passage is foreign for a variety of reasons and it makes it very difficult to understand the meaning of the Kreyòl spoken by the man. In this way, Danticat is making a statement: it is difficult to understand. Somethings cannot be translated. Like Haitian drinks, foods, and animals that are culturally and geographically bound, oral Kreyòl is uniquely Haitian and therefore untranslatable. This can be observed repeatedly in Danticat's novels. In *Claire of the Sea Light*, colloquial swearing is untranslated: “can't be some homo *masisi* bullshit... needs to be real” (Danticat 82). In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* interjections are untranslated: “*ou byen?* Are you alright?” (Danticat 48); and oral story telling practices are untranslated: “‘*Tim, tim,*’ she called. ‘*Bwa chèch,*’ they answered” (123). In *The Dew Breaker*, sometimes whole sections of dialogue go untranslated. For example, when a character in the

short story “Seven” surprises his love with a present he asks, “*Ki sa l ye?*” (Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* 39). The reader is not given a translation or any other contextualization, leaving the Kreyòl a mystery to English readers. As a result, Danticat's use of dialogue leans more towards a Kreyòl audience. There is something inconvertible about dialogue and conversational Kreyòl and Danticat respects that.

In these examples of bilingual writing, Danticat demonstrates three things. First, she demonstrates the complexity of her navigation between two countries, cultures, and languages. Danticat is always in the process of self-translation, balancing English and Kreyòl as separate, but equal ingredients in her expression. Neither language is used to exoticize or trivialize the other; rather she tries to use both languages in tandem, yet different spheres. For Danticat, *Lago* and hide-and-seek are one in the same, yet different. Likewise, her translations of Haitian proverbs attempt to maintain the distance between Kreyòl and English. In fact, in many cases, Danticat illustrates the incompatibility and untranslatability of these two languages, especially as it pertains to dialogue. Despite the fact that her novels are mostly written in English, Danticat's bilingual writing reveals what it means to be postcolonial, creole, and diasporic—what it means to have each foot planted in a different country, culture, and language, what it means to be understood by some people and misunderstood by others. That being said, the second thing that Danticat's bilingual writing demonstrates is her understanding of audience and community. Like I mentioned earlier, the bulk of Danticat's work is published in the United States, which suggests that her audience is largely American. Her attempts to clarify and/or contextualize the Kreyòl language also suggest that she is writing for a non-Haitian audience. However, her attention to redundancy through translation insinuates that she is writing for diasporic Haitians like herself. Likewise, Danticat's attempt to conserve Kreyòl in dialogue

speaks to a Haitian audience. Third, Danticat's use of Kreyòl in translation makes a statement about the impossibility of translation between Kreyòl and English, Haiti and the world. For Danticat, there is something especially untranslatable about spoken Kreyòl; furthermore, in an attempt to include Haitian voices, Danticat preserves the orality that she associates with Kreyòl by incorporating sound into her writing with bimodal expression.

### **Bimodal Expression: Kreyòl and Sound**

Just as Danticat employs bilingual expression across her works, she juxtaposes written and oral language as a function of bimodal expression. This juxtaposition is artfully illustrated in the Epilogue of *Krik? Krak!*, titled, “Women Like Us.” In this short story, a mother adamantly disapproves of her daughter’s desire to become a writer. According to the mother, writing is as distasteful and troublesome as the most unpleasant sounds. Worse than silence, the mother believes that writing, pencil on paper, has an unpleasant “scraping” noise, saying also that “it sounds like someone crying” (Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* 220). “Women like you don’t write” she asserts (221). Rather, she claims, the women in her family use their voices. They are women who tell “fables and metaphors” and “whose similes, and soliloquies, whose diction and *je ne sais quoi*” create a tradition, culture, and community (220). In this passage, soliloquies and diction (perhaps fables, too) emphasize the spoken word or oral performances. The women in her family are also described “whispering,” “murmuring,” “singing,” and having stories to tell (222-223). Therefore, the women in her family communicate orally and communally which is very different from a writer’s habits. In this story, and in many others by Danticat, writing is the antithesis of orality. Furthermore, in an attempt to resolve this conflict, Danticat infuses sound,

verbal expression, and song in her text, producing stories that function bimodally, as written language that emulates oral language.

Themes of sound, song, and storytelling are pervasive in all of Danticat's work, although it is best illustrated in her children's book, *Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation*. In this short picture book, Danticat tells a story about a young Haitian-American girl and her father, who are separated from the mother when she is detained at an immigration detention center. Narrated by the little girl, the story begins: "When Mama first goes away, what I miss most is the sound of her voice" (Danticat, *Mama's Nightingale*). In order to comfort herself, the girl listens to her mother's voice on their phone's answering machine; later in the story, the mother sends the girl tape recordings of herself singing Haitian songs and bedtime stories about separated nightingales who will soon be reunited. Through the imagery of this song bird, in addition to the tape recordings, songs, and stories, Danticat tells a story about the ways in which orality can bring separated families together.

In other works, the role that orality plays in separation is much less straightforward. This is true of the first short story in Danticat's collection, *Krik? Krak!*, which begins with a young man writing a letter to his love while he is out at sea, fleeing from Haiti. As the story progresses, the narration also reveals the perspective of the young woman who is also writing letters to the young man. Consequently, writing appears to be the glue that holds these two lovers together while they are separated; however, the text emphasizes sound as the ultimate memorialization.

As previously mentioned, the structure of this short story is epistolary. The two lovers write for each other and the narrative perspective shifts from the one's letter to the other's letter. However, the letters do not respond to each other; rather, each character writes a singular narrative, like a journal entry, without ever knowing about the other's letters. Yet, in many

ways these unsent letters serve as an imaginary conversation that mimics the communication they might have, had the two lovers not been separated. Although this journal writing may help the writer to emotionally remember his or her loved ones, the letters are never received, perpetuating the distance between them. Ultimately, the young man's journal is tossed overboard and the letters and memories sink to the bottom of the ocean, never to have an audience to share his stories. In the end, writing becomes an attempt, though futile, to stay in touch with and to memorialize loved ones. The circumstances of exile and separation prove to be too precarious to overcome through writing.

Sound, on the other hand, has the power to bring people together across long distances. On the boat, sound reminds the young man of home. He describes a fellow passenger on the boat as speaking "in a singsong that reminds [him] of the villagers in the north" (Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* 5). It is the incantation of her song-like voice which reminds him of Haiti. Therefore, sound is something that people can have in common. More broadly, sound and song also bring people of the Caribbean together. One woman on the boat claims that people in the Bahamas misunderstand Haitians, "even though their music sounds like ours" (14). Here, sound is assumed to be a cultural heritage that unites people beyond political boundaries. Lastly, song on the boat reminds the passengers of togetherness: they sing "*Beloved Haiti, there is no place like you. I had to leave you before I could understand you*" and some of the passengers cry in grief for their exile (9). In this instance, song brings the passengers together, yet it also reminds them of their separation from home, which causes them to weep. In all of these examples, sound or song is tied tightly to community and homeland. Unlike the disjointed writing present in this story, sound and song bring people together.

Ultimately “Children of the Sea” presents a paradoxical account of diasporic memorialization. Sound, song, and speech prevail as methods of communication across time and space, despite the seeming impermanence of oral communication. On the other hand, written expression fails as a form of communication, a theme that consistently recurs across Danticat’s work. For this reason, Danticat’s characters cling to oral expression, especially in the face of separation or adversity, in order to memorialize their language, culture, and loved ones.

This is evident in other texts as well. In *The Dew Breaker*, a young woman living in the U.S. receives a letter from her parents back in Haiti that reads, “We have not heard your voice in a while and our ears long for it. Please telephone us” (Danticat 53). In this example, families that are separated throughout the Haitian diaspora are able to keep in touch via mail, yet they yearn for each other’s voices when they are apart. Likewise, in *Krik? Krak!* a young girl preserves tape recordings to remember her boyfriend: “Papa wants me to throw out those tapes of your radio show. I destroyed some music tapes, but I still have your voice” (Danticat 4). And in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* the narrator’s grandmother who urges, “Listen. [...] There is always a place where, if you listen closely in the night, you will hear your mother telling a story” (Danticat 234). In each of these passages, voice overcomes diasporic displacement and unites the Haitian community.

Just as the mother in “Women Like Us” associates orality with community practices and family values, Danticat links orality to Kreyòl. Again, *Mama’s Nightingale* can be used to highlight a few patterns in Danticat’s approach to verbal expression. Like the rest of Danticat’s oeuvre, the story is written primarily in English narration with excerpts of Kreyòl interspersed throughout the text. Although the written Kreyòl language is noticeably different from written English, Danticat uses different techniques to further distinguish Kreyòl from English.

For example, in *Mama's Nightingale*, Danticat uses italics to emphasize her use of Kreyòl. When the little girl listens to the recording of her mother's voice on the answering machine, Danticat writes: “*“Tanpri kite bon ti nouvèl pou nou!”* Please, leave us good news!” (Danticat, *Mama's Nightingale*). In this example, the answering machine message had been recorded in Kreyòl. This is clear because the phrase “Tanpri kite bon ti nouvèl pou nou!” is surrounded by quotations, whereas the English phrase “Please, leave us good news!” is part of the narration. This function of quotation versus narration, in addition to the noticeable differences between Kreyòl and English, should be enough to indicate how Danticat is using these two languages. However, she uses an additional sign of difference—italics. In standardized English it is custom to italicize non-English words, so in this manner Danticat is not particularly innovative; yet the move that Danticat is making in this passage is noteworthy. Danticat's use of italics not only marks the phrase as being written in a different language, but it also marks the phrase as being expressed verbally. The Kreyòl is not only produced verbally on the answering machine, but it also *sounds* different from the English, which the italics are able to accentuate. Additionally, the illustration on this page shows the little girl listening to the Kreyòl words swirling around the room as they pour out of the answering machine. The words inflate into larger text the further they spread away from the machine in the same way a voice can expand and fill up an empty room. The answering machine, the swirling of the Kreyòl words in the illustration, the italics, and the quotation marks all work together to stress the orality of this Kreyòl phrase.

The italicization of Kreyòl in conjunction with speech or song can be seen across most of Danticat's books. In the short story “Night Women” in *Krik? Krak!*, the narrator describes: “I hear him humming a song. One of the madrigals they still teach children on very hot afternoons

in public schools. *Kompè Jako, domé vou?* Brother Jacques, are you asleep?” (Danticat 87). Despite the fact that this phrase is not put into quotation marks like the example I highlighted in *Mama’s Nightingale*, this example of Kreyòl is delivered in the context of humming and singing a song; therefore, the Kreyòl phrase, “*Kompè Jako, domé vou?*” is accompanied by an assumed beat and a melody. Furthermore, the combination of song, Kreyòl, and italics brings the sound of the Kreyòl language to the forefront of the text.

Before I continue this analysis of Danticat’s bimodal expression I want to be clear about something: I realize that what I am proposing is impossible. Sound cannot be transposed onto novels in the same way that a painting is not the object it portrays. Paradoxically, Danticat uses text to represent orality. This paradox is the center of deconstructionist debate: is language pure semiotics or is meaning created in modality? In Danticat’s work, there is no purity—speech changes the text and text changes speech in a cyclical nature. This perpetual transformation of modality and meaning reflects the creolization that is central to Danticat’s identity and creativity. By infusing orality into text, Danticat productively applies deconstructionist theory so as to illustrate the ways in which the variations of language and meaning reflect the variations of postcolonial identities. In doing so, she also makes an important statement about the purpose of art. In order to write a novel that accurately represents the Haitian diaspora, Danticat must also represent the language and orality of its community.

Other examples of Danticat’s textual representation of orality can be found in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. The characters in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* often insert Kreyòl words into their conversations: “Say hello to your *manman* for me” (Danticat 35), “I’m going to do the *maché*” (115), “*Ca va byen?* [...] I brought your wife and daughter back in one piece” (212). In each of these examples, Danticat takes care to italicize the Kreyòl words, therefore distinguishing

between the English words and Kreyòl words. Additionally, the short interjections of Kreyòl into English conversation present a very colloquial twist in the characters' speech. As a result, this pattern of one or two Kreyòl words italicized in characters' speech illuminates a certain vernacular orality. Nevertheless, Kreyòl is emphasized as verbal expression within Danticat's text.

Conversely, in some cases, Danticat italicizes English in order to represent Kreyòl song or speech. This technique is particularly prominent in *Krik? Krak!*. For example, in "Caroline's Wedding" the narrator describes the radio "playing an old classic on one of the Haitian stations. *Beloved Haiti, there is no place like you. I had to leave you before I could understand you*" (212). In this passage, the italics indicate the lyrics to the "old classic" Haitian song. However, the text is translated from its, presumably, original Kreyòl lyrics into English. In this case, Danticat uses italics to indicate that the song is being sung in Kreyòl, but she uses translation so that her English readers can understand the lyrics' meaning. Other examples of this can be found in *The Dew Breaker* when "a *konpa* song praising the government" played "*you have led us/you have fed us*" (Danticat 202). A piece of propaganda, this song is doubtlessly broadcasted in Kreyòl. Consequently, italics are still signifiers of a Kreyòl orality; yet Danticat's translation allows Anglophones to be a part of this orality.

In other cases, italicized English is more difficult to interpret. In "A Wall of Fire Rising," a little boy recites his lines for a school play: "*A wall of fire is rising and in the ashes, I see the bones of my people. Not only those people whose dark hollow faces I see daily in the fields, but all those souls who have gone ahead to haunt my dreams*" (Danticat 56). In this example, there are no indicators that the boy's speech is in Kreyòl; neither is there an indication that it is in French. However, the italics communicate the fact that the boy's speech is spoken differently

than the rest of the English dialogue and narration. Therefore, the italics signify a language other than English. Due to Danticat's tendency to italicize Kreyòl throughout and across her writings, it seems appropriate to infer that the boy's speech is in fact in Kreyòl. Additionally, the italics may suggest a certain level of performativity as the young boy executes such a dramatic monologue. In conclusion, even though it is written in English, this passage constructs, yet again, an oral Kreyòl.

While Danticat's tendency to associate Kreyòl with speech, sound, and song is evident across her texts, I want to be careful not to reduce Kreyòl to solely an oral, vernacular, or performative language. Rather, I want to illuminate these examples in order to understand the complexity of the Creole community that Danticat writes about and participates in.

Christina Kullberg faces a similar challenge in her examination of Martinican literature. She notes, "translations of creole songs, proverbs, direct discourse, and expressions now appear in Martinican novels" in similar ways that Kreyòl emerges in Danticat's novels (114). Largely, she argues that "Creole<sup>6</sup> and orality are cultural anchors, pointing toward as well as expressing a specific identity" (115). She believes that Martinican authors privilege a representation of oral Creole in order to reveal a cultural community. Creole is not solely an oral language; it exists in other forms,<sup>7</sup> as evidenced by Danticat's literal use of Kreyòl written into her fiction. However, the point is that it is a language within a culture that has a rich tradition in storytelling and song. According to Kullberg, the language therefore privileges orality in order to recreate its cultural voice.

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<sup>6</sup> Here, Kullberg is referring Martinician Creole more specifically.

<sup>7</sup> For example, multiple newspapers, like *Haïti Progrès*, are published in Kreyòl (in addition to French and English).

Storytelling has deep roots in Haitian history and culture. Other important forms of oral literature include songs, proverbs, and riddles. One scholar explains that oral traditions are “an integral part of the cultural heritage of a country [like Haiti] where families must create their own entertainment in the evenings” (Lambert). However, other scholars attribute Haiti’s oral traditions to its non-literate culture. Because the majority of people in Haiti cannot read or write in French, much less in Kreyòl, “wisdom is oral... people hand down their knowledge and express it in proverbs” as well as in jokes and folktales (Corbett). In many cases, Haiti’s oral histories trace back to African storytelling traditions. For example, one scholar describes the “‘Crick Crack’ storytelling performance” as an African tradition in which “the ‘audience’ participates and there are close connections between performers and audience to the extent that the two almost become one” (Creighton). In other words, he highlights the African nature of an interactive storytelling session that mirrors the Haitian practice of Krik Krak. In addition to being the title of one of Danticat’s books, Krik Krak is a Haitian storytelling tradition in which the storyteller asks the audience if they would like to hear a story by shouting “Krik?.” If the audience is interested in what the storytelling has to say, they respond “Krak!” An example of this can also be found in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*: “‘Krik?’ Called my grandmother. ‘Krak!’ Answered the boys. Their voices rang like a chorus, aiding my grandmother’s entry into her tale” (Danticat 123). In this way, storytelling becomes a two-way conversation between storyteller and audience. Moreover, Danticat’s adoption of Krik Krak demonstrates her dedication to a bimodal expression, one which mimics oral traditions in written form.

According to Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant and Mohamed Taleb Khyar, this rootedness in oral histories is a foundation of creoleness. “In Praise of Creoleness” they argue, “provider of tales, proverbs, ‘timtim,’ nursery rhymes, songs, etc.

orality is our intelligence; it is our reading of this world” (895). When the dominant culture in Haiti privileges French text-based literature and cultural discourse, it creates “a break, a gap, a deep ravine between written expression [...] and traditional Creole orality enclosing a great part of our being” (895). Furthermore, even when creole authors successfully publish traditional folklore or oral histories, Bernabé and his co-authors believe that those texts are “completely cut off from the roots of our orality” (895). They explain that, as a result, “this nonintegration of oral tradition was [and continues to be] one of the forms and one of the dimensions of our alienation” (895). In other words, a lack of orality in our text-based world perpetuates the voicelessness of creole people—a problem with which Danticat is deeply concerned. Ultimately, in order to put an end to the systemic oppression of creole voices, a new literature must be invented “which will obey all the demands of modern writing while taking roots in the traditional configurations of our orality” because, as the situation stands, written expression without orality is destructive (896). Danticat’s bilingual and bimodal writing makes strides towards an inclusive, integrated literature. Additionally, Danticat’s work explores themes of voicelessness and the futility of writing in order to illustrate the pervasiveness of the gap between oral and written as well as its implications for the Haitian diaspora. In the next two sections, I will demonstrate the ways in which Danticat uses theme, motif, and structure to highlight the oppressive nature of a monomodal writing and to subsequently propose a new genre that meets the needs of both creole identities and the Western cannon.

### **The Haitian Diaspora: Voicelessness and the Futility of Writing**

Danticat illustrates the futility of writing most vividly through Ms. Hinds in *The Dew Breaker*. When she wakes up from her procedure, Ms. Hinds finds herself speechless. She looks

around. She hears doctors and patients walking in the hallway and a group of nurses chatting outside her door. Breathing is difficult. Desperate to get her nurse's attention, she opens "her mouth wide, trying to force air past her lips," but all that comes out is "the hiss of oxygen and mucus filtering through the tube in her neck" (Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* 60). Becoming panicked, Ms. Hinds thrashes about in her bed and throws objects at the nurses who rush in the room to restrain her. When a compassionate nurse hands Ms. Hinds a notepad and pencil, she scribbles "I can't speak" (61). And although writing provides Ms. Hinds some temporary solace,

[The] relief she must be feeling now would only last for a while, the dread of being voiceless hitting her anew each day as though it had just happened, when she would awake from dreams in which she'd spoken to find that she had no voice, or when she would see something alarming and couldn't scream for help, or even when she would realize that she herself was slowly forgetting, without the help of old audio or videocassettes or answering machine greetings, what her own voice used to sound like. (66)

Ms. Hinds is the personification of the alienation caused by the gap between written expression and creole orality. Unlike the majority of patients who have laryngectomies, she is young and a non-smoker. Danticat makes it clear that Ms. Hinds is a victim, she did nothing to deserve this voicelessness. Yet she is rendered mute, perhaps for the rest of her life. Silenced through history, institutional oppression, European languages and discourse, members of the Haitian diaspora, like Ms. Hinds, are deprived of a voice. The tragedy of Ms. Hinds is that when she is voiceless, she can only turn to writing for means of communication, but writing cannot "scream for help" or preserve her voice in the same way that audio recordings can. Consequently, although writing is a justifiable mode of communication, Danticat demonstrates

that it cannot sufficiently vehicle an authentic creole voice because the Haitian community is so heavily entrenched in themes of sound and song. And ultimately, writing perpetuates this diasporic voicelessness because written word silences verbal expression.

This conflict is central to most of Danticat's works. Characters suffer from silence. In *Mama's Nightingale*, the daughter suffers from the separation between her and her mother, but what she misses most "is the sound of her voice." In *Krik? Krak!* a young man dreams of voicelessness: "I tried to talk to you, but every time I opened my mouth, water bubbles came out. No sounds" (Danticat 12). In another story from *Krik? Krak!* the narrator explains the terror of silence: "silence terrifies you more than the pounding of a million piece of steel chopping away at your flesh" (223). In *The Dew Breaker* when a man remembers his wife's death, he remembers how she had "lost her power to speak [...] her lips moved, but no sounds came out of them" (Danticat 206). Repeatedly, Danticat portrays members of the Haitian diaspora who are plagued by voicelessness.

Yet, when these voiceless characters turn to writing as a form of communication, writing proves to be futile because it cannot fulfil the need for orality. The futility of writing is evident in the short story "Children of the Sea" from *Krik? Krak!* that I mentioned earlier. The two lovers, separated by distance, try to use writing to stay emotionally connected. In one journal entry the young man writes, "I know you will probably never see this, but it was nice imagining that I had you here to talk to" (Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* 27). In this passage, writing acts as a substitute for conversation, for orality, but the letters are never exchanged, illustrating the ineffectiveness of written expression in the diasporic community. Even if journal entries could theoretically simulate a conversation, in this situation it cannot replace or supplant orality; therefore, writing in this story

is doubly futile: unable to communicate across diasporic distance and unable to capture the essence of orality.

These examples, among many others in Danticat's works, demonstrate that "Writers don't leave any mark in the world. Not the world where we are from" (*Krik? Krak!* 221). Just as Bernabé said, written expression will continue to alienate and silence creole communities as long as oral traditions remain marginalized and unintegrated. That is why, when writing is not sufficient, Danticat privileges the radio as a vehicle for creole voice in her fiction.

### **Radio: A Solution**

In an interview with the New York Public Library, Danticat identifies radio plays as "these bridges" between the writer and the people who are not "able to participate in the story" due to language and/or literacy barriers (O'Neill). In another interview with *Guernica Magazine*, she describes what it feels like to have had some of her own stories translated into Kreyòl and produced as radio plays: "They become totally different. More alive in some way. More immediate" ("The Art of Not Belonging"). For Danticat, creating Kreyòl oral literary productions is the penultimate creation for a creole artist like herself. Creating Kreyòl oral literary traditions is a "more alive," "more immediate," and more authentic representation of the Haitian community that Danticat's writing inhabits. The radio serves as the solution to Haitians' voicelessness amidst the futility of writing. For this reason, Danticat tries to preserve the essence of the radio in her written fiction, both thematically and structurally.

The radio is a motif that appears in nearly all of Danticat's works. In *Claire of the Sea Light*, a character named Louise George runs "a popular weekly [radio] program called *Di Mwen* or *Tell Me*, a weekly interview/gossip show" (Danticat 68). Each week, Louise invites a member

of the community to share their story live on air. And each week, “people all over Ville Rose would tune in to it” (68). In *Claire of the Sea Light*, radio is the center of the social and political life of Ville Rose. Conversely, the radio show reflects the social and political life of Ville Rose, as Louise’s guests talk about their personal lives each week.

Other instances of the radio include examples of Haitian characters listening to music and news reports. In *Krik? Krak!*, characters listen to music programs consisting of “old sorrowful bolero[s]” (Danticat 196) and “old classic” Haitian songs (212). Others listen to local broadcasts that announce “the list of names of people who passed the university exams” (24) or national transmissions that recount federal arrests, “killing[s] in Port-au-Prince,” and news about boats sinking off the coast (28). Similarly, the radio acts as a primary source of information and culture in *The Dew Breaker*, *Claire of the Sea Light*, and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and receives honorable mention in Danticat’s non-fiction works *Create Dangerously* and *Brother I’m Dying*. The presence of radio in Danticat’s works is extensive.

In much of the world, the radio has become an outdated informational platform. According to the Pew Research Center, most people around the world depend on television or newspapers as their news sources (“Where People Get Their News”). However, in Haiti the radio is the primary platform for mass communication (Pierre). One explanation for this is the low literacy rate that plagues the nation. Most recent data collection by Unicef suggests that about 50% of adults living in Haiti are literate; however, Danticat argues that “the actual figure is probably lower than that if one defines literate as, for example, being able to read an entire book” (*Create Dangerously* 44). Moreover, less than half of the population can read the (French-language) newspapers. Additionally, the World Bank ranks Haiti as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere with about 80% of its population living in poverty. Only 12% of the

population owns a television, according to the *World Factbook*. Therefore, the radio, offering affordable and accessible information, serves as a foundation for the nation's communications.

In her writing, the radio is crucial not only for domestic communication and empowerment, but the radio is vital for the diaspora. In *Krik? Krak!*, Haitians in New York sit “around the kitchen radio listening to a music program on the Brooklyn Haitian station” (Danticat 196). And in *The Dew Breaker*, the radio allows characters to be informed about “what [is] happening both here [in the United States] and back home [in Haiti]” (47). In this way, the radio is an essential component to sustaining Haitian communities beyond Haiti's borders.

Notably, the radio is more than a cultural motif: it serves as a source of equitable discourse and literary production, which Danticat tries to recreate in her books. In an interview, Danticat explains that she imagined the structure of the entire novel *Claire of the Sea Light* to be like a radio show in which each chapter acts like an episode of the radio drama on-air (“An Interview with Edwidge Danticat”). She explains, “the radio is probably the most democratic form of justice where people can be heard. I think of the book as a part of Louise's [a character in *Claire of the Sea Light*] show and her narration of the town” (Jones). The radio is democratic because it is a proponent and vehicle of Haitian voice. When Haitians are excluded from and alienated by the Eurocentric text-dominant discourse, the radio becomes a space where Kreyòl orality can thrive. Interestingly, though written most recently, the structure of *Claire of the Sea Light* is identical to the structure of her older novels *Krik? Krak!* and *The Dew Breaker*. All three of these novels consist of a collection of stories from different perspectives, just as *Di Mwen* consists of guest speakers each week. This structure promotes multiple narratives, emulates Haitian community life, and memorializes orality. Danticat's imitation of

the radio show format creates a space within the Eurocentric text-dominant discourse that democratically celebrates Haitian voices.

To drive the importance of this point home, Danticat memorializes radio journalist Jean Léopold Dominique as a hero and martyr of Haitian voices. Dominique worked at Radio Haiti Inter during the Duvalier dictatorships and transformed the station into an instrument of resistance and a champion of pro-democracy activism (“Jean Léopold Dominique”). Notably, Dominique was among one of the first radio journalists to broadcast in Kreyòl. In addition to broadcasting news reports and political commentaries, Dominique designed a literary program. Haiti’s most renowned authors have written in either French or English—for example, Jacques Roumain, René Depestre, Stephen Alexis, Frankétienne, Lyonel Trouillot, Edwidge Danticat. Many of whom also published abroad for foreign audiences. As a result, many Haitians do not have access to the richness of their literary traditions. For this reason, Dominique piloted a radio program that translated classic texts like *Masters of the Dew* by Roumain and “A Wall of Fire Rising” by Danticat from their French and English (respectively) originals into Kreyòl. Consequently, the radio became a fountain of literary culture. Because he used the radio as a powerful tool to educate millions of Haitians, Dominique threatened the status quo in a period of heavy governmental censorship. Unfortunately, he was exiled and ultimately murdered for his political commentary. However, Danticat continues to propel his legacy forward in many of her works. In *Create Dangerously*, she writes about Dominique’s dedication to the Haitian people: whether in exile or in Haiti, “what seemed undeniably compelling about him [...] was his exceptional passion for Haiti and how that passion had finally betrayed him” (Danticat 42). Danticat also writes about characters, like Dominique, who are murdered for speaking out on the radio in *Claire of the Sea Light*. People

and characters who speak to Haitians or provide space for Haitian voices, on behalf of Haitians, become martyrs in a world that silences Haitian voices and the radio plays a crucial role in this empowerment.

Through the radio, Danticat makes a counter-statement to the text-dominant discourse. By introducing the radio as a form of cultural and literary production, Danticat defends the value of oral literature. Despite the Eurocentric claim to the fleeting nature of oral literature, Danticat demonstrates that oral productions are in fact able to endure centuries of time and long distances across geographic space. Haitian oral traditions have propelled forward stories and practices that stretch back to African traditions hundreds of years before slaves were taken to the Caribbean. And now, with the help of today's technology, Haitian voices are transcending the nation's borders and making cultural contributions to a wider audience in the diaspora. Not only does Danticat prove the epochal and geographic durability of oral tradition, but she also argues for its authority. When Haiti was under oppressive dictatorships, oral productions of information and culture provided political clarity. Additionally, the radio endorses multiple narratives and opposes the singular, heroic narrative typical of the Western epic. The structure of Danticat's novels demonstrate that multiple voices create a truer representation of the world, thereby allotting greater authority to multiple narratives. In Danticat's work, radio becomes the solution to the futility of writing and the alienation of creole identities that writing perpetuates.

## **Conclusion**

In so many ways, Danticat is answering Bernabé's call for a new literature that balances the demands of modern writing while "taking roots in the traditional configurations of our orality." Danticat manipulates the text-dominant industry she publishes in, in order to privilege

other forms of representation, namely the oral-based histories, languages, and identities of Haitians which have been continuously silenced for the past 500 years. By infusing techniques and themes that infuse written and oral expression, Danticat creates a new literary tradition that validates Haitian voices and reconciles Haiti with its diaspora and with the rest of the world.

Firmly entrenched in the realm of literacy, academia, and publishing houses, Danticat uses traditional conventions in order to effectively subvert the alienating and silencing effects of contemporary literature. In her bilingual writing, Danticat uses translation between Kreyòl and English, but she validates the originality and creativity of both linguistic and cultural communities. Therefore, by using bilingual expression in her novels, Danticat unveils the hidden “collective unconscious [and] common genius” of Haitian people (Bernabé 899). Concerning her bimodal writing, Danticat conventionally uses italics in order to highlight the ways in which the Haitian diaspora operates in two modes of expression. By incorporating dialogue, song, and sound and promoting bimodal expression in her texts, she closes the gap between written expression and orality. Together, Danticat uses bilingual and bimodal expression to authenticate Haitian diasporic voice and identity that are culturally and historically bounded in traditions of Haitian oral performances. Lastly, Danticat uses language in conjunction with content, motif, and structure in order to construct a new literary form that infuses and transmits text and orality in order to validate and promote other, less-valued, forms of cultural and literary production within the current hegemony of text-dominant literary studies. Bernabé writes, “creole orality, even repressed in its aesthetic expression, contains a whole system of counter values, a counterculture; it witnesses ordinary genius applied to resistance, devoted to survival” (895). Although she participates in both written and oral productions, Danticat’s advocacy for oral literature is a

counterculture to Eurocentric literary traditions. She is building a new genre in which Haitian voices can thrive and be celebrated.

In this way, Danticat is also redefining creole literature. Creoleness is so deeply entrenched in linguistic and oral fusions that it often gets reduced to the concept of creole languages. In its fullest sense, creoleness applies to the ways in which different cultures and traditions interact, in addition to the hodgepodge of languages that can ensue in the same space. Therefore, Danticat's bilingual and bimodal writing expands creole literature in that it reaches beyond written literary traditions and blends oral and textual expression. By experimenting with the impossible, Danticat effectively and artfully represents the realities of creole identities and postcoloniality and consequently captures the authenticity of today's globalized world.

Word Count: 10,167

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