Polyglot Passages: Multilingualism and the Twentieth-Century Novel

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis reads the twentieth-century novel in light of its engagement with multilingualism. It treats the multilingual as a recurring formal preoccupation for writers working predominantly in English, but also as an emergent historical problematic through which they confront the linguistic and political inheritances of empire. The project thus understands European modernism as emerging from empire, and reads its formal innovations as engagements with the histories and quotidian realities of language use in the empire and in the metropolis. In addition to arguing for a rooting of modernism in the language histories of empire, I also argue for the multilingual as a potential linkage between European modernist writing and the writing of decolonisation, treating the Caribbean as a particularly productive region for this kind of enquiry. Ultimately, I argue that these periodical groupings – the modernist and the postcolonial – can be understood as part of a longer chronology of the linguistic legacy of empire. The thesis thus takes its case studies from across the twentieth century, moving between Europe and the Caribbean. The first chapter considers Joseph Conrad as the paradigmatic multilingual writer of late colonialism and early modernism, and the second treats Jean Rhys as a problematic late modernist of Caribbean extraction. The second half of the thesis reads texts more explicitly preoccupied with the Caribbean: the third chapter thus considers linguistic histories of Guyana and the Americas in the works of the experimental novelist Wilson Harris, and the fourth is concerned with the inventive and polemical contemporary Dominican-American novelist, Junot Díaz.

Contents

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1. Introduction: Multilingualism, Modernism and the Novel

> I would go so far as to take bliss in a *disfiguration* of language, and opinion will strenuously object, since it opposes "disfiguring nature."
>
> - Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*[1]

> My languages slid into each other's ear from one continent to another.
>
> - Hélène Cixous, 'My Algeriance'[2]

This thesis investigates multilingual writing across the twentieth century, as exemplified by a series of novelists whose work engages, in a variety of ways, with multilingualism. The four authors I consider in detail – Joseph Conrad, Jean Rhys, Wilson Harris and Junot Díaz – are brought into dialogue by their multilingualism; each of them writes from some personal and political engagement with plural languages, and each explores in their work the possibilities of writing multilingually within a text which is notionally Anglophone.

The four authors whom I consider in this study are also united with regard to their choice of literary form. The novel, which classical accounts posit as having arrived at roughly the same time as the functionally monolingual European nation-state, and risen to prominence as those European nations themselves became global imperial powers, is a form whose history is uniquely tied to that of empire. But if the novel is, in part, weighed down by this history, populated with the baggage of empire in various

[1] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p.37.
[2] Hélène Cixous, 'My Algeriance, in Other Words: To Depart not to Arrive from Algeria', trans. Eric Prenowitz, in *Stigmata* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p.226.

ways both thematic and formal, implicated with global marketplaces and channels of readership that are themselves products of empire, it also contains within itself a unique set of resources with which to work through these problematic associations. The novel, in the memorable formulation of Mikhail Bakhtin, represents an unusual management, engagement with, and deployment of a plurality of voices: in the novel multiple narratives can coexist or compete, and it is in the very nature of the form to deploy a variety of languages. The parameters of the novel form, though, are of course not static, and the multilingual must also be understood as a dynamic force, one which continues to act upon and to shape the novel as it develops in the century of the decline and demise of empire.

A consideration of multilingualism in the novel in the timeframe I propose must necessarily begin with modernism. The advent in literature in the early decades of the century of a foregrounding of form, a renegotiation of the terms of realism inherited from the nineteenth-century novel and a fragmentation of political, ethical and philosophical commitments bestows a number of concerns which unavoidably mediate the novel's transition from a time of high empire through the world wars to the decades of decolonisation. Modernism's shift in attention toward form invites investigation of the mimetic links between writing which embraces fragmentation and often explicitly experiments with the multilingual at the level of the text, and a world wherein the process of decolonisation challenged the political status commanded by European metropolitan languages and those of their colonised subjects. Alongside such formal concerns, the historical boundedness of classical accounts of modernism by the height of the so-called scramble for Africa at one end and the Second World War at the other necessitates a discussion still unfinished as to the engagement in modernist writing with the decline of empire and the accompanying alteration in political and linguistic thought.

Just as the periodical classification of literature is a messy exercise, so too are the geopolitical contexts in which such literature arises. Multiple accounts exist which explore in different ways the dovetailing of modernist and postcolonial concerns in literature. While some older perspectives tend to see modernism as petering out by the mid-century, and while a certain version of the postcolonial sees it as the literary projects of former colonies gaining independence, the interrelation of these two strands of critical thought have been complicated.[3] A range in perspectives is thus available, from those which rigidly maintain a view of modernism as a Euro-American product, albeit one whose formal parameters were taken up in various ways by writers from colonies and former colonies, through those which see the Euro-American example as just one kind of modernism among many, with postcolonial literature representing the entry into modernity of various other parts of the world, to those which see the 'original' modernism itself as a kind of writing of decolonisation.

While I will offer some scattered thoughts on these linkages, I also propose that through the multilingual, we can discern a different chronology: a series of writers who treat the novel as an opportunity to engage with histories of multilingualism, and who thus engage throughout the twentieth century with legacies of empire, and who continue to explore and to reinvent the linguistic possibilities of the novel. While we might follow Edward Said in understanding the novel as a form particularly implicated in the European colonial project, we can also discern across the twentieth century a range of linguistic strategies which complicate this history, and which understand that to

[3] Consider Raymond Williams, arguing with some scepticism in a 1987 lecture that "'Modernism", as a title for a whole cultural movement and moment, has been retrospective as a general term since the 1950s, thereby stranding the dominant version of "modern" or even "absolute modern" between, say, 1890 and 1940.' (Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* [London: Verso, 2007], p.32.), or Bradbury and McFarlane's 1976 collection, which offers a chronology of modernism which ends in 1930 (Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976]).

explore the potential of the novel to account for multilingualism is also necessarily to consider the response it offers to a history of colonialism.

The account of the novel that follows takes into account case studies from the early origins of literary modernism at the peak of empire through to the present day, and which consciously cuts across the extant distinctions between modernism and the postcolonial. I will consider the European writing of the beginning of the century as already engaged in postcolonial work, and I will read the postcolonial novel, particularly that of the Caribbean, as making its own productive contributions to the wider redrawing of the history of empire. In so doing, I aim to propose a history of the novel in the twentieth century which understands the form as engaged in an ongoing renegotiation of the norms of language usage which are a bequest of empire. I thus begin with Joseph Conrad as the paradigmatic writer of the heyday and decline of empire, on the understanding that it is far from coincidental that the novelist most associated both with the origins of modernist form and with the origins of a writing which engages critically with empire happens also to be a multilingual; one who stands in oblique relation to the English language itself, and whose work foregrounds questions of multilingual language usage with unusual frequency. I end my account with Junot Díaz, a writer of the contemporary Caribbean whose work foregrounds the unfinished project of postcoloniality. In Díaz as in Conrad, we see both a formal preoccupation with language and a determination to relate this issue to a wider context, and to append it to a longer political history: language, for Díaz, is a site of experimental potential as well as a material entity with a history of implication in colonial and authoritarian control.

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To begin outlining this project, it is necessary to say at the outset that multilingualism, contrary to a common misconception shared by many monolinguals, is not only perfectly common, but in fact the geographical and historical norm from which monolingual experience deviates. While, as we shall see, literary criticism has sometimes been hesitant to recognise or to incorporate this fact, it is a matter of platitude for linguists. As one account would have it, relatively briefly put:

> To be bilingual or multilingual is not the aberration supposed by many (particularly, perhaps, by people in Europe and North America who speak a 'big' language); it is, rather, a normal and unremarkable necessity for the majority in the world today. A monolingual perspective is often, unfortunately, a consequence of possession of a powerful 'language of wider communication', as English, French, German, Spanish and other such languages are sometimes styled. This linguistic myopia is sometimes accompanied by a narrow cultural awareness and is reinforced by state policies which, in the main, elevate only one language to official status.[4]

It is true that the authors I will consider in this study can be conscripted as a rebuttal to this misconception; to assert that the Anglophone novel is, so to speak, a fiction, and that it can and does contain within it a multitude of languages aside from English. But it is also worth noting as we proceed that this misconception is asymmetrical and ideological – it is much more likely to be held by those who speak a language with its origins in western Europe, which is to say a language whose widespread distribution is an unavoidable corollary of its imperial history. The politics of such a misapprehension have thus been more sharply criticised by Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook as

[4] John Edwards, *Multilingualism* (London: Penguin, 1995), p.1.

'blinkered views that posit a bizarre and rare state of monolingualism as the norm.'[5] In fact, Makoni and Pennycook go even further in their analysis, setting out to expose and to undermine the ideological gestures implicit in any effort to identify and define a discrete entity called 'a language', arguing that 'languages were, in the most literal sense, invented, particularly as part of the Christian/colonial and nationalistic projects in different parts of the globe.'[6]

Given this ongoing work in destabilising the very foundations of language, and of insisting that languages in and of themselves are discontinuous and amorphous entities, it is perhaps necessary to pause and ask the obvious question: what is multilingualism? Linguistically, this question has multiple answers, ranging from the straightforward to the open-endedly complex. While academic studies of the subject will often resort to simple and pragmatic definitions – 'the presence of more than two languages either in individuals or in society', for example – the implications and inflections of such definitions are vast nevertheless.[7] To think critically about multilingualism is necessarily to consider a great breadth of perspectives; multilingualism may be considered psychologically or phenomenologically, it may be a question of society and group dynamics, or of politics and state policy. Issues gathered under all of these headings will necessarily inform this study.

It is, of course, not necessarily any simpler to consider multilingualism from a purely literary perspective: what is multilingualism in the context of the literary text? While to an extent the chapters which follow represent a series of possible answers to this question, I will make clear at the outset that my approach to answering this

[5] Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook (eds.), *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007), p.22.
[6] Makoni and Pennycook, p.1.
[7] Anat Stavans and Charlotte Hoffmann, *Multilingualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.2.

question is a purposely expansive one. Certainly, the most common-sense definition holds true in some cases – the existence of two or more languages within a dialogue, a text, or an author or character's mind (note that here and throughout this project, I use 'multilingual' to refer to *two or more* languages, in contrast to certain accounts like that from Stavans and Hoffmann above, which understand the multilingual as comprising *more than two* languages and treat bilingualism separately). The multilingual may also be a political condition, wherein multiple languages figure within state policy, within colonial practice or in the meetings between nations or communities. Following the kind of analysis offered by Makoni and Pennycook, though, I will also consider as multilingual incidences of discontinuity or contradiction within the 'same' languages: meetings of dialect and register, incidences of unusual vocabulary or accent.

Correspondingly, the writers who feature in this project exist in a variety of relations to various kinds of multilingualism, but all, at their core, both write out of and engage in their work with multilingualism and questions surrounding it. Joseph Conrad was a true polyglot, speaking fluent French and a considerable amount of Russian in addition to his native Polish, before eventually learning and beginning to write in English in his late twenties. In addition to this, and as I seek to show, his novels represent an interrogation of the possibilities of multilingualism as well as the deployment of a variety of multilingual writing strategies. Jean Rhys, by contrast, was a deeply hesitant multilingual, having grown up speaking English and hearing Creole in Dominica, speaking the former with an accent which betrayed her Caribbean origins and, upon moving to Europe, becoming a capable yet anxious speaker of French. Wilson Harris is primarily concerned with the colonial history of his native Guyana and of the Americas more generally, and has foregrounded the roles played by multiple languages both in the European colonisation of the region and in attempts to fashion an artistic idiom free from this history. Junot Díaz is a Dominican immigrant to the United

States who writes in a linguistically-inventive prose, notionally in his second language of English.

To consider a corpus of writers whose engagement with multilingualism is explicit is significant in no small part due to a tendency in literary studies to replicate the same elision of the multilingual which the linguistic sources above criticise, which is to say that considerations of literary multilingualism frequently define themselves in terms of striking novelty. Thus Steven G. Kellman's assertion that translinguals (that is, writers working in a language other than their mother tongue) are 'the shock troops of modern literature', or this fuller and more recent formulation from Juliette Taylor-Batty:

> Outside of Joyce and Beckett studies, and despite the recent 'transnational turn' in modernism studies, the topic still receives very little attention. This is in no small part due to the continuing cultural and political conception, particularly amongst Western native speakers of world languages such as English, of monolingualism as the 'norm' and the resultant perception of cases of literary multilingualism as exceptional, unusual, extraordinary.[8]

What resembles a standard academic summary of the lay of the critical land in fact demonstrates the pervasiveness of paradigmatic understandings of mono- and multilingualism. Taylor-Batty goes on to cite a breadth of scholarly accounts of multilingualism in literature from 1960 to the twenty-first century, pointing out that they can be relied upon to define themselves in terms of the apparent novelty to their readers of the very notion of literary multilingualism. The constant reassertion of the newness of writing multilingually, and of conceiving of the world through a multilingual lens,

[8] Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p.31, Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2013), p.7.

though, serves to demonstrate that a lasting monolingual paradigm continues to inform studies of literature.

A worthwhile corrective to such misconceptions is also offered in Yasemin Yildiz's *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, which is one of few works to assert the necessity of extending the kind of complication of flat accounts of mono- and multilingualism as outlined above to the reading of literary texts. Yildiz, too, points out the embeddedness in certain Western cultural narratives of this monolingual paradigm, remarking that 'to…many cultural texts, the phenomenon of multilingualism appears as a remarkable new development of the globalized age', while in actual fact 'it is monolingualism, not multilingualism, that is the result of a relatively recent, albeit highly successful development.'[9] Such a paradigm has, for Yildiz, 'functioned to obscure from view the widespread nature of multilingualism, both in the present and in the past.'[10] Herein Yildiz acknowledges what underpins Makoni and Pennycook's analysis above: the fashioning of such paradigmatic thinking around language, and the manufacturing of the very notion of the mother tongue, were inextricable from the rise of the nation state in Europe, and from the colonial designs of these same states. Such positions build upon the insight of Benedict Anderson, who argued that the rise of the nation state in Europe was contemporaneous with the process wherein 'capitalism and print created monoglot mass reading publics', which 'created, and gradually spread, the conviction that languages (in Europe at least) were, so to speak, the personal property of quite specific groups.'[11]

[9] Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p.2.
[10] Yildiz, p.2.
[11] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 1991), pp.43, 84.

This rise of the nation, along with the elevation of certain languages to national status, was also the historical context which allowed for the rise of the novel; Ian Watt has argued that, in addition to the novel being reliant upon the emergence of a western European bourgeoisie, it relied for its invention upon the emergence of a class of readers in the vernacular, contiguous with the spread of middle-class and clerical professions necessitating such literacy.[12] And yet the novel was also, as Edward Said reminds us, implicated in its rise to prominence with the parallel rise of empire, thus the memorable formulation that 'the novel, as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other.'[13] Indeed, turning to a slightly fuller statement of Said's thesis, we must emphasise the extent to which the novel was involved in carrying out the ideological work of empire:

> Without empire, I would go so far as saying, there is no European novel as we know it, and indeed if we study the impulses giving rise to it, we shall see the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand, and, on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism.[14]

It is necessary therefore to consider that if a component of empire was the manufacture and export of particular epistemologies of language, and particular means of apprehending and taxonomising linguistic difference, then the novel too can be considered in light of its relation to these language histories. If one part of the 'complex ideological configuration' which sustained empire is a set of ways of thinking about

[12] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* [1957] (London: The Bodley Head, 2015), pp.37-9.
[13] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), p.84.
[14] Said, p.82.

language, then these might also be found within the 'patterns of narrative authority' typical of the novel.

If we consider a germane example in the shape of *Robinson Crusoe*, it is possible to discern some of the imperial politics of mono- and multilingualism at work. Thus, shortly after the arrival of Friday:

> *Friday* began to talk pretty well, and understand the Names of almost every Thing I had occasion to call for, and of every Place I had to send him to, and talk'd a great deal to me; so that in short I began now to have some Use for my Tongue again, which indeed I had very little occasion for before; that is to say, *about Speech*.[15]

Crusoe does not trouble, of course, to learn any language known to Friday, but makes it his business to teach Friday to speak English, 'so well,' in fact, 'that he could answer me almost any Questions.'[16] This fact Crusoe is quick to exploit in order to educate Friday in the ways of Christianity, and indeed of nation and nationality: those same facts which we have established were contemporary with the rise and the spread of national language. Thus, when Crusoe asks Friday 'the Names of the several Nations of his Sort of People', he finds that he can 'get no other Name than *Caribs*': nation and language simply do not map onto each other for Friday in the same ways as they do for Crusoe.[17] It is apparently far less of a problem for Crusoe to speak in the languages of other colonisers: when he and Friday rescue another European (along with Friday's father) from being devoured by cannibals, Crusoe speaks with him first 'in the *Portuguese* Tongue', later in 'as much *Spanish* as I could make up.'[18]

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[15] Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.180.
[16] Defoe, p.180.
[17] Defoe, p.181.
[18] Defoe, p.198. We learn later that this 'Spaniard' 'spoke the Language of the *Savages* pretty well' (p.203).

Yet even in so totemic an example of the English imperial novel as this, we can find the material with which to begin unravelling some of the language logic of empire. Certainly, Friday is depicted as being drawn into a certain kind of monologic idiom. We do not know what language or languages he speaks, and the text is able to enact a full repression of them: we learn later that Friday becomes an interpreter for Crusoe, a prototype of that class of interpreters whom colonial policy (as in a famous document like Macaulay's 'Minute on Indian Education') fashioned as a means of managing the fact of multilingualism among its subjects. Just as colonial policy facilitated and relied upon the export of a monolingual paradigm of governance, the Anglophone novel subsumes the fact of other languages within its English narration. But, as Bakhtin's perspective on the novel made clear, the novel itself is never truly monologic; it is 'a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice.'[19] As such, we can, according to one account, 'find various instances of "languaging in *Robinson Crusoe*, when the hero creates a fracture between English as spoken in England, and English as spoken in the Caribbean, in contact with Spanish and Portuguese.'[20] We need not credit a text like *Robinson Crusoe* with anything like a productive or democratic essaying of multilingualism, but, in a text dealing quite explicitly with imperial practice, multilingualism is simply impossible to avoid. We can thus discern as multilingual effects not only the casual acknowledgements of Crusoe's own Portuguese and Spanish, but the transformations and modifications of English which emerge through Friday's 'broken' attempts at speech with Crusoe. Reading a novel like Defoe's, that is, makes us aware of that 'contradictory process' emphasised by Emily Apter wherein 'globally powerful languages such as English, Mandarin Chinese, Swahili, Arabic, French

[19] M.M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination* ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.261.
[20] Diana de Armas Wilson, 'Where Does the Novel Rise? Cultural Hybrids and Cervantine Heresies', in Anne J. Cruz and Carroll B. Johnson (eds.), *Cervantes and His Postmodern Constituencies* (New York: Garland, 1999), p.58.

simultaneously reduce linguistic diversity and spawn new forms of multilingual aesthetic practice.[21]

I choose to mention *Robinson Crusoe* here not only because it is, according to the popular imagination, the first 'English' novel, and thus aptly demonstrates that even in its origins, the Anglophone novel had to confront the reality of multilingualism as it arose in the colonies of the European powers. It is significant, too, insofar as it takes the Caribbean as its principal setting, a region with its own particular language histories which render it an unusually fecund one in which to consider the phenomenon of literary multilingualism, and which will also form the locus of this study. I follow some precedent in considering the Caribbean as a particularly productive site for this kind of enquiry – Neil Lazarus has made a strong case for such an understanding of the Caribbean:

> In work composed in the languages of the former colonial powers, especially – as, most notably, in the Caribbean – the socially and historically sedimented resources and symbolic freightage of these languages are first deconstructed and then reformulated so as to enable them to shoulder the burden of *post*colonial representation.[22]

If the Caribbean has been the site of some nascent investigation of colonial language politics for as long as the novel has existed, then it must also be acknowledged that the particular histories of colonialism and language in the Caribbean mean that the process of confronting the colonial past through language has been ongoing, too, in writing from the region itself. Writing in (for example) English from the Caribbean, then,

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[21] Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p.3.
[22] Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.83.

contains within it the 'sedimented resources' of much more complex and more plural language histories.

The Caribbean is the site of a unique set of instantiations of the language policy and language epistemology which, as we have already seen, were widespread concerns of empire. Edward Kamau Brathwaite has commented on the combination of language with political power and intellectual history which was enacted in the Caribbean:

> What our educational system did was to recognize and maintain the language of the conquistador – the language of the planter, the language of the official, the language of the Anglican preacher. It insisted that not only would English be spoken in the Anglophone Caribbean, but that the educational system would carry the contours of an English heritage. Hence...Shakespeare, George Eliot, Jane Austen – British literature and literary forms, the models which had very little to do, really, with the environment and the reality of non-Europe – were dominant in the Caribbean educational system…People were forced to learn things which had no relevance to themselves. Paradoxically, in the Caribbean (as in many other 'cultural disaster' areas), the people educated in this system came to know more, even today, about English kings and queens than they do about our own national heroes, our own slave rebels, the people who helped to build and to destroy our society.[23]

Here Brathwaite provides gestures both to the continuity with broader imperial practices experienced by the Caribbean, and the ways in which the Caribbean stands out as unique. We have already seen, of course, that a certain tension exists between the rise of state language and a kind of monolingual national conception on the part of the

[23] Brathwaite, Edward Kamau, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984), p.8.

imperial powers, and much more plural states of affairs in those regions which they sought to bring under their control. Brathwaite thus gestures, too, to the plurality of imperialisms experienced by the Caribbean, inviting consideration of 'the language of the conquistador': the Caribbean experienced near-constant military and economic competition, redrawing of borders and reinscription of different European linguistic norms which few colonial regions experienced with such consistency.

The languages common to empire – 'the language of the official, the language of the Anglican preacher' – are also, in the Caribbean, 'the language of the planter': the presence of slave economies in the region amounted to a further series of linguistic complexities falling under the jurisdictions of the European powers. The Caribbean necessitates a consideration of the West African languages of slaves, which were subsumed into the linguistic milieu and flattened by language policy; the colonisers, Brathwaite remarks, 'did not wish to hear people speaking Ashanti or any of the Congolese languages. So there was a submergence of this imported language. Its status became one of inferiority.'[24] It is necessary too, of course, to consider the languages of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, which were either subsumed into European linguistic taxonomies or eradicated entirely along with their speakers. All of these considerations amount to the sharpest of divisions between state apparatuses like education (as discussed by Brathwaite) which were shaped into the monolingual institutions of empire, and centuries of actual language praxis, which have actually existed on a creole continuum. Material language usage among populaces is, as accounts like that of Makoni and Pennycook remind us, always discontinuous and piecemeal; creoles are not the exception so much as the norm. Or, according to another account, 'the Caribbean is characterized by its very complexity, its multiplicity of origins, its

[24] Brathwaite, p.7.

elusive boundaries, and its defiance of fixity.'[25] This is the reality which monologic assertions of state and imperial power repress.

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How, then, do the more engaged multilingual concerns of each of the writers I consider play out in their work? This, of course, is a question of political commitment as well as of form, and what is shared across the works of these four authors is a negotiation at the level of the text of the problematics and the possibilities of multilingual writing. A useful roadmap with which to negotiate this set of issues is offered by Meir Sternberg, who, echoing these concerns, points out that the 'complications' of the fact of multilingualism for the writer 'are intratextual as well as intertextual and representational as well as communicative.'[26] Sternberg thus succinctly demonstrates that, while translation and translation studies provide one way to approach the issue of multilingualism and writing, it is also important that we extend such enquiries into the text itself, where the mediation between languages must also be enacted and negotiated. Sternberg, pointing out that 'such framing and juxtaposition of differently-encoded speech are…particularly common within the fictive worlds created in literature', lays out a series of strategies by which a text can represent and interrogate multiple languages.[27] While Sternberg begins by identifying a practice of 'referential restriction', wherein the events of the text are simply confined to a community or society which is linguistically uniform (his example here is Jane Austen), the textual effects I will be considering lie somewhere between 'vehicular matching' and 'homogenizing convention'. In the former example, the text faithfully reproduces the

[25] Barbara Lalla, Jean D'Costa and Velma Pollard, *Caribbean Literary Discourse: Voice and Cultural Identity in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014), p.2.
[26] Meir Sternberg, 'Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis', *Poetics Today* 2.4 (Summer-Autumn 1981), p.221.
[27] Sternberg, p.221.

linguistic diversity it aims to depict – offering untranslated dialogue in multiple languages – while in the latter, it tacitly acknowledges the presence of multiple languages but does not make explicit reference to them, simply offering all text and dialogue in its own language.

Sternberg offers a continuum of positions between these two poles, reflecting that in practice, a variety of strategies coexist, often in close proximity, within one text. Instead of lingering too theoretically upon this range and the distinctions therein, I will pause here to provide an example, in the hope of demonstrating not only the varied approaches which can be taken to depicting and interrogating the multilingual, but what kinds of rhetorical and political strategies inhere therein. I will thus turn to an early scene from Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel *The Secret Agent*. Kellman has drawn particular attention to this as a novel which betrays Conrad's 'incomplete translingualism', offering as examples the moments in which Conrad's syntax or vocabulary reveal an apparent authorial translation from French.[28] This is, however, only a partial explanation of the wealth of multilingual considerations which *The Secret Agent* forces.

Mr Verloc, the *agent provocateur* of the title, arrives at what is strongly suggested to be the Russian embassy in Belgravia, and there enters into conversation with the 'First Secretary', Mr Vladimir. The scene, conducted in a mixture of French and English, tantalises the reader with a series of playful and mocking gestures toward the presumed linguistic content, which arrives in the text mediated through various degrees of translation. Thus the opening of the conversation:

> The feet of Mr Verloc felt a thick carpet. The room was large, with three windows; and a young man with a shaven, big face, sitting in a roomy arm-chair before a vast mahogany writing-table, said in French to the Chancelier

[28] Kellman, p.11.

d'Ambassade, who was going out with the papers in his hand:

"You are quite right, mon cher. He's fat – the animal."[29]

The 'Chancelier d'Ambassade' is an apparent concession to the role of French as the official language of diplomacy in this context; while various narrative gestures (of which the use of French is one) seem to identify this as the Russian embassy, the Chancelier d'Ambassade has the Germanic name 'Wurmt', as does Mr Vladimir's predecessor, 'Baron Stott-Wartenheim'. The mingling of multilingual strategies here is more apparent still in the spoken dialogue which follows, which is characterised both by the authorial tag alerting the reader to an act of translation – 'said in French' – and by the deployment of 'mon cher', a relatively recognisable French idiom which renders the passage both accessible and recognisably foreign. Here we see two of the common strategies identified by Meir Sternberg's typography of multilingual writing practice: the former, what Sternberg terms 'explicit attribution', the latter, 'selective reproduction', or 'intermittent quotation of the original heterolingual discourse…supposed to have been uttered by the fictive speaker.'[30] Already, we may be compelled to speculate as to the effect these techniques produce. Does 'Chancelier d'Ambassade' lack an analogue in English, or is it being deployed knowing that an English alternative would suffice? Is it thus adding semantically to the content of the passage, or enacting some lampooning strategy with regard to what is already there? Something similar may seem to lie within the use of 'mon cher', which may infuse the dialogue with authenticity, making it seem simply 'more French', or may again appear parodic, an overly-familiar French idiom which seems somewhat out of place. Perhaps, too, we ought to take note of the manner

[29] Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.14.
[30] Sternberg, p.225.

in which this accentuates the asymmetry of Vladimir's utterance; why is the term of endearment rendered in French, and the ensuing insult translated into English?

Acts of so-called selective reproduction offer a convenient way to begin dissecting the multilingual parameters of this moment, but even in the brief passage above it seems there is something rather more subtle afoot. Indeed, the slightly early arrival of Mr Verloc's feet ('the feet of Mr Verloc…') mark the first sign that something strange is happening to Conrad's English here. The inversion of word order could be read as a Gallicism, inadvertent or otherwise, or an incidence of what Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien has called 'weird English'.[31] There is something uncanny in the resonance of this, which seems to play a key part in bringing to light the atmosphere of political tension suffusing the exchange. This is no less the case with regard to the nonstandard deployment just afterward of a semicolon immediately before a conjunction, which gives the sentence a curiously lurching quality, or the inversion of the expected order of adjectives in the construction 'shaven, big face'. It is difficult to explain why 'big, shaven face' would be so much more comfortable (less still why 'large, shaven face' would be even more so), but at any rate, with 'vast, mahogany writing-table' the order is restored before we have much time to think about it.[32] Moments like these, I think, demonstrate that something is lost in attributing them to an 'incomplete translingualism', as though the writing is on its way to being English, and just hasn't quite arrived. It is, on the contrary, in this malleable treatment of English, this deployment of something which feels both English and not-quite-English, where so much of the effectiveness of the writing lies.

[31] Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien, *Weird English* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
[32] An entertaining chapter on this so-called 'hyperbaton' appears in Marc Forsyth's *The Elements of Eloquence: How to Turn the Perfect English Phrase* (London: Icon Books, 2013); the remarks concerning the ordering of adjectives in particular went viral across multiple social media in late 2016.

The explicit gestures toward the multilingual must be read alongside these curious moments where the text's English begins to deconstruct itself. The strategies we see above, though, are comparatively simple compared to what begins to unfold over the following pages.

> "You understand French, I suppose?" he said.
>
> Mr Verloc stated huskily that he did…He muttered unobtrusively somewhere deep down in his throat something about having done his military service in the French artillery. At once, with contemptuous perversity, Mr Vladimir changed the language, and began to speak idiomatic English without the slightest trace of a foreign accent.
>
> "Ah! Yes. Of course. Let's see. How much did you get for obtaining the design of the improved breech-block of their new field-gun?"
>
> "Five years' rigorous confinement in a fortness," Mr Verloc answered unexpectedly, but without any sign of feeling.[33]

We can assume that, with Mr Vladimir's first of these lines, the conversation is still taking place in French, and thus his question is anything but simple. The apparently combative nature of asking *in French* if Mr Verloc speaks French can also be read as a complete absurdity: a question which can only be answered in the affirmative, or not at all. That is, Mr Verloc cannot answer the question unless he does indeed speak French, and Vladimir's request forecloses the possibility that he cannot; he is either asking a question while already knowing the answer, or while expecting to receive no answer at all. All of this, of course, through the text's recourse to Sternberg's 'explicit attribution', is flattened conveniently into the parent language of the text; the reader can speculate as to the kind of disturbance or self-defeating logic at play, but they are not made subject

[33] *The Secret Agent*, p.15.

to it. And yet, with Vladimir's 'contemptuous' switch into English – 'idiomatic English without the slightest trace of a foreign accent', in fact – it seems clear that the reader, too, is beginning to be implicated in the potential consequences of the text's interplay of languages. In addition to bearing witness to Verloc's own language performance, we are reminded that language at the level of the text, too, may not be all that it seems. If we have to be told that we are reading English even as we read it, what other language effects may be taking place that we are not informed of? Just as Vladimir's spoken English betrays no signs of the more complex or questionable origins of its speaker, literary prose, too, may be duplicitous. It may conceal other languages within it, or it may think in a language other than its own.

The potential of the multilingual as a device for humour and parody is only further exemplified as this strikingly rich encounter continues:

> Mr Verloc intimated hoarsely that he was in the habit of reading the daily papers. To a further question his answer was that, of course, he understood what he read. At this Mr Vladimir, smiling faintly at the documents he was still scanning one after another, murmured "As long as it is not written in Latin, I suppose."
>
> "Or Chinese," added Mr Verloc stolidly.
>
> "H'm. Some of your revolutionary friends' effusions are written in a *charabia* every bit as incomprehensible as Chinese-"[34]

If 'mon cher' is a relatively simple multilingual gesture, which aims to convey a sense of authenticity in replicating the text's dialogue without the need for any great proficiency on the part of the reader, then *charabia* is a rather more complex piece of vocabulary to deploy. *Charabia* in fact means nonsense, gibberish, something deliberately or

[34] *The Secret Agent*, p.19.

stubbornly impossible to understand, and it is therefore with some irony that the text here switches into quite colloquial French: the word *charabia* is either semantically or literally nonsense, depending on the perspective of the reader.[35] The point to note in this case, though, is that there are multiple layers at play, numerous possibilities in making sense of the conversation which grant to its participants various levels of proficiency, ease or understanding. Verloc's seemingly benign but stubborn insistence that he might just as well speak Chinese as Latin can also be taken for a witticism; with another authorial aside, we have already learnt that the conversation has switched back to French, in which *chinois* literally means Chinese, but idiomatically refers to any language which is overly complex or difficult to understand.[36]

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My decision to take an example from Conrad here is not an arbitrary one, because while this study will take case studies from across a long twentieth century, Conrad, as a modernist writer at the beginning of the century, makes clear a number of the concerns which will inform all of the authors I consider. Indeed, to consider multilingualism as it both shaped and preoccupied the novel in the twentieth century must, necessarily, begin with a consideration of modernism. This much will be clear even according to classical understandings of what modernism was, or is; modernism's position at the height and decline of the empires of Europe, its foregrounding of the linguistically-constructed nature of its works, its preoccupation with questions of form, with extending the possibilities of realism and its more pragmatic associations with

[35] In fact, the etymology of *charabia* is, in the manner of the word 'barbarian', linked directly to the ridicule of heteroglot groups within or outside a national language, having once referred specifically to the Auvergnat dialect. A fuller consideration of the etymology of *charabia* appears in Renée Balibar, *Le Colinguisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), pp. 8-9.

[36] Quite gratifyingly, French-English dictionaries can thus be found to translate *chinois* as Chinese, 'double Dutch' or Greek, as in 'it's all Greek to me'.

multiple languages, migration, borders and so forth, will all by now be clear as contexts for the work which will follow.

The so-called new modernist studies has provoked a great broadening in the purview of the discipline, inviting considerations not only of the temporal reach of modernist influence throughout the twentieth century and into the present day, but also of the breadth of artistic practice which can be dubbed modernist, the origins of modernist forms in non- Euro-American contexts and languages, as well as the uptake of more established conceptions of modernist practice by non-Western writers.[37] While these projections outward geographically and temporally (in the latter case, outward typically means *forward*) have made for reconsiderations of the linkages between modernist form and political engagement which have in turn prompted new reflections on the connections between modernism and colonialism, I would suggest, too, a need to look backward – to further identify the inheritances of empire in the early origins of modernism, wherein its formal and linguistics preoccupations can be properly rooted.

It is not my most immediate concern here to take a position amid the wider institutional discussions and debates which have emerged around modernism recently, gaining particular momentum in the last decade, particularly with regard to the proper temporal, geographical and stylistic boundaries of the field. Nevertheless, though, it will be necessary to touch upon these conversations, if only in order to extricate the terms in which modernism will be considered and deployed in the coming analysis. Eric Hayot has offered a succinct critique of the expansionist tendency in modernist studies, taking issue with the scholarly practice of:

[37] See Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA* 123.3 (2008), 737-748, Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies', *Modernism/modernity* 17.3 (Sept 2010), 471-499, Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough's *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

> Placing authors and artists into an already existing theory of modernism whose center remains European. The only way you recognize that a new person is a modernist, or that Brazilians had modernism, or that the many modernisms all belong to the same general category of the modernist, is if you begin from a conception of what modernism is in the first place. Adding some new person to the general house, which must be done on the grounds that in some sense the person *already belongs* there, allows the same four or five major figures to continue to define its most basic values. The furniture changes; the foundation is unmoved.[38]

Hayot thus provides a convincing perspective on the so-called Eurochronology problem which scholarship has confronted: taking an expansionist approach to a field of study like modernism is all well and good, but it begins from a Eurocentric notion of literary period and of modernity itself.

Hayot's own response to the problem of where modernist studies can and should be going in our present moment is also illuminating; instead of situating modernism in a particular time or place, Hayot defines it as one among literary modes themselves defined by the approach they take to the possibility of representing the world. For Hayot, modernism is the 'world-denying' mode, insofar as it 'represents situations – no longer worlds – in which no single shared experience dominates, in which communication becomes a cacophony.'[39] This is a useful articulation of what modernism is for my purposes, first because it allows us to detach modernism from the particular political circumstances which give rise to it; it is sufficiently general that we can retain the European high modernist locus as being one particularly sustained

[38] Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.4.
[39] Hayot, p.132.

instantiation of modernist practice, while allowing for the possibility of other modernisms which are not necessarily influenced by it, but share its preoccupations with a perceived incapacity to represent the world. Secondly, with its emphasis on communicability and cacophony, Hayot's thesis allows us to think about the multilingual as both a concern and an articulation of modernist practice more generally.

Hayot's analysis is, of course, not such a wild departure from longer-held perspectives on modernism, with their traditional association with fragmentation, with a turn inward, with incapacity and with a crisis of political and community identification. With his emphasis on community and communication, though, Hayot offers an account which makes a consideration of language considerably more pressing. The thesis on communicability also calls to mind another relatively recent perspective on modernism, that offered by Michael Valdez Moses with respect to Conrad:

> The paradigmatic Conradian scene of the imperial encounter is one of *disorientation*, one in which the Western mind, far from subjugating the pliable native environment to the scientific and epistemological categories of its omnipotent and omniscient European intelligence, finds itself at a loss, overthrown, confused, panicked, frustrated, and turned back upon itself. This Conradian scene typically culminates not in an act of Western epistemological mastery and political domination but one of uncertainty and alienation, radical scepticism, and intense critical self-examination.[40]

In this account we see – in addition to an important assertion of the colonial genesis of modernist writing, and a clear complication of Said's Orientalism – a similar kind of 'world-denying' impetus to that advanced by Hayot. For Moses, too, a kind of

[40] Michael Valdez Moses, 'Disorientalism: Conrad and the Imperial Origins of Modernist Aesthetics', in *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1988-1939*, ed. by Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p.45.

incapacity lies at the heart of modernist practice, and this necessarily throws into relief questions around communicability; later Moses refers more specifically to a 'crisis of language' underpinning Conrad's fictional aesthetic, an idea which I shall consider further in my first chapter.

In these perspectives, which understand modernism as being either motivated or characterised principally by a kind of alienation from the world and an accompanying incapacity of communication, it is clear that language must play a constitutive role. Recent considerations of modernism have foregrounded the issue of multilingualism more fully, contributing to a more in-depth set of perspectives on the ways in which modernism engages more explicitly with language. Steven G. Yao's work, for example, has placed the practice of translation as a central consideration of the modernist period, gesturing to various modernist writers' involvement in the practice of translation and thus representing one approach to exploring modernist practice as concerned specifically with languages and the spaces between them:

> Throughout the Modernist period…translation occupied a manifold conceptual space: it constituted an autonomous literary activity that inspired sustained and varied critical reflection: it functioned as a specific technique in the construction of texts in a variety of different modes, ranging from "original" works to so-called adaptations to "translations" proper, as that term has been traditionally understood, texts by which various writers both expanded the scope of Modernism and explored issues of gender, politics, and language itself; and it embodied a comprehensive textual strategy for negotiating between the demands of transmission and transformation, between the authority of tradition

> and the demands of innovation, between the endowments of the past and the imperatives of the present.[41]

Yao's perspective is important insofar as it invites us to think about modernism in the light of languages in the plural as well as language in the singular. It is not merely that modernists engaged with language as their media in ways more forthright than previous generations of writers, nor that modernists effected striking redeployments of language and exploitations of its malleability. What we see in an account like Yao's and its foregrounding of translation is a more worldly, politically engaged set of concerns; while *language* may be a dispassionate or detached area of practice and study, to think about *languages* is necessarily to acknowledge the political and ideological moves necessary in their separations and meetings. Striking, then, is the focus Yao invites us to direct toward 'issues of gender, politics and language itself', suggesting a need to consider the politics of language and the linguistics of the multilingual as material political experiences. This, of course, is not to elide the practices of formal experimentation inherent to modernism, but it is a vital fact underpinning it; as Yao goes on to write, 'through the practice of translation, Modernist writers undertook to extend the limits of English itself, which in turn led them to discover new possibilities for their own expression.'[42]

A more recent account by Juliette Taylor-Batty goes further still in its association of modernism with an applied, worldly sense of the multilingual, suggesting that the new social relations engendered by European modernity brought with them a newfound literary awareness of linguistic difference:

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[41] Steven G. Yao, *Translation and the Languages of Modernism: Gender, Politics, Language* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.27.
[42] Yao, p.7.

> The result is not only an acute awareness of the inadequacy of established literary languages and forms to express this new world, but an unprecedented sensitivity to linguistic and cultural plurality and difference – an awareness, in short, of the condition of Babel.[43]

There may be a slight tendency here to overstate the case; modernist linguistic engagement and experimentation can, as we have seen, be considered within a much longer time frame of language and empire. Nevertheless, Taylor-Batty offers a way into thinking about modernist practice as concerned, again, not only with language in the abstract, but with concrete histories of language. The growing consideration of various kinds of multilingual writing within the canon can thus, in Yildiz's phrase, 'help to reveal the significance of multilingualism for modernism on the one hand and for postcolonial and transnational writing on the other.'[44]

This is a reminder, too, offered by Moses' account of the emergence of Conrad's style above: to think about modernism with particular recourse to its negotiation of multilingualism is to properly ground it within particular histories of language. Moses and Begam's 2007 collection is part of what remains an emergent scholarly tendency to situate modernism with regard to its relation to, and inheritance from, European imperialism. It is only now, according to Christopher GoGwilt, that it is becoming 'increasingly more plausible to view modernism, once considered a product of Europe and America, as the effect of wider, transnational phenomenon. In this view, literary and artistic modernism properly belongs within a history of decolonization.'[45]

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[43] Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp.3-4.
[44] Yildiz, p.15.
[45] Christopher GoGwilt, *The Passage of Literature: Genealogies of Modernism in Conrad, Rhys, and Pramoedya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.4.

This is in addition, of course, to those more established, valuable accounts which consider the extended history of modernism as it proceeds into the twentieth century to be taken up by writers from the decolonising world, particularly, for the purposes of this study, those from the Caribbean. Such a perspective is found, with necessary ambivalence, in the work of Simon Gikandi:

> Since entry into the European terrain of the modern has often demanded that the colonized peoples be denied their subjectivity, language, and history, it would be tempting to argue that Caribbean writers have sought new modes of expression and representation by rejecting modernity and by seeking or revalorizing ancestral sources from Africa and India…And yet there is a sense in which Caribbean writers cannot escape from modernism and its problematic issues, especially the questions of language, history, and the colonial subject which it raises. Generations of Caribbean writers and intellectuals have had to bear the burden of modern European history and its ideologies as that history was initiated by the "discovery" and then transformed, shaped, and even distorted by subsequent events and institutions such as the plantation system and the colonial condition.[46]

Gikandi's insights are vital because they allow us to think productively about the points of connection between modernist practice, language and the Caribbean. We have seen, and will see, that the potential for an unravelling of some of the norms of thinking about mono- and multilingualism may lie nascent within the origins even of European modernist aesthetics. Many of these issues which may seem only dormant in a writer like Conrad, though, receive their fullest political articulation through their interrogation

[46] Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (London: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp.2-3.

by those from a region such as the Caribbean, whose history bears the signature of direct experience with colonial language paradigms through both praxis and policy. This thus informs the literary approaches to multilingualism which we can discern in writing from the modern Caribbean; as Ch'ien has written more generally, 'the act of weirding English' receives its political instantiation as the twentieth century progresses, when writers are found 'daring to transcribe their communities and thus build identities.'[47] Thus a writer like Brathwaite can go on to say, in *The History of the Voice*, that 'what T.S. Eliot did for Caribbean poetry and Caribbean literature was to introduce the notion of the speaking voice, the conversational tone.'[48] It may remain too subsumed within a broader account of stylistics, but Jahan Ramazani thus succinctly summarises the issue when he writes that 'modernist heteroglossia – rapid turns from high to low, Standard to dialect, English to Sanskrit or Chinese' can be understood as 'another form of literary bricolage submitted to the dialectics of indigenization by postcolonial poets, especially in the Caribbean.'[49] I would only offer the corrective that, rather than seeing the multilingual as one among many forms of literary experimentation, it deserves to be read as the key point of contact between a longer history of twentieth-century writers.

I would pause here to draw out more directly two paradoxes, or perhaps continua, which arise from these considerations of modernism alongside language. The first of these concerns language itself. At one end, there is a tendency to consider the modernist approach toward language (and perhaps literary approaches to language more generally) as being the stuff of dispassionate artistic practice, the medium in which the artist works and which she bends to her will, deploys as she sees fit. The more tense partner to this perspective is a more worldly approach to language, wherein language is

[47] Ch'ien, p.4.
[48] Brathwaite, p.30.
[49] Jahan Ramazani, 'Modernist Bricolage, Postcolonial Hybridity', *Modernism/modernity* 13.3 (Sept 2006), p.453.

material, learned, performed and the medium through which the individual approaches the world, other individuals, and communities.

The second, which arises too from these accounts of modernist practice, is one of possibility and incapacity. On the one hand, throughout generations of modernist scholarship, we have the sense of modernism as a time of representational crisis, wherein a sense arose of artistic practice as being ultimately incapable of representing the world, particularly in the light of the horrors of the First World War: consider, to give one example, Bradbury and McFarlane's classic account in which modernism is described as 'not only a new mode or mannerism in the arts, but a certain magnificent disaster for them'.[50] And yet herein, also, lies the contrary; modernism as a time of radical innovation, of new representative strategies, and a great extension of the possibilities of the literary text.

The work that follows will amount in significant part to a consideration of the responses offered to these two paradoxes, and their meeting, by a series of writers. Multilingualism itself represents, at times, a crisis moment for the (ostensibly) Anglophone novel, a realisation that the linguistic resources of the novel are unequal to the various kinds of linguistic breadth, variety and cacophony which exist in the worlds its practitioners seek to represent. And yet in all of the novelists I will consider in the coming chapters, we find a wealth of strategies for dealing with these problems which amount to an extension of the possibilities of the novel itself.

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The analysis that follows pursues the vein of the multilingual through a series of case-studies drawn from a 'long' twentieth century, beginning at the close of the 19th

[50] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism' in *Modernism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.26.

century with Joseph Conrad and ending with Díaz at the beginning of the 21st. Through episodic consideration of four novelists drawn from high and peripheral European modernism, from the decolonising Caribbean and present-day 'global' literature, I aim to show that the multilingual represents a problematic point of consideration in writing throughout the century, from the heart of the modernist project through the postcolonial and into the present day. I thus cover a historical and spatial range which may seem broad, but in doing so aim to question the tendency toward more episodic periodisations of the twentieth-century novel. My concern is not chiefly, as some previous accounts have productively explored, with identifying the precise moment at which modernism gives way to the postcolonial, so much as to invite an alternative chronology wherein a wide range of literary works can be grouped in the way they respond *en masse* to the language history of empire, and seek to work through, work against or work out of the linguistic paradigms left behind by the European imperial project.

Chapter 1 offers a reading of Joseph Conrad as the aforementioned originator of a long twentieth-century set of perspectives on the novel, empire and multilingualism. Focusing on two of Conrad's novels set at the periphery of empire – the Belgian Congo in *Heart of Darkness* and the fictional American republic of Sulaco which straddles the Caribbean and the Pacific in *Nostromo* – I consider a central pivot in Conrad's oeuvre around the multilingual problematic. In the case of the former text we see the straining edges of the imperial language paradigm, wherein Marlow, as intrepid colonial frontiersman, struggles with the limits of metropolitan knowledge as stymied by its monolingualism, and experiences the cataclysmic fraying of his own monologic sense of self. *Nostromo*, considered as Conrad's mid-career magnum opus, represents his attempt to fashion a new approach to dealing with the language legacies of colonialism: as opposed to *Heart of Darkness*, it is a strikingly dialogic text, which seeks, with partial

success, to break out of the myopic perspective of high colonialism, documenting a nascent post-colonial idiom in a self-conscious multilingualism far removed from that of *Heart of Darkness*. I thus seek to understand key formal moves in Conrad's writing career as governed by changing strategies of confronting the colonial language paradigm, and its likely subsequent dissolution as decolonisation begins to take hold.

Where chapter 1 deals with an arch-canonical modernist, albeit one of complex linguistic background, **chapter 2** inverts some of its concerns, dealing instead with a semi-canonical, peripheral modernist writing into the metropolitan centre. Jean Rhys has begun more often to take centre stage in critical discussions, serving as an important point of connection between high modernist European writing and later postcolonial responses, particularly those of the Caribbean. While Rhys's 'Creole' aesthetic has begun to be broadly acknowledged, the linkage between her modernist practice in the inter-war years and her deep concern with the material realities of language adoption, acquisition and usage has not been established as fully as it could be. I thus consider Rhys's work as attentive, first and foremost, to the quotidian realities of language praxis in the high colonial metropoles of London and Paris through a consideration of her first four novels. I seek to establish Rhys as an ambivalent participant in the project of high modernist aesthetics, due in no small part to an apparent frustration in her work with the limited potential of modernist practice to truly confront and engage productively with the social and political implications of language usage in the modern metropolis.

Chapter 3 continues the study's trajectory through the twentieth century, returning to the Americas via the writing of the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris. Harris is described by Simon Gikandi as 'possibly the most self-conscious Caribbean modernist,' but, like Rhys, he represents an interrogation of the linguistic potential

offered by modernist form, also introducing a far deeper historicisation of the lasting linguistic effects of multiple European imperialisms in the Caribbean and South America.[51] Harris shares with the likes of Brathwaite a sense of colonialism as engendering a cataclysmic fragmentation for its Caribbean subjects, with multiple languages first being forced together by the slave economy, before being subsumed and codified into national languages under the administration of the European power. Harris's novels, along with his criticism, foreground the necessity of a confrontation with the particular language histories of Guyana, the Caribbean and the Americas. His writing is highly idiosyncratic, adopting, adapting and acknowledging certain modernist conventions, rooting them anew in Guyana and its colonial history. Therein we find an archaeological pursuit of the dormant possibilities of the manifold languages submerged in the Englishes of the modern Caribbean.

Chapter 4 brings the study to the present day through a consideration of the bestselling Dominican-American novelist Junot Díaz. Díaz has been a central figure in recent discussions of contemporary literary multilingualism and its relation to translation and increasingly globalised literary marketplaces. Díaz also, though, offers a series of incisive perspectives on the postcolonial and the unresolved legacies of empire in the Caribbean, and I argue for a consideration of his lively, experimental multilingual form alongside this longer history. Via his engagement with institutions of writing and education, though, Díaz also continues to bring modernism into dialogue with the former concerns, and can thus be considered as the inheritor of the kind of ambivalent uptake of modernist form which is a common thread linking my earlier case studies. Díaz thus brings together the two chronologies of modernism and the multilingual,

[51] Gikandi, p.4.

which, I argue, ought to be centrally positioned in a consideration of the twentieth century novel.

We can thus deduce across these works the unfolding of a series of negotiations of multilingual realities and multilingual writing practices. On the one hand, what they show are a series of redeployments of the multilingual as a textual resource; explorations of the potential of the novel in a Bakhtinian sense, a series of mimetic experiments in offering a novelistic image of the multilingual. Each is modernist in the most general sense we have seen, wherein form emerges out of a response to the limits and possibilities of communication itself. Thus, on the other, what is discernible in them all is a working through of the very material lineages of language bequeathed by empire. All four writers engage directly with histories of mono- and multilingualism which give rise to various political and social issues for consideration; who can talk to whom, and in what language? How are political ideologies played out and negotiated in acts of language, whom do they favour and whom might they oppress?

1. Post/Colonial Linguistics: Language Effects and Empire in *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo*

Surely, no consideration of the Anglophone novel in the twentieth century can start anywhere but with Joseph Conrad. Critical truisms of Conrad's influence abound – Conrad was the final major Victorian novelist and the first major modernist one, his works represent a unique depth of reflection on the nature and the reach of empire for their time, and his writings presaged many of the most present political issues of our own time, from decolonisation and globalisation to the rise of America as a superpower, the enduring concern with and fear of terrorism, and the practices which would become known as neo-colonialism. For the purposes of my analysis, it is also key to note that language marks an unusually pervasive preoccupation of Conrad's novels.

Conrad's translingualism is sufficiently familiar as to need precious little gloss; he composed his life's works entirely in English, a language he learned only in his twenties, when he was already fluent in French as well as his native Polish.[1] It is perhaps of even greater interest that Conrad's novels represent a strikingly consistent interrogation of the possibilities and limitations of language. Marlow's famously ambiguous narrative in *Heart of Darkness* fails entirely to represent the languages of the subjects of colonial rule, even as the text is completely aware of their existence. *Nostromo* depicts a cacophony of European interests squabbling over the fate of a Hispanophone state, watched all the while by its remarkably terse protagonist. *Under Western Eyes* is narrated by an English 'teacher of languages' living in Geneva. This chapter will thus read two texts at the centre of Conrad's oeuvre – the 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness* and the 1904 novel *Nostromo* – as plotting between them Conrad's negotiation and

[1] See Steven G. Kellman's *The Translingual Imagination* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), which takes Conrad as one of its major case-studies.

renegotiation of issues around language and multilingualism both at the height of, and in the aftermath of empire. Between these two texts we can diagnose both an evolving approach to form, a trying-out of multiple strategies to engage with the multilingualism of the worlds they encounter and create, and the move toward a conscious foregrounding of multilingualism as what is, and will become, an enduring problematic in the Anglophone novel.

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In the midst of a period of heavy revolutionary violence in *Nostromo*, we witness Martin Decoud penning a hurried letter to his 'favourite sister' in Paris.[2] Decoud was born in Conrad's fictional republic of Costaguana but educated in France, and thus appears as somewhat of an anomaly: a creole who has reverted to 'the exotic dandy of the Parisian boulevard' (*N* 166). Though Decoud passes as European, then, he is evidently a more complex entity than some of the solitary seamen who serve as protagonists of many of Conrad's most well-known texts. Decoud is a journalist; the editor of the *Porvenir*, the yellow-journalistic propaganda vehicle of the white capitalist classes of Costaguana, established to combat the ascendant independence movement which the *Porvenir* and its readership term 'negro liberalism' (*N* 116). Decoud is also the self-styled architect of the eventual secession of Sulaco from the republic, a kind of aspirational Bolívar analogue, opening his letter by requesting that his sister 'prepare our little circle in Paris for the birth of another South American Republic' (*N* 162).

The letter itself is a curious textual artefact: on the one hand, it is typical of Decoud's polyglot, writerly sensibilities, fluent in the creolised idiom of Costaguana, while on the other, it is peppered with errors, syntactic double-takes and awkward

[2] Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.162. Further references appear parenthetically as (*N*).

repetitions. In one tell-tale sign of the frantic composition of the document, as Decoud hurries to relate the latest heroic act of the eponymous Nostromo, he slips into a near-verbatim repetition:

> That man seems to have a particular talent for being on the spot whenever there is something picturesque to be done…That man has a peculiar talent when anything striking to the imagination has to be done. (*N* 163, 164)

The would-be revolutionary Decoud is evidently preoccupied with Nostromo, but stubbornly unwilling to give him credit: Nostromo, later to be feted by most as the true hero of the conflict, is in neither case identified by name, each mention draws attention to the apparent superficiality of his actions, while his strangeness – first 'particular', later 'peculiar' – is subtly amplified. More arresting still is a moment of bizarre syntax which creeps into Decoud's narrative, when he relates that 'all the servants they had ran away yesterday and have not returned yet' (*N* 167-8). This is particularly curious when we consider that this passage, which sounds like nothing so much as a calque or a moment of clumsy translation, comes in the midst of the easy polyglossia which by this point we have come to associate with Decoud. This includes both authorial gestures to the French in which Decoud is no doubt assumed to be writing – 'This, *soeur chérie*, is my companion…' (*N* 179) – and Decoud's own casual deployment of the Creolised vernacular of Costaguana: 'only a week ago they used to call him a *Gran' bestia*' (*N* 171), 'Quién sabe?' as the people here are prone to say in answer to every question.' (*N* 180)

What sense can we make of Decoud's letter, which mingles cosmopolitan ease with outright confusion? If the latter features, the cosmopolitan multilingual gestures which are so pervasive in *Nostromo*, represent a particular pluralist paradigm, what are we to make of those elements such as the former example, where language appears to show fault lines, falling short of its semantic goals? We might, as some commentators

on Conrad have done, take this as an occasion to note the inherent 'foreignness' of Conrad's writing, unfolding as it does in virtuosic English but bearing the occasional trace of the French or Polish languages with which he was more familiar. This would thus join other moments throughout Conrad's oeuvre where unusual vocabulary or arresting syntax are to be dismissed simply as authorial accidents or sloppy editing. We might suppose that this interpretation has a simple alternative: that Conrad deliberately includes such moments of linguistic awkwardness to illustrate panic, miscomprehension, or any other such response which may momentarily arrest a character's ability to express themselves. It is, I think, vital that we sidestep such questions, along with their implied gestures toward issues of authorial intent, which have nevertheless continued to rear their heads in academic discussions of Conrad's multilingualism, some of which I shall touch upon in the work that follows. There is, I hope to show, a textual logic at play in *Nostromo* whose implications are much greater, and which represents a troubled working-through of a multilingual paradigm of an emerging postcoloniality.

While Decoud is of course no simple analogue, the points of kinship between Conrad and his character are nevertheless illuminating. Like Conrad, Decoud is a multilingual writer – Conrad is, in Sylvere Monod's pleasing phrase, an 'anglograph'[3] – a fluent French speaker (and writer) who nevertheless earns his keep penning propaganda journalism in the republic's official Spanish. Each man, while others dwell upon their outside appearances of foreignness, takes a kind of refuge in the process of self-fashioning which writing seems to offer. Indeed, Conrad himself seems to identify to some extent with Decoud, writing in his author's note that Decoud's love interest,

[3] 'I call Conrad an anglograph, not an anglophone writer, because, while he was not *sensu stricto* English-speaking – he never lost his recognizable foreignness in speech – he was unquestionably and brilliantly English-writing.' (Sylvere Monod, 'Conrad's Polyglot Wordplay', *The Modern Language Review* 100 [2005], p.231.)

Antonia Avellanos, was modelled on Conrad's own first love, even as he also (perhaps self-effacingly) dismisses Decoud as 'a trifler'.[4]

The text takes another curious turn as Decoud gets up from his letter:

> Looking out of the window, Decoud was met by a darkness so impenetrable that he could see neither the mountains nor the town, nor yet the buildings near the harbour; and there was not a sound, as if the tremendous obscurity of the Placid Gulf, spreading from the waters over the land, had made it dumb as well as blind. Presently Decoud felt a light tremor of the floor and a distant clank of iron. A bright white light appeared, deep in the darkness, growing bigger with a thundering noise. The rolling stock usually kept on the sidings in Rincon was being run back to the yards for safe keeping. Like a mysterious stirring of the darkness behind the headlight of the engine, the train passed in a gust of hollow uproar, by the end of the house, which seemed to vibrate all over in response. (*N* 166)

The strangeness of this passage is arresting, because for just a moment, Conrad seems to rehearse again almost all of the most familiar stylistic features of *Heart of Darkness*. More than this, the extract from *Nostromo* almost too-perfectly recalls a passage from *Heart of Darkness* in which Marlow, too, is interrupted in his reflections on Kurtz by a nearby locomotive:

> His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines. But I had not much time to give him, because I was helping the engine-driver to take to

[4] Joseph Conrad, 'Author's Note', in *Nostromo*, p.411.

pieces the leaky cylinders, to straighten a bent connecting-rod, and in other such matters. (*HD* 177)

Again, then, we see the 'impenetrable darkness' of the earlier text, and along with its curious and overdetermined descriptive style which emphasises nothing so much as the absence of anything to describe – 'the tremendous obscurity', the dumb and the blind, the 'mysterious stirring' of yet more darkness. We can identify, too, the 'delayed decoding' which is another of the hallmarks of *Heart of Darkness*: Decoud, latterly the pseudo-omniscient narrator of his own version of the events in Costaguana, is suddenly reduced to the same kind of bemused actor so exemplified by Marlow, and we too must wait for the train, first identified only through its distant sounds and the shaking of the floor, to come into view. The reminder, however brief, seems at once to contradict the ease of underhand statecraft which Decoud attempts to convey to his sister, and for a moment he is, once again, the baffled frontiersman, staring into the abyss of Costaguana's *golfo placido*.

This may be an unremarkable observation, unless we acknowledge that otherwise, *Nostromo* marked a series of departures for Conrad, his style and his writing process. While Conrad's earlier texts tended to deal with specific, individual experiences in real-life locations in the colonies, often drawing heavily on Conrad's own experience as a mariner, *Nostromo* is sprawling, sociological and somewhat stationary, relating the events of an entirely imagined South American state (albeit one which bears a more-than superficial resemblance to Colombia) across decades of its tumultuous history. While the earlier works show the trials of the actors of empire at the frontiers of colonial endeavour, *Nostromo* shows a flourishing neo-colonial state: just consider the rusted, leaking ivory train of *Heart of Darkness*, supplanted by the thundering, gleaming locomotive of *Nostromo*, conveying the silver from the mine to the harbour. As Eloise

Knapp Hay remarks, '*Nostromo* was the first novel [Conrad] wrote from very slight personal experience, the first in which his insatiable reading was his mainstay,' and Conrad himself revealed the extent to which he regarded the work as one of self-transformation in a Decoud-esque code-switching letter to William Rothenstein, writing that 'I am not myself and shall not be myself till I am born again after Nostromo is finished…Je tombe de fatigue.'[5] Conrad's legendary writer's block was never more in evidence than during the writing of *Nostromo* - Zdzislaw Najder suggests that Conrad was 'desperately tired by his wrestling with *Nostromo*', with successive periods of illness punctuating 'the struggle for each successive thousand words'[6] – to the extent that a part of one of the serialised instalments was probably penned by Ford Madox Ford.[7]

When Decoud remarks that 'the persistent barbarism of our native continent did not wear the black coats of politicians, but went about yelling, half-naked, with bows and arrows in its hands,' he offers a succinct gloss on this transition in Conrad's concerns, with the racialised border thinking of the earlier works giving way to semi-shrouded political intrigue (*N* 167). With this latter image, of course, Decoud again recalls no text so much as *Heart of Darkness*, which will be my other point of reference in this chapter. *Heart of Darkness*, as we have seen, is exemplary of the kind of narrative style from which Conrad began to depart in writing *Nostromo*; whereas *Nostromo* is sweeping, plural and, in a sense, realist, *Heart of Darkness* is insular, psychological and reflective. *Heart of Darkness*, in its depiction of the so-called scramble for Africa, depicts the last stages of a speculative, exploratory European colonialism, a model of the intrepid colonial agent at the edges of the known world which by *Nostromo* has been

[5] Eloise Knapp Hay, '*Nostromo*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. J.H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.82, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad: Volume 3*, ed. Frederick Karl and Laurence Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983-2007), p.147.
[6] Zdzislaw Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Life* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), p.335.
[7] Najder, p.341.

replaced by a very different form of European proxy control which is political, scheming and economic.

These mid-career shifts in Conrad's subject matter and narrative approach are accompanied by corresponding shifts in form. In some sense, these changes appear counterintuitive, with the apparently realist, socially- and politically-attentive *Nostromo*, with all the apparent kinship with great novels of the nineteenth century which this suggests,[8] supplanting the earlier *Heart of Darkness*'s introspection, psychological and unreliable narrative so beloved of the high modernist writers who emerged a decade or two later. The reality, I hope to show, is rather more complex, with each text negotiating a slightly different relationship with the realist tradition, in an attempt to portray as meaningfully as possible the experiences of the enactors of European hegemony in more far-flung, peripheral and developing regions. In this regard I follow Chris Baldick's challenging assertion that those works generally grouped under the label 'modernist' were in fact characterised by a reinscription of the realist mode: 'modernism did not abolish or supersede realism; it extended its possibilities.'[9]

The way negotiations and interactions of language are depicted is, I suggest, crucial to tracking this development in Conrad's approach: the emphasis on the individual voice for which *Heart of Darkness* is famed, its jealous guarding of the narrative role from outside influences, appears to be wholly supplanted by *Nostromo*'s polyglot interplay, multiple protagonists and seemingly much more distant narrator. Temporarily leaving aside those questions of the mental interplay of European languages assumed to underpin Conrad's ultimately Anglophone writing, explorations of linguistic possibilities and limitations are of fundamental importance to Conrad's

[8] As Jacques Berthoud writes, *Nostromo* 'achieves a monumentality that ranks it with the great works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky' ('Introduction', in *Nostromo* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], p. x).
[9] Chris Baldick, *The Oxford English Literary History Vol. 10 1910-1940: The Modern Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.401.

developing perspectives on imperialism, world politics, and the European self-conception. That is, both through seeking to put into words the realities of the colonial border, and in negotiations and interplay of language between rival textual factions, language is the medium through which Conrad's characters seek to understand, and to position themselves within, the politically- and socially-complex outside world. Those moments wherein Conrad depicts, in narration and in dialogue, linguistic bafflement, linguistic interplay and outright linguistic failure, are revelatory of the kinds of complex political questions which lie at the root of particular formal and stylistic gestures.

In reading these two texts side-by-side, I hope to complicate some pervasive, seemingly common-sense conclusions which we might otherwise be tempted to draw. The first is the aforementioned progression toward high modernism in the early decades of the twentieth century: Conrad's narrative and thematic developments in this period tend to complicate the notion that in this period, psychological and interior narratives would take their position unchallenged as the preeminent literary mode. Furthermore, I do not adhere to the view that cosmopolitanism can be easily conflated with a kind of utopianism; that cultural and linguistic pluralism is necessarily and of itself a progressive force, and that, by association, writing which seeks to incorporate more voices, to represent more points of view and to widely explore the potential of multiple languages, can be automatically credited as necessarily democratic or egalitarian. Such a notion is arguably predicated on a misreading of Bakhtin's notion of polyglossia, itself based on the notion that the 'novelistic image' is 'the image of another's language'.[10] The seemingly counterintuitive literary-linguistic developments which we see in Conrad's mid-career period are thus an important test case for the ways in which the multilingual novel sought to make sense of the world; the trying-out of

[10] M.M. Bakhtin, 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', in *The Dialogic Imagination,* ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.44.

different narrative approaches to language which we see in Conrad are demonstrative of processes of self-conception in the midst, and in the wake, of empire.

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Conrad's early novels – from *Almayer's Folly*, published in 1895, through to 1902's *Typhoon* – are concerned primarily with the outer reaches of empire; with the actual process of colonisation as it is experienced by its agents, among whom Conrad, in his early career as a merchant sailor, could reasonably be counted. These agents of imperial change – merchants, sailors, explorers, capitalists – confront not only the social and political strife which accompany it, but pursue and interrogate the ideology of imperial capitalism to its heart as a foundational epistemology of the European self-conception: as Michael Valdez Moses has written, Conrad's characters 'almost always operate at the edge of empire, where they repeatedly experience the shock of cultural disorientation, of a sudden and unnerving dislocation of their moral, epistemological, political and (more rarely) religious convictions'.[11] These early works are novels of empire in the most dynamic sense; not only depictions of colonising practices, but confrontations with and reflections upon the ideologies which inform and justify them, frequently explored through the introspective first-person narratives of Europeans at the cutting edge of empire. This depth of consideration, and the close binding together of the narrative formation of these novels with the kinds of imperial ideologies which underpin them, reminds us again of the necessity to remain mindful of the linkage Said proposes between the 'patterns of narrative authority' of the novel and the 'complex ideological configuration' of empire on the other.[12]

[11] Michael Valdez Moses, 'Disorientalism: Conrad and the Imperial Origins of Modernist Aesthetics', in *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1888-1939*, ed. Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses (London: Duke University Press, 2007), p.52.
[12] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.82.

Thus, to suggest that these are texts merely 'about' empire is to trivialise them; Conrad's novels are interwoven at every level of their narrative fabric with imperial ideology. The early works in particular, as I shall argue with recourse to *Heart of Darkness*, display a narrative logic which is reflective of a particular imperial outlook, emphasising first-person narration, productive incomprehension, and primacy of the solitary, European voice to the pointed exclusion of others. These texts also emphasise introspection and reflection, albeit from the limited perspective of the European coloniser; while *Heart of Darkness*'s Marlow, just like Almayer or 'Lord' Jim, experiences empire as one of its enactors, he does not do so passively, instead confronting his own sense of duty and its apparent moral implications, questioning his own self-conception and its place within the wider narrative of colonial politics.

Said further writes that, in literary writing concerned with empire:

> The facts of empire are associated with sustained possession, with far-flung and sometimes unknown spaces, with eccentric or unacceptable human beings, with fortune-enhancing or fantasized activities like emigration, money-making, and sexual adventure.[13]

This is a checklist of colonial motifs which maps easily onto Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* – there are clear echoes of its mysterious central African location, its larger-than-life characters, its symbolic treatment of commodities, principally ivory – and so it is unsurprising that *Heart of Darkness* is read not only as Conrad's paradigmatic 'imperial' text, but as one of the most complex and involved confrontations of empire of its time.

Importantly, though, and following Said's ideas regarding 'patterns of narrative authority', *Heart of Darkness* also brings to its colonial subject matter a set of formal

[13] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.75.

concerns which are equally revealing. Somewhat contrary to readings of the text which emphasise its structural reciprocity and dwell upon the analogies it seems to draw between the metropolitan centre and the colonial periphery ('And this also…has been one of the dark places of the earth.')[14] and by extension the minds of the coloniser and the colonised, Conrad's delivery of the narrative as seen through the eyes of his recurring narrator, Marlow, amounts to a deeply unidirectional narrative perspective. We might recall here Conrad's famous assertion from the preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* – 'My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you *see*!'[15] – which at once seems to disavow the kind of ideological interplay between reader and text that a post-Said reading would emphasise, and to acknowledge the necessary singularity of viewpoint which these early novels amount to.

The semi-autobiographical origins of *Heart of Darkness*, rooted in Conrad's own time as master of a Belgian steamship in the Congo, are of course not in dispute. James Clifford, though, in an article on Conrad and his contemporary and fellow Pole, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, situates the genesis of the text in a very particular aspect of Conrad's time in Africa. Clifford's insight is that the linguistic aspects of the text's context and composition are perhaps more important than the more commonly-cited professional ones:

> The Congo experience was a time of maximal linguistic complexity. In what language was Conrad consistently thinking? It is not surprising that words and

[14] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.105. Subsequent references are parenthetical as (*HD*).
[15] Joseph Conrad, 'Preface', in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. xlii.

> things often seem disjointed in *Heart of Darkness* as Marlow searches in the dark for meaning and interlocution.[16]

Immediately before departing for Africa, Conrad returned to Poland for the first time in fifteen years, renewing his grasp of his mother tongue; while in the Congo, he continued to write letters to his lover Marguerite Poradowska in French, while keeping a diary in English and working on the manuscript of *Almayer's Folly*. Thus:

> Between Polish, the mother tongue, and English, the language of future career and marriage, a third intervenes, associated with eroticism and violence. Conrad's French is linked with Poradowska, a problematic love object (she was both too intimidating and too intimate); French is also linked with Conrad's reckless youth in Marseille and with the Imperial Congo, which Conrad abhorred for its violence and rapacity.[17]

The gestures toward the multilingual in *Heart of Darkness* may not map so clearly onto particular concerns as Clifford suggests they did for Conrad himself, but the broader insight underpinning Clifford's reading is particularly germane. *Heart of Darkness* represents a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of the relationships between language, culture and the self, challenging the long-held assumption 'that a self belongs to a specific cultural world much as it speaks a native language: one self, one culture, one language.'[18] While it may be true that *Heart of Darkness* does not foreground multilingualism to the same extent as some later texts (such as we have seen, and will see, in *Nostromo*), it is nevertheless important to recognise the constitutive role played by a shift away from a monolingual epistemology.

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[16] James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning: Conrad and Malinowski', in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.101.
[17] Clifford, p. 102.
[18] Clifford, p. 92.

This 'maximal linguistic complexity' which Conrad was experiencing thus has clear correlates in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow, too, has only just begun to reinhabit his mother tongue – after 'a regular dose of the East' amounting to 'six years or so' (*HD* 107-8) – when he is sent to the Congo. More explicit indications of the kind of linguistic disturbance which is to follow begin to enter into the text as Marlow tells of his experiences at the Brussels offices of his employer. First we see him in conversation with 'the great man himself',[19] who 'shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. *Bon voyage*.' (*HD* 111). Even here we see the beginnings of an uncertainty in the text as to how to deal with incidences of multilingualism: '*bon voyage*' could be a free indirect summary of the content of the officer's remarks, delivered either ironically or sincerely, or a verbatim recollection on Marlow's part, left untranslated to convey his own satisfaction with his French. The insertion of 'I fancy' further calls into question Marlow's recollection – does Marlow misremember the handshake, or the vague murmuring, or seek to reassure himself that his French was indeed satisfactory? At any rate, the *bon voyage* is rather more pithily rendered with Marlow's Latin '*Morituri te salutant*' a little later (*HD* 111).

While fairly characteristic, it is again notable that Marlow's examination by a doctor is introduced with a drift into French syntax – "'a simple formality,' assured me the secretary' (*HD* 111) – a slip which makes perfect sense through recourse to Conrad's own experience of 'linguistic complexity', and no sense at all within the context of Marlow's spoken narration. The complexity is only further realised as a part of Marlow's conversation with the doctor is rendered:

[19] A probable analogue of the high-ranking Belgian colonial agent Albert Thys, who interviewed and subsequently hired Conrad in 1889.

> 'Pardon my questions, but you are the first Englishman coming under my observation…' I hastened to assure him I was not in the least typical. 'If I were,' said I, 'I wouldn't be talking like this with you.' 'What you say is rather profound, and probably erroneous,' he said, with a laugh. 'Avoid irritation more than exposure to the sun. Adieu. How do you English say, eh? Goodbye. Ah! Goodbye. Adieu. In the tropics one must before everything keep calm.'…He lifted a warning forefinger…'*Du calme, du calme. Adieu.*' (*HD* 112)

All of this comes after Marlow interrupts the doctor's phrenological examinations to ask 'are you an alienist?', in a borrowing of the slightly more common French *aliéniste* (*HD* 112). The linguistic parameters of this conversation, conducted in a mix of English and French, are curiously overdetermined. An explicit gesture toward the language being spoken – through Marlow's insistence that, by virtue of his speaking French with the doctor, he is not a typical Englishman – seems to prepare the complications which follow. The doctor's code-switch into English – to deliver a goodbye, as part of a series of goodbyes unfolding across this and the previous page – is mirrored by the interruption of Marlow's own narrative to replicate the doctor's subsequent French adieu. We see through this exchange, then, both a rather forced insistence on the text's deployment and management of French-English bilingualism, and the inadvertent creeping-in of a rather subtler level of Gallicism. This is revealing of the dual nature of the engagement with language which we see in *Heart of Darkness*: the multilingual is both a resource for the text to deploy strategically, and a pathological preoccupation underlying it.

All of this comes before Marlow even reaches the Belgian Congo – to which he is conveyed on a French ship with a Swedish captain, who speaks English to Marlow 'with great precision and considerable bitterness' (*HD* 115). The uneasy

cosmopolitanism of the European characters in *Heart of Darkness* is far from incidental, and Moses has drawn attention to the differing ethnic, national and linguistic backgrounds of Conrad's colonialists:

> One might say that in some crucial respects, the *dispersed, disorganized, heterogeneous*, and *nomadic* character of this peripheral imperial community of Europeans presages, in an outsized and exaggerated manner, that of the European cosmopolis.[20]

The depiction of Marlow's interactions with this cast of characters, then, represents a certain play at the edges of the monolingual paradigms of empire; as we have seen, interactions across languages appear antagonistic and fraught, and this will continue with Marlow's arrival in Africa (he is arriving, of course, to replace his Danish predecessor, Fresleven). The remainder of the narrative, concerned with Marlow's journey up the Congo river toward Kurtz, though, also introduces a new set of linguistic concerns, both in the arrival of some of the more commonly-considered quirks of Conrad's descriptive style, and through the introduction of a chorus of new languages for the text to confront.

The murkiness at the outer reaches of Marlow's narrative, and the sense that just beyond his point of view lies a cacophonic, shrouded and mysterious pre-colonised world, is brought to life through the novella's distinctive language. Numerous features of the language of Marlow's narrative, framed by mostly passive listeners as a series of personal recollections, suggest that it ultimately falls short in its task of accurately conveying the reality which he recalls. This sense is perhaps most discernible in Marlow's seemingly constant overdetermination of the 'mystery' of his own narrative:

[20] Moses, p.60.

> But there was the fact facing me – the fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma, a mystery greater – when I thought of it – than the curious, inexplicable note of desperate grief in this savage clamour that had swept by us on the river-bank, behind the blind whiteness of the fog. (*HD* 146)

This typical passage is characterised by techniques which reappear throughout the remainder of *Heart of Darkness*, and which combine to create a sense of language struggling to retain its capacity to meaningfully relate human experience. In addition to simply extended, repeated insistence on mystery, this passage makes use of redundancy ('unfathomable enigma', or, elsewhere, 'inconceivable mystery' [*HD* 174]) and oxymoron ('blind whiteness of the fog'; this device notably reappears in Kurtz's death scene, in which we learn that 'he cried in a whisper…a cry that was no more than a breath' [*HD* 177]). These components, among others, are what led F.R. Leavis to diagnose a shortcoming in Conrad's style:

> The same vocabulary, the same adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery, is applied to the evocation of human profundities and spiritual horrors; to magnifying a thrilled sense of the unspeakable potentialities of the human soul. The actual effect is not to magnify but to muffle.[21]

For Leavis, the effect of the partial, occasionally myopic narrator is to somehow weaken the narrative, or to obstruct the 'true' meaning which could otherwise be conveyed – indeed, Leavis goes on to suggest that Conrad 'is intent on making a virtue out of not knowing what he means'.[22] It seems somehow counterintuitive, though, to suggest that

[21] F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* [1948] (London: Penguin, 1993), p.205.
[22] Leavis, p.107.

Conrad would establish for the text a particular structuring logic based around a very deliberate lensing of events through a single character – 'before all, to make you *see*' – only to have this fall short of its end goal. Rather, we might consider such productive tensions to be integral to the effect of the text as a whole.

Indeed, the particular modes of representation which Conrad draws upon in *Heart of Darkness* have been recognised as part of a more general shift in the novel's relation to realism which is characteristic of the late nineteenth century, and indicative of the new directions which would be taken up by the high modernists. Paul Armstrong has notably suggested that Conrad, along with his fellow 'literary impressionists' Henry James and Ford Madox Ford, drove the novel in a new direction precisely because of their foregrounding of the experiences of interpretation and incomprehension: 'the change in the novel's direction which James, Conrad, and Ford helped bring about is signaled by the importance they assign to the experience of bewilderment'.[23] More recently, Moses has advanced this thesis, via a set of postcolonial concerns, to suggest that those experiences, both narrative and stylistic, which we might term 'bewilderment', are representative of a particular colonial *Weltanschauung* dubbed 'disorientalism'. Moses states of Conrad's style that

> In *Heart of Darkness* it emerges out of a crisis of language that is integral to the disorienting experience of the Western colonialist at the fringes of empire. For the *alien* environment of the (Congo) river places Marlow's linguistic capacities under an immense, near fatal pressure.[24]

Thus this particular sense in *Heart of Darkness* of a void of non-comprehension which forms the epistemological boundaries of the colonist is represented mimetically in the

[23] Paul B. Armstrong, *The Challenge of Bewilderment: Understanding and Representation in James, Conrad, and Ford* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp.1-2.
[24] Valdez Moses, p.54.

text – the reader, too, experiences this as a stark contrast in the novella between characters who speak and characters who do not, and between those elements in the narrative which can be coherently represented and those which are rendered only in a partial or disordered manner.

Crucially, this sense of bewilderment is also explored dialogically through the text's seemingly obsessive preoccupation with voices. As Finn Fordham writes, Marlow has 'a fetish for voice as guarantor of identity'; the attribution of the quality of voice to characters in *Heart of Darkness* is seemingly synonymous with the attribution of selfhood.[25] The gulf which represents the outer limit of the imperial worldview is figured metonymically through the distance between speaking and listening:

> A voice. He was very little more than a voice. And I heard – him – it – this voice – other voices – all of them were so little more than voices – and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices – even the girl herself – now… (*HD* 153)

Marlow's pursuit of Kurtz (the 'he' and the 'voice' above) amounts, indeed, to an attempt to close a loop of understanding which instead remains perpetually open-ended. Marlow is trapped in the role of speaker, both in his position as the novel's primary narrator and as a colonial agent who, in moving inland, loses contact with other English speakers and becomes surrounded with unknown languages. Fordham notes this paradox, wherein Marlow seemingly cannot bridge the binary separation of speaking and listening:

[25] Finn Fordham, *I Do I Undo I Redo: The Textual Genesis of Modernist Selves in Hopkins, Yeats, Conrad, Forster, Joyce, and Woolf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.174.

> Marlow, voluble teller of tales, more a mouth than an ear, in his narrative listens more than he speaks, is an ear not a mouth; but as narrator he never stammers, is rather a preacher in full command as he sails steadily through syntactically complex and purple periodic prose.[26]

Marlow's ability to structure reality appears to suffer as a result of his lacking a point of external linguistic reference, with his interpretation of the events surrounding him growing increasingly sluggish (most evidently in those passages whose technique is characterised by what Ian Watt has described as 'delayed decoding').[27] The progress of the narrative is palpably slowed as Marlow approaches Kurtz and his surroundings grow increasingly murky. Indeed, the central crisis of the novella appears to be the ultimate failure of the promise of conversation which Kurtz offers – instead of semantic and epistemological closure, Marlow is confronted with a meaningless void.

Heart of Darkness is distinctly ill-disposed toward permitting any voice to speak which detracts from the master narrative. Marlow's narrative, of course, is complex, reflective and in many ways undermines (or certainly examines) the colonial position, but it is nevertheless solitary in its reflections. Marlow's position as narrator, for all its inbuilt paradox as identified by Fordham above, is apparently jealously guarded: leaving his meeting with the manager of the station which is his first port of call on the Congo, Marlow is to be found 'muttering to myself my opinion of him. He was a chattering idiot' (*HD* 124). The voices of the native inhabitants of the region are, as has been well-documented, typically limited to a range of howls, shrieks and cries such that their originators are seldom identified as human; as Robert Hampson writes, African languages 'are represented consistently as pre-verbal, pre-syntactic sound – as sound

[26] Fordham, p.174.
[27] Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), p.175.

that is the direct expression of emotion, as sound that is pure sound (akin to music), as sound that is utterance without meaning'.[28] Examples of such treatment, such as that below, are in no short supply:

> I ordered the chain, which we had begun to heave in, to be paid out again. Before it stopped running with a muffled rattle, a cry, a very loud cry, as of infinite desolation, soared slowly in the opaque air. It ceased. A complaining clamour, modulated in savage discords, filled our ears. The sheer unexpectedness of it made my hair stir under my cap. I don't know how it struck the others: to me it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed, so suddenly, and apparently from all sides at once, did this tumultuous and mournful uproar arise. (*HD* 143)

The narrative thus enacts a complete detachment of human vocal sounds from semantic meaning – the same process is enacted graphically when Marlow encounters handwritten notes in the margin of Tower, Towson or Towser's 'An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship', assuming them to be written in cipher when in fact, it transpires, they are in Cyrillic. It is left to one of the pilgrims to ask 'Good God! What is the meaning - ?', a question ultimately left appropriately unfinished since, in the fog which surrounds the ship, there is apparently none (*HD* 143).

Those moments when speech is, perhaps unexpectedly, granted to the text's African characters are thus particularly illuminating as apparent exceptions to the text's ruling logic:

> …a young, broad-chested black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils and his hair all done up artfully in oily ringlets, stood near

[28] Robert Hampson, "'Heart of Darkness" and "The Speech that Cannot be Silenced'", *English* 39 (1990), p.17.

> me. 'Aha!' I said, just for good fellowship's sake. 'Catch 'im,' he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth – 'catch 'im. Give 'im to us.' 'To you, eh?' I asked; 'what would you do with them?' 'Eat 'im!' he said curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude. (*HD* 144)

Chinua Achebe's commentary on this episode is noteworthy; we can read in Achebe, too, the suggestion that there is a minor collapsing of the novella's ruling epistemology here. White men speak, black men do not: as Achebe states, 'it is clearly not part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the "rudimentary souls" of Africa',[29] or, for our purposes, it is clearly not epistemologically consistent with the rest of the text that the 'rudimentary souls' should be granted the chance to speak. Achebe goes on to suggest, persuasively, that this is a paradoxical further step in Conrad's machinations to make the African peripheral characters of *Heart of Darkness* as inhuman as possible:

> At first sight these instances might be mistaken for unexpected acts of generosity from Conrad. In reality they constitute some of his best assaults. In the case of the cannibals the incomprehensible grunts that had thus far served them for speech suddenly proved inadequate for Conrad's purpose of letting the European glimpse the unspeakable craving in their hearts. Weighing the necessity for consistency in the portrayal of the dumb brutes against the sensational advantages of securing their conviction by clear, unambiguous evidence issuing out of their own mouth Conrad chose the latter.[30]

[29] Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', in *Heart of Darkness,* ed. Paul B. Armstrong (New York and London: Norton, 2006), p. 341.
[30] Achebe, pp. 341-342.

Thus Conrad, with perhaps characteristically clumsy orthography,[31] extends English, semantically meaningful speech to a native character only in order that they can further show their inhumanity. The various yelping, chattering and shrieking sounds previously used having exhausted their use value in demonstrating their originators' inhumanity, Conrad, in Achebe's view, chooses to grant them occasional speech only to show that these individuals are not so simple-minded that they cannot also possess murderous and anthropophagic intentions, as if to retrospectively justify their being treated as inhuman. The role and treatment of racial identity in this and Conrad's other works has been the subject of generations of critical reflection, and is not my primary focus here. These observations are noteworthy, though, in their ability to show that there is something ultimately untenable in the strict set of narrative conditions which Conrad sets out in *Heart of Darkness*. Just as relief from Marlow's solitary narration is to be found in occasional digressions to the wider frame narrative, particular linguistic gestures from inside the narrative serve, too, to undermine it. We can thus identify a kind of productive failure here; contrary to Leavis's assertion of a rather simpler failing in Conrad's text, those moments wherein the text is forced to break its own rules concerning voice within the narrative in fact serve only to add to its effectiveness. In *Heart of Darkness* we witness in real time the unravelling of a particular colonial epistemology, with Marlow's authoritative history beginning slowly to fray at its edges, and to fail to be heard over the outside voices which begin to enter it.

And yet still, it seems that these particular linguistic acts are not fully accounted for. Contrary to Hampson's reflections on Conrad's method, the lines 'catch 'im – give

[31] An honourable mention is surely owed to 'Little Belfast' from *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* – 'Belfast shrieked like an inspired Dervish:- '…So I seez to him, boys, seez I, "Beggin' yer pardon, sorr," seez I to that second mate of that steamer' – for whom, as for the Africans in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad himself seems to possess only the most cursory familiarity with the dialect he is apparently trying to replicate. (Conrad, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* p.8.)

'im to us – eat 'im' could not be fairly described as 'utterance without meaning'. They are, in fact, virtually as semantically straightforward as Marlow's narrative ever gets, certainly standing at odds to the bulk of the narration, characterised as it is by 'inexpressible mystery', philosophical reflection and long, cascading sentences. Equally as unusual in the text is how starkly visceral this solitary African voice is; we see it accompanied by 'a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth', and this proximity of body and voice is apparently enough to provoke in Marlow an unusual depth of empathic engagement: 'I would no doubt have been properly horrified, had it not occurred to me that he and his chaps must be very hungry' (*HD* 144). This is an almost absurd level of engagement on Marlow's part – to be so apparently moved from his outward consideration of Africans as 'unhappy savages' (*HD* 117) and 'dusty niggers' (*HD* 119) early in his narrative to a willingness to place himself in the shoes of a cannibal ('Don't you know the devilry of lingering starvation, its exasperating torment, its black thoughts, its sombre and brooding ferocity? Well, I do.' [*HD* 146]) –which, notably, is provoked precisely by these simple, declarative utterances. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari write:

> Language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth. The mouth, tongue, and teeth find their primitive territoriality in food. In giving themselves over to the articulation of sounds, the mouth, tongue, and teeth deterritorialize. Thus, there is a certain disjunction between eating and speaking…to speak, and above all to write, is to fast.[32]

This structural disjuncture between eating and speaking is thus emphasised in Conrad's curious insistence on foregrounding the mouth which speaks its intention to eat the

[32] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 19-20.

body of another. This aberration is a productive one, though. Contrary to Achebe's thesis that these words exist only to further engender a sense of distance, it appears that by placing words in the mouth of an African character for the first time, Conrad forces Marlow at least to embark upon a new level of identification with them: the highest conceivable gulf in morality, between the African cannibal and the European colonist, coincides with the highest level of identification Marlow can achieve.

The visibility of the mouth uttering these words invites comparison with the novella's other speakers. Kurtz, by comparison, seems peculiarly detached from his own voice:

> The volume of tone he emitted without effort, almost without the trouble of moving his lips, amazed me. A voice! a voice! It was grave, profound, vibrating, while the man did not seem capable of a whisper. (*HD* 167)

In direct contrast to the lines quoted above, Conrad here deliberately separates the speech of Kurtz from the bodily apparatus required to produce it – Kurtz speaks even as he appears physically incapable of speech. A similar phenomenon is at work in one of the occasional reminders that Marlow is delivering his narrative to an audience in almost-uninterrupted speech:

> It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The other might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river. (*HD* 130)

Like that of Kurtz, Marlow's voice too is arrestingly non-corporeal, as are his listeners – the darkness obscures the shapes of those listening as well as the 'human lips' which are shaping the words of the narrative. Marlow's words seem to issue forth independently of him, as part of a narrative for which he is only the conduit, which of course, from Conrad's perspective, he is.[33]

We can see, then, that these moments of speech reveal Conrad's narrative approach in *Heart of Darkness* to be deeply paradoxical. Michael Greaney's reflections on the narrative mode of *Heart of Darkness* are illuminating as to the paradoxical statuses of speech and writing therein:

> Writing cedes authority to speech – Marlow is postulated as an originating voice of which the texts are mere transcripts – yet that very speech exhibits many of the flaws and imperfections commonly imputed to writing.[34]

In both of these cases – the bodily speech of the African native and the bodiless speech of Kurtz and Marlow – the narrative aspires to a kind of purity of voice over text: the speaker of the 'catch 'im' lines is rendered as a visible mouth, it is Kurtz's voice which Marlow pursues above all else, and Marlow is, of course, the archetypal logorrheic spinner of yarns. In the latter case, though, Marlow's overwrought language and occasional obsessive description and layering of mystery serve as signs that this is not to be taken entirely seriously as a reported oral narrative: as Fordham notes, 'Conrad is careful to craft Marlow's vocality and retains much oral rhetoric but…it is writing which allows him to turn the simpler orality of a first draft into more syntactically

[33] To return briefly to Deleuze and Guattari's remarks on eating and speaking, it is perhaps of note that Marlow seems remarkably restrained in his appetite. A cup of tea, partaken of at the company offices in Brussels, appears to tide Marlow over for almost the entirety of the narrative, until he callously returns to his dinner upon being informed of the death of Kurtz. Of this meal too, though, he eats little.
[34] Michael Greaney, *Conrad, Language, and Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.65.

sophisticated and textual forms'.[35] In the former, the few phrases spoken by native characters rely on orthography to convey their sense of foreignness: 'Mistah Kurtz' and 'catch 'im' could just as easily be phonetic transcriptions of Received Pronunciation as the hypothesised central African accent which Marlow can be presumed to be mimicking. And finally, in the case of Kurtz, the words he speaks are ultimately lost – in Marlow's lie to his Intended concerning his last words – to be revived only through Marlow's retrospective narrative.

Returning via *Heart of Darkness* to Bakhtin, then, we arrive at a somewhat counterintuitive proposition: what we see in the former is a dialogic text which uses its own dialogism to present itself as a monologic text. A paradox arises between, in Clifford's phrase, the 'maximal linguistic complexity' which is the making of the text, and its seeming opposition to free dialogue between its participants, and its crafting of a narrative position which is pathologically singular. From the vaguely satisfactory French we witness Marlow speaking early in his narrative, *Heart of Darkness* depicts a colonial setting in which various models of linguistic communication – written or spoken, monoglot or polyglot, cried or whispered – successively break down. The seeming puncturing of this ruling logic through Marlow's interaction with a cannibal only serves to deepen the paradox: the text relies upon the interjection of other voices – both the audience outside Marlow's narration and the voices present within it – to heighten the sense of Marlow as a solitary voice within a void.

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Conrad's mid-career period immediately following the turn of the century is marked by a series of novels which stand out among his oeuvre as the most ostensibly political: around a decade separates the publication of *Heart of Darkness* and *Under*

[35] Fordham, p.174.

Western Eyes, and the intervening period saw the appearance of *Nostromo* as well as *The Secret Agent*. These four texts alone plot a remarkably prescient narrative arc – from the borderlands of colonial expansion through economic consolidation to revolutionary politics in the European centre – implying a series of distinct paradigm shifts in the self-conception of Europe and Europeans. Indeed, if a sense persists, either explicitly or implicitly, that Conrad's style reaches something of an apotheosis around the turn of the century (and *Heart of Darkness* surely remains by some margin Conrad's most studied text, with *Lord Jim* quite possibly the second-most), I would seek to counter this by suggesting that Conrad's narrative and formal processes undergo radical changes in this period which operate in tandem with the shifting contexts of imperialism and world politics in which, and against which, he wrote.

I am concerned here in particular with the transformations which take place between *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo*. A letter from 1903 aptly demonstrates the thought process linking the two major texts, in which Conrad compares the Belgian colonial exploits in the Congo to those of the conquistadores in South America:

> Their achievement is monstrous enough in all conscience – but not as a great human force let loose, but rather like that of a gigantic and obscene beast. Leopold is their Pizarro, Thys their Cortez and their 'lances' are recruited amongst the souteneurs, sous-offs, maquereaux, fruit-secs of all sorts on the pavements of Brussels and Antwerp.[36]

Comparative histories of colonialism may provide the link between *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo*, but a number of key distinctions in narrative and theme can be discerned between the two; these are reflective of wider conceptual and geopolitical shifts in the

[36] *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Frederick Karl and Laurence Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983-2007), Vol. 3, p.101.

intervening years. The 'scramble for Africa' documented, of course, in its heyday in *Heart of Darkness*, was beginning to abate – a majority of Africa had been brought under European imperial control, and the hitherto unmapped reaches of the interior of the continent were beginning to be understood. Another key context is the rise of American 'dollar diplomacy', ushering in with it a new era of imperial geopolitics. By the time *Nostromo* was published, the American construction of the Panama Canal had begun, following the heavily American-sponsored secession of Panama from Colombia in 1903. The completion of the Canal would bring the American West coast within trading reach of Europe and much of the world's economy – the influence of these events over *Nostromo*, in the secession of Sulaco from Costaguana and the shady San Francisco-based tycoon Holroyd, is clear. What we find in *Nostromo*, though, is a continuing sense that dominion over the far-flung colonial peripheries remains fundamentally important to Europe and Europeans, not only economically but epistemologically. *Nostromo*'s cast of characters, far wider and more diverse than that of *Heart of Darkness*, share nothing if not their vital, cathectic bond with Costaguana, Conrad's troubled South American nation state.

Thus the transition from *Heart of Darkness* to *Nostromo* represents not only a key pivot point in Conrad's career, when the intrepid and dutiful frontiersmen of empire such as Marlow and Jim give way to political revolutionaries and machinating capitalists, and the far-flung reaches of empire are replaced by flourishing colonial outposts and the occasional burgeoning modern metropolis, but a microcosm of a major shift in world politics and a corresponding change in the self-conception of the former (or, perhaps, continuing) imperial powers. Accompanying this radical sea-change in context, we can determine a series of companion alterations in Conrad's narrative technique. The myopic, introspective first-person narrative of *Heart of Darkness* has been abandoned in favour of a more sweeping, realistic style which is characterised by a straightforward

refusal to foreground a single, internally coherent point of view – Conrad himself would describe it as 'an achievement in mosaic'.[37] As Jacques Berthoud writes in an introduction to *Nostromo*, Conrad 'wants the reader to attend to the complex, fluid, and manifold nature of events, to the *how* rather than the mere *what*,' a succinct summary of some of the key distinctions in narrative approach between it and earlier novels; gone is the impressionistic impulse ('to make you *see*!') in favour of a denser, more intricate and complex narrative, attentive to historical cause-and-effect and to politico-economic realities.[38]

This series of changes are somewhat paradoxical. *Nostromo*, like *Lord Jim*, is an eponymous novel, a move which appears to gesture toward a solitary protagonist. If Nostromo can be called a protagonist at all, though, he is one in the picaresque vein, dwarfed by the 'material interests' which form instead the novel's narrative direction. Nostromo, himself of indeterminate background and a composite of identities, is endowed with narrative influence at the request and permission of the powerful imperial capitalist factions of the novel; his name, a pun on the Italian *nostro uomo*, 'our man', bears testament to this fact. As Greaney writes, 'Nostromo says comparatively little in the first half of the novel, as though he is content for the voice of the world to speak for him, and of him, with a suitable degree of respect and admiration'[39] – in this respect he bears a passing resemblance to Kurtz. Both *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo* seem constantly to be preparing themselves for the arrival of such seemingly-dominant figures; once they arrive, both Nostromo and Kurtz meet an untimely demise, leaving the reader to question what degree of impact, if any, they really had. Both texts appear deeply aware of the expectations they set regarding these pivotal characters and the

[37] *Collected Letters*, Vol.6, p.231.
[38] Berthoud, 'Introduction', pp. xii-xiii.
[39] Greaney, p.126.

narrative promise which they are ultimately unable to fulfil, but the narrative position of *Nostromo* is arguably placed at a greater remove of scepticism, the narrator adopting a kind of free indirect hedging from his first mention: 'It could very well be said that it was Nostromo alone who saved the lives of these gentlemen' (*N* 13).

We might also draw comparisons, though, between Nostromo and Marlow, insofar as each can be deemed a cipher of more general thematic or narrative issues. Just as Marlow is a manifestation of the kind of linguistic bafflement which *Heart of Darkness* brings to light, Nostromo represents the frustrated search for a protagonist in a classical vein, a figure who carries the hopes of a whole cast of characters, but who eventually calls into question the worth of such a notion; he is, we might suggest, an exhausted remnant of the kinds of dominant, individual protagonists which characterised Conrad's earlier novels. And yet Nostromo is also the quintessential representative of the new narrative direction taken in the novel which bears his name: he is a consummate cosmopolitan, known by a variety of names – the 'Capataz de Cargadores' to his admirers, 'Gian' Battista' to his fellow Italians, 'Juan' to his former lover Paquita – speaking multiple languages and even dressing in a hybrid style, with 'a grey sombrero…the bright colours of a Mexican serape…[an] embroidered leather jacket…[and] a silk sash with embroidered ends' (*N* 93).

The reflections of the frame narrator of *Heart of Darkness* on Marlow's own storytelling style draw out another paradox:

> The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside the kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow

> brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (*HD* 105)

This is a notoriously perplexing excerpt, which seems to convey a sense of narrative meaning which is at odds with the approach taken in *Heart of Darkness*, proposing an idea of meaning which emphasises interpretation or context, and which appears to contradict the solitary, introspective voice of Marlow. This is a perspective which seems, in fact, to be more fully realised in *Nostromo*, a text in which characters, far from possessing clear, outward voices, are subject to the machinations of politics and capital which surround them, determined from the outside by their role in the complex social relations of Costaguana, and struggle to make themselves heard amidst a cacophony of competing voices.

The question of narrative voice, so essential a structuring device in *Heart of Darkness*, is less easily answered in *Nostromo*, whose narrator is a much more nebulous entity. Sometimes the narrator appears omniscient, or something close to it – *Nostromo*, after all, has tended to be regarded as among the more 'realist' of Conrad's novels, inviting parallels with numerous nineteenth-century forebears – while at other times, signs point to a narrator who is densely implicated in the history of Sulaco. Greaney has suggested that the key distinction between this and Conrad's earlier works is the replacement of the oral storyteller with something more akin to 'academic history' and that *Nostromo*'s narrator 'doesn't need to borrow the eyes and ears of his characters to witness [Costaguana's] tempestuous political affairs'.[40] Nevertheless, we can arguably see that this narrator is much more plural in nature to begin with; other narrative points of view may be unnecessary, but only because this is a more heteroglot narrator than we

[40] Greaney, p.115.

see elsewhere in Conrad, able to embody multiple points of view in a way that Marlow was not.

I would approach with some caution, though, what might seem a logical continuation of this point: that this radical widening of narrative perspective and pluralising of point of view is, in and of itself, a progressive or a democratising gesture. Certainly, it is true that this represents a significant overhaul of the kind of narrative position in evidence in *Heart of Darkness*; the *Nostromo* narrator has a much wider field of vision, both in time and in space, and also seems to display a much greater breadth of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic understanding. However, the narrator is just present enough as to force a constant questioning of his reliability or agenda, and hence even in his most detached, arguably realistic moments, the reader remains aware that such distance is a mere performance. The characteristic feature of *Nostromo*'s narration, then, is not so much a new kind of impartial realism, but a kind of constant play between the narrator as distant and omniscient and as involved and partial.

From the opening pages of the novel, the depths of the narrator's engagement with the cultural and lexical particulars of the Republic of Costaguana are clear:

> The common folk of the neighbourhood, peons of the estancias, vaqueros of the seaboard plains, tame Indians coming miles to market with a bundle of sugar-cane or a basket of maize worth about three-pence, are well aware that heaps of shining gold lie in the gloom of the deep precipices cleaving the stony levels of Azuera. (*N* 5-6)

Established here is a narrative voice which is freely multilingual, code-switching not only in its deployment of the place names of Conrad's fictional republic, all of which are in Spanish, but in its narration too, substituting Spanish common nouns where English ones would suffice, and relying on the occasional loanword (such as 'peons' above) as a

convenient pivot. These incidental formal acts, though, serve to gesture toward a much deeper transnational sensibility. The problematic construction 'tame Indians' would tend to implicate the narrator in a particularly racialised understanding, with obvious colonial undertones. The narrator's point of economic reference is British – the bundles of sugar-cane and baskets of maize, obviously specific regional commodities, have an exchange value of 'about three-pence', situating them within a global market at the height of the British Empire. And yet the narrator's economic grasp of the region is also locally-inflected; the aforementioned 'tame Indians' are 'well aware', we learn, of deposits of gold lying buried in the region, but this gesture seems more than a little sardonic on the part of the narrator when it transpires that the focal commodity of the novel is silver, not gold. The narrator's familiarity with the region's folk wisdom, particularly that of the indigenous population, though, is apparently not in dispute, as he continues by telling a story of three primordial colonial adventurers – 'two wandering sailors – Americanos, perhaps, but gringos of some sort for certain' and 'a gambling, good-for-nothing mozo' – who disappeared while exploring the peninsula of Azuera, remaining as supernatural guardians of the rumoured gold: 'the legendary inhabitants of Azuera guarding its forbidden wealth' (*N* 6).

Particularly throughout the first of three parts of the novel, entitled 'The Silver of the Mine' the narrator continues to tantalise with brief revelations and implications of himself within the narrative. One such example is the following passage, in which the narrative glosses a period of some years of economic development, and the accompanying transformations wrought upon Sulaco by the success of the silver mine and the construction of a railway:

> Those of us whom business or curiosity took to Sulaco in these years before the first advent of the railway can remember the steadying effect of the San Tomé

> mine upon the life of that remote province. The outward appearances had not changed then as they have changed since, as I am told, with cable cars running along the Street of the Constitution...and a vast railway goods yard by the harbour, which has a quay-side, a long range of warehouse, and quite serious, organised labour troubles of its own. (*N* 73)[41]

Again, there are a few buried clues here as to exactly what role the narrator takes in relation to the events which he narrates. We learn for the first time, for example, that the narrator is not among those Sulaco-born Europeans which count among them the likes of Gould and Decoud. He is, instead, one of those 'whom business or curiosity took to Sulaco'– we do not learn which of these it was, but his portentous intonation regarding 'quite serious, organised labour troubles' would suggest a more-than-passing sympathy with the plight of the Sulaco bourgeoisie. That some time has passed since the narrator was actually an eyewitness in Sulaco ('as I am told') would lend further support to the suggestion that the narrator is part of the capitalist classes who have been repeatedly targeted in the region's history of revolutions, and fled the region at some unspecified point in the past. This is an interpretation supported by Greaney, who suggests with reference to the politics of language deployed by the narrator that 'his casual plundering of the Spanish lexicon to supply "exotic" local colour for an English master-narrative reproduces at the level of language the very Anglo-American political ascendancy that the novel charts.'[42]

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[41] The linguistics of this otherwise-straightforward piece of English narration are admittedly slightly interrupted by the curious construction 'a long range of warehouse', but this seems marginally too subtle to be anything more than a mistake on Conrad's part. Conrad's occasional tendency in *Nostromo* to deviate from the norms of English grammar, often under the influence of his prior understandings of either French or Polish, has been commented upon by, among others, Ian Watt (*Joseph Conrad: Nostromo (Landmarks of World Literature)* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], p.30) and Zdzislaw Najder ('A Century of Nostromo', *Conradiana* 40.3 [Fall 2008], p.243).

[42] Greaney, p.120.

The narrator's tendency toward irreverence further complicates some of the ideas of nationality, belonging and language which are already in dispute in *Nostromo*. Zdzislaw Najder has remarked that 'the authorial point of view oscillates skilfully between two contrasting attitudes: one of detachment, often with a sardonic twist; the other, of emotionally charged ethical commitment';[43] the former of these is particularly evident in some of the narrator's commentary upon particular incidences of language. One of the more curious of these takes place early in the novel, in the form of a speech given by Sir John, the financier of the railway which so transformed Sulaco, and who, like Holroyd, is a particular kind of disinterested capitalist, investing in Sulaco from afar, standing in stark contrast to the performed indigeneity of the likes of Charles Gould.

> [Montero] lifted his glass. "I drink to the health of the man who brings us a million and a half of pounds."
>
> […]
>
> Sir John did not move.
>
> "I don't think I am called upon to rise," he murmured to Mrs. Gould. "That sort of thing speaks for itself." But Don José Avellanos came to the rescue with a short oration, in which he alluded pointedly to England's goodwill towards Costaguana – a goodwill, he continued significantly, "of which I, having been in my time accredited to the Court of St. James, am able to speak with some knowledge."
>
> Only then Sir John thought fit to respond, which he did gracefully in bad French, punctuated by bursts of applause and the "Hear! Hears!" of Captain Mitchell, who was able to understand a word now and then. (*N* 90)

[43] Najder, p. 234.

Again, there is a great density to the kinds of interrogation of themes of language and identity at work here. First we encounter Montero, the general who will eventually launch a coup against the 'President-Dictator' Ribeira and his European capitalist supporters, who is apparently speaking English which is at once idiomatic ('I drink to the health') and grammatically flawed ('a million and a half of pounds'). After José Avellanos' interjection, in which his time spent as a diplomat to the royal court serves as an apparent sign of cosmopolitan prestige, comes Sir John's perplexing decision to address the room in French. This is apparently without precedent, Montero's earlier grammatical fumble having served to demonstrate that the conversation had been hitherto taking place in English. The narrative voice appears quick to ridicule Sir John's decision, via the mockingly oxymoronic construction 'gracefully in bad French', not to mention the uncomprehending encouragement of Captain Mitchell, a character for whom the narrator seems to reserve a particular level of contempt – the first major character to be introduced, we quickly learn that he is 'really very communicative under his air of pompous reserve' (*N* 11).[44]

This kind of ambivalent but attentive treatment of language is particularly evident in this passage, as well as in other long scenes which involve a great deal of dialogue uniting major characters. Earlier we are introduced to Ribeira, whose own speech to the assembled dignitaries is reported in a similarly curious manner:

> The Excelentísimo was on his legs. He said only a few words, evidently deeply felt, and meant perhaps mostly for Avellanos – his old friend – as to the necessity of unremitting effort to secure the lasting welfare of the country

[44] The garrulous sailor Captain Mitchell invites comparison with Marlow, but in reality appears to represent Conrad's parting ways with this model of storyteller. As Greaney writes, 'the resemblance between Marlow and Mitchell is…entirely superficial. Throughout *Nostromo*, Mitchell displays irrepressible enthusiasm for storytelling…but absolutely none of Marlow's subtlety, irony or self-consciousness.' (Greaney, p.117)

> emerging after this last struggle, he hoped, into a period of peace and material prosperity. (*N* 88)

The juxtaposition of registers is curious here. The deployment of the dictator's Spanish title 'Excelentísimo' sits alongside the strange construction 'on his legs', presumably to be taken to mean 'standing' where of course 'on his feet' would be the expected idiom. This apparent slip is immediately tempered, though, by the dense, political language of the proceeding sentence – 'the necessity of unremitting effort to secure the lasting welfare…' – all of which tends to belie the insistence that Ribeira's speech is 'evidently deeply felt'.

It is equally noteworthy, though, that of the two 'authorial points of view' which Najder identifies, the latter, characterised by 'emotionally charged ethical commitment', also stands in a particular relation to the multilingual narrative techniques which Conrad deploys. That is, Conrad does not merely use incidences of the multilingual as occasions for narrative mockery – they also occur in situations which invite deep levels of empathic identification with particular characters. Najder suggests that this latter authorial voice aligns itself in particular with Emilia Gould (Conrad, in his author's note which shimmers metatextually between distance and identification with the novel's narrator, identifies Mrs. Gould as one of those characters whom he thanks for 'firm friendships and unforgotten hospitalities'),[45] a fact which is evident in the following extract:

> Mrs. Gould smiled a good-bye at Barrios, nodded round to the Europeans (who raised their hats simultaneously) with an engaging invitation, "I hope to see you all presently, at home; then said nervously to Decoud, "Get in, Don Martin," and heard him mutter to himself in French, as he opened the carriage door, "*Le*

[45] Conrad, 'Author's Note', in *Nostromo*, p.409.

> *sort en est jeté."* She heard him with a sort of exasperation. Nobody ought to have known better than himself that the first cast of dice had been already thrown long ago in a most desperate game. (*N* 121)

Particularly noteworthy here is Mrs Gould's instantaneous and idiomatic translation of Decoud's fateful pronouncement: '*le sort en est jeté*' could be literally translated as 'the spell has been cast', but Mrs Gould, in this passage of free indirect narration, renders it instead as 'the die has been cast', the better to disapprove of Decoud's apparently dilettantish engagement with Costaguana poltics.

These few extracts show the diversity of narrative techniques with which Conrad brings to life the multilingual reality of Costaguana. These techniques have been extensively taxonomised by Meir Sternberg, who gathers under the term 'translational mimesis' the means by which writers respond to the 'formidable mimetic challenge' of representing 'polylingual discourse through a communicative medium which is normally unilingual'.[46] These methods can be further distinguished with reference to the level of implied authorial or narrative intervention they exhibit, ranging from direct quotation of characteristic or idiomatic moments of polylingual discourse, or 'selective reproduction' in Sternberg's phrase[47] – consider Decoud's '*le sort en est jeté*' above, or his own writerly quotation of 'Quién sabe?' in his aforementioned letter – to what Sternberg terms 'explicit attribution', that is, a simple statement on the part of the narrator concerning the language being spoken at a particular moment.[48] While I shall return to these categories later, it is worthwhile at this stage merely to note the level of freedom with

[46] Meir Sternberg, 'Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis', *Poetics Today* 2.4 (Summer-Autumn 1981), p.222.
[47] Sternberg, p. 225.
[48] Sternberg, p.331.

which Conrad deploys them, inviting further consideration of the proximity or otherwise of the narrator to his narrative.

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Some of those epistemological characteristics of empire which Conrad demonstrates in *Heart of Darkness* are nevertheless carried forward. Perhaps most immediately apparent is the way in which both texts revolve around a fixation on a particular commodity, demonstrating aptly the links between European economic investment and colonial self-investment; the hypnotic and corrupting influence of ivory in *Heart of Darkness* which proves to be Kurtz's undoing is matched only by the similar spell cast by silver in *Nostromo*. Also evident is a continuation of Conrad's preoccupation with voice and voices, with characters in both texts being reduced to their speech acts. Fredric Jameson's commentary on one particular characteristic of Conrad's political preoccupations, though, is illuminating, both as to wherein the continuity lies, and where its limits are to be found. Jameson identifies *Nostromo* with *Lord Jim* as embodying 'the story of the passing of the heroic age of capitalist expansion; it marks the end of the era when individual entrepreneurs were giants, and the setting in place of the worldwide institutions of capitalism in its monopoly stage'.[49] Jameson's metaphor of the entrepreneurial 'giant' calls Kurtz to mind, who is described in such terms in *Heart of Darkness*; in a text such as *Nostromo*, this shift in global politics is represented by a shift in narrative style – wherein the heroic figure is no longer privileged as a narrative centre – and in textual form.

The use of language in a wider sense is a useful indicator of how great a departure *Nostromo* is for Conrad. The uncontested primacy of the individual voice

[49] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), pp.237-238.

which Conrad deploys in *Heart of Darkness* – for Jameson the 'the Marlow figure' is one and the same with 'the story-telling infrastructure'[50] - has been eclipsed in *Nostromo*, as the figure of the solitary European seeking acquaintance with the 'dark places of the earth' has been replaced by a squabbling band of divergent colonial interests. As such, the characterising linguistic mode of *Nostromo* is polyglossia – the novel's voices are plural and distinct, and thus, instead of allowing individual voices to dominate, Conrad depicts voices as in constant competition, invested with ideological interests and vying for socio-political primacy. As Bakhtin has noted, 'there are no "neutral" words and forms – words and forms that can belong to "no one"; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents,' and this heteroglot conception of language is one which can be clearly identified in *Nostromo*.[51] It is complicated, though, by Conrad's use of multiple national languages – *Nostromo* contends not only with competing ideological intentions within a language, but across multiple languages through a cast of polyglots. The partial moral introspection and witting self-transformations which serve as companions to the solitary voice in *Heart of Darkness* are thus replaced in *Nostromo* by external performances of identity which are deeply conscious and deliberate.

The older Spanish-speaking imperial class of the novel – dubbed the 'Blancos' – may espouse the longest-held claim to 'true' Costaguana citizenship, but in Sulaco their history of bloody conquest appears in the process of being eclipsed by a newer class of English-speakers. Typified by Captain Mitchell, the local representative of the 'Oceanic Steam Navigation Company', these members of the novel's cast are altogether more entrepreneurial, seeking to stake a claim to the region principally through domination of

[50] Jameson, p.239.
[51] M.M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981),p.293.

its industries, of which the silver mine of Charles Gould stands as the most vital. Gould's American backer Holroyd, though, represents a third generation of control, characterised by economic dominion from afar through multinational industry. And yet for all of these competing conceptions of imperial control, each of these groups appears destined to allow their grasp on the Sulaco republic to slip and become passive in the wider trajectory of the region's destiny, which is ultimately shaped by the actions of two 'unaffiliated' agitators – the French journalist and political idealist Martin Decoud, and the Genoese longshoreman Nostromo.

By the highly evolved colonial state which Conrad depicts in *Nostromo*, the 'native' condition has been all but elided; the 'tame Indians coming miles to market' of the first page seldom bother to make the journey again, and a solitary 'negro fisherman' serves as the most cursory reminder of the history of displacement and slavery on which Conrad's fictional republic is constructed (*N* 5-6). The simple gulf of intelligibility, all but absolute in *Heart of Darkness* and serving as an invisible barrier between the two opposed conditions of native and colonial, has been replaced instead by a highly evolved patois, an educated European polyglot class, and the vying for social primacy of various European *linguae francae*.

Stephen Clingman has remarked with particular conviction upon the treatment of fixed notions of identity in the novel, particularly nationality:

> The Republic of Costaguana, of course, comprises varied forms of identity, indigenous, Hispanic, African, English, Italian, and is searching for its own 'nationality', but on the question of the national Conrad is particularly scathing. All its versions in the novel are farcical, and it is indicative that Conrad leaves it

> to a parrot ('very human') in the Gould household to shriek '*Viva Costaguana!*' while puffing itself up and ruffling its feathers.[52]

Clingman's observation is a fair one, so long as we avoid drifting too far toward the implied converse: that, if Conrad is so personally and narratively ill-disposed toward nationality, he must simultaneously be engaging in an uncritical celebration of the kind of post-national cosmopolitanism we see in *Nostromo*. Certainly, it is true that the majority of *Nostromo*'s central characters have deliberately diverse and convoluted backgrounds, rendering their ties to Costaguana somewhat suspect and always subject to scrutiny. Edward Said has noted, though, that each of Conrad's focal characters in *Nostromo* 'earns his citizenship in Costaguana either by an act or by a process of naturalization'[53] – in doing so, characters arguably do pursue a certain fixity of identity, but one which seems always to recognise identity-forming as a process.

It is these acts and processes which are central to the novel's narrative, and in which we witness elaborate fictions of nativity and frantic redrawings of the dividing lines of national identity. We might consider these observations, too, in light of Jed Esty's more general commentary on the changes to notions of character which take place in the modernist period:

> In [characteristic modernist fictions such as those of Conrad, Woolf and Joyce], characterization does not unfold in smooth biographical time but in proleptic fits and retroactive starts, epiphanic bursts and impressionistic mental inventories, in accidents, in obliquity, in sudden lyric death and in languid semiconscious delay.[54]

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[52] Stephen Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.52.
[53] Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* [1975] (London: Granta, 1997), p.111.
[54] Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.2.

We can recognise a number of these elements in Marlow's narrative, particularly if we read it as a voyage of self-discovery as much as an imperial travelogue. They are arguably clearer, though, in *Nostromo*, wherein character is a more diffuse affair, the narrative is less linear, and global events seem to dwarf individuals whose assertions of character are either determined by or in spite of wider narratives of capital, politics and nationhood.

Martin Decoud, we have already seen, is one of Conrad's typical transnational polyglots, having returned to his native Costaguana from exile in Paris to become the chief agitator for the declaration of Sulaco as an independent state. Like Nostromo, Decoud is visually distinguished as a part of Costaguana's cosmopolitan class:

> The shirt collar, cut low in the neck, the big bow of his cravat, the style of his clothing, from the round hat to the varnished shoes, suggested an idea of French elegance, but otherwise he was the very type of a fair Spanish creole…His full round face was of that warm, healthy creole white which is never tanned by its native sunshine. Martin Decoud was seldom exposed to the Costaguana sun under which he was born. (*N* 111)

Here, Decoud's consummate Europeanness seems to serve as a direct refutation of any credit which his Costaguana birth might score him in the ongoing battle for influence. His nativity is at best a convenient footnote to his European cultural education (later on, he is referred to as 'the Costaguana boulevardier' [*N* 114]), and this fact, it seems, is deployed by Decoud himself in order to engender an artificial sense of intellectual distance in his reflections on the emerging Costaguana crisis:

> This life, whose dreary superficiality is covered by the glitter of universal blague, like the stupid clowning of a harlequin by the spangles of a motley costume, induced in him a Frenchified – but most un-French – cosmopolitanism, in

> reality a mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority…'Of course, government in general, any government anywhere, is a thing of exquisite comicality to a discerning mind, but really we Spanish-Americans do overstep the bounds. No man of ordinary intelligence can take part in the intrigues of *une farce macabre*.' (*N* 111-2)

This sense of distance is compounded by the unusual density of multilingual gestures – particularly of Sternberg's 'selective reproduction' – which announce Decoud's introduction. The shifts into French seem to announce moments of ridicule, both on the part of Decoud, dismissing Costaguana politics as '*une farce macabre*', and the narrator, who in similarly withering terms aligns Decoud with 'dreary superficiality' and 'universal blague'. Indeed, the narrator appears to have little time for Decoud's performances of identity – Decoud describes himself both as a 'Spanish American' and 'Parisian to the tips of his fingers' – and dismisses him as 'in danger of remaining a sort of nondescript dilettante all his life' (*N* 112). Decoud's irresolvable plurality, even as it appears to be typical of Costaguana, seems to frustrate the narrator, who cannot easily slot all of Decoud's contradictions into the narrative.

While Conrad self-effacingly associated himself with Decoud, whose importance he then downplayed in his author's note, this rather disavows his centrality to the text – it is Decoud and Nostromo in tandem who ultimately shape the narrative, sharing their status as itinerant men of uncertain birth whom the Republic's capitalist powers seek to manipulate for their own ends, only to have their plans backfire. In Nostromo's case, of course, this relates to his successfully growing rich on the ill-gotten silver; Decoud serves as the architect of the Sulaco republic's secession from Costaguana, chiefly in order to save himself and his lover Antonia from persecution. The irony, of course, is that both men ultimately meet their demise, but the silver

remains missing, and Sulaco remains independent; each man's narrative influence ultimately outlasts him.

It is for this reason that a conversation between Decoud and Mrs Gould, in which the subject of secession is first broached, represents a moment of pivotal importance. It is notable, though, not only for the introduction of a major narrative theme, but for the stylistic manner in which this is enacted. Sylvère Monod has suggested that 'it is perhaps in *Nostromo*, with *boulevardier* Decoud's lapses into Gallic speech, that one finds Conrad's most elaborate, refined, and convincing coinages of French sentences',[55] and in this exchange we see the centrality of polyglot techniques to *Nostromo*'s overall form. Conrad's playing-out of this scene, densely multilingual, littered with puns as well as occasional stumbles, is highly characteristic of the new set of stylistic concerns which *Nostromo* inaugurates; indeed, from beginning to end, the scene reads as a primer in the kinds of multilingual writing techniques which are essential to the novel's narrative.

The conversation between Decoud and Mrs Gould is played out in three languages. Spanish seems often to serve as the *lingua franca* of Costaguana, as close to an official language as the republic's diverse interests allow; as Greaney remarks, 'Spanish is the first language of Costaguana but the second language of *Nostromo*'.[56] Decoud begins, then, by addressing Mrs. Gould as 'Senora', but the conversation then drifts through two further languages, demonstrating the ways in which, even between two characters, ideas of linguistic primacy are contested and uncertain. A pun serves as a pivot point into French:

[55] Sylvère Monod, 'Conrad's Polyglot Wordplay', *The Modern Language Review* 100 (2005), p.231.
[56] Greaney, p. 120.

> "Montero victorious, completely victorious!" Mrs. Gould breathed out in a tone of unbelief.
>
> "A canard, probably. That sort of bird is hatched in great numbers in such times as these. An even if it were true? Well, let us put things at their worst, let us say it is true." (*N* 154)

This is a quintessential multilingual pun – Decoud suggests that stories of Montero's victory are likely to be fraudulent, and gestures, through the metaphor of these rumours being 'hatched' like birds to the French etymology of 'canard'. The irony, though, is that from the first word of the conversation the reader has been led to believe that the conversation is taking place in Spanish, a language in which this pun would not work. The seemingly sinuous deployment of language by Decoud here is in fact reliant on Conrad somewhat bending the rules in relating this conversation, allowing us to simply presume that the dialogue has switched to English.

This gesture seems in violation of an unspoken rule of this kind of multilingual dialogue, wherein elsewhere Conrad is careful to mark in the narrative the points at which the language has changed; a few lines later, we learn that 'Decoud went on again in French', serving as an authorial confirmation of the change we have already witnessed (*N* 154). Only later, though, and in an apparent gesture of deference toward Mrs. Gould, do we learn definitively that 'Decoud had dropped easily into English, which he spoke with precision, very correctly, but with too many z sounds.' (*N* 157). The mildly paradoxical nature of Decoud's English – syntactically and semantically precise, if occasionally phonologically suspect – is subtly removed from similar gestures we see Conrad make elsewhere. There is a more than passing resemblance to 'Mistah Kurtz, he dead' – here, too, we see a very deliberate level of estrangement, wherein language is made unfamiliar through an act of phonological disturbance which

nonetheless leaves the semantic content untouched. And yet in *Nostromo*, we see that Conrad eschews this kind of graphical representation – the narrator adds in the caveat regarding Decoud's pronunciation, rather than allowing the reader to experience it directly.

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Just as in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad's interrogation of his own narrative conditions ultimately appears to leave them appearing exhausted and untenable. The myopic, singularly-focused narrative style of *Heart of Darkness* is eventually and paradoxically forced to accept other voices in order to reassert its own self-conception. Similarly, the always-plural narrative of *Nostromo* seems to require its own narrator to intervene and provide a steadying commentary on the way language unfolds as used by the novel's characters, and to reflect critically upon concepts of identity which seem otherwise to circulate in a state of flux. Though *Nostromo* presents an avowedly cosmopolitan state in a seemingly freely cosmopolitan narrative, it seems ultimately to punish its characters for not conforming to a hidden set of cultural and political norms. Hirsch, the hapless and cowardly German hide merchant who meets an unpleasant end at the hands of an enraged Sotillo, serves as an example of this. At the point of Hirsch's capture after stowing away aboard the lighter carrying Nostromo, Decoud and the silver to the Isabels, the response is a muddle of language with no coherent semantic direction:

> His Spanish, too, became so mixed up with German that the better half of his statements remained incomprehensible. He tried to propitiate them by calling them *hochwohlgeboren herren*, which in itself sounded suspicious. When admonished sternly not to trifle he repeated his entreaties and protestations of

> loyalty and innocence again in German, obstinately, because he was not aware in what language he was speaking. (*N* 236)

The mildly comedic tone of this passage, in which Hirsch's fear drives him to incoherence, is reasonably clear. More subtly apparent, though, are the ways in which Hirsch, an outsider who seeks to ingratiate himself to the capitalist classes of Sulaco but fails to do so, undermines the structuring logic at play in regulating the narrative's various communities. Hirsch proclaims deference, but does so in a language other than the accepted Spanish *lingua franca* of the region's ruling classes. Crucially, he is not even aware of the language he is using – this vaguely macaronic passage is the very opposite, then, of the kinds of calculating code-switching deployed by the likes of Decoud and the Goulds. We further learn that Hirsch 'kept on forgetting Decoud's name, mixing him up with several other people he had seen in the Casa Gould', inadvertently gesturing toward the absurdly underdetermined nature of those characters who are entirely and plurally defined from the outside (*N* 236).

Moments of linguistic disturbance, plurality and failure, then, are the formal features which *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo*, two texts ostensibly differing greatly both in their narrative approach and subject matter, have in common. The linguistic conditions of each text are allowed to productively undermine themselves: in the case of the former with new and plural voices entering the text only to further confirm the singular and introspective nature of the narrator, and in the latter with a seemingly already-plural linguistic milieu descending into ridicule, failure and narrative scorn for its participants. Both cases, in their trying out of very particular sets of narrative conditions to depict pertinent and timely geopolitical realities, reveal the fracturing of particular models of European self-conception and political impact, first with *Heart of Darkness* showing the ultimately untenable model of the European exerting political and narrative

dominion over the wider world. *Nostromo*, though, is not an antidote, but a further interrogation of the politics of language and narrative in a world which continues to bear the effects of colonial politics.

2. Lost for Words in London and Paris: Language Performance in Jean Rhys's Cities

If we can see in Conrad two components which motivate my consideration of the novel more broadly – a significant role played by empire in the emergence of a recognisably modernist aesthetic, and an interrogation of multilingual possibility and inheritance as a counterpart to this – then we can productively continue to explore these threads as they extend into the high modernist period of the interwar years. What can be deduced in the modernist novel as I read it here is an ongoing shaking-off of lingering traces of empire which refuse to be so easily dispensed with; these may represent both the foregrounded political concerns of the novel or, as we have already seen in part in Conrad, a deeper hold over the unconscious formal elements of the text.

It is with these concerns in mind that I turn to Jean Rhys. While we have seen in Conrad both a regional significance ascribed to Central America and the Caribbean, and a mediation of African voices through an English-language text, Rhys is the first Caribbean-born author in this study. Born in Dominica in 1890 to parents of European descent, Rhys was preoccupied in both her life and writing with her incomplete Caribbeanness, occasionally reflecting upon her possibly mixed-race heritage or the manner in which her Caribbean upbringing had influenced her accent and speech. Neither truly Caribbean nor fully European, Rhys was educated in England from the age of 16, briefly attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and experienced a lifestyle which vacillated between hedonism and destitution, spending time in London, Vienna and Paris. In the latter of these, she became a peripheral fixture of the high modernist scene, being eventually persuaded to publish fiction and translations by Ford Madox Ford.

While *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys's explicitly postcolonial rewrite of Jane Eyre, remains her most recognisable work, it is in the novels composed in these decades of wandering in Europe which in fact show most clearly Rhys's participation in the evolution of the Anglophone modernist novel. Urmila Seshagiri has made a strong case for reading *Voyage in the Dark* in particular as a key milestone; a fulcrum in the development of the novel which bridges the gaps between the valorisation of form in the 1920s, its subsequent decline in the 1940s, and the eventual rise of postcolonial concerns in the 1950s and 1960s. *Voyage in the Dark* is, for Seshagiri, 'a novel about a Creole demimonde [which] illuminates a complex but overlooked genealogical moment in twentieth-century literature: the point when the exhausted limits of modernist form revealed the lineaments of postcolonial fiction.'[1] The novel both 'breaks modernism apart' and 'lays the groundwork for a developing literature of postcoloniality'.[2] The Rhys we read in the early novels thus exists in a kind of space-between; both a peripheral modernist and a proto-postcolonialist. While the postcolonial character of Rhys's works has been broadly recognised, there is a growing move toward a cautious consideration of them as modernist as well: it is through the early novels that we see most clearly the mediation in Rhys's work between modernist form and the languages of lingering imperial politics.

If Conrad is the consummate multilingual writer who, with varying degrees of intent, begins to foreground the multilingual through his novels, and to interrogate its significance both in the coming decline of empire and the rise of novelistic strategies to reflect upon it, Rhys enacts a kind of reversal of these concerns. Rhys may have had a lifelong anxiety about the extent of her own linguistic potential – albeit an unfounded

[1] Urmila Seshagiri, 'Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix: Jean Rhys and the Evolution of the English Novel in the Twentieth Century', *Modernism/modernity* 13.3 (September 2006), p.487.
[2] Seshagiri, p.488.

one – but in her first four novels the multilingual is promoted to centre stage. In her depictions of the lives of women at the fringes of society in both Paris and London, we see a conscious foregrounding of the social and political implications of language in the emerging postcolonial metropolis and, in a departure from contemporary modernist detachments of form, an insistence upon the lived experiences and material realities of languages for their speakers.

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Classic accounts of inter-war modernism have tended to identify the modernists as an intellectually focused, metropolitan community of stylistic avant-gardists, with Raymond Williams having argued that 'the artists and writers and thinkers of this phase found the only community available to them: a community of the medium; of their own practices.'[3] More recent readings have taken up this idea in order to qualify and complicate it, as in the following account by Tyrus Miller:

> In the Anglo-American context, the imagist and vorticist movements and the postwar Paris expatriate scene likewise receive a disproportionate amount of critical attention, because they identify clear communities of rebel experimenters working in emerging modes and forms.[4]

The oblique engagement of a writer such as Rhys with these hypothesised artistic communities is, in one sense at least, well-established by those readings which position her as a minority female modernist or an outlying colonial or 'creole' modernist.[5] The

[3] Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London, New York: Verso, 2007), p.45.
[4] Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999), p.5.
[5] See 'Creole Modernism' in Christopher GoGwilt, *The Passage of Literature: Genealogies of Modernism in Conrad, Rhys, and Pramoedya* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Carol Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), Anna Snaith, *Modernist Voyages: Colonial Women Writers in London, 1890-1945* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014), Peter Kalliney, 'Jean Rhys: Left Bank Modernist as Postcolonial Intellectual' in

recent global turn in modernist studies more generally, too, has allowed for the semi-canonisation of minority modernists such as Rhys, either through studies which retain as their locus the aforementioned and established group of experimental inter-war writers, or through calls to more radically unsettle the spatial and temporal foundations of modernism on which earlier studies were built.

These issues in criticism – of semi-canonical, outlying and minority modernisms – could be productively brought into dialogue with questions of form, not only in order to further understandings of these latter concerns of Rhys's work, but in order to undermine the primacy of form and the implied dissociation of form and socio-political concerns integral to the former generalisations. In this sense, we might identify Rhys more closely with the category of 'late modernism' as identified by Miller:

> Late modernist writers energetically sought to deflate the category of form as a criterion for judging literary works. For the latter-day reader, their works reveal how contingent was the modernist buildup of form and formal mastery, crucially important to the advances of a small, prestigious group of writers and critics, but by no means coextensive with the field of modernism as such – particularly when one began to consider writers outside the canonized mainstream.[6]

Miller's term rests on a divide which is both temporal and thematic, late modernism being the sudden arrival in the 1930s of political sensibilities which had been lacking in earlier modernist writing, or 'a detour into the political regions that high modernism had managed to view from the distance of a closed car.'[7] A writer such as Rhys serves to

The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms, eds. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.413-432.

[6] Miller, p.18

[7] Miller, p.13.

show that a socially- and politically-engaged modernism was a well-established counter-current, as in Urmila Seshagiri's perspective that Rhys 'breaks modernism apart by refusing to privilege aesthetic form.'[8] The four metropolitan novels which form the initial phase of Rhys's career sit in an uneasy relation to the modernist canon of the 1920s and 1930s, engaging in linguistic and other formal experimentation, but doing so with an apparent trepidation which reveals a deep concern for social dynamics and socio-political context.

One of the more apparent manifestations of the multilingual which can be traced through the development of modernism and late modernism is a concern with translation. Steven G. Yao has established that, as a process and literary mode, translation was integral to the modernist movement not only as an interest in itself, but as a lens through which other quintessential modernist concerns were viewed:

> Throughout the period, translation as a literary mode functioned, and was recognized, as a kind of dynamic procedural lens through which the Modernists could at once view both the past as well as other cultures and, perhaps even more importantly, focus their images of these traditions in their own times and in ways that could serve their individual ideological and aesthetic purposes.[9]

Rhys, like various other modernist authors, occasionally undertook work as a translator herself, perhaps most notably of the novel *Sous les verrous* (or *Barred*, as it was called in Rhys's English translation), written by her husband Jean Lenglet under the pen name Edouard de Nève and inspired by his own experiences of being imprisoned and subsequently deported from France: the same events inspired Rhys's own *Quartet*.

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[8] Seshagiri, p.488.
[9] Steven G. Yao, *Translation and the Languages of Modernism: Gender, Politics, Language* (New York, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.7.

These, too, were the events which brought Rhys into contact with Ford Madox Ford (whose barely-disguised fictional alter ego is Heidler in *Quartet*), who first encouraged Rhys's work as a translator. Further to her initial efforts to translate the work of others, Ford also encouraged Rhys to translate sections of her own work as a means of overcoming writer's block or dissatisfaction with the wording of a section.[10] Thus translation for Rhys, in a very particular sense, became heavily interlaced with her writing style and development as an author; it is not merely a side project, but a practice which is intricately bound together with her writing process more generally. When Rhys fictionalised Paris and London, it was with a deep-lying sensibility as a translator as well as a fiction writer; the early novels thus deal with multiple languages and dramatised acts of translation, while betraying a concern with the inherent plurality of the modern metropolis. Even the most apparently monolingual section of Rhys's writing, after all, may have undergone a profoundly translational gestation, infusing these novels at the deepest level with multilingual sensibility.

While Rhys's concern with translation in one sense aligns her as a stylist with the canonical modernists, it is also an area in which we can begin to identify some of her characteristic ambivalence. Certainly, it is true that, within modernism more widely, this attention to translation exists alongside writing practices which are apparently antithetical to it. If, at its heart, translation holds the goal of carrying information and intelligibility wholesale from one language to another, many modernist works stand starkly against this ideal, foregrounding incidences of the multilingual which refuse to be translated. The great multiplicity of languages we encounter in, for example, the Circe episode of Ulysses, the epigraphs to 'The Waste Land' or 'Prufrock', not to mention the Chinese characters of Pound, seem instead to invite a consideration of the limits of

[10] Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990), p. 134.

translatability; indeed, Haun Saussy has recently argued for transcription and macaronics to be understood as the 'Other', the very antithesis of translation.[11] In Rhys, too, we encounter such paradoxes, wherein a writer ostensibly concerned with and schooled in translation opts to deploy multilingual writing techniques which stand against it.

Where Rhys seems to stand out as a writer of this period is in her deep-seated concern with learned languages and questions of language proficiency. In relation to the question of translation, Yao points out that while canonical modernists may have 'achieved remarkable results', this was frequently done so seemingly in spite of their possessing 'partial, imprecise, faulty, and sometimes even no formal understanding of the languages in which the texts they translated were originally written'.[12] Such concerns, though, were of course not foregrounded in these writers' work, and even in the companion cases of non-translation, multilingual writing techniques are much more frequently deployed by modernists for formal, allusive or disruptive value than in the service of a genuine interrogation of the realities of language and its social implications. Occasional incidental references to learned language among the high modernists – the 'demotic French' of *The Waste Land*'s Mr Eugenides is one example[13] - instead form one of the central problems of Rhys's modernist novels, which dramatise the adjustments made by individuals to the emerging multicultural and multilingual metropolis.

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Given that Rhys wrote in English, it is unsurprising that of the four early novels, the two which are set wholly in France – *Quartet* and *Good Morning, Midnight* – are the most strikingly multilingual. These novels' shifts into French (along with occasional

[11] Haun Saussy, 'Macaronics as what Eludes Translation', *Paragraph* 38.2 (2015), p.215.
[12] Yao p.12.
[13] Which, in fact, was either 'abominable' or 'vile' in Eliot's discarded drafts; the level of scorn, evidently, was tempered by the finished product. (T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: a facsimile & transcript of the original drafts* [London: Faber, 1971] p.31.)

fragments of other languages, such as German and Latin) serve in the first instance to dramatise the experiences of 'lost generation' immigrants, English speakers among a bilingual community in Paris with its own social conventions and group dynamics which occasionally collide with those of the city's French-speaking natives. The French used in these novels is certainly of interest, but it is nevertheless not the sole manifestation of multilingual practice. While characters converse, write and even think in French, there are also incidences of encounter with unknown languages, dramatisations of accent and pronunciation, and cases wherein English is itself made unfamiliar, such as through its being spoken by a non-native speaker.

Occurrences of the multilingual, though, are not confined to these two novels. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is the only novel wherein the narrative is divided between Paris and London, and explores the potential effects of mixing English and French in its own particular way. Here characters may stumble over their vocabulary ('Entrez…Come in.' says Julia upon her return to London [EN 315]),[14] and at times apparently deliberate authorial calques indicate a psychological melding of English and French, such as the final line of the novel, 'It was the hour between dog and wolf, as they say' (EN 357), where Julia has returned to Paris but translates a French idiom awkwardly into English, her awareness of her own foreignness ('as they say') coexisting with an internalised Parisian awareness.[15] In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* we also encounter an unusual prevalence of paratextual artefacts in French, from the first page on which Julia is handed a hotel business card, through a series of letters which the text presents in English but acknowledges that it has translated, to the picture she sees in a

[14] References are to *The Early Novels: Voyage in the Dark, Quartet, After Leaving Mr Mackenzie, Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984)
[15] For a reading of untranslated and untranslatable French in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* in particular, see Juliana Lopoukhine, 'En français dans la texte: la poétique de l'inarticulé de Jean Rhys', *Revue LISA* 13.1 (2015).

window of 'a male figure encircled by…a huge mauve corkscrew' which is presented with the text '*La vie est un spiral, flottant dans l'espace, que les hommes grimpent et redescendent très, très, très sérieusement.*' (*EN* 256).

Voyage in the Dark, too, although it is set entirely in England with the exception of Anna Morgan's reminiscences of her Caribbean childhood, has its own particular components of linguistic diversity. Accent is a central preoccupation of the novel, with Anna's accent identifying her colonial background ('She was born in the West Indies or somewhere, weren't you, kid? The girls call her the Hottentot. Isn't it a shame?' [*EN* 21]), as well as other accents, such as regional variants of English, being deployed within the text.[16] As Urmila Seshagiri notes, *Voyage in the Dark*'s multiple voices collide in ways which emphasise their greatly varied linguistic registers:

> Whether describing Dominican childhood or adulthood in England, Anna's first-person narration registers multiple voices: mass advertising, popular and folk songs, plantation catalogues of slave-names, passages from imperial geographical tracts, and English cultural mandates about femininity.[17]

The first voice we hear in *Voyage in the Dark* is thus that of a woman who sells 'fishcakes on the savannah' who calls out 'Salt fishcakes, all sweet an' charmin', all sweet an' charmin.' (*EN* 17). Shortly after Anna is chastised by her landlady for 'showing yourself at my sitting-room window 'alf naked like that' (*EN* 18). This is reimagined shortly after as parodic performance, as Anna's friend adopts a cockney accent: 'I was speaking to you, 'Orace. You 'eard. You ain't got clorf ears.' (*EN* 20). Between Rhys's Paris and her London, then, we can see that there are numerous facets of the multilingual at work,

[16] The protagonists of Rhys's first four novels are, in order of publication, Marya, Julia, Anna and Sasha. It is difficult not to hear, in the metrical insistence on –a names, an echo of Rhys's birth name – Ella – which it was Ford who encouraged her to abandon in favour of her *nom de plume*.
[17] Seshagiri, p.489.

from highly arresting in-text language shifts to much more subtle elements of style. While it is clear that these factors result in a multiplicity of textual voices and represent a richly diverse linguistic environment, the overall effects are more disparate, and require that we pay closer attention to particular cases of the multilingual.

From the outset, Rhys's fiction is characterised by a prevalence of multilingual effects: incidences of translation, mistranslation, code-switching, mispronunciation, understanding and misunderstanding abound. As Nagihan Haliloğlu has written, Rhys's characters in Paris and London seem caught up in a 'war of sense-making,'[18] while Juliana Lopoukhine has identified Rhys's aesthetic as 'une poétique de l'inarticulé'. Indeed, the first spoken dialogue of *Quartet*, Rhys's first published novel, establishes such a precedent through a kind of linguistic encounter which is evidently typical for the protagonist Marya Zelli:

> Often on the Boulevards St Michel and Montparnasse shabby youths would glide up to her and address her hopefully in unknown and spitting tongues. When they were very shabby she would smile in a distant manner and answer in English:
>
> 'I'm very sorry; I don't understand what you are saying. (*EN* 133)

This brief and ostensibly simple exchange nevertheless introduces a number of the linguistic concerns whose development we can trace throughout *Quartet* and subsequent novels; not only do we see here the foregrounding of the cross-linguistic encounters which will prove typical of Rhys's Parisian dialogue, but also, equally importantly, the kind of narrative duplicity with which such encounters are treated. The central implication of the passage seems clear enough; in order to avoid the unwelcome

[18] Nagihan Haliloğlu, *Narrating from the Margins: Self-Representation of Female and Colonial Subjectivities in Jean Rhys' Novels* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), p.93.

attentions of young men, the female protagonist takes refuge in her own apparent monolingualism. Yet the fact that Marya can evidently decide whether or not to respond in this way (after all, we do not know how Marya responds when the youths are *not* 'very' shabby, but presumably it is different) undermines the idea that the youths speak only in 'unknown' tongues – how often, then does Marya really understand, and simply claim not to as a convenient excuse?

This passage thus begins to seem riddled with contradictions. The grotesque evocation of linguistic difference – the speech in question is not only unknown, but 'unknown and spitting', delivered by a character who glides, serpent-like, up to the protagonist – establishes a radical defamiliarisation which goes beyond a mere absence of understanding. Having established this perception, though, the text immediately questions it, as Marya's decision-making process is revealed and we are led to wonder whether this defamiliarity is an authorial invention, or a free indirect revealing of a tactic for avoiding unwelcome attention. What, too, are we to make of Marya's spoken reply, laced with a kind of mock deference formed not only of her distant smile, but a redundancy of language – not just sorry, but 'very sorry', and the needless clarification of 'I don't understand what you are saying' – within a sentence which is ultimately not meant to be understood? And, furthermore, all of this begins to seem redundant when we consider that, after all, the intentions of a young man approaching a woman on a bohemian city street are likely to be roughly the same regardless of the language he speaks. Marya's response thus ultimately takes on the characteristics of what Freud calls 'kettle logic' – 'I don't understand you, and the answer is no.'[19]

[19] Marya's location in this segment is apparently one of Rhys's favourites – in After Leaving Mr Mackenzie, we see Julia walking the same route, which seems to have become even less familiar: 'Julia would bump every now and again into somebody coming in the opposite direction. When the people glared at her and muttered it seemed as if shadows were gesticulating.' (EN 258)

Such encounters – wherein there is a hint of hostility and lingering questions surrounding the extent of understanding which has taken place – are highly characteristic. Leaping almost two decades ahead to Rhys's final novel before a 25 year hiatus, we see similar (if not identical) Parisian locations as the setting for multilingual encounters which have grown much more vexed. 1939's *Good Morning, Midnight* stakes a strong claim to being Rhys's most 'interior' novel, making use of extended stream-of-consciousness passages which see the protagonist Sasha partaking in extensive analysis of the metropolitan world around her, retreating into her own mind in response to a city which feels increasingly hostile, unfriendly and alienating. It is, characteristically, a hostile encounter not with native Parisians, but with fellow English expatriates or tourists which forms the climactic scene of the novel, such that it is subjected to extended analysis within the text and recurs as a memory throughout the remainder of the novel. The encounter takes place in Théodore's, an establishment which appears unchanged since Sasha's earlier experiences in Paris several years prior to the events of the novel:

> I light a cigarette and drink the coffee slowly. As I am doing this two girls walk in – a tall, red-haired one and a little, plump, dark one. Sports clothes, no hats, English. Théodore waddles up to their table and talks to them. The tall girl speaks French very well. I can't hear what Théodore is saying, but I watch his mouth moving and the hugemoon-face under the tall chef's cap.
>
> The girls turn and stare at me.
>
> 'Oh, my God!' the tall one says.
>
> Théodore goes on talking. Then he too turns and looks at me. 'Ah, those were the days,' he says.

'Et qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, maintenant?' the tall girl says, loudly. (*EN* 388)

Sasha's fellow Englishwoman abroad, seemingly aghast at the sight of her, responds with what is ostensibly a shocking act of aggression, demanding in vulgar terms to know what Sasha is doing in the restaurant.[20] This obviously raises questions of inclusion and exclusion – Sasha, typically for a Rhys protagonist, is clearly deemed to belong on the outside of a particular group or identity. It is less clear, though, precisely what kind of objection is being raised: is Sasha's appearance particularly shocking, does her reputation precede her, or is this simply a gratuitous or spiteful act? Answering these questions is made no easier by the fact that this encounter has taken place between two expatriates: no simple nationalism or bigotry is responsible, and if this utterance is representative of some wider group identity, it is unclear what kind of basis it may have.

This is far from the only incidence of the profane in *Good Morning, Midnight*, which is somehow saved from appearing gratuitous precisely because it only ever appears in French.[21] As in this example, this has the effect both of tempering and accentuating any possible offence given, foregrounding moments of tension experienced by Rhys's characters in their material settings also as formal disruption. Thus 'qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici', which echoes throughout the novel, reappearing even in its closing pages and occasionally becoming subject to wordplay, a potential sexual encounter shortly after dismissed as 'complètement fou' (*EN* 407), the painter Serge too

[20] Elsewhere it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Rhys is merely unusually fond of French profanity, as in *Quartet*, when Marya encounters on her trip to the Riviera 'a little white boat, called Je m'en fous' (EN 228).

[21] Kellman offers a reflection on this phenomenon which is both illuminating and amusing, commenting that 'Anglophones often find it easier to say either *merde* or *te amo* than their English equivalents. For all the coarseness of contemporary culture, it is doubtful that many of the young Americans who sport chic T-shirts inscribed "Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?' would dare wear one emblazoned with the equivalent in English.' (Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination* [London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000], p.27)

being condemned as ‘fou’ even as he responds with ‘je m’en fous’ (*EN* 421). Still with the painter, we see Sasha:

> Go up the stairs of a block of studios into a large, empty, cold room, with masks on the walls, two old arm-chairs and a straight-backed wooden chair on which is written ‘Merde’. The answer, the final answer, to everything? (*EN* 414)

Rhys’s exploitation of the multilingual possibilities of her novels thus occasionally dissolve into bathos; far from a centre of metropolitan potential, these occasional deployments of profane French seem resigned, almost nihilistic in their tone.

An alternative reading of the passage in Théodore’s is possible, though, which instead casts the episode as an act of gross miscalculation; as Sasha reflects almost immediately afterward, 'considering the general get-up what you should have said was: 'Qu'est-ce qu'elle fiche ici?'' (*EN* 388). The red-haired woman's attempt to prove herself a genuine expatriate by delivering her put-down in idiomatic French, as Sasha suggests (regardless, seemingly, of her earlier observation that ‘the tall girl speaks French very well’), appears to have backfired, her choice of a crass expression rather than a softer one in fact drawing attention to herself, marking her, instead of Sasha, as the vulgar foreigner. This interpretation appears to be played out in Sasha's analysis in the following pages, hypothesising some of the questions of belonging and authenticity which may lie at the heart of the disagreement:

> And then the girl said: 'Qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici'? Partly because she didn't like the look of and partly because she wanted to show how well she spoke French and partly because she thought that Théodore's was her own particular discovery. (But, my dear good lady, Théodore's had been crawling with kindly Anglo-Saxons for the last fifteen years to my certain knowledge, and probably much longer than that.) (*EN* 390)

Sasha's interpretation of the encounter is that her adversary's behaviour represents a desire to be recognised as a genuine cosmopolitan, or an intrepid and inquisitive traveller. Once again, though, we are not necessarily compelled to trust Rhys's narrator; is Sasha's reading of the situation accurate, or is it simply a projection of her own anxieties? In fact, in addition to its recurring consistently throughout the remainder of the novel, the red-haired girl's refrain is added to by Sasha, who incorporates further questions surrounding her own identity into the insult, almost immediately, for example, adding 'la vielle':

> Qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, la vielle? What the devil (translating it politely) is she doing, that old woman? What is she doing here, the stranger, the alien, the old one?...I quite agree too, quite. I have seen that in people's eyes all my life. I am asking myself all the time what the devil I am doing here. All the time. (*EN* 390)

This extended example is particularly illuminating as to the ways in which the interior, psychic world and the exterior, social world interact in Rhys's writing. The ineluctable plurality of the inter-war metropolis, bustling with lively social interaction and a diversity of language, is clearly seen in the process of being internalised here – the protagonist's stream of consciousness allows Rhys to continue the dialogue even after the event has passed, seemingly positing a dialogic relation wherein individuals are anchoring points for a wider socio-ideological reality. And yet this reading, following Bakhtin's position on heteroglossia in the novel, accounts only partially for this exchange: the accompanying effect, through the meticulous psychological realism which sees Sasha's analytical response spun out over multiple pages (and, in fact, it recurs throughout the remainder of the novel), is a profound sense of individual isolation. While we bear witness here to a flashpoint of conflict between the delicately poised social groups of expatriate city life, what is ultimately foregrounded are the mechanisms

through which social group dynamics are internalised. The complex psychology which surrounds a learned language, its deployment and possible mis-deployment, is revealed to lie at the heart of socio-political interaction.

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Passages such as these are illustrative of the kind of cautious adoption of modernist practice which is typical of Rhys's writing. Rhys's interlingual encounters are choked and tongue-tied, seemingly actively holding back a promised level of transnational or transcultural interaction; in the initial example of Marya's exchange on the Boulevard St Michel, the narrative appears to carefully distance the reader from the confident bilingual conversation which they might expect. Instead, this extract privileges uncertainty over certainty and misunderstanding over understanding, offering the promise of a confident cosmopolitanism only to withdraw it. Perhaps most pertinently, there is a potential unity of content and form here; the implied critique of cosmopolitan ease offered in the dramatization of flawed bilingualism is reflected in a similarly ambivalent uptake of modernist form, which seemingly refuses to confidently foreground multilingual speech in favour of allowing it to simmer below the surface, where it remains ill-defined and amorphous.

Rebecca Walkowitz's intervention in the critical tradition surrounding modernist cosmopolitanism is particularly useful here. Walkowitz's *Cosmopolitan Style* furthers the thesis that, contrary to understandings of the cosmopolitan as the radically emancipatory foundational context for modernist writing, numerous writers in the modernist tradition crafted a 'critical cosmopolitanism': a cautious adoption of transnational themes and practices which served as a critique of hegemonic practices of imperialism and nation state, with an awareness that cosmopolitanism also possessed a troubled past as a product and legitimator of colonial control. As such, Walkowitz

draws attention to those writers who 'have used the salient features of modernist narrative, including wandering consciousness, paratactic syntax, recursive plotting, collage, and portmanteau language,'[22] not merely in the mimetic service of reflecting inter-war society, but in order to criticise some of the assumptions inherent to an uncritical adoption of cosmopolitanism.

We can thus read in Rhys's forays into fictionalised cosmopolitan interaction a scepticism toward the nature of the cosmopolitan; seemingly paradoxically, these forays into bilingual and transcultural interaction amount not to an adoption of an avowedly cosmopolitan writing strategy, but a deeply ambivalent take on the possibilities of the cosmopolitan. Walkowitz further suggests that 'critical cosmopolitan' literary strategies 'often privilege the ability to see and think mistakenly, irreverently, trivially, and momentarily over the necessity to see and think correctly or judgmentally,'[23] a tendency we can identify in these examples from Rhys. In fact, Rhys seems to pursue these problematic epistemological conditions to a pessimistic conclusion; incidences of partial understanding or botched interlingual encounter predominate, while uncomplicated portrayals of cosmopolitan ease are few and far between.

Nevertheless, though, in these examples from *Quartet* and *Good Morning, Midnight* we can see that, with different levels of success, Rhys's protagonists in fact deploy their own multilingual abilities as a means of defusing seemingly volatile encounters. Both Marya and Sasha attempt to draw on reserves of linguistic proficiency – tactically and productively hidden in Marya's case, analytically pored over in Sasha's – in order to negotiate themselves out of situations which threaten their independence or identity. The multilingual, though, is decidedly not a utopian ticket to cross-cultural

[22] Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006), p.2.
[23] *Cosmopolitan Style*, p.18.

understanding and benign cosmopolitanism, and while we can identify these as some of the more 'successful' examples of multilingualism in Rhys's work, it is of course apparent that in both cases they are used to engineer social distance, rather than to build social bridges. While in these extracts we can already see certain fissures emerging, wherein these deployments create only a partial understanding, or a partial thaw in a hostile social encounter, though, a majority of Rhys's multilingual stagings are avowedly unsuccessful, resulting in complete misunderstanding or miscommunication.

This is apparent in *Voyage in the Dark*, which lacks the density of code-switching evident in the other three novels. Nevertheless, in the fraught scene of Anna's abortion which marks the beginning of the end of the novel, Rhys again makes use of a multilingual exchange. After learning that her former lover Walter has departed for Paris, and after D'Adhémar seeks to reassure Anna that her situation amounts to 'une vaste blague', it transpires that Mrs Robinson, the practitioner who performs Anna's abortion, is French-speaking Swiss (*EN* 122). Thus Anna, in an apparent attempt to project ease onto the situation, elects unprompted to open the conversation in French:

> I said, 'Elles sont jolies, ces fleurs-là.' Simpering, wanting her to know that I could speak French, wanting her to like me.
>
> She said, 'Vous trouvez? On me les a donnés. Mais moi, j'ai horreur des fleurs dans la maison, surtout de ces fleurs-là.' (*EN* 123)

Here, perhaps unlike some of Rhys's other protagonists, Anna is quite open about her motivations (this, after all, is the novel with which Rhys made the shift to first-person narration, which she would retain in *Good Morning, Midnight*); she speaks French purely in order to demonstrate that she can do so, and in turn to gain the approval of a perceived authority figure (much as Sasha hopes her red-haired adversary does in *Good Morning, Midnight*). Indeed, it seems almost as though it is Anna's realisation that Mrs

Robinson is a French speaker which prompts her to seek to impress; even in this most fraught of moments in the narrative, the opportunity to participate in some demonstration of cosmopolitan ease is one which cannot be refused. Yet, in a move which should perhaps be predictable by this stage of Rhys's oeuvre, the attempt is not a successful one, and while here it is not Anna's language which Mrs Robinson takes issue with, the attempt nevertheless falls flat when it is revealed that the sentiment itself is misguided, even in its apparent triteness. In fact, that the flowers were not Mrs Robinson's own choice, but a gift from an anonymous individual (perhaps another of her patients) serves only to reemphasise the uniqueness of the situation, its strangeness, and the anonymous and clandestine nature of the procedure which Anna is about to undergo.

Anna's response to this episode also seems rather typical of Rhys's protagonists in general, and it somewhat closely mimics the thinking of Sasha following her vulgar encounter in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Apparently incapable of acknowledging her own miscalculated attempt to slip easily across a cultural divide, Anna responds instead by questioning Mrs Robinson's credentials:

> She was tall and fair and fat and very fresh-looking. She was dressed in red, close-fitting. Not in very good taste, considering she was so fat. I thought, 'She doesn't look a bit French.'
>
> […]
>
> She smiled and nodded and moved her hands, telling me about what I ought to do afterwards. That was the only thing French about her – that she moved her hands a lot. (*EN* 123)

The response which Rhys creates here is a rather obstinate one – Anna thinks, in effect, that since her attempt to speak French didn't garner the intended response, the other

participant in the conversation must simply not be French. Anna cannot be at fault, her attempted cosmopolitanism having been so carefully planned and clearly motivated, and hence Mrs Robinson must have misunderstood, or have been expressing a point of view which was somehow only a facsimile of the Frenchwoman she purports to be. With a kind of curious obstinacy, Anna then switches back to English, again drawing attention to a detail and again receiving a sharp riposte:

> She brought me a small glass of brandy. I said, I thought it was rum they had. 'Comment?' (*EN* 123)

Except, in an obvious detail which was introduced just a few lines earlier, Mrs Robinson is not French at all, but Swiss. What seems to have unravelled, then, is not only Anna's attempted cosmopolitan performance, but the entirely false identity which she projected onto Mrs Robinson, which quickly unravelled when subjected to any scrutiny.

Again, though, we can consider an alternative reading of this scene. Given that Anna's sole intent here is to indicate her ability to speak French, the actual content of her initial address holds a purely phatic function. That is, saying 'those flowers are pretty' – as would probably be immediately obvious in English – is a banal pleasantry, a bathetic gesture given the severity of the situation. Thus again we might consider that it is in fact the respondent, Mrs Robinson, who has made a miscalculation here: instead of acknowledging that Anna's French is an attempt to inject some social convention into a situation where there would otherwise be none, she takes Anna at her word. She therefore replies with an honesty – I hate having flowers inside, and particularly those ones – which is striking in its brusqueness. The proper socio-linguistic performance is thus only restored at the end of the episode:

> She smiled and said politely, 'Vous êtes très courageuse.' She patted me on the shoulder and went out and I got dressed. Then she came back and took me to

> the door and shook hands with me at the door and said, 'Alors, bonne chance.' (*EN* 124).

Again, the bathos is apparent – social order is restored, even as Anna leaves and has the near-death experience which ends the novel in which, in addition to believing a portrait of a dog on her bedroom wall is speaking to her (in both French and English), she recalls a Masquerade carnival from her youth in the Caribbean. In Seshagiri's striking reading of this scene, 'the literal hemorrhage of Anna's body in this final scene symbolizes the hemorrhage of modernist forms: Anna's various cultural identities, all of which are called up in her hallucination, have become, like extant forms of modernist aesthetics in the 1930s, discrepant, excessive, and unassimilable.'[24]

The faltering attempts of English speakers to convincingly speak French represent a thematic link across all four novels. Indeed, it seems on many occasions that a certain scorn is reserved for characters who do so. This is the case practically throughout *Good Morning, Midnight* – the majority of the novel's English characters are parodic figures, tourists, expatriates and businesspeople who immediately stand out as English in spite of the notions of the cosmopolitan to which they appear to hold themselves. Sasha herself appears to be no exception to this rule – Rhys's Paris is an environment in which origins are determinedly cast off, and identifiers as gauche as nationality are to be disavowed where possible. And yet a solitary detail is capable of undoing the illusion:

> What's wrong with the fiche? I've filled it up all right, haven't I? Name So-and-so, nationality So-and-so...Nationality – that's what has puzzled him. I ought to have put by marriage.

[24] Seshagiri, p.500.

> I tell him I will let him have the passport in the afternoon and he gives my hat a gloomy, disapproving look. I don't blame him. It shouts 'Anglaise', my hat. (*EN* 365)

Sasha here attempts to 'pass' as non-English to the *patron* of a hotel, but, comedically, the detail of her hat immediately undermines her case. Sasha perhaps (like Rhys) holds a French passport, a French-language document which will trump her apparently un-French appearance, but in the meantime, her nationality is reduced to a simple metonymic association.

The most uncompromising portrait, though, is of the character Mr Blank, the owner of the couturier in which Sasha is working at the beginning of the novel. By contrast, this is a character who is immediately described as 'the real English type. Very nice, very, very chic, the real English type, le businessman' (*EN* 367). And yet in this context it seems that being English, or at least being part of the English capitalist class, serves as an indicator of a kind of cosmopolitan ease, at least in the eyes of the deferential shop manager Salvatini. Mr Blank serves to subject Sasha to a test of cosmopolitan credentials:

> ‘Good morning, good morning, Miss-‘
>
> ‘Mrs Jansen,’ Salvatini says.
>
> Shall I stand up or not stand up? Stand up, of course. I stand up.
>
> ‘Good morning.’
>
> I smile at him.
>
> ‘And how many languages do you speak?’
>
> He seems quite pleased. He smiles back at me. Affable, that’s the word. I suppose that’s why I think it’s a joke.
>
> ‘One,’ I say, and go on smiling.

> Now, what's happened?...Oh, of course…
>
> 'I understand French quite well.'
>
> He fidgets with the buttons on his coat.
>
> 'I was told that the receptionist spoke French and German fluently,' he says to Salvatini.
>
> 'She speaks French,' Salvatini says. 'Assez bien, assez bien.'
>
> Mr Blank looks at me with lifted eyebrows.
>
> 'Sometimes,' I say idiotically. (*EN* 368)

With Sasha's 'oh, of course…' we appear prompted to realise that the conversation, concerning in part Sasha's ability to speak French, is in fact itself taking place in French, a fact that she, too, seems temporarily to forget. Shortly afterward, Sasha's stream of consciousness indicates that, once again, it is another English speaker whom she perceives as putting her own polyglot capabilities to the test:

> I at once make up my mind that he wants to find out if I can speak German. All the little German I know flies out of my head. Jesus, help me! Ja, ja, nein, was kostet es, Wien ist eine sehr schöne Stadt...homo homini lupus (I've got that one, anyway), aus meinen grossen Schmerzen homo homini doh ré mi fah soh la ti doh... (*EN* 371)

The internal monologue here allows us to bear witness to the panicked unspooling of information in Sasha's mind, with her rehearsed German mingling with other pieces of rote learning drawn from music and Classical Latin. Here we see the extent to which, in Rhys's fictional Paris, language is conceived of as performance, or certainly as something to be learned, perfected and then deployed in the opportune moment in order to create the most convincing effect. As is continuingly apparent, though, these deployments are more often prone to unravelling even as they are enacted.

Sasha, though, turns out to fall victim not to her own lack of language skills, but to Mr Blank's, who, after Sasha has concluded that he does not, in fact, wish to see her speak German, makes the request 'will you please take this to the kise?' (*EN* 371). This seemingly inconsequential act of mispronunciation – after an extended panic, it is revealed both to Sasha and to the reader that Mr Blank had intended to pronounce the French word *caisse* – is in fact almost unique in Rhys's writing. In few other locations do we see an orthographic representation of a mispronunciation; here, though, an apparent nonsense word only gradually emerges as a faltering attempt to use a French word. Unlike previous examples, here the reader is in fact implicated in the misunderstanding; the brief crisis of meaning thus emerges apparently in real time, with the reader following Sasha on a doomed trip around the shop floor with no better idea of what she is seeking than she herself has. There is thus a more than passing resemblance here to the classic Conradian tactic of 'delayed decoding', except that in this case what is to be decoded is not an issue of narrative progress so much as a punchline; as Elaine Savory has remarked, we can read this episode as a 'direct, brilliant social satire' which ridicules the attempted polyglossia of a character like Mr Blank.[25] This is in contrast to Carole Angier, who suggests a slightly less directed humour in this passage, arguing that the episode 'is a sustained exercise in Kafkaesque absurdity, funnily horrible, horribly funny. In it Sasha searches for she-knows-not-what, the holy grail, the 'kise' – the keys?'[26] Even after the linguistic issue has been clarified, though, the question still remains which is central to that of the previous example from *Good Morning, Midnight*: precisely what kinds of questions are being raised when two English people converse, in Paris, in French? While simple equivalences between the languages an individual speaks and their nationality are avoided or consciously ignored, the question still remains as to precisely

[25] Elaine Savory, *Jean Rhys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.123.
[26] Angier, p.378.

what relationship exists between a character's linguistic proficiency and their own enacting of identity.

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These incidences, in which pairs of characters converse (or attempt to) in a second language, serve to highlight the performed aspects of language in these novels. When Sasha's stream-of-consciousness makes us party to her rehearsing of her lines before and after intense social interactions, we are offered a glimpse into the psychic realities of Rhys's multilingual milieu. From this, we can extrapolate a reading of Rhys's language which casts these multilingual events as deeply unnatural, grotesque and deliberate performances of cultural ease which, while appearing as incidental if hostile interactions, betray a fraught and psychologically complex process of adaptation to the cosmopolitan environs of London and Paris. Indeed, the two stream-of-consciousness novels allow us to see that barely any act of multilingual performance comes unencumbered by anxieties over usage, and while naturally we are only privileged to those of the protagonists, this reality invites further ridicule, too, of those incidental characters (such as the unnamed 'red-haired girl' and Mr Blank) who seemingly offer more strident acts of self-translation.

A return to Tyrus Miller's elaboration of the nature of late modernist aesthetics is useful here. For Miller, one of the stylistic features which marked the transition from high modernist to late modernist writing was a new-found deployment of particular forms of satire, or parody:

> [The late modernists] developed a repertoire of means for unsettling the signs of formal craft that testified to the modernist writer's discursive mastery. Through a variety of satiric and parodic strategies, they weakened the formal cohesion of the modernist novel and sought to deflate its symbolic resources, reducing

> literary figures at points to a bald literalness or assimilating them to the degraded forms of extraliterary discourse.[27]

Thus Rhys's deliberate lampooning of those occasions wherein multilingualism is used as a means of establishing social superiority resembles not only a derision directed toward the interpersonal reality which these acts supposedly represent, but a tying-together of form and content in a way which also highlights the shortcomings of modernist form. These represent occasions wherein a valorisation of linguistic capability would seem, too, like an uncomplicated reassertion of the stylistics of high modernism. Instead, Rhys self-consciously allows their unravelling to unfold across the text, in so doing ridiculing her own fictional creations, but also overly-coherent stylistics which may obscure the social and psychic realities.

Rhys's apparent lack of confidence in the possibilities of second languages extends, too, to written language, which is also be subjected to acts of defamiliarisation. What we see in Rhys is an occasional foregrounding of acts of written communication in order that they, too, can be revealed as participating in a troubled multilingualism. This is in contrast to a text like *Heart of Darkness*, which is notable in its inability to assimilate the textual artefacts which nevertheless exist within it; the Harlequin's Russian notes on a seaman's manual are unfathomable to Marlow, and of Kurtz's written report on 'Savage Customs' we see little first-hand but the scrawled post-scriptum 'Exterminate all the brutes!', which Marlow later tears off.[28] This is in contrast to the lawyer's letters in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*: first one arrives which is 'typewritten in English' (*EN* 253), and a few pages later we see the final one, which begins '*Enclosed please find our cheque for one thousand five hundred francs (fcs. 1,500).*' (*EN* 257).

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[27] Miller, p.20.
[28] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.155.

This time, instead, we read that 'The words '*Quinze cents francs*' were written in a round, clear hand', the novel drawing attention both to the handwritten status of this second letter, and to the fact that it was evidently composed in French, the narrator having done for us the work of translation (*EN* 257).

More intriguing still in the depth of its multilingual possibilities is a letter written by Stephan Zelli, Marya's husband in *Quartet* – here Rhys demonstrates that private communication, too, falls foul of the shortcomings of a partial multilingualism. The language in the letter is curious in a number of ways, and for the full effect of this to be clear it is necessary to quote it here in full:

> A letter from Stephan arrived next morning.
>
> *My dear Mado,*
>
> *I fear that you must be most unquiet. Still I could not write for the reason that I was not allowed to up till yet. When I came in that evening I found two men waiting for me and they showed me the warrant for my arrest. I am accused of selling stolen pictures and other things. This is ridiculous. However, here I am, and I don't think that they will let me go as quickly as all that. Except I can find a very good lawyer. Everything will depend on my lawyer. Come to see me on Thursday, the day of the visits, and I will try to explain things. My dear, I have such a cafard.*
>
> *Stephan* (*EN* 150)

The language of this letter is immediately striking. The choice of 'cafard' is unusual as an English loanword, but invites a further connotation: as well as sadness or depression, in French it can also mean an informant, a snitch, a reading surely invited by the criminal context of the letter's composition. The grammar, too, is deployed in unusual ways; 'most unquiet' at best sounds peculiarly antiquated, and 'except I can find a very

good lawyer' is even more arresting. Perhaps most bizarre of all is the redundancy and ungrammatical sentence structure in 'still I could not write for the reason that I was not allowed to up till yet'. There are a range of potential interpretations of this, and examples from elsewhere in Rhys's output might lead to the conclusion that we are reading a translation from French; whether this would be conducted by Marya or by the author would be less clear. In fact, in a move which would be unusual if applied to one of Rhys's incidences of spoken multilingualism, Rhys provides an explanation, stating shortly later that 'Marya folded her letter, which was written in English on cheap, blue-lined paper'. While questions regarding the language being spoken or the extent to which characters are understanding one another are often left deliberately unanswered, here Rhys provides the answer in-text: the letter is written in English, and thus any limitations in the language are a result of Stephan's attempts to commit his own broken English to paper. Just as in the case of Mr Blank's clumsy pronunciation, we can ascribe a rather simple and blunt conclusion to this – Mr Blank speaks bad French, and Stephan speaks bad English – although we have already been told that Stephan 'spoke English fairly well in a harsh voice and (when he was nervous) with an American accent' (*EN* 140). More pertinently, though, this extract shares with more public examples a concern with the boundaries between social spheres, and the fog of miscommunication which arises at them: just as in the case of the meeting of the executive Mr Blank with the receptionist Sasha, here the border between Marya and the criminal underworld in which her husband is implicated is characterised by a muddle of mistranslation.

Strategies of parody and mockery, then, abound in these novels. As Miller goes on to note, though, these writing strategies among late modernists tend to result in a kind of mirthless laughter in which the actual subject of ridicule is lost, swallowed into a wider social reality, or conflated with the authorial voice itself. This, in turn, stems from the initial conditions in which these strategies are deployed – the absurdity of a

changing and hostile world and the individual seeking to find a place within it. As Miller writes, 'the mind's recognition of the world's alterity is also a self-recognition. The mirthless laugh is the event of this recognition.'[29] Concerns over this ridicule which seems not to know its own direction are also raised quite literally in Rhys's unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please*, such as in this humorous passage:

> We were reciting a poem in which the word 'froth' occurred, and Honour refused to pronounce the word as Mr Heath did. 'Froth' said the elocution master. 'Frawth' said the pupil…There was no end to the scandal. Honour was taken away from the school by her mother, who had written a book on the proper pronunciation of English.[30]

The wryness of Rhys's relating of this incident conceals a much more ambivalent take on questions of accent and linguistic propriety. We might imagine from the comedy of such an extract that Rhys sneered at such narrow and classist ideas of pronunciation and elocution. Such a perspective must be tempered, though, by the similar – if less dramatic – circumstances of her own ejection from the Academy of Dramatic Arts, wherein the Caribbean character of her own accent was considered too great an impediment to her progress by her teachers. Rhys's father was made aware of this and promptly withdrew her from the school. That this disappointment would have an enduring effect on Rhys seems a fair conclusion, and, as her biographers observe, not only did she develop a habit of speaking at an almost-inaudible whisper, but she took distinctly 'U' affectations to heart, and 'to the end of her life she too said 'chimney piece' and 'looking glass', never 'mantel' or 'mirror'; to the end of her life she too hated the sound of cockney.'[31]

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[29] Miller, p.60.
[30] Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: an unfinished autobiography* (London: Penguin, 1981), p.103.
[31] Angier, p.48. See also Lilian Pizzicchini, *The Blue Hour* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).

Rhys's unusual degree of concern for the performance of identity *within* language is complemented by a similar concern in her biography for such encounters *across* languages. Just as we see performance anxieties complicating the delivery of language by characters in her fictions, or the stresses of social expectations prompting complete linguistic amnesia, similar such episodes can be found in *Smile Please*, as when Rhys, with a French tutee, attempts to hail a taxi only to find that 'the taxi-driver looked at us both with a very doubtful expression, and all my French had deserted me. I could only say, '*Nous sommes perdus*.'[32] This forms part of an attitude of lifelong self-criticism on Rhys's part which is given a particularly ambivalent instantiation in the case of her language usage, with Carole Angier drawing attention to particularly illuminating example from late in Rhys's life:

> In February [1970]…a team came to interview her for French television. This was a revealing little episode. First, of course, that she'd agreed to be on French television at all, when she'd categorically refused to be on English – 'Too nervous!' (although she seems to have managed to forget it was television, in order to face doing it)…as soon as the interview began, she said, every word of French 'flew out of my head'. (Just like Sasha, when she thinks Mr Blank wants to test her German: 'All the little German I know flies out of my head'). Yet Maryvonne, who was there, was '*astonished* at how she could say exactly what she wanted in French.'[33]

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There is a tension at play between the intense psychic realism with which Rhys treats the multilingual, and by extension issues of group dynamics and social belonging,

[32] *Smile Please*, p.150.
[33] Angier, p.598.

and the stylistic flourishes of parody and mockery which may, in contrast, invite us to consider Rhys's treatment of language as intentionally overwrought, exaggerated and ridiculed. This in turn invites a paradoxical consideration of the kinds of realism which might underlie these performed and dramatised worlds. Juliet Taylor-Batty briefly glosses the function of the multilingual in Rhys's novels thus:

> In Rhys, translation becomes constitutive of style, but is still, ultimately, mimetic: translational discourse depicts the reality of the colonial migrant, and English/French interlingual effects serve to represent Anglophone characters in Paris.[34]

While this seems inarguably to be the case, we should be cautious of settling upon too rigid an understanding of the purpose of the multilingual facets of Rhys's writing. After all, while it is true that the meetings, combinations and conflations of English and French in the novels serve to represent Anglophones in Paris, this is an explanation which tells us little as to why they are there – after all, Rhys could simply tell rather than show us that these interactions take place. The performed and satirical depictions of the multilingual which we have already seen, too, complicate the notion of mimesis which Taylor-Batty suggests here; while it is clear that Rhys wishes to represent *something*, the exaggerated and overwrought depictions of language in the novels tend to run counter to so direct a notion of representation.

Raymond Williams identifies in *The Country and the City* a historical trend in English fiction for in-text reconstruction of purportedly spoken languages and dialects, gesturing to a particular character which the phenomenon develops through the Victorian period and into the twentieth century:

[34] Juliet Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), p.13.

> Examples of deliberately varied orthography can be collected from as early as the Elizabethans: Shakespeare himself did it for Welsh and French speakers, and versions of a 'rural' dialect – a conflation of regions – also became commonplace…But the systematic convention of class modes of speech belongs, effectively, to the late nineteenth century, in a period of obviously increasing class consciousness which was extending to just these parts of behaviour… it is a significant mark of a way of seeing which has been praised for its naturalism and for its apparent exclusion of self-conscious authorial commentary. The real point is that the 'commentary' is now completely incorporated; it is part of a whole way of seeing, at a 'sociological' distance.[35]

Here Williams suggests that, through writers such as Dickens and Hardy, by the turn of the twentieth century the practice of orthographically depicting variations in language, dialect and accent had become densely bound together with notions of class thanks to the increase of class consciousness in more general life. Williams's critique, though, is that while a naïve reading of this phenomenon would be to treat it as a way of permitting the inclusion in a text of voices which may be radically different from those of the author, the reality is that the author's own mode of seeing becomes incorporated into the means of depiction: voices may be defamiliarised, but they still say exactly what the author wants them to.

Williams's perspective here leaves us with a tantalising question. If, for writers of the Victorian period, orthographic reconstruction allowed for the smuggling-in of authorial social commentary under the guise of a rigorous naturalism, how are we to continue along these lines of analysis when presented with the works of an experimental author which do not purport to be naturalist at all? The distinction is more intricate

[35] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* [1973] (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), p.226.

than it may at first seem – after all, we naturally assume that stream-of-consciousness narratives are not naturalist, but are they not still essentially purporting to mimetically reconstruct a reality, even if this reality takes place inside a character's head?

A radically different but equally useful distinction between works of art which are realist and those which are more abstract is offered by Roman Jakobson. Jakobson establishes an essential divide in the varied forms of representation which a work can offer which is allegorised, or linked at some basic level, with the psychological condition of aphasia. Aphasics, Jakobson suggests, respond to their condition in two distinct ways: either through recourse to contiguity or similarity. That is, when an individual becomes 'lost for words', they seek an alternative mode of expression which stands in for the elusive sign either in the form of something which is similar to or resembles it, or through something which is a part of or closely associated with it. These two responses thus govern Jakobson's categorisation of literary works (and art forms more generally):

> The primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of Romanticism and Symbolism has been repeatedly acknowledged, but it is still insufficiently realized that it is the predominance of metonymy which underlies and actually predetermines the so-called Realist trend, which belongs to an intermediary stage between the decline of Romanticism and the rise of Symbolism and is opposed to both.[36]

Thus for Jakobson – who states shortly afterward that 'prose…is forwarded essentially by contiguity'[37] – realism, which emerged in the nineteenth century as the dominant mode of prose writing, is characterised as a form by a reliance on metonymy (or

[36] Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances' in *Language in Literature*, eds. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (London, Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 1987), p.111.
[37] Jakobson, p.114.

contiguity) as a narrative device. Complicating Jakobson's thesis, David Lodge applies this idea to modernist fiction, suggesting that such a neat opposition between the metonymic and metaphorical modes breaks down when it encounters the stylistic innovations of modernist writers, ultimately drawing the conclusion that modernist prose is particularly noteworthy insofar as it combines these two registers: 'while it seems true that Modernist fiction belongs to the metaphoric mode in Jakobson's scheme, this is perfectly compatible with the retention and exploitation of metonymic writing on an extensive scale.'[38]

The further complication we encounter when looking to read Jakobson alongside Rhys will likely now be clear: Rhys's novels, probably more so than other modernist works if not to their complete exclusion, deal not only with metaphor and metonymy as narrative devices, but to a great extent construct their narratives around actual instances of aphasia. By returning briefly to a previous example from *Voyage in the Dark*, we can immediately see the ways in which Jakobson's opposition between metaphor and metonymy is interrupted. Anna, who finds herself in a strikingly foreign situation, is apparently lost for words when she ultimately settles on 'Elles sont jolies, ces fleurs-là'; but is this a metaphorical or a metonymic construction? On one hand, the flowers have nothing to do with the situation; they are simply an example of aesthetic beauty, deeply removed from the present reality. On the other, much as Mrs Robinson wishes they were not, they are a part of the room, if only a temporary one; they represent a brief digression into the surroundings, a moment of dwelling on a component part of a wider reality. With the next piece of imagery, the distinction is again unclear: Anna focuses on Mrs Robinson's clothing, the shape of her body, her way of carrying herself, in a formal move which is apparently metonymic. And yet,

[38] David Lodge, 'The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy' in *Modernism*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1976)

when Anna thinks 'that was the only thing French about her', a reversal is enacted – the emphasis on individual parts is apparently only in order to suggest their discontinuity with the whole.

Following Williams's hypothesised 'sociological distance', then, we can see that, according to these further understandings of realism, Rhys's narratives serve to leave unclear the question of how great this distance is. As Miller elaborates, the late modernist author is marked by just this absence of clarity:

> Late modernism is decisively marked by a minimal "positionality" of the authorial subject. That is to say, these texts bear the marks of an author without determinate social, moral, political, or even narrative location: isolated, in drift, and unstably positioned with respect to the work.[39]

The complicated relationship between, on the one hand, an intense and calculated psychic realism and, on the other, an exaggerated caricaturing of figures which embody techniques of belonging, serves to show just what is at stake here. The more intentionally parodic we read a scene such as this, the more apparent the object of lampoon appears to be: Anna's generalisations and hurried conclusions may appear as the product of an extended ridiculing of rigid notions of nationality, belonging and class, or they may be a much subtler unfolding of a social and psychic reality. Thus while these orthographic depictions of speech in languages other than English may serve a very direct mimetic function, they may also serve as conduits through which certain authorial and political perspectives are smuggled into the text.

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[39] Miller, p.63.

As this implies, the final facet of Rhys's textual multilingualism is the attention it invites to another form of realism – the social and political. If Rhys has rightly been recuperated and canonised by a generation of critics who have focused on the interiority of her novels, and their success in giving voice to a particularly female, often particularly postcolonial individual subjectivity, this need not detract from the fact that Rhys is evidently a writer who espouses a strong concern for the social and political, and a preoccupation with the ways in which human communities deal with wider issues of race, class, nationality, gender and so forth. If one facet of Rhys's characters is an occasionally detached, contemplative *flâneurie*, the companion means of understanding them is to place them within, alongside and between particular social groups, wherein they interact with ideas of inclusion and exclusion, prejudice and belonging. After all, as Andrew Hussey is keen to emphasise in the following extract, the Paris which lies at the heart of much of Rhys's fiction was marked by rapidly shifting social dynamics, changes in demographic makeup and endemic racial tensions:

> In the 1920s and early 1930s, Paris was filling up with many more different races and languages than ever before, even if these were well nigh invisible to well-heeled cultural tourists…In Paris in 1921, foreigners represented 5 per cent of the population. By 1930, this figure had doubled… A word that was widely used in the press at this time was the term *métèque*, a neologism from the ancient Greek word *metic*, which was used for aliens who had no citizenship in a Greek city. It was introduced into French by the right-winger Charles Maurras in the 1890s, at the height of the Dreyfus affair, and it became commonly applied to foreigners in France. Its use was always pejorative if not strictly speaking racist.[40]

[40] Andrew Hussey, *Paris: The Secret History*, pp.338-339.

Suspicion of foreigners, and a concern on the part of 'normal' Parisians at the rate at which the makeup of the city is changing, are phenomena which seldom lie far below the surface in Rhys's take on the city. Of note, too, is the way that these very real changes in Parisian demographics, economics and culture interacted with the city's artistic communities, as Miller draws attention to:

> The high calling of art that the modernists professed to follow had fallen prey to fashion and proven susceptible to banalization and vulgarizing imitation. Wyndham Lewis bitterly satirized the "apes of god" playing at bohemian existence, buying up fashionably humble studios in the artists' quarters at prices far beyond the means of struggling artists…As the fashion took hold, the cafés of Paris became more crowded with tourists seeking a look at the "lost generation" than with the writers and artists who ostensibly made up the spectacle.[41]

Forming a response to both of these phenomena, Deborah Parsons identifies one of the strengths (for our purposes, at least) of Rhys's particular approach to chronicling Parisian life as a tendency not to linger too obsessively in the city's expatriate communities and locations. Instead, Rhys and her characters wander further from the beaten track in pursuit of the porous membrane which connects this scene with Paris's more entrenched communities, establishments and attitudes:

> She may not portray the 'Latin Quarter' of the expatriate community – the social hubs of the Dome and the boulevard Saint-Germain – but instead she retreats into the Paris that exists on the margins of this society, its back streets and dilapidating small hotels. Moreover, these are essentially depicted through

[41] Miller, p.30.

> surrealistic atmosphere, conversation, and social encounter rather than naturalistic spatial description.[42]

This approach to categorising the nature of Rhys's exploration of the city may help build on the distinction between the naturalistic and the experimental which we encountered earlier through Williams. While Rhys's novels do reveal some attention to the geographical realities of the city – identifying particular streets, landmarks and establishments – her approach is clearly not to develop a sociological picture of particular communities, building a realistic, bustling city from the ground up. Instead, the heart of Rhys's cities lies in the myriad individual interactions which take place within it which are not realistic so much as they are exaggerated caricatures, occasionally grotesque and vulgar displays of inclusion and exclusion which are conducted in equally exaggerated and overwrought language.

One example of Rhys's exploration of socio-political attitudes through the social encounters which take place in Paris's seedier establishment takes place early in *Quartet*, at the Hotel de l'Univers where Marya Zelli is resident. Christina Britzolakis has drawn attention to the hotel as a distinctly Rhysian space, standing in not only for Rhys's ongoing preoccupation with exile and homelessness, but with the contradictory role of the cosmopolis itself, a reflection of Paris as 'on the one hand, a place of refuge for Europeans fleeing political or ethnic persecution, and, on the other, a site of increasing xenophobia and racial paranoia in a climate of political and economic volatility.'[43] This is a very typical example of the way Rhys depicts glancing encounters with what are

[42] Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 139.
[43] Christina Britzolakis, '"This way to the exhibition": genealogies of urban spectacle in Jean Rhys's interwar fiction', *Textual Practice* 21.3 (Sep 2007), pp.460-1.

obviously deeply-rooted sentiments through incidental characters, here the petty bourgeois *patron* and *patronne* of the hotel:

> 'Ah, all these people,' she thought.
>
> Madame Hautchamp meant all of them. All the strange couples who filled her hotel – internationalists who invariably got into trouble sooner or later. She went back into the sitting-room and remarked as much to Monsieur Hautchamp, who was reading the newspaper, and Monsieur Hautchamp shrugged his shoulders; then, with an expression of profound disapproval, he continued his article which, as it happened, began thus:
>
> '*Le mélange des races est à la base de l'evolution humaine vers le type parfait.*'
>
> 'I don't think,' thought Monsieur Hautchamp – or something to that effect.'
>
> (*EN* 150)

Implied, here, is an unambiguous and rather withering dismissal of the attitudes of the French-born Parisian bourgeois. The overemphasis of 'all' – 'all these people…all of them…all the strange couples' – serves to suggest that a tendency to homogenise lies at the heart of Parisian suspicion of foreigners. More widely, the turn to Monsieur Hautchamp's newspaper serves to establish a connection between this kind of individual suspicion and wider narratives of racial politics in Europe at the time – the Hautchamps' exasperation with their clients thus seems to represent a facet of a wider political outlook as Monsieur Hautchamp scoffs at the newspaper's attempted riposte to the eugenics movement. Of note, too, is the way in which the theme of translation appears to open a channel for the authorial voice here; the qualifier 'or something to that effect' marks 'I don't think' as an approximating translation (of *je ne crois pas*, or something similar, we are left to assume), questioning but seemingly also dismissing Hautchamp's response.

We can look, too, to the kinds of political attitudes which are represented in Rhys's London and find further examples of characters which seem to serve as caricatures of thinking regarding nationality and race which appears to have been in general circulation at the time. Ethel Matthews, one of Anna Morgan's series of London landladies in *Voyage in the Dark*, is one example of a kind of London foil to the Parisian middle-class attitudes of the Hautchamps in *Quartet*. Ethel, too, inhabits a rather nebulous space on the fringes of respectable London society, running a small business which evidently provides her with the money for her own flat, allowing her to take Anna in as a lodger. As a masseuse, though, Ethel is keenly aware of the less respectable spheres of London commerce, alluding to the nominally similar businesses which serve as fronts for prostitution:

> …Ethel talking about how respectable she was. 'If I were to tell you all I know about some of the places that advertise massage. That Madame Fernande, for instance – well, the things I've heard about her and the girls she's got at her place. And how she manages to do it without getting into trouble I don't know. I expect it costs her something.' (*EN* 99)

Just as in Rhys's Paris, rising levels of immigration and the accompanying diversification of the city are tacitly associated with negative change. Here, though, as opposed to the Parisians' fear that their hotel's international clientele are bringing with them the twin possibilities of crime and political upheaval, Ethel instead identifies the changing cultural landscape of London with moral decline. Significantly, the secondhand rumours which Ethel dispenses implicate a woman who is, or purports to be, French, in the running of prostitution in London. More than this, Ethel begins to suggest rather conspiratorially that, while the aforementioned Madame Fernande is apparently able to

bribe her way out of trouble, it is Ethel herself who bears the brunt of the police's attention:

> 'Did I tell you about what happened last week? Well, it just shows you. The day after I'd put in my advertisement there were detectives calling and wanting to see my references and my certificates. I showed them some references, and some certificates too. I was wild. Treating me as if I was a dirty foreigner.' (*EN* 99)

The narrative progress of this extract is very much the same as that of the previous lines from *Quartet*. In a seeming microcosm of the development and acceptance of xenophobic politics, a casual suspicion of foreigners on the part of small business-owners gradually spills over into sentiments apparently more openly bigoted. The irony in this case, of course, is that Anna herself is marked throughout the text as foreign by those she encounters, and yet Ethel is apparently unmoved by or unaware of her non-European heritage.

While some qualities are clearly shared by Rhys's London and Paris and their inhabitants, we may find that it is in fact in their dissimilarities that some of the more revealing aspects of these novels are realised. In basing her fictions between these two cities, we need not – perhaps should not – assume that what Rhys is enacting is simply a homogenised notion of the 'modernist city', which is characterised by cosmopolitan encounters and multiracial pools of characters, but ultimately devoid of geographic and demographic particularity. Certainly, it is true that if we look back over these two extracts, we can see that they hold a great deal in common: the characters' bourgeois status, the domestic setting apparently interrupted by outsiders, the fear of attention from law enforcement as a result, and so forth. Indeed, the excerpts seem almost identical in structure, except that between the two there is a remainder: the category of

race which is conspicuous by its absence in the London example (Anna's possibly multi-racial background having been established as a concern earlier in the novel) just happens to correspond with the sentiment which is similarly conspicuous in the Paris example, through its appearing in untranslated French.

It may seem that this is an overly neat equivalence to draw, and it is true that these remainders are not necessarily as immediately apparent as this. Nevertheless, the recurrences of certain narrative themes, attitudes, spoken expressions and physical locations across the four novels begin to appear so wilful as to strongly encourage this kind of analysis. Another example, for our purposes, appears on the first page of *After Leaving Mr MacKenzie*:

> The landlady was a thin, fair woman with red eyelids. She had a low, whispering voice and a hesitating manner, so that you thought: 'She can't possibly be a Frenchwoman.' Not that you lost yourself in conjectures as to what she was because you didn't care a damn anyway. (*EN* 251)

Here, in the novel which precedes *Voyage in the Dark*, is an earlier source of the same kind of expression which follows Anna's brief discussion of Mrs Robinson's flowers. The similarity is again reasonably clear; in both cases, the protagonist, through recourse to another woman's appearance, rejects the possibility of her being French. The two extracts, read alongside each other, though, leave little clue as to what a genuine Frenchwoman ought to look like: Julia dismisses the possibility in this case based on the landlady's low voice and hesitating manner, whereas Mrs Robinson is bustling, authoritative and verbose. The landlady is thin and fair, whereas Mrs Robinson is 'fair and fat'.

In both of these cases, it seems that somewhere between Rhys's Paris and London, characters' certainties regarding questions of politics and identity are being

muddled, complicated or lost.[44] While it may seem that it is the similarities between these apparent recurrences which are noteworthy, I would suggest that we can discern more through attention to what does not reappear, or is, one could argue, mistranslated or left untranslated between the two occurrences. That is, the particular politics of the multilingual which arise from Rhys's Paris and London do not do so through a synthetic process, whereby the two together give rise to some abstract 'politics of the city'; rather, the multilingual component of Rhys's writing lies exactly within the non-homogeneities of the modernist metropolis (or metropolises), and the refusal to acknowledge fixities of identity which this entails. Thus, we might read the latter example not in order to settle upon a proposition like 'French women have dark hair' or 'French women don't wear red', but as a perspective on the politics of identity which refuses to subscribe to simple correspondences as holding potential for identification.

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If – and this seems a contentious claim in the first place – Rhys's fictional works can be said to espouse, endorse or convey a particular political outlook, it seems persuasive, then, to consider that, rather than being worn brashly on its sleeve, it lies buried and deeply interwoven with Rhys's characteristic style and language. Or, more specifically, I would argue that in the case of these four Rhys novels, a particular conception of politics, or response to political perspectives, arises specifically from their form. While certain modernist deployments of linguistic alterity have been identified with a clear and acknowledged political agenda – Rebecca Walkowitz has noted, for example, the ways in which Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* 'identifies translation, that engine of homogeneity, as a necessary component of anti-fascist and anti-patriarchal

[44] We might also consider the ways in which these intertextual mistranslations function across time as well as space; in an example discussed earlier, Marya's confident but duplicitous response to the attentions of men on the Boulevard St Michel has been lost by the time of a seemingly similar (and geographically identical) encounter takes place for Julia.

association'[45] – such an agenda is not acknowledged in or by Rhys, who did not write critically and whose reflections on her own work are scant at best. This is an idea which has been succinctly expressed by Elaine Savory, who writes that

> In the best and most creative ways, [Rhys's] textuality demonstrates a refusal to be absolutely coherent and therefore an acceptance of unresolved ambiguity, ambiguity which permits creative innovation and which is in effect politically anarchist, in the sense of resisting centralised and authoritative readings of experience.[46]

Just as in the extracts above, Rhys starkly lays bare, seemingly without comment or judgement, myriad political points of view which demonstrate direct political engagement from across the political spectrum – from anarchism and bolshevism to fascism – and from multiple levels of the class system, from the bourgeois reverence of the status quo worn proudly by the Hautchamps, to the subtle implications of Marya's husband Stephan Zelli in proletarian, revolutionary politics from the same novel. By contrast, the protagonists of Rhys's novels are insular, even self-absorbed to the point of a kind of refusal to engage politically, even as they are themselves the figures who are at the centre of the political strife of the times which surrounds them – single women, expatriates, possibly of mixed race, and so forth.

This is not to suggest, though, that we need read these novels as *apolitical*. Indeed, it is clear from the extracts discussed above that political thought, both implicit and explicit, circulates freely within them. While contemporary political issues are arguably presented only in order to be ridiculed or undermined, questions of identity

[45] Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'For translation: Virginia Woolf, J.M. Coetzee and transnational comparison' in *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction* ed. David James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[46] Savory, p.x.

politics at a more abstract level are clearly the subject of a great deal more narrative ambivalence. Thus, while characters may express conviction regarding the identities of others, such convictions are found to be based on a foundation which is ultimately shifting and ill-defined. And yet this very suspicion with which identity politics are treated can itself be regarded as a political act – this is perhaps what Savory refers to as a kind of political anarchism.

Extracts such as the conversation between the Hautchamps above are illustrative of another characteristic of the political slant to Rhys's work. While the artificial division between the two issues has been exacerbated by the academic division of Rhys's readers into modernist and postcolonial camps, it seems clear that racial and political thinking lie very close together in these early novels. Just as Rhys's credentials as a postcolonial writer deeply concerned with issues of race do not begin and end with *Wide Sargasso Sea* or even *Voyage in the Dark*, the early metropolitan novels of Paris and London serve to starkly remind us that race lay at the heart of European political thought in the early decades of the twentieth century, from the Dreyfus affair and the eugenics movement through to the rise of fascism.

With regard to Rhys's thinking on race, critics can seem starkly divided between two apparently contradictory perspectives. Savory, on one hand, writes that 'her concerns about insoluble divisions caused by race contrast with Wilson Harris's challenge to essentialisms in his mythic construction of liminal identities,'[47] suggesting that the approach to race which Rhys espouses is almost an essentialist one, or at least one in which racial characteristics bear a socio-political weight which is not easily overturned. H. Adlai Murdoch, meanwhile, takes the view that Rhys's depictions of race and racial issues takes part in a very direct project of undermining and collapsing the

[47] Savory, p.xv.

boundaries between sharply essential conceptions of race, situating her as an early exponent or anticipator of the kind of Caribbean thought which would later embrace an idea of creolization as a radically emancipatory and revolutionary act:

> By revealing and underlining the doubleness and instability in contemporary conceptions of social relations and "racial" categories, then, Rhys undermines our perception of both metropole and colony and of notions of belonging and exclusion.[48]

The project of undermining is one which is clearly manifested in Rhys's multilingual writing strategy. However disparate we might consider the nature of Rhys's multilingual writing practices and the nature of the commentary which thy provide upon the socio-political realities of Paris in terms of class, race, nationality and so forth, we might hypothesise that one unifying thread is that these means of writing serve to disrupt simplistic notions of inclusion and exclusion which lie at the heart of these concerns. What is clear is that Rhys's urban environments, even while they are heavily class- and race-conscious, and that issues of class and race circulate freely within them, are characterised by an absence of fixity between these ideas and language. Language in these early novels does not map simply onto a social reality, engaging in a simple system of correspondences wherein linguistic variation functions as a simple cypher for racial and national diversity, or for class stratification. Instead, the linguistic referents which seek to pin down and fix identities are themselves revealed to circulate within a multilingual cacophony, which makes a mockery of such simple identifications. Characters stumble over their words, muddle their vocabularies, inadvertently code-

[48] H. Adlai Murdoch, 'Rhys's Pieces: Unhomeliness as Arbiter of Caribbean Creolization', *Callaloo* 26.1 (Winter 2003), 256.

switch and disavow their own linguistic origins, disrupting their own position within a cosmopolitan order even if, through language, they seek to fix the positions of others.

Following Miller, we can identify in Rhys a productive undermining of some of the fixities of modernist form, stylistic flourishes which could be said to elide the socio-political problematics which form a backdrop to the writing. There is, though, an embeddedness inherent in Rhys's deployments of multilingual style, an often sophisticated deployment of, for example, multilingual puns in the service of extending or pluralising interpretation. Nevertheless, Rhys allows her modernist stylistics to fragment and fracture, pulling apart the cosmopolitan promise of multilingualism and, in so doing, revealing the ambivalent adaptations of individuals to the realities of a changing, modernising world. Ultimately, Rhys's four metropolitan novels reveal a deep interweaving of modernist form and socio-psychic reality. Tentative adoptions of what we might consider to be a quintessential modernist notion of linguistic freedom serve to highlight the multilingual problematic which lies at the heart of Rhys's writing.

3. Self, Dialect and Dialogue: The Multilingual Modernism of Wilson Harris

Wilson Harris's 2001 novel *The Dark Jester*, a kind of dream narrative in which the narrator visualises the Spanish conquest of Peru and the meeting between the conquistador Pizarro and Atahualpa, the last emperor of the Incas, portrays the unfolding of European colonialism in the Americas through interlinguistic encounter. *The Dark Jester* comes late in Harris's authorial career, which is remarkable in both its length – Harris began his career submitting stories to the Guyanese periodical *Kyk-over-Al* in the late 1940s – and the prolific output of works therein. Harris's first novel of more than twenty, *Palace of the Peacock*, appeared in 1960; his last, *The Ghost of Memory*, in 2006. The mode we see here is typical of Harris's narratives, which tend to travel across time and employ dream sequences to establish transhistorical connections, particularly between the era of decolonisation and pre-colonial cultures and mythologies of the Americas: 'eschewing realism for a kind of simultaneity between past and present', as Peter Hitchcock has characterised it.[1] Pizarro enters the room 'like the Shadow of fate and dominating power', bringing with him a bishop and a translator.[2] There thus proceeds to unfold a series of partial and incorrect translations, as Atahualpa and Pizarro's bishop find that each of their metaphysical perspectives do not translate into the language of the other. As the bishop suggests that a tribute of gold will save not only the Inca people, but Atahualpa himself from eternal damnation, we see that:

> Atahualpa did not respond and the Bishop restored the Cross to his neck. Atahualpa's eyes looked through the Bishop and out into the Storm and up into the shadowed features of his father, the sun. The translator was perturbed as to

[1] Peter Hitchcock, *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p.70.
[2] Wilson Harris, *The Dark Jester* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p.43. Having been captured by the conquistadors, Atahualpa sought to buy his freedom by filling a room with gold – the so-called 'Ransom Room' still stands in the Peruvian city of Cajamarca. Upon receipt of the gold, the conquistadors murdered Atahualpa regardless.

> whether he had conveyed the Bishop's message. I felt there was more to the translator than I understood.[3]

The narrator notes the distress of the translator, who seems to recognise the shortcomings of his art; he has, after all, been called upon to convey to the supposedly divine Sapa Inca the superior worth of the Judeo-Christian tradition, a daunting task which appears to go beyond mere translation. Thus, moments later, the Bishop asserts that 'you worship Horses, I am told by this translator, and Birds and Serpents. Horses are unfamiliar to you but you seem to know them as gods returning home' and, finally:

> 'Nature is a devil,' the Bishop was saying to the translator. 'Tell the Inca so. Tell him that nature and natures which fall outside of the Orthodoxy of the Church lead to pagan devilries. There is only one way to worship, to find God. We have fought Crusades to make this clear.'[4]

The evangelising tendencies of the conquistadors in *The Dark Jester* do nothing to conceal the even baser impulses of violence and greed underpinning them, and Harris depicts the acts of colonisation as comprising simple violent acts which take on a lasting, transhistorical significance. Harris's account, though, is also keen to emphasise the proximity of language to colonial domination; indeed, the foundational act depicted here is one of linguistic exchange, albeit imperfectly mediated, possibly deliberately manipulated, by the unnamed translator, seemingly standing both for the gulf in linguistic understanding between coloniser and colonised and for the potential duplicity of language as an instrument of control.

As the preeminent novelist of postcolonial Guyana, Harris's novels, which deal generally with the history of European colonialism across the Americas, seldom refrain

[3] *The Dark Jester*, pp.44-45.
[4] *The Dark Jester*, p.47.

from addressing the more specific colonial history of his home country. *The Dark Jester*, which ostensibly deals with the Spanish colonisation of Peru, is in fact no exception, incorporating the legend of El Dorado, the lost Incan city of gold which generations of colonial myth in fact situated in the interior of Guyana:

> I dream I am Tupac Amaru in world theatre.
> I cross to Vilcabamba. My pursuers follow and find nothing but a smoking ruin like mist above water. I am there. Yet I have left for the Amazon. I seek El Dorado. It is precious to me as much as Troy was to King Priam and Cassandra.[5]

The syncretic approach to mythology, likening El Dorado to Troy, is another calling card of Harris's work, wherein we often find enacted a commitment to the potential for common identification across cultures by the structural underpinnings of mythology. As one account of Harris puts it, his work 'is a sustained meditation on the Caribbean as a meeting point of world history, wherein ancient Amerindian concepts and language forms continue to articulate with European, African and Asian postcolonial cultural forms, specifically through the physical landscapes of the Guyanese interior.'[6] Typically, though, if we see here a tacit embrace of the radical potential contained within myth, it is also possible to discern a more cautionary note, wherein mythic narrative can provide legitimation for ambitions of colonial control. Among such myths, El Dorado is surely one of the most notable: the rumour of the lost Inca city somewhere in the Guianas (the area now comprising Guyana, French Guiana and Suriname) 'sparked the

[5] *The Dark Jester*, pp.106-7.
[6] Patricia Noxolo and Marika Preziuso, 'Moving Matter: Language in Caribbean Literature as Translation between Dynamic Forms of Matter', *Interventions* 14.1 (2012), p.124.

imaginations and greed of British, French, and Dutch explorers alike'.[7] Indeed, Walter Raleigh's two published accounts of his voyages to Guiana include:

> His extensive description (generally based on hearsay) of Manoa [an alternative name for El Dorado], which he claimed to be the famous "City of Gold" sought by nearly every European explorer of the century. In Raleigh's assessment, Manoa and the surrounding kingdom of Guiana were in some way related to a branch of the Inca royal family, pushed out of Peru by Pizarro but maintaining a large portion of the kingdom's wealth.[8]

As artefacts of colonial history, Raleigh's accounts are illuminating insofar as they show European colonisers manufacturing a mythology to spur their imperial designs, while also offering an unusually stark account of the untrammelled greed for wealth ultimately underpinning such ventures. While no such city of gold ever existed, the gold itself did – metal extraction has long surpassed sugar production as the mainstay of the Guyanese economy.

In Harris's fiction, then, we can immediately begin to identify some of the particularities of postcolonial writing from Guyana. Harris, we will see, can be brought productively into dialogue with various other writers and writing from the Caribbean, but Guyana also stands apart from its neighbours in particular ways. A member of the Caribbean (CARICOM is headquartered in its capital, Georgetown) but on the South American mainland, it had previously formed part of a last enclave of the continent not subject to Spanish or Portuguese control (and remains the only English-speaking country in South America). The three Dutch colonies of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo were occupied by Britain during the early Napoleonic wars and unified as

[7] Joshua R. Hyles, *Guiana and the Shadows of Empire: Colonial and Cultural Negotiations at the Edge of the World* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014), p.4.
[8] Hyles, p. 16.

British Guiana in 1831. Against the contexts of the overthrow of slavery in Haiti (which left a gap in the world sugar market) and a growing sense that the abolition of slavery was imminent, the transition to British control was marked by a rapid increase in the slave population.[9] Following the abolition of slavery across the British empire in 1833, plantation owners sought a workable solution to the post-slave economy; the chief responses were the selling of plantations back to groups of ex-slaves (these became known as 'Free Negro Villages')[10] and the large-scale import of indentured labour from China (in the tens of thousands) and India (in the hundreds of thousands).[11] Now somewhat arbitrarily divided from neighbouring Suriname and nearby French Guiana by generations of colonial administration, much of the West of Guyana is also claimed by Spanish-speaking Venezuela. It is, we have seen, the inheritor of a syncretic mythology which promotes a strong archaeological connection to pre-Columbian civilisations which is less-commonly experienced elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Nevertheless, in seeking to record the historical rupture engendered by the arrival of European colonisers in the Americas, Harris positions himself among a tradition of linguistic-historical thought common to his Caribbean contemporaries. While the meeting of language and history forms a classic concern of postcolonial writing in the most general sense – Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin draw attention to 'the gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it', emphasising particularly 'those whose language is systematically destroyed by enslavement, and…those whose language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power' – these concerns have their

[9] Diana Paton, 'The Abolition of Slavery in the Non-Hispanic Caribbean', in Stephan Palmié and Francisco A. Scarano (eds.), *The Caribbean* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p.291.
[10] Hyles, p.45.
[11] Gad Heuman, 'Peasants, Immigrants, and Workers: The British and French Caribbean after Emancipation', in Stephan Palmié and Francisco A. Scarano (eds.), *The Caribbean* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p.357.

particularly regional iterations in the Caribbean and among Caribbean postcolonial writers.[12] For many writers of and from the Caribbean, the moment of colonisation marks a dual problematic insofar as it enacted simultaneously the destruction of history, both in its extermination of the pre-Columbian peoples of the Caribbean and its removal of African slaves from their own societies, and the destruction of language, both through forcing together the multiple African vernaculars of the slaves, and its imposition of the monoglot paradigm of the imperial power. This we have seen in Kamau Brathwaite's remarks concerning the 'submergence' of 'imported' language in the Caribbean.[13] For Brathwaite, the central problematic at the heart of the postcolonial writing of the Caribbean is the recuperation of this language, in order that postcolonial subjects can once again be the possessors of a language which is capable of conveying their experiences. This archaeology of pre-colonial experience is a project we can also find in the critical writing of Derek Walcott, who writes of the period before colonisation:

> In that aboriginal darkness the first principles are still sacred, the grammar and movement of the body, the shock of the domesticated voice startling itself in a scream. Centuries of servitude have to be shucked; but there is no history, only the history of emotion.[14]

Clear again here is the intertwining of language and history, as Walcott figures the pursuit of Caribbean history as the search for a 'grammar' and a 'domesticated voice'. Emphasising further this central lack, Walcott goes on to suggest that in order 'to record the anguish of the race', Caribbean peoples 'must return through a darkness

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[12] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* [2nd ed.] (London: Routledge, 2002), p.9.
[13] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984), p.7.
[14] Derek Walcott, *What The Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p.5.

whose terminus is amnesia. The darkness which yawns before them is terrifying.'[15] Walcott and Brathwaite thus both gesture toward an erasure of identity at the point of colonisation, aligning themselves with a response in Caribbean writing which J. Michael Dash has characterised as 'the effort to write the subject into existence'.[16]

These accounts are marked by a particularly archaeological vocabulary in their discussion of history, embracing a deep historical time-frame and emphasising acts of historical recovery in their discussion of the process of writing. Thus, too, do Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant, in their landmark essay 'In Praise of Creoleness', characterise early Caribbean writers as 'the precious keepers (often without their knowing) of the stones, of the broken statues, of the disarranged pieces of pottery, of the lost drawings, of the distorted shapes: of this ruined city which is our foundation'.[17] Herein appears to lie one of the most particular features of writing from the postcolonial Caribbean: the problem of language in the region cannot be extricated from the problem of history, and Caribbean writers thus cannot help but confront the two as a single phenomenon. Walcott's Nobel lecture, entitled 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', thus seems to pivot constantly between consideration of the attempt to recover a concrete sense of Caribbean history and the fashioning of a productive approach to language, culminating in the pithy expression that 'there is the buried language and there is the individual vocabulary, and the process of poetry is one of excavation and of self-discovery.'[18]

Turning to Harris, it is clear that these preoccupations underlie his writing. However – in no small part due to the particularities of colonial history in Guyana – Harris's oeuvre also reveals its own specific set of concerns. As we have seen, Harris's

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[15] Walcott, p.5.
[16] J. Michael Dash, 'Introduction', in Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p.xiii.
[17] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, 'In Praise of Creoleness', trans. Mohamed B. Taleb Khyar, *Callaloo* 13 (1990), p.886-7.
[18] Walcott, p.70.

writing foregrounds an attempt to establish connections between the experiences of colonial subjects of Guyana and their pre-colonial ancestors. Harris also – perhaps due to Guyana's unusual degree of ethnic diversity owing to the period of indentured labour which brought into the country numerous subjects from China, India and Portugal, and owing also to border disputes with its linguistically-distinct neighbours – foregrounds more thoroughly the multilingualism of the colonial period, as opposed to the enforced monolingualism of the colonial power. Thus, turning to Harris's own formulation of this postcolonial archaeology of language, we can see the foregrounding of a particularly distinctive response:

> He (the problematic slave) found himself spiritually alone since he worked side by side with others who spoke different dialects. The creative human consolation – if one dwells on it meaningfully today – lies in the search for a kind of inward dialogue and space when one is deprived of a ready conversational tongue and hackneyed comfortable approach.[19]

Harris, then, appears to echo the concerns of other thinkers of the Anglophone Caribbean, who are committed to the idea that language is both the form and the substance of an ongoing attempt in Caribbean writing to forge a consciousness free from the socio-political and epistemological constraints of the colonial past. Harris's position, though, also betrays a more oblique engagement with the collectivist notions of identity which we can discern, for example, in Walcott's discussion of the 'anguish of the race'. In fact, turning to a similar formulation in Walcott, it is possible to see more precisely the point from which Harris departs:

[19] Wilson Harris, 'Tradition in the West Indian Novel', in *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon Publications, 1967), p.33.

> Deprived of their original language, the captured and indentured tribes create their own, accreting and secreting fragments of an old, an epic vocabulary, from Asia and from Africa, but to an ancestral, an ecstatic rhythm in the blood that cannot be subdued by slavery or indenture.[20]

Through the archetype he calls the 'problematic slave', Harris identifies slavery in the Caribbean as a moment of Babelic rupture, wherein the individual subject is isolated though being transplanted into a multilingual environment. This, in turn, leads to Harris's own implied definition of the project of West Indian writing as a 'search for a kind of inward dialogue', offering an unusually individualist response to the problem, even while identifying this as a concession to the multilingual reality wherein the individual is 'deprived of a ready conversational tongue'. As compared to his contemporaries from the Anglophone Caribbean, Harris's pronouncement tends more closely toward Edouard Glissant's characterisation of colonisation in the Caribbean as a process of 'making strangers out of people who are not'.[21]

Harris thus seems to share, too, in the formulation found in 'In Praise of Creoleness' which describes Caribbean peoples as 'fundamentally stricken with exteriority'.[22] However, Harris marks himself as distinct from that body of Caribbean writing which takes as its central focus the embrace of hybridity and linguistic diversity in the service of pursuing a productive postcolonial literature. Harris appears much more ambivalent, citing multilingualism instead as a central problematic which bears within it the destructive, enforced hybridity engendered by slavery. For Harris, the colonisation of the Americas is conceived as a foundational act of linguistic rupture, and this immediately complicates received notions of the status of multilingualism in

[20] Walcott, p.70.
[21] Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p.5.
[22] Bernabé et al, p.886.

Caribbean writing. Harris's work stands in oblique relation to traditions of linguistic pluralism and *creolité* in the Caribbean, not rejecting pluralism *per se*, but acknowledging that it has a problematic history stretching from the very origins of colonialism in the region to the modern-day Caribbean. Harris is even quite explicit, in one autobiographical recollection, of the pejorative connotations of the term 'Creole' in his youth in Guyana, writing that 'sometimes the term *Creole* was implicitly or covertly hurled at us like a metaphoric brick (designed to alert us to our impure lineage and mixed race)'.[23]

Harris stands out among Caribbean writers, too, for being unusually strongly implicated in discussions surrounding the adoption and refinement in postcolonial contexts of the tropes and techniques commonly associated with European modernism. Jahan Ramazani has perhaps most succinctly glossed the way in which European modernism was taken up and productively deployed by generations of post-war postcolonial writers:

> Far from being an obstruction that had to be dislodged from the postcolonial windpipe, Euromodernism – in one of the great ironies of twentieth-century literary history – crucially enabled a range of non-Western poets after World War II to explore their hybrid cultures and postcolonial experience. For these poets, the detour through Euromodernism was often, paradoxically, the surest route home.[24]

This, of course, has a particular iteration in the Caribbean, where 'hybrid cultures' and 'postcolonial experience' have their own regionally-specific meanings. Simon Gikandi,

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[23] Wilson Harris, 'Creoleness: The Crossroads of a Civilization?', in A.J.M. Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The unfinished genesis of the imagination* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.237.
[24] Jahan Ramazani, 'Modernist Bricolage, Postcolonial Hybridity', *Modernism/modernity* 13.3 (Sept 2006), p.446.

in his study of Caribbean modernism *Writing in Limbo*, thus marks Harris as more distinctive still in describing him as 'possibly the most self-conscious Caribbean modernist', which is to say not only that Harris was particularly aware of his works' implication in the modernist tradition, but also that he fashioned a particularly Caribbean set of responses to it.[25]

Many of the ways in which Harris's writing seems to engage directly with the modernist tradition are quite immediately apparent: his novels embrace non-sequential narratives, unusual syntax and atypical vocabulary, alluding widely both to canonised Euro-American literary texts and to mythology. Simply put, the combination of these effects, too, has led readers to comment widely on the difficulty of engaging with Harris's writing. This is a central preoccupation of Gregory Shaw's article on Harris, which perhaps errs too strongly toward an account of Harris which reproduces only the familiar analytical terms associated with European modernism:

> If many readers find his writing impenetrable, this is because it frustrates conventional expectations of sequence, form, temporal and spatial relationships and juxtaposition. It operates by a logic other than the narrative logic to which we are accustomed; the components of the Harrisian narrative – word, image, metaphor – are deployed according to a different method which the critic has to elucidate.[26]

While Shaw's account is attentive, then, to the formal features of Harris's fiction which must be confronted by the reader seeking to interpret them productively, it must be complemented by the more specific regional rootedness of Harris's writing.

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[25] Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.4.
[26] Gregory Shaw, 'Art and Dialectic in the Work of Wilson Harris', *New Left Review* I/153 (Sept-Oct 1985), p.124.

To some extent, we can discern in Harris a more direct engagement with the more peripheral modernist concerns of a writer like Rhys. Harris, too, shows some commitment to the kind of psychic realism we have already seen in Rhys, wherein the specifics of modernist form are deployed to mediate the relationship between the mind and a modernising, cosmopolitan world. As the extract from *The Dark Jester* shows, we can also find in Harris's writing a more concrete engagement with language than classic accounts of modernism might suggest, paying attention not only to language in the abstract but to human experiences of learned languages and the material implications of their deployment. What we will continue to see to a greater extent in Harris, though, is the transplant of these features directly into the colonised and decolonised society: the mythological underpinnings are those of the pre-Columbian Americas, and the language politics depicted are those inherited directly from colonial administration.

The remainder of this chapter will focus principally upon *The Guyana Quartet*, which collects Harris's first four novels published between 1960 and 1963, all of which are set in Guyana and draw heavily on Harris's own experiences working as a surveyor in the interior of the country.[27] What I call Harris's multilingual modernism takes many forms, and operates on multiple levels, representing a series of apparently formal responses to what are in fact deeper questions of identity, selfhood and epistemology in a postcolonial context. At one extreme, which might be deemed the micro or small-scale level, are individual words borrowed from dialects and languages other than what we might tentatively call 'standard' English; these incidences of unusual vocabulary may prove arresting or disruptive to the experience of reading, and gesture toward a sense of what it might be like to speak the language from the outside. On a larger scale, Harris speaks, as we shall see, of 'configurations' of language which represent not only a shift

[27] Wilson Harris, *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber, 1985). All references to this volume will appear parenthetically within the text.

of register, but a space within the human psyche which is able to function free from the colonial strictures which are otherwise inherent to English. It is important to note also that these techniques are combined with other quintessential modernist features: wide-ranging cultural and historical allusions, transplanting of mythic and epic features into more modern locations, and narratives which are framed, disrupted or non-linear. Multilingual modernism, though, is far from being a solely formal endeavour, and Harris's writing is as much a recognition and depiction of a multilingual situation – that of colonial and postcolonial Guyana – as it is a practice; it is writing *of* the multilingual as well as writing which *is* multilingual. Harris's techniques of linguistic interruption, whether large or small, sweeping or subtle, all participate in a wider project, namely the formation of the self in relation to political grand narratives of nation, ethnicity and community, and in relation to the knowledge and understanding of the colonial past.

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Harris's fictional world is one in which the identity of anything, whether an inanimate object or a human being, is unstable. Things represent people, people are transformed into things, animals, trees and rivers serve as allegories, doubles, opposites or negations, and every entity, no matter how concrete it may appear or seem naturally to be thought of, carries a dense and complex symbolic weight: in Shaw's words, 'as it is with word and image so it is with character. The Harrisian world is a world of "doubles", his nature, a nature of mirrors, opaque streams, dark pools, eyes in which the double springs to life'.[28] Again, we can establish a certain continuity with trends in Caribbean writing (even as we will ultimately see how distinctively these unfold in Harris's Guyana), and Walcott, following on from earlier, provides another useful gloss:

[28] Shaw, p.125.

> Nouns are renamed and the given names of places accepted like Felicity village or Choiseul. The original language dissolves from the exhaustion of distance like fog trying to cross an ocean, but this process of renaming, of finding new metaphors, is the same process that the poet faces every morning of his working day, making his own tools like Crusoe, assembling nouns from necessity, from Felicity, even renaming himself.[29]

One immediately apparent example is the treatment of the signifier 'Mariella' in *Palace of the Peacock*, the first novel in the *Quartet*, which depicts a multi-ethnic crew on an expedition into the interior of the country. The narrator has dreamed of Mariella, a woman who is subsequently introduced as the 'mistress' of Donne, the crew's leader; the expedition is apparently in search of her:

> The crew began, all together, tugging and hauling the boat, and their sing-song cry rattled in my throat. They were as clear and matter-of-fact as the stone we had reached. It was the best crew any man could find in these parts to cross the falls towards the Mission where Mariella lived. (26)

Yet as the narrative progresses, Mariella begins to be mutated and transformed by the text; she becomes synonymous with the Mission that is her home, appearing to metonymically swallow her surroundings. Eventually, the name seems entirely uncoupled from its initial material signification, coming to represent a nebulous, deeply abstract sense of the *telos* of the expedition. Thus, as the expedition arrives at the Mission, Mariella the woman is nowhere to be seen, but the narrator nevertheless remarks that 'it was the first night I had spent on the soil of Mariella' (42). Mariella, though, is then transformed again, not into another material entity, but as a signifier to be surpassed: 'the crew came around like one man to the musing necessity in the

[29] Walcott, p.70.

journey beyond Mariella' (61). The journey thus continues toward something much more abstract, while simultaneously away from Mariella; by the time the narrative reaches its conclusion, it is 'the seventh day from Mariella' (111).

It is thus difficult not to identify in Mariella a figure with a more-than passing resemblance to Kurtz from *Heart of Darkness*, a text whose influence *Palace of the Peacock* divulges in its spatial logic of inward expedition as well as its more conceptual negotiations of intrepid investigators surrounded by a world which they cannot fully apprehend. If Kurtz represents the classic modernist example of a promise of hermeneutic closure which the text offers up in order to reveal it eventually as empty, Mariella begins to resemble a conscious re-imagining of the same theme.

Peter Hitchcock has further emphasised the interplay between language, character and symbolism in Harris's fictional world:

> In Harris's epic novels, what is symbolic in character, time, and place is much more important than what individuates character. The architectonics of Harris's narration is a dream language, a fiction making that pierces the unreality of the real and presents language itself as the form (rather than language as form-giving) of the re-visionary.[30]

The noun in the *Guyana Quartet* is thus a highly malleable entity – it is radically destabilized and endowed with uncertain and changing meaning, and as such contains within it a radical potential. If the process of signification is disrupted to such an extent, then the deployment of any word which participates in this new logic of signification is a foreignising gesture, one which interrupts the language's power of epistemological control and renders it itself foreign to the uninitiated speaker. The implications of an

[30] Hitchcock, p.47.

approach such as this are profound when writing in a postcolonial context, particularly that of the Caribbean wherein, for many writers and thinkers, one of the central epistemological obstacles to the fashioning of a self and a community free from the strictures of colonial control, is the continuing dominance of an imposed colonial language. Harris draws, though, on different systems of signification for the purposes of identification and nomenclature in the *Quartet:* British or 'standard' English, the official language of Guyana, and the widely spoken vernacular Guyanese Creole, based on English but with Dutch, West African, Arawakan and other influences.[31] This wide linguistic pool, in combination with the surreal and allegorical features of Harris's writing, means that noun usages in the *Quartet* are likely to prove arresting or unconventional, and to have multiple or changing meanings based on how and when they are used, and who by. As Nathaniel Mackey has put it in rather more poetic terms, when reading Harris we find that words tend to 'creak', that is, to risk coming apart and to sound their own internal discontinuity. Thus, for Mackey, 'where the word is inflected with legacies of conquest and oppression, as in the region where Harris was born and of which he writes, the creaking of the word is an opening, an opportune alarm sounded against presumed equivalence, presumed assurances of unequivocal fit.'[32]

Of course, most powerful among all types of nouns in the context of the novel is the proper name, which Roland Barthes has written grants 'a precious remainder (something like *individuality*, in that, qualitative and ineffable, it may escape the vulgar bookkeeping of compositional character)'.[33] If the proper name is what permits the reader to imagine that a complete and entire person exists somewhere within or on the

[31] The Guyanese government now recognises a further 11 languages, including Spanish, Portuguese and numerous indigenous languages such as Carib and Wapishana.
[32] Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.183.
[33] Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p.191.

reverse side of the text, though, the kind of destabilising gestures to which Harris subjects proper names in the *Guyana Quartet* can also be read as a fragmentation of character itself. Catherine Gallagher's gloss on this passage from Barthes can thus also be read as indicating the further limits of its possibility:

> Where it is not purposely prevented from doing so (as in the *nouvel roman*) the proper name draws together and unifies all the semantic material, and we have, according to Barthes, the ideologically suspect pleasure of sensing a person on the other side of the text. Incompletion, he maintains, moves ineluctably toward a desired completion through the agency of the name.[34]

We might indeed suggest that Harris's treatment of the name does just this – to purposely prevent it from signifying a complete and demarcated entity. Harris appears both to recognise the push toward completion instigated by the name, and to deploy strategies to stop this process in its tracks. In fact, Harris has reflected on something that looks very similar in discussing his own experience of leading boat crews into the interior of Guyana as a surveyor:

> The crews that I took with me, most of them, were excellent in terms of what they could do, but very few could write beyond signing the pay sheet. They might have been able to read a paragraph in a newspaper, or to read a newspaper in a crude kind of way. Those men were described on the pay sheet as boatmen, bushmen, chainmen, woodmen; described within a uniform function – they operated within a rigid function and they were excellent within that function. The bushman may be someone (he may be a hunter or whatever) who does his job extremely well, but he has grown oblivious of all sorts of

[34] Catherine Gallagher, 'The Rise of Fictionality', in *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p.360.

> subtleties and vague outlines within the bush itself. In order to exercise that block function of hunting and slaying, he has to eclipse a great deal...If by stable societies we mean we want people who are locked within block functions, uniform functions, then what does that society serve?[35]

We can extrapolate some connections here which link Harris's approach to language to a more embedded critique of colonial practice. Colonialism partakes of both acts of naming (as in the cases of slave names) and in acts of signification, imposing a monolingual reality which sets itself up as a closed system of signification. Here Harris gestures to an ongoing colonial practice in his own background, wherein the logic of imperial economic modernity again imposes rigid distinctions upon those who are not best-placed to interrogate them; the designations of boatman, bushman and so forth amount to an elision of the plurality of identities which lurk beyond them.

The Whole Armour, the third novel in the *Quartet*, furnishes an example of the complexity with which nouns and names are treated in Harris's fictionalised Guyana; in fact, we can also discern here a destabilisation of the distinction between proper and common nouns. The novel, heavy with allusions to Christianity while blending them with more local mythologies, opens with the character Abram being asked to shelter an apparent murderer:

> The woman said – "You got to hide my son, Abram. They going hang him if they lay hands on him. You got to hide him. I begging you and I telling you, please." She was able to match Abram's curious appearance: a vigorous and a strong black skin of a woman, polished like mahogany, approaching forty.

[35] Wilson Harris, 'Literacy and the Imagination: A Talk', in A.J.M. Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The unfinished genesis of the imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.77.

> Chinese eyes, emotionless in expression and filled with the blackest unshed tears. (245)

Certain particularities of Harris's deployment of language are in evidence here, as the grammar of Guyanese Creole in the dialogue (particularly the dropped auxiliary verbs, as in 'they going hang him' and 'you got to hide him') begins to bleed into the unusual syntax of the following sentence ('a vigorous and a strong black skin of a woman'). The allusive potential of names immediately introduces a further interpretive layer, though – anyone familiar with Judeo-Christian mythology might be compelled to think twice before trusting a man named Abram, or Abraham, with their son.

These allusions become only denser as the narrative progresses; the woman is Magda, her child Cristo. Cristo and Abram are further conflated with Cain and Abel, though, as Abram, in a quintessential branching of narrative, appears first to die spontaneously, only to have Cristo confess to his murder:

> His heart was suddenly racing unto death in the furious ominous plunging way that happened to him time and time again when he saw himself on his curious twisted limb and tree: the ultimate moment to leap had come, he knew, and to abandon a grotesque imitation of life for the spirit of universal dust and the innocence of a phantasm of pollen. (251)

> "All right," he cried. "I killed him. I killed Abram." (256)

A third explanation for Abram's apparent death then creeps into the narrative as easily as the first two:

> She cried instantly and furiously: "You two must be had a bitch of a fight in there. You must be fall 'pon the door proper hard with all you double weight. It was waiting for *me* to finish it…"

> Cristo stopped her, all his grievous intuition mounting to a climax in the cry he gave. "The tiger. It's the *tiger*."
>
> "*Tiger!*" Magda was startled and rooted to the ground. "*Tiger!*" The grotesque truth flashed on her face like a ruling fable of the land. She lumbered forward into the hut. It was deserted. The shirt had been ripped from the dead man's back and flung into a corner wrapped in the nervous stamp of blood. Of Abram, there was no sign. (262)

Some degree of acquaintance with Guyanese vernacular is required, first of all, to recognise that the tiger is, in British English, not a tiger at all (of course, since tigers are not found in South America) but a jaguar; always named as such in Guyana, though, the 'tiger' is a culturally ubiquitous symbol, the national animal and one associated with a long mythology of human attacks which is central to the novel. More significant still, though, is the way the tiger as a plot element relies on dual systems of signification – more than any other big cat, the jaguar is unlikely to attack humans (the narrative relies on this irony; characters thought to have been taken by the jaguar reappear unscathed). The tiger, on the other hand, has connotations of genuine menace; stories of man-eating tigers play a part in the cultural mythology of the British Empire and the Indian subcontinent, from which generations of immigrants arrived in Guyana and the wider Caribbean as indentured labourers.[36]

Cristo in fact seems to meld with the tiger. First he himself appears to have fallen victim to the tiger, then later he reappears, seeming to come back from the dead with the assistance, 'far from home', of 'white priests and magicians':

[36] This is a linguistic quirk also made use of by Conrad; in *Nostromo*, General Barrios is known to the populace as 'the Tiger-killer' (Conrad, *Nostromo*, p.119), later as 'the one-eyed tiger slayer' (p.354).

> 'They looked after me.' His voice flagged a little but he kept his head up. 'The truth was – I was dead tired. Fitted me together again. Chest and stump. Broken neck and skull. Gave me *this*.' He held up his tiger's coat helplessly, almost shamefacedly. 'Said the last thing I had done was to shoot the beast. I didn't believe them, of course. I told them it wasn't me but they who had killed the ancient jaguar of death.' (345)

Far from enacting any kinds of narrative closure, the transformation of Cristo into the tiger only amounts to another strand, a further opening-out of the possibilities contained within the name, which of course is already pregnant with the imagery of Christ and of *The Count of Monte Cristo*.[37] Harris has in fact provided some further gloss on this imagery in particular as a pluralising gesture:

> The ancient jaguar or tiger of South America – whose flayed hide Cristo wears in *The Whole Armour* – is another costume and initiation mask. The stripes on Cristo's carnival body like the stars on the peacock's tail lend themselves to different interpretations and explications. The tiger comes out of the vastness of a continent and is older than the Carib bone-flute though it is possessed by music nevertheless, by chords or stripes of genesis-drum that are painted sometimes by the moon in the depths of the forest.[38]

The gesture toward the non-human, which we will see holds a deep significance across Harris's *Guyana Quartet* (as well as his fictional output more broadly) here exists not only as one example of a series of possible significations, but as a container of the potential for plural signification itself. Cristo's donning the hide of the tiger which he

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[37] Alexandre Dumas, of course, was born to a Haitian father of part-slave descent, thereby representing the Caribbeanness which is already present in the canon of literature produced by the European imperial power.

[38] Wilson Harris, 'A Note on the Genesis of the *Guyana Quartet*', in *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber, 1985), pp.12-13.

already resembles poses a link between him and the wider environment, a possible rootedness in Guyana and its forests, but also a set of visual signs which are in themselves subject to further interpretation.

For what will not be the last time in a consideration of Harris and language, Cristo's becoming the tiger calls to mind a potentially productive instantiation of Deleuze and Guattari's 'minor literature'. Deleuze and Guattari argue that Kafka's works represent the archetype of minor literature – a literature which asserts itself within the language of a political majority, but which 'deterritorialises' that language, uncoupling it from its implications with political oppression and allowing for a collective assertion of a minority identity within it. It is far from incidental that we can discern in Harris the kind of peripheral authorial position we see in Kafka: just as Kafka was a Czech writing in German, Harris is compelled to write in the English in which his ancestors were colonised. Yet here we also see in Harris the kind of recourse to the non-human which Deleuze and Guattari emphasise at great length as a cornerstone of their analysis of Kafka. We can thus consider Harris's human-animal relations along the same lines as Deleuze and Guattari consider Kafka's:

> To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs. Kafka's animals never refer to a mythology or to archetypes but correspond solely to new levels, zones of liberated intensities where contents free

> themselves from their forms as well as from their expressions, from the signifier that formalized them.[39]

There is in fact a more complex becoming-nonhuman at play in Harris. The narrative conflates Cristo with the tiger as the killer of Abram. But Abram himself cedes his humanity in his death scene, seeing himself as 'curious twisted limb and tree', resigning himself to become a 'phantasm of pollen'. As the narrative branches, so does Abram, quite literally; with his exit from the text, he also becomes incorporated into its nonhuman landscape. Like Kafka's animals, though, as we have seen, Harris's tiger prompts a crossroads of signification, a breakdown of the signifying logic of the text. Yet if the turn to the animal brings with it a certain freedom from linguistic convention – the narrative has no need to render the speech of the tiger – there is no Kafkaesque rejection of mythology or archetype here. Harris's tiger is both a gesture which complicates linguistic hegemony, and one which contains an allusive potential, directing the reader to an archetype which is regionally-embedded even if not linguistically.

Lest there not be a sufficiently dense trail of allusions to follow already in Harris's tiger, it is also difficult not to acknowledge the modernist filtration of Christian mythology here:

> Signs are taken for wonders. 'We would see a sign!'
> The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
> Swaddled with darkness. In the juvescence of the year
> Came Christ the tiger[40]

[39] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p.13.
[40] T.S. Eliot, 'Gerontion', in *The Waste Land and other poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p.15.

Echoes of Eliot's Christ-as-tiger are reasonably apparent, but the formulation of the 'word within a word' also makes for a useful gloss on Harris's allusively dense approach to language. As we can see in this example, the commonplace noun that is the tiger turns out to carry within it different meanings which are, to some extent, in opposition to each other. Harris's treatment of the sign of the tiger, though, allows for the otherwise contradictory coexistence of these valences (the tiger as benign cultural totem versus the tiger as malign man-eater), while also potentially admitting intertextual references as well.

It appears somewhat more than incidental that Harris's characters, as in the case of Magda, Abram and Cristo, are seldom entirely aware of the syncretic potential contained within their names. Throughout the *Quartet*, as when Magda asks Abram to shelter her son, the allusive possibilities of names play on a dramatic irony between the cultural and linguistic spheres in which the characters move, and the wider literary and linguistic traditions apparently assumed of their readers. This is a creative potential, though, which Harris helpfully elucidates in an essay:

> Within the gulfs that divide cultures – gulfs which some societies seek to bypass by the logic of an institutional self-division of humanity or by the practice of ethnic cleansing – there exists, I feel, a storage of creative possibility that, once tapped, may energize the unfinished genesis of the imagination.[41]

Again we can see that Harris's allusive gestures to Western mythology, which we may be inclined to dismiss as a straightforward incorporation of the European modernist mode, are transformed in a particular way by their Caribbean context. What is at stake, in this case, is the risk of 'institutional self-division of humanity' or indeed ethnic cleansing,

[41] Wilson Harris, 'Creoleness: The Crossroads of a Civilization?', in A.J.M. Bundy (ed.), *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The unfinished genesis of the imagination* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.239.

issues which Harris, among other Caribbean writers, has recognised as formative of the Caribbean experience.

The *Quartet* thus seems engaged in a dual project of identifying these 'gulfs' and emphasising their apparent width, while also ironising them and drawing links across them through allusion. It thus appears as another of Harris's quintessential gestures when, in *The Secret Ladder*, the final novel in the cycle, his protagonist Fenwick (one of Harris's many autobiographical analogues, a hydrographic surveyor who emphasises his own mixed ethnicity) encounters a swamp-dwelling elderly man named Poseidon:

> 'Old man Poseidon occupying here, Mr Fenwick,' Bryant volunteered. He moved his jaw involuntarily as if the sharp spirit in his voice had sliced each word in half so that only the mutilated shadow of humour appeared on his lips. 'Here?' Fenwick was startled. He had occasionally glimpsed an ancient presence passing on the river before his camp but had never properly seen it or actually addressed it. Rumour had created a tortuous and labyrinthine genealogy for Poseidon, the oldest inhabitant of the Canje. His grandfather had been a runaway African slave who had succeeded in evading capture and had turned into a wild cannibal man in the swamps, devouring melting white cocerite flesh wherever he spied the mirage of high baking land; feasting on the quivering meat of sensitive turtle (until he turned to human jellyfish himself) as well as the soft underbelly of fearsome alligator. (369)[42]

Again, the measure of irony inherent in this act of naming is ultimately left for the reader to work out. There is not necessarily anything remarkable about encountering a swamp-dweller named Poseidon in the context of Harris's fictional world, but there is a

[42] Another offering for the zoological pedant – alligators, properly speaking, are not found in South America. The closely-related black caiman, though, is native to the rivers of Guyana and, unlike the jaguar, responsible for numerous documented human fatalities.

clear bathos in the juxtaposition of a descendent of runaway slaves turned swamp-dwelling cannibal and the Greek god of the sea. There seems again to be a deliberate understatement of this kind of allusion when, shortly afterward, Poseidon is referred to simply as 'the black man with the European name, drawn out of the depths of time' (385). The closest the protagonist Fenwick comes to acknowledgement is in his observation that 'he had a Greek name – Poseidon. Lord knows who gave him this!' (384), but this hints again at an understanding of the allusion more rooted in the material conditions of empire. In some ways the convention of naming deployed by Harris most closely resembles the slave name, dispensed by the colonial power in an act of erasure of the colonial subject's history but, used in the aesthetic medium of the novel, also able to invite new connections, to suggest equivalences to debase the norms of Western interpretation and to elevate the colonial subject. The effect of using names which carry such significance is to provoke a reflexive consideration of the ways in which the colonial experience can be viewed as both integral to and subversive of the colonising cultural traditions. Nathaniel Mackey has emphasised something similar in his reading of *The Secret Ladder*'s Poseidon, dwelling upon the means by which the character as a fictive construction intervenes within the text's longer logic of history:

> Insofar as Poseidon represents Adamic seed or primogenitorship...the passage constitutes either a refusal to invest the ancestral past, as is commonly done, with connotations of Edenic wholeness...or a reminder of Fenwick's and our own estrangement from (and thus the unintelligibility to us of) whatever unity Poseidon does represent. These two readings essentially amount to the same thing – an insistence upon the elusiveness or irretrievability of wholeness, upon *différance*.[43]

[43] Mackey, p.177.

There is, though, in the scenes involving Poseidon, another apparent redeployment of some of the resources we have already seen in Conrad. Like *Palace of the Peacock*, *The Secret Ladder* seems occasionally to revel in its allusive potential to Conrad's own tale of river-bound exploration, and the appearance of a man whom rumour identifies as a cannibal only further foregrounds the intertext. To reiterate briefly, we have seen in our reading of Conrad an example of the 'deterritorialization of the mouth' which Deleuze and Guattari identify as inherent in acts of language.[44] Here, as in *Heart of Darkness*, we encounter a character who disrupts some of the signifying logic of the text, which, in turn, cannot seem to help but foreground with unusual insistence the actual physical apparatuses of speech. Just as Poseidon is introduced by Bryant, whose jaw moves involuntarily, actually mutilating the words as he delivers them, we see in Poseidon the inheritance of a mouth used primarily to the mastication of raw flesh, both animal and human. When Poseidon eventually speaks, we are not even made party to his words, only, again, to the disjunction between them and the mouth which produces them:

> Poseidon addressed Fenwick at last. His mouth moved and made frames which did not correspond to the words he actually uttered. It was like the tragic lips of an actor, moving but soundless as a picture, galvanized into comical association with a foreign dubbing and tongue which uttered a mechanical version and translation out of accord with the visible features of original expression. (371)

Fenwick may hear words, but they appear not to be coming from Poseidon's mouth, which moves in some other way, suggesting other terms which may be seen but not heard. Contrary, now, to Conrad's cannibal, whose speech makes perfect sense amid the swirling morass of Marlow's narrative, here we see a mouth which is physically present but discursively absent. There is even, here, an echo of some of the terms which Harris

[44] Deleuze and Guattari, pp.19-20.

deployed in his discussion of the 'problematic slave'. Poseidon appears as a kind of parody of one who speaks words they do not fully inhabit – in his 'mechanical version' we see a similar device to the 'hackneyed comfortable approach' to which the people of the Caribbean do not have access. Poseidon also, quite literally, possesses a 'ready conversational tongue', but it seems to be of no use in giving an account of himself amid the rumours of cannibalism which instead predominate.

This episode attracted the attention of C.L.R. James, a committed follower of Harris and his brand of postcolonial critique. James, too, notes that 'the way that Poseidon's lips move is contrary to the things that Poseidon is supposed to be saying. In other words,' James goes on, 'the physical appearance of Poseidon is one thing but the things that he is saying come from a different age and a different generation.'[45] Here, perhaps, is a more explicit engagement with the logic of 'gulfs' between peoples of which Harris writes. The most obvious gulf here may be a cross-cultural one – emphasised by Harris's ironic melding of classical and Caribbean mythology – but this could also be read as one of many gulfs comprising Poseidon, one of which could also be historical. Poseidon thus appears to resemble the kind of oblivion of history which has shaped so many accounts of the postcolonial Caribbean; he represents a remnant of something which has been lost, and is quite literally a conduit to the slave experience which the figures of the novel have no access to. Fenwick is thus moved by the experience as one which primarily highlights his incapacity:

> He did not want to confess how he had been moved and disturbed to the greatest depth by the apparition of Poseidon, and how little he had made of the

[45] C.L.R. James, *Wilson Harris – A Philosophical Approach* (St Augustine & Port of Spain: Extra-Mural Department, University of the West Indies, General Public Lecture Series: West Indian Literature 1, 1965), p.12.

> old man's complaint, the voice and expression were so alien and painful and extreme. (373)

Poseidon thus appears as a kind of gesture toward the possible, but also precipitates a return to the traumas of the colonial past.

Some of the most intriguing moments in the *Quartet*, though, arise when this logic of signification – totemic, European names, whose possessors seem ignorant or apathetic toward their apparent connotations – is disrupted. One such moment, in *The Far Journey of Oudin*, takes the form of a jarring interaction between a character and a European interloper, seemingly and awkwardly bridging the aforementioned distinction between colonial experience and metropolitan connotations. In this incident, a character named Kaiser is suddenly made aware of the heretofore unacknowledged significance of his name:

> Kaiser had heard Venezuela was rich. He had driven a German mining engineer from Berbice to Georgetown a year ago. He remembered asking ten dollars for the trip and the man requesting a receipt. It was a voucher to remind him to recover from his company. Kaiser had signed his name Kaiser, as usual. The man had smiled. I thought you were *Kayser*, he said, but I see you have written *Kiser*, K-a-i-s-e-r.
>
> I am *Kayser*, Kaiser replied stubbornly.
>
> You sign with the name of an emperor, the man said with a sweeping delighted smile.
>
> Yes, Kaiser said proudly. I have heard of black emperors whose signature alone will rule the world.

> The man looked startled and mystified, and a little distressed by the ignorant reply. God forbid, the man said, that you should think of him in that light. Whatever may have happened since, in Germany, the Kaiser himself was a good man.
>
> It was Kaiser's turn now to be heartily dumbfounded and confused. (182)

The vaguely absurd misunderstanding over the pronunciation of Kaiser's name brings to the fore in a more practical sense the apparent epistemological distance between coloniser and colonised. Kaiser learns that his name is, in a sense, not really his; like the slave name, it carries an unknown semantic significance in a language which is not his own. And yet the German mining engineer, too, appears mildly shaken by the encounter; the tacit ethnocentricity of his worldview is laid bare, and there is perhaps a gesture, too, toward the previously unacknowledged role played by the colonial in establishing European or Eurocentric modernity. The act of writing down the name disrupts the gulf of signification which had previously separated the spheres of the European and the colonial subject, stripping away one layer of irony while providing a new one. The reader, of course, recognised the allusion to the German emperor from the beginning, and yet learns that they, too, have made a fundamental error; only when the text provides the phonetic transcription 'Kayser' does their inadvertent mispronunciation become clear.

It seems that, on Kaiser's part at least, there is a bitter recognition of the power of naming which is retained by European powers, for whom domination of colonies is epistemological and linguistic as well as political, when he comments moments later, to himself, 'you have no language, you have no custom.' (182) Yet the German mining engineer, functioning here as a kind of cypher for European colonial power more generally, is arguably more disturbed by the encounter, wherein Kaiser as colonial

subject shows not only a troubling awareness of the structural and epistemological reality of imperialism, but a radical self-conception as a 'black emperor' which challenges the psychical architecture of colonial control. The engineer is genuinely unsettled, 'a little distressed' by Kaiser's easy association of 'black emperors' with world domination; the hypothesised reversal of the ethnic conditions of empire forces an uncomfortable consideration of the politics involved, engendering the somewhat insipid defence of the Kaiser as a 'good man'.

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Given the equivocation we have already seen in the degree of Harris's commitment to multilingualism as a productive writing strategy, it is not altogether surprising that the texts collected in *The Guyana Quartet* are not linguistically diverse in the most immediate sense; this is to say that their characters and narrators tend not to switch languages in the manner we have already seen in, for example, Conrad and Rhys. This is not to say, though, that Harris departs so radically from certain conventions of Caribbean writing as to dispense altogether with the problematic that multilingualism offers, and what we can certainly read in *The Guyana Quartet* is an undertone of linguistic tension which acknowledges that multilingualism remains a preoccupation to be confronted. Certainly, in the *Quartet* we find allusions to the possibilities of linguistic encounter which are latent in the Guyanese society and landscape, and in the nation's borders with Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Venezuela and Brazil, even if they tend not to be rendered through in-text code-switches. Just as the use of naming and nouns can secrete multilingual possibilities within them, Harris has articulated in a 1990 interview the extent to which multilingualism can be explored at the level of the phrase, again recalling some of the notions of language archaeology which we have already seen espoused by the likes of Brathwaite and Walcott:

> What one is saying is that it is possible to have a configuration in the English language, springing from the fact that the English language in South America secretes within it the tongues of ancient peoples who have long vanished. There are still survivors, but basically those tongues have long vanished, but they still exist in the English language and are able to throw up that kind of configuration – there is a rhythm that comes into the English language. The English that is spoken in England has rhythms that come from the Latin tongue, perhaps, who knows, from the Gaelic or Scottish tongue and these rhythms can do certain things. But when you come to South American English, you have another factor which is these ancient tongues, and they are able to create this configuration.[46]

Like the colonial names in the novels which bear resemblance to slave names, Harris seems to suggest here that one of the linguistic possibilities upon which writing in postcolonial Guyana can draw can be found in these 'configurations' of language, linguistic gestures to colonial prehistory which permit the opening of a new linguistic and mental space within the apparatus of the imposed colonial language. Such an idea seems counterintuitive, since it is in essence a suggestion that a language can manifest itself *within* another language, recalling Derrida's proposition that 'one cannot speak of a language except in that language. Even if to place it outside itself'[47] – each author seems to suggest that, while the external boundaries of a language are somewhat elastic, constantly at risk of snapping back into place as they are stretched, the act of manipulating them can in and of itself be a productive one, engendering new modes of thought and gesturing toward an outside space.

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[46] Michael Gilkes, 'The Landscape of Dreams' (Conversation with Wilson Harris, Sept. 1990), in Hena Maes Jelinek (ed.), *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination* (Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1991), p32.
[47] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.22.

This extract appears to show Harris moving between conceptions of the multilingual – from the 'spiritually alone' historical paradigm to a more hopeful one, which offers both a language held in common and a particular set of linguistic elements in which to root individual or collective identity. The *Guyana Quartet* nevertheless sets out to first depict the enforced multilingualism of the colonial state, a condition which is seemingly socially and culturally fractured, characterised by communication which is stilted at best, and at worst impossible. In *Palace of the Peacock*, for example, in which the crew at the centre of the novel already possess a variety of mother tongues and an accompanying difficulty in exchanging ideas, we see the crew take aboard an elderly Arawak woman, whose one linguistic link with the rest of the group, the part-Amerindian Schomburgh, dies, leaving no possibility of conversation. For a time it seems that the only imaginable outcome of this loss of communication is oblivion:

> The old crumpled Arawak woman had advised us the evening of the day before where to stop and camp for the night. It was too late she said (Schomburgh interpreting) to venture into the nameless rapids that seethed and boiled before us. (75)
>
> [DaSilva] spoke to himself, forgetting his destination and turning helplessly to the old Arawak woman. There was no interpreter now Schomburgh had gone. A wrench had uprooted the instrument of communication he had always trusted in himself. (76)

The loss of the possibility of translation seemingly engenders the loss of something deeper; in practical terms, the crew have lost their conduit to knowledge of the surrounding area (and the possibility of language facilitating a connection to and identification with landscape, a theme to which I will return later), but it seems there is a more radically existential shifting of knowledge here. The loss of the possibility of

speaking and listening is, for the crew, a more troubling severance of a part of the psyche, that 'instrument of communication' which they had trusted to understand and interpret the world around them has here had a part of it permanently stripped away. Surely we can see in a scene such as this a sensitive and visceral application of what Harris means when he suggests that the colonial subject is 'spiritually alone'.

In continuing to dramatise the crew's response to the death of Schomburgh and the loss of their interpreter, though, Harris gestures toward a possibility of solace which is not so much in spite of this loss but seemingly integral to it, writing

> And yet he knew it was a mortal relief to face the truth which lay farther and deeper than he dreamed. This deathblow of enlightenment robbed him of a facile faith and of a simple translation and memory almost. (76)

Harris appears to suggest here that the loss of communication which colonialism engenders is a problem which translation alone is unable to resolve. Harris's articulation of a need for 'inward dialogue' seems here to be restated in a more strident form – it is only when the easy and incomplete resolution provided by translation has been removed that it is revealed to have been 'facile' and 'simple'. It is only after linguistic interpretation has been denied to DaSilva and by extension the rest of the crew that they appear to realise that true resolution lies much deeper within the self, and not in outward conversation with others. This recalls in some way the rather cryptic comments exchanged between Donne and the narrator when the Arawak woman is first brought aboard:

> "We're all outside of the folk," I said musingly. "Nobody belongs yet..."
>
> "Is it a mystery of language and address?" Donne asked quickly and mockingly.

> "Language, address? […] No it's not language. It"s...it's"...I searched for words with a sudden terrible rage at the difficulty I experienced..."it's an inapprehension of substance[...]it's fear of acknowledging the true substance of life." (52)

Situated within a longer consideration of the propriety of relations between the landowning and working classes, the colonialist and the colonised, and the various racial groups of Guyana, Donne mocks the idea that the answer to all the potential conflicts therein lies in the possibility of communication. The narrator responds by elaborating upon this idea, and in his explanation appears again to gesture to the idea that resolution lies within – that to truly identify and experience one's own fully-realised postcolonial subjectivity, one must remove the psychical barriers preventing true engagement with the 'substance of life'.

Harris's description of this kind of possibility is deeply abstract, and it is perhaps with some caution that we should approach any attempt to overlay onto categories as broad as 'rhythm' and 'configuration' a more formally-defined kind of reading. Nevertheless, it appears that to try to look deeper into the possibility Harris is indicating here is a necessary step in any attempt to fully understand Harris's process of rendering a thinking, talking postcolonial subject. One attempt which has been made to theorise this process of interrupting the hegemonic function of a language from within is again offered by Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Kafka, which sets out a particular framework of language elements which may be fertile regions for subversive gesture, writing that:

> Generally, we might call the linguistic elements, however varied they may be, that express the "internal tensions of a language" *intensives* or *tensors*...And it

> would seem that the language of a minor literature particularly develops these tensors or these intensives.[48]

While it would be wise to bear in mind that as Deleuze and Guattari's analysis gains in depth it also becomes more specific to Kafka's German, they do offer some specific examples of what forms these linguistic 'tensors' might take, namely 'malleable verbs' (that is, those which can take on a range of homophone meanings), 'multiplication and succession of adverbs' and 'pain-filled connotations'.[49]

One of the most apparent points of entry into this idea of linguistic configuration is through dialogue, wherein, in Hitchcock's phrase, 'Harris delights in transcribing the lilt and cadence of conversational English in Guyana'.[50] Incorporating the rhythm and vocabulary of Guyanese Creole, the spoken language of the *Quartet* often displays a marked contrast with its narrative prose, which is characterised by intricate description and a varied, inventive approach to sentence structure and length. However, as is more subtly apparent, Harris's writing displays a degree of cross-pollination between the two media, probing and questioning the artificial boundary between language as speech and language as aesthetic medium. This is an important distinction as this porous boundary between narration and speech is what marks Harris's work as different from that of nineteenth-century colonial writers in whose work, whether or not it sought to depict the multilingual, this distinction is absolute; what we see in Harris's work is surely a very different approach to managing language and dialect to the 'Mistah Kurtz – he dead' of *Heart of Darkness*. Certainly we can begin to see this relationship being complicated in the sustained interiority of Rhys's

[48] Deleuze and Guattari, pp.22-23.
[49] Deleuze and Guattari, p.23.
[50] Hitchcock, p.70.

modernism, but it receives its fullest analytical expression only in the language theory of the postcolonial Caribbean:

> After our traditional tale tellers, there was some kind of silence: the dead end. Elsewhere bards, griots, minstrels and troubadours passed on their trade to writers (*markers of speech*) who took gradually their literary autonomy. Here, there was a break, a gap, a deep ravine between a written expression pretending to be universal-modern and traditional Creole orality enclosing a great part of our being. This nonintegration of oral tradition was one of the form and one of the dimensions of our alienation.[51]

It is not necessarily that Harris privileges orality as offering a unique insight into the self in decolonised Guyana (as the authors of 'In Praise of Creoleness' tend to advocate), but it becomes clear as we consider his dialogue that there lies within it a decision to foreground the material realities of Guyanese speech.

The interactions between the brothers in *The Far Journey of Oudin* represent an area in which to explore these ideas, given that between them the brothers speak with a variety of accent, idiom and dialect. Four of the brothers attempt to prevent their dying father from leaving his estate to Oudin, the illegitimate fifth brother, fearing that in their father's eyes, as one brother comments, they have become:

> "Over-confident," Hassan said. "He believe we all really gone soft, driving car, and getting so Englishified in all our style. You know what I mean. Year after year you throw away every tradition the old man prize." (158)

Here Hassan seems almost to gloss the tension in Guyanese speech between a fidelity to the 'rhythms' (in Harris's phrase from earlier) giving it local character and the alternative

[51] Bernabé et al, p.895.

impulse to adopt the manner of the colonial power. Hitchcock suggests that 'one could read this negatively, as if the ascription of the barely articulate to the brothers…is a further stereotypic representation of South Asian Guyanese, but then such speech, even at its most stuttering, conveys their worldviews as individuals'.[52] The preservation of such worldviews, though, appear in this instance to be under threat from a kind of capitulation to imperial Britain, a threat which is embodied, too, in the speech patterns of the oldest brother and ringleader Mohammed. These are characterised by occasional instances of British English idiom delivered in a Guyanese accent – 'the doctor mek no bones yesterday' (155), 'you hit the nail on the head at last' (159) – in a blending of registers apparently more deliberately explicit than that of the speech of Hassan. The 'rhythms' of the brothers' language thus seem to bring to life the clash of the kinds of linguistic configurations which Harris has outlined, their speech playing out a conflict of interest between adherence to local norms and embrace of the colonial power. The opposition in the above extract between local and imperial character is clear – tradition on the one hand, Englishness on the other – as is the anxiety this engenders. But what is more pertinent still is the way in which this is enacted directly through speech.

Elsewhere, the recurrence of specific patterns of language is bound into the sense of grim inevitability which surrounds the events of the *Quartet*, particularly *Palace of the Peacock*, wherein the expedition Donne leads seems doomed to failure from the very beginning. As C.L.R. James reads the novel, 'these men are engaged on this difficult journey, about six or eight of them, and they are all dead':[53]

> The odd fact existed of course that their living names matched the names of a famous dead crew that had sunk in the rapids and been drowned to a man,

[52] Hitchcock, p.70.
[53] James, p.5.

> leaving their names inscribed on Sorrow Hill which stood at the foot of the falls. (26)

Harris enacts through details such as this a sense that colonised peoples are bound to endlessly repeat the stresses of past history, the recurrence even of the names of the characters recalling his approach to the tradition of the slave name which was discussed in the previous section. Tied more into questions of linguistic register and the power of the phrase to enact narrative events, though, is the way the unavoidable demise of the crew members the second time around seems always to carry within it an echo of the first. In instances such as these it is possible to see the emergence of a mythic quality of narration, one which begins to collapse the distinction between narrative voice and orality. We can see such a process at work here in the case of Wishrop:

> She had seen Wishrop crawling like a spider into the river where he had been tangled in the falls. Days after she pointed out his curious skeleton picked clean by perai, and that was the last of dead Wishrop. (57)

This is the first death; its details are seemingly reprised shortly after in explaining the second:

> They had seen his hands aloft two times quickly after his immersion for all the world like fingers clinging to the spokes and spider of a wheel. The webbed fingers caught and held for an instant a half-submerged rock but the crouching face was too slippery and smooth and they had slipped and gone...Wishrop's flesh had been picked clean by perai like a cocerite seed in everyone's mouth.(81)

If the repetitions between these two extracts seem to carry within them a sense of inevitability, such that the linguistic mode of the colonial is one which is bound to

describe the same events in the same terms over and over again, the alternative explanation is perhaps that these repetitions are a mythologising gesture, one which lays down a configuration of language which taps into a deeper commonality of human experience. Certainly in a literal sense the language in these two excerpts displays some use of Deleuze and Guattari's 'pain-filled connotations', but what is more simply evident is a deliberate recurrence of both vocabulary and structural or grammatical elements which is characteristic of the narrative style of *Palace of the Peacock*. In the example of Wishrop's demise these recurrences include the lensing of an event through other characters' eyes – 'she had seen', 'they had seen' – and the use of animal similes – the image of a spider and the skeleton 'picked clean by perai'. Surely significant, though, is the way that by the second telling it is the narrative voice which seems to have internalised the reported speech of the first. In another example, importantly, this same technique is used to establish and reify the sense of purpose which unites the characters:

> The old innocent expectations and the journey – Donne's first musing journey to Mariella – returned with a rush. (44)
>
> The crew came around like one man to the musing necessity in the journey beyond Mariella. (61)
>
> It was the seventh day from Mariella...Vigilance stood at the top of the sky he had gained at last following the muse of love... (111)

There is obviously a practical problem in identifying those language 'configurations' of which Harris has spoken when they belong to languages which have 'long vanished'. But what we can tentatively suggest is at work here is an attempt to newly establish a distinctive local mythology through the use of very deliberate recurring rhythms of language. As we have seen previously, Mariella is as much a cypher of individual purpose as a character, and here the name becomes more clearly a structural anchor –

'to Mariella', 'from Mariella', 'beyond Mariella' – around which the journey toward a realised sense of postcolonial subjectivity is conducted.

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The rooting gestures toward the multilingual in Harris's writing reach ever deeper, limited not only to incidental gestures toward outside linguistic influence but incorporating deep structuring tendencies which seek to open a space within the English language which is distinct in character from the imperial power. It thus becomes apparent just how closely these multilingual forms relate to deep ontological questions regarding the self, and how it can be fashioned in a postcolonial state. Simon Gikandi again provides a useful gloss as to how such a process relates to the wider project of bringing into being a modern Caribbean fiction:

> An integrated discourse of self is surely the ultimate or possibly utopian desire of Caribbean writing, but it can only be reached after the negotiation of a historically engendered split between the self and its world, between this self and the language it uses.[54]

It is clear that the fashioning of such a sense of self forms a productive strand of Harris's fictional project. Many among Harris's readers have acknowledged this in some way – Hitchcock has cited Harris's confrontation of 'the history of Being as a "white mythology"', James has pursued in *The Guyana Quartet* moments of Heideggerian *Dasein* and Sam Durrant writes of a 'hosting of history' which seeks to 'unhinge the identity of the subject' – even as others have been too quick to attribute to Harris an unquestioning embrace of the collective identities implied by narratives of Creoleness.[55]

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[54] Gikandi, p.18.
[55] Hitchcock, p. 44, James, *Wilson Harris: A Philosophical Approach*, Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), p.54.

The resemblance to Gikandi's gloss continues, though, and it is precisely with these relationships, between self and world and particularly between self and language, with which I am concerned.

Harris's negotiating of this problem of fashioning the self and placing it in the context of a productive relationship with language, with environment and with more universal questions of identity, has appeared in numerous guises in his writing. Paget Henry has written that 'the immanent, creative dynamics of the self are explicitly thematized in Harris and occupy a central place in his philosophy', going on to suggest that Harris embraces an ontology of 'radical immanence', wherein consciousness and psyche are not carefully delineated aspects of each individual but structures which underlie both thinking and non-thinking entities, providing a possible basis for connection and identification which exists at a deeper and more universal level than the human individual.[56] Harris has articulated this immanent philosophy of consciousness in characteristically poetic terms:

> When I speak of the unconscious I'm not only speaking of the human unconscious but of the unconscious that resides in objects, in trees, in rivers, I'm suggesting that there is a psyche, a mysterious entity, that links us with the unconscious in nature, and here again you have polarities to do with energy and passion. So if you have a great storm sweeping across the landscape, we may tend to see the storm purely as a natural phenomenon. Now, in some ancient cultures they saw that as the gods addressing us. But the point is that you can always take the energy of the storm, the passion of the storm, and place it in

[56] Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.90, 95.

> nature, or you can attempt to place it in some anthropomorphic areas of ourselves.[57]

We have already seen Harris explore the links between human and non-human consciousness in a series of highly literalised ways: Cristo becomes the tiger, Abram becomes the tree, Poseidon becomes human jellyfish. These transformations are also often proximal to acts of language; Cristo speaks into being his own hybridity with the tiger, while the silent Wishrop is cast into the water to be devoured by fish.

Harris's depiction of this underlying structure of consciousness as a 'mysterious entity' may seem tantalisingly vague, but within the context of his ongoing oblique engagement with explorations of Caribbean history such as we have seen in Walcott and Brathwaite, the example he provides serves as a gesture toward illumination. Just as we have previously seen Harris referring to 'the tongues of ancient peoples' here again is a reference to 'ancient cultures' through which we can conceive of an alternative means of interpretation. Natural phenomena are recurrent and unchanging, but the hermeneutics applied to them are human, and contingent upon cultural and historical factors. We can begin to see, then, that Harris's philosophy is one which places the individual in a relationship with the world which is lensed through a series of culturally-normative processes of analogy, metaphor, and vocabulary.

This leads us then, to the second of Gikandi's proposed relationships, that which exists between the self and the language through which it communicates and understands. It is worth referring back here to Harris's thoughts on language and 'configurations' thereof, a perspective which appears to resemble structurally his thoughts on consciousness and its relation to the wider world. Just as human selves would like to be able to conceive of themselves as sharply-defined entities, easily and

[57] Vera M. Kutzinski, 'The Composition of Reality: A Talk With Wilson Harris', *Callaloo* 18.1 (1995), p.20.

intuitively separable from others, human languages masquerade as entities whose edges remain unblurred and unsullied by contact with others, but are in fact porous and open, engaging always in a process of exchange and incorporation with other languages. Harris suggests that, in fashioning a postcolonial Caribbean self, it is necessary to make recourse to an immanent notion of consciousness, and it seems that similarly, in attempting to fashion an aesthetic language, Harris prescribes an approach which acknowledges and even celebrates the admission of other processes of expression and understanding which at first glance appear to lie outside the defined limits of the language.

A possible meeting of Harris's ideas of immanent consciousness and a plural, multilingual linguistics might bear some resemblance to the ideas of Brathwaite, whose *History of the Voice* seeks to outline a productive notion of what he terms 'nation language' This term refers not so much to an idea of language which is tethered to nation in the political sense, but to a more abstract notion of a language which, though it may be inherited or handed down from a colonial power, nevertheless contains within it some notion of national identity which defines itself against that of the coloniser; we might consider the French of Aimé Césaire, pregnant as it is with conventions of both contemporary colonial Martinique and older African cultural norms, as an example of this. While it relies to some extent on the conventions of poetry and its implicit ties to the oral tradition, Brathwaite's understanding of the possibility with which such a language is endowed is nevertheless illuminating for our purposes:

> The other thing about nation language is that it is part of what may be called *total expression*...Reading is an isolated, individualistic expression. The oral tradition on the other hand demands not only the griot but the audience to complete the community: the noise and sounds that the maker makes are

> responded to by the audience and are returned to him. Hence we have the creation of a continuum where meaning truly resides. And this *total expression* comes about because people be in the open air, because people live in conditions of poverty ('unhouselled') because they come from a historical experience where they had to rely on their very *breath* rather than on paraphernalia like books and museums and machines. They had to depend on *immanence*, the power within themselves, rather than the technology outside themselves.[58]

Brathwaite too, then, returns to this idea of immanence in seeking to develop an understanding of the productive power of artistic language to a sense of Caribbean identity. As in Harris, though, this idea is quite profoundly paradoxical – Brathwaite apparently rejects the productive capability of 'isolated, individualistic expression' while simultaneously advocating the strength of 'the power within' in maintaining an independent Caribbean character. Similarly, Harris acknowledges that the condition of the slave is characterised by a loss of communal identification and communication, but advocates a process of turning inward in seeking to resolve it.

The apparently counter-intuitive nature of these propositions, though, is one which Harris appears to embrace as part of the writing process. We can see in more detail Harris's attempt to work through this quandary in *Palace of the Peacock*, wherein the multi-racial crew led by Donne into the Guyanese interior is beset by a lurking sense of their own apparently irreconcilable differences. Mimicking Harris's critical thoughts on the proximity of the self to the environment, as the expedition penetrates further into the rainforest, the individual members of the crew reflect on their own sense of

[58] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984), pp. 18-19.

selfhood. As they do so, they appear one by one to die, to be subsumed back into the physical environment; by the end of the novel, though, the crew are present once more, and together, having apparently reached some deeply abstract space in which their racial and linguistic differences are collapsed – the titular Palace seems characterised by nothing so much as the bare existence of the novel's reborn characters alongside each other. One of the crew members who engages in illuminating self-reflection is Wishrop, who is eventually thrown from the boat into the river and 'picked clean' by its inhabitants in mimicry of his historic namesake who met with the same fate. Here we are offered a glimpse of the inward dialogue which Harris sees as central to the fashioning of self:

> He spoke infrequently and as brokenly and whimsically as his labouring companions. His desire for communication was so profound it had broken itself into two parts. One part was a congealed question mark of identity – around which a staccato inner dialogue and labouring monologue was in perpetual evolution and process. The other half was the fluid fascination that everyone and everything exercised upon him – creatures who moved in his consciousness full of the primitive feeling of love purged of all murderous hate and treachery.
>
> He sought to excuse his deficiency and silence by declaring that he knew better Spanish than English. It was a convenient lie and it carried the ring of truth since he had lived for many years on the Guyana, Venezuela border. (55)

The narrator, a verbose but frequently and lengthily silent presence in the novel, takes on an apparently pitying tone with regard to the conversational abilities of the crew. It seems, indeed, that Harris in his critical writing would likely take a similar view to that of his narrator – that outward attempts at cross-cultural dialogue, at least those which are not paired with a lengthy and deep sense of introspection, are to be dismissed as

whimsical. Indeed, the convenient fiction that Wishrop is in fact a Spanish speaker does little to assuage the rather withering pity with which he is treated, even as he attempts, as a colonial subject, to engage in meaningful dialogue with others in his position.

It is worth recalling at this point one of the nuances of the lines from Harris quoted above. The 'creative human consolation' which Harris endows with such importance exists not simply in the 'inward dialogue', but in the *search* for such a dialogue. It seems important, then, to bear in mind that, when reading a section such as that detailing the thoughts of Wishrop above, it is the *process* contained therein that carries the most importance, and that looking for some kind of outcome or easy sense of hermeneutic closure would, in a manner of speaking, be missing the point. Nevertheless, what occurs in Wishrop's mind is illuminating as to the nature and form which such a process can take, adding definition to this idea which, in Harris's critical writing, can seem frustratingly nebulous and resistant to interpretation. Like Harris has suggested elsewhere, the starting point of this process of self-healing lies in the sense of linguistic isolation which the colonial condition engenders – what troubles Wishrop and sets him thinking along these questions of identity is a 'desire for communication', a condition which is as practical and quotidian as it is philosophically and intellectually ripe for interpretation.

As the narrative makes the transition from this question of an outward need to communicate to an inward search for resolution, there is a jagged and jarring sense of fragmentation. One of the fragments is a 'congealed question mark of identity' – surely an attempt at a cliché-free posing of the question 'who am I?' - which promptly divides itself again, into both a 'staccato inner dialogue' and a 'labouring monologue' This combination of an interior monologue as well as an interior dialogue is a perplexing one, but it highlights the distinction Harris is keen to make elsewhere; the consolation

of the colonial self lies within the psyche, but not as a monologue but a dialogue – not as the *parole* of the individual subject, but as the *langue* of a deeper, structuring linguistic consciousness. The effect of the latter, in whatever form it exists within the psyche of Wishrop, is to stage a kind of abrupt reversal, wherein a sense of introspection has reached so deeply into the individual consciousness as to meet a vein of dialogue with something deeper – the immanent, 'universal' unconscious, that which connects human subjects at a fundamental level, rather than the superficial level of dialogue. It is at this point that the inward dialogue meets not with the self, but with others – 'creatures who moved in his consciousness' – which need not necessarily be seen as other human subjects, but as some forms of cipher for other consciousnesses, unsullied by the 'murderous hate and treachery' which frustrate outward attempts to communicate, leaving only 'the primitive feeling of love'. It seems that in this process of linguistic failure and rehabilitation, we can see what Henry has characterised as 'consciousness breaking through the circular walls of the ego.'[59]

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What the *Guyana Quartet* ultimately reveals is a confrontation of the status of the multilingual in colonial Guyana and its continuing significance in the context of decolonisation. Moments of linguistic experimentation in the novels serve as the originators of a process of introspection which reaches deep into the psyche of the postcolonial subject. This approach to the multilingual in Harris invites a particular mode of reading – Harris's philosophy of immanence as identified by Henry locates the germ of post-imperial rehabilitation deep within a shared or communal consciousness, and accordingly it is necessary to look beyond individual language-events within the text to a deeper structuring consciousness which forms the very narrative fabric of the novel

[59] Henry, p.99.

cycle. This ultimately reveals in turn Harris's deeply dialectical approach to the connection of the individual and the collective; the turn inward which Harris mandates in response to the realities of the colonial Caribbean experience seems to place him at odds with many of his contemporaries, but it also contains within it a paradoxical engagement with that which is held in common.

Here we can see the meeting of multilingual and modernist concerns in Harris's work. Harris is a clear inheritor of multiple modernist traditions – taking influence from a time of political cataclysm and social upheaval (that is, the process of decolonisation in Guyana) which engenders questioning of long-held cultural norms (particularly, in this case, the lasting characteristics of the time spent as a British colony), and paying particular attention to the crisis of the self which such outside circumstances provoke. What is apparent in reading Harris, though, is that language is central to the attempt to work through these concerns, not only as a medium or means of articulating them, but as tied deeply into their very substance. The multilingual in Harris is at once the political reality of a postcolonial nation whose native languages cannot be fully eradicated by the occupying power, the deployment of a plurality of voices, registers and definitions in seeking to textually work through this cultural context, and the vexed state of mind which Harris's philosophy of immanent consciousness seeks to resolve.

Returning to Deleuze and Guattari's most persuasive account of the multilingual in the modern, we can reiterate again those components of Harris's project in the *Quartet* which render it productively 'minor'. To assert a minor literature is:

> To make use of the polylingualism of one's own language, to make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of the language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic

> Third World zones by which a language can escape, an animal enters into things, an assemblage comes into play.[60]

Harris brings into play his own assemblages – the configurations of language which give rise to a space in which to interrogate the linguistic inheritances of empire which is both productively 'minor' and particular to Guyana. Amidst a body of Caribbean literary approaches which seek to confront language head on, to insist upon the fashioning of a nation language or to resign themselves to oblivion amidst the erasures enacted by colonialism, Harris elects instead to break out by turning inward. Harris confronts the problematic of multilingualism beguilingly; the unconscious of the language breaks out, and an animal enters in.

[60] Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 26-27.

4. The Dangerous Multilingualism of Junot Díaz

In a 2015 interview on *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, Junot Díaz recalls the moment he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his 2007 novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*:

> You gotta understand, it's hard to translate cultural capital to people. My mother's like a very, you know, down, salt-of-the-earth Dominican woman, and I was at her house when they called me up to tell me I'd won a Pulitzer…and she didn't know what it was, and the first question was like 'how much money is that?'….and so I had to look it up, and it was like ten thousand dollars, and she was like 'you made more on your paper route'…she was very disappointed, man.[1]

Characteristically self-deprecating in its humour, the Dominican-American novelist's anecdote proves surprisingly – perhaps shrewdly – illustrative. The overwhelming success of Díaz's novel, which has attracted praise and critical interest for the confessional honesty with which it relates the experience of Dominican immigrants in the United States, and the inventive, multilingual prose in which it does so, turns out to be 'untranslatable' to Díaz's mother. Not only this, but it is specifically her rootedness, her working-class background and, indeed, her Dominicanness, which stand in direct opposition to the cultural sphere of the novel which seeks to replicate the same. With barely-concealed subtext, then, Díaz succeeds too in distancing himself from the terms of his own success: he may have won a Pulitzer, but he is, decidedly, not the kind of writer whom one would expect to win a Pulitzer.

[1] *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, Season 3 Episode 8, 1 October 2015. http://www.nbc.com/late-night-with-seth-meyers/video/junot-diazs-mother-wasnt-impressed-with-his-pulitzer prize/2915308?onid=147636#vc147636=2

Díaz's selection of translatability as the metaphor for his work's reception is surely no accident, and nor indeed is the ambivalence with which he treats the apparent gulf between the wild critical acclaim his writing has received, particularly within America but also in a wide variety of literary marketplaces around the world. The idea that his work might meet with very different kinds of readership is one which Díaz has reflected upon throughout his career. Indeed, in an early interview, Díaz sets out a program for the kind of audience he hopes his work will reach:

> I feel I'm not a voyeur nor a native informer. I don't explain cultural things, with italics or with exclamation or with side bars or asides. I was aggressive about that because I had so many negative models, so many Latinos and black writers who are writing to white audiences, who are not writing to their own people. If you are not writing to your own people, I'm disturbed because of what that says about your relationship to the community you are in one way or another indebted to.[2]

This chapter will, in part, consider the relationships which Díaz's texts cultivate with their readers. While Díaz acknowledges here the importance of writing for one's own people, these reflections reveal that the anticipation of other readerships, particularly those of the racial majority and the literary establishment, also weigh heavily upon Díaz's literary production. As we see above in Díaz's tongue-in-cheek relating of the story of his mother's disappointment, and as we will see when reading the texts, negotiating between different readerships, and cultivating different kinds of readers in ways particular to them, is a central preoccupation of his writing.

[2] Diógenes Céspedes and Silvio Torres-Saillant, 'Fiction is the Poor Man's Cinema: An Interview with Junot Díaz', *Callalloo* 23.3 (Summer 2000), 900.

If Díaz seems in the opening quotation to hive off for himself a space which is aesthetically, linguistically and socially outside the American literary establishment which has welcomed him, it becomes clear as the interview progresses that this is no accident. Moments earlier, the conversation skips tactfully over another detail, which is Díaz's more recent MacArthur fellowship, awarded in 2012 to the tune of half a million dollars (surely a couple of lifetimes' worth of paper routes, or at least enough to make the Pulitzer look parsimonious by comparison), and this narrative of relative poverty continues as Díaz reflects upon his position as a professor of creative writing at – of all places – MIT:

> Part of it is like, I just like nerds; I'm like a big nerd…and I have a high tolerance for being the poorest person anywhere, and at MIT, on faculty, if you're teaching creative writing, all the other folks, a lot of them have run labs, they've got a ton of patents, like when our cars pull up, when you go to the parking lot you see all these people with like antique Jaguars and my shit's all tore up.[3]

If in Díaz's opening anecdote we find him positioning himself in oblique relation to two bodies of received wisdom – literary awards and mainstream literary criticism on one hand, and the academic study of minority ethnic and global literatures on the other – then the third pole we might consider is the creative writing program which has emerged as such a force in post-WWII American writing. Díaz, like one of his most-acknowledged influences Sandra Cisneros, has emerged as a vociferous critic of the creative writing program since earning his MFA from Cornell University in 1995, culminating in the 2014 *New Yorker* essay 'MFA vs POC'. Here Díaz argued that the creative writing program has served to stifle both writers of colour and the linguistic

[3] *Late Night with Seth Meyers*

and aesthetic forms they found with which to express themselves, privileging instead an artificial depoliticisation which sought to exclude questions of race, gender and linguistic alterity from the workshop, and by extension from the writing it produced. Or, in Díaz's own rather pithier phrase, 'that shit was *too white*.'[4]

The discussions which surround Díaz's fiction are revealing of two very different trajectories taken by American modernism (here I mean, in its most expansive sense, the various modernisms of the Americas, rather than the modernism of Fitzgerald, Faulkner and Dos Passos specifically) in the twentieth century. On one hand is the worldly expansion of the transatlantic experimental forms of the inter-war years through subsequent decades, the 'modernist bricolage' we have seen identified by Jahan Ramazani wherein writers from the decolonising world took up various tropes of this modernism and found them to be useful means of exploring cultural hybridity and the postcolonial experience; the tradition, then, of Garcia Marquez and Carpentier, Brathwaite and Harris, Césaire and Damas. On the other would be the very different, inward absorption of transatlantic modernism and its critical convictions into the (particularly American) university, which would not only set the terms for academic literary criticism in the mid-twentieth century, but would also, as Mark McGurl's recent study *The Program Era* has identified, be instrumental in the birth of the creative writing program, which took its 'cultural bearings' from 'the modernist tradition as it had been institutionalized in and as the New Criticism.'[5] This is not to say, of course, that Díaz represents the sudden suturing of these two critical traditions which had hitherto remained entirely separate – it is necessary here to acknowledge Joshua Miller's *Accented America*, which casts American modernism as an assertion of linguistic difference against

[4] Junot Díaz, 'MFA vs POC', *The New Yorker* April 30 2014. http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/mfa-vs-poc
[5] Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (London: Harvard University Press, 2009), p.306.

increasing political pressure toward a monolingual paradigm, and Díaz's own willingness to cast himself as an inheritor of certain strands of American modernist writing, most notably represented by Toni Morrison – but to consider Díaz's writing as a point of interaction is to begin to recognise some of the tensions which inhere within it.[6]

Díaz's criticism of the program era (or 'The Age of the Writing Program' as he calls it in 'MFA vs POC') is no simple rehashing of well-trodden criticisms of the creative writing institution as capable of producing only a certain kind of minimalist realism a la John Cheever or Raymond Carver (important as these figures doubtless are in the history of the program). Indeed, it is more inclined to echo the aforementioned criticism of Sandra Cisneros, who wrote that 'in Iowa, I was suddenly aware of feeling odd when I spoke, as if I were a foreigner…I couldn't articulate what it was that was happening, except I knew I felt ashamed when I spoke in class, so I chose not to speak.'[7] Cisneros hints not only at the kind of exclusion from discussion which Díaz also identifies, but gestures toward a certain expectation of voice or compulsion to articulate, which McGurl describes as a kind of phonocentrism inherent in one of the main aesthetic categories of writing-program production, which he terms 'high cultural pluralism'. This, in McGurl's terms, is 'a body of fiction that joins the high literary values of modernism with a fascination with the experience of cultural difference and the authenticity of the ethnic voice';[8] it is not difficult to draw parallels between this and Díaz's own comments regarding his resistance of the categories of native informer and voyeur.

Thus it is not, for Díaz, solely the problem that the MFA experience was characterised by a lack of students and faculty of colour (although to some extent, of

[6] Joshua L. Miller, *Accented America: The Cultural Politics of Multilingual Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[7] From the introduction to the 1994 edition of *The House on Mango Street*, quoted in McGurl, p.334.
[8] McGurl, p.32.

course, it was). Rather, Díaz's account seeks to emphasise that the writing program he experienced (and continues to experience as a faculty member and visiting writer) possessed only a very limited political and aesthetic vocabulary with regard to racial and national difference. Thus the conversation of his peers is characterised by 'shit like: Why is there even Spanish in this story? Or: I don't want to write about race, I want to write about *real* literature', and he recalls 'one young MFA'r describing how a fellow writer (white) went through his story and erased all the 'big' words because, said the peer, that's not the way 'Spanish' people talk. This white peer, of course, had never lived in Latin America or Spain or in any US Latino community – he just knew.'[9]

If we grant credence to Díaz's dismissal of the possibilities of the writing program as a proving ground for cultural difference, then this goes some way toward explaining the triumphant attention which the growing critical literature affords to the multilingual, multicultural parameters of his fiction. Though one recent volume's assertion that 'when…*Oscar Wao* was published in 2007, the landscapes of American literature and culture changed forever' may seem tinged with hyperbole, the novel's appearance has nevertheless seen academic readers, popular audiences and broadsheet critics alike generally united in their assertions that the novel represents a strikingly bold injection of pluralism into the climate of American letters.[10] Thus the reflections of *New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani, who suggests that Díaz:

> Writes in a sort of streetwise brand of Spanglish that even the most monolingual reader can easily inhale…and he conjures with seemingly effortless aplomb the two worlds his characters inhabit: the Dominican Republic, the host-haunted motherland that shapes their nightmares and their dreams; and America (a.k.a.

[9] Díaz, 'MFA vs POC'.
[10] Monica Hanna, Jennifer Harford Vargas, José David Saldívar, *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), p.4.

> New Jersey), the land of freedom and hope and not-so-shiny possibilities that they've fled to as part of the great Dominican diaspora.[11]

It is worth pausing to consider some of the implications of this analysis. Recalling Díaz's comments concerning the translatability of his success to his Dominican mother, Kakutani's review takes a particular position regarding the converse translatability of Dominican experience to the English-language reader. According to this reading, Díaz's linguistic diversity is deployed for essentially democratic, mimetic purposes – in order to accurately represent the Dominican Republic and New Jersey, and to allow the reader (even the most monolingual one) to apprehend the erstwhile circumscribed experience of Dominican diaspora. This is an approach shared in its essence by a number of Díaz's readers who, while they may not share Kakutani's convictions about the ease of reading which *Oscar Wao* promises, still essentially see the novel as welcoming readers who seek to understand it, even if this may take some effort. This goes some way toward explaining endeavours like Kim's 'Annotated Oscar Wao',[12] a crowdsourced online project which pursues a complete decoding of the novel's every multilingual effect and intertextual allusion, as well as a number of academic articles which emphasise a particular context of allusions as the ultimate skeleton key to the text, such as one reading by Tim Lanzendorfer which argues that 'the novel offers a sweeping reinterpretation of Caribbean history in a way that is completely intelligible only if one understand the relevance of its primary fantasy intertext, *The Lord of the Rings*'.[13]

Other readers, though, have taken an opposing approach, rejecting either the ease of Díaz's writing, its democratic approach, or both. Thus Maria Lauret has

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[11] Michiko Kakutani, 'Travails of an Outcast', *New York Times* Sept. 4 2007.
[12] 'The Annotated Oscar Wao: Notes and translations for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz' - http://www.annotated-oscar-wao.com/
[13] Tim Lanzendorfer, 'The Marvelous History of the Dominican Republic in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*', *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 38.2 (Summer 2013), 127.

observed that, owing to the novel's drawing upon 'languages and literatures too numerous to mention, and too heterogeneous to identify', it is simply too wide-ranging and diffuse not to comprise serious work for all but the most highly-specialised reader, if such a thing exists at all.[14] This in turn necessitates that we remain mindful of the likely diversity of readership when considering a novel like Oscar Wao; we might reject Kakutani's implied proposition that there are simply monolingual and multilingual readers, paying heed instead to Rebecca Walkowitz's reflections on the 'born translated' novel and the nature of its audience:

> To write in English for global audiences...is to write for a heterogeneous group of readers: those who are proficient in several languages, those who may be less-than-proficient in English, and those who may be proficient in one version of English but not proficient in another. This diversity creates an enormous range of English-language geographies, writers, and audiences. It means that readers of English-language texts are likely to have very different experiences: the work will be foreign, strange, or difficult to some; it will be familiar to others.[15]

For a novelist of such acclaim as Díaz, then, it must unavoidably be the case that his work will reach a huge diversity of readership, just as it is inevitable that these heterogeneous readers will apprehend the text in a variety of different ways. This is not necessarily to deny Díaz the possibility of writing 'to his own community', but it does suggest at least that the 'ideal' readership is not the only one worth consideration. Doris Sommer's insights concerning 'particularist' writers of the Americas who are aware of

[14] Maria Lauret, *Wanderwords* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p.246. See also pp.246-249.
[15] Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp.20-21.

the possibility of welcoming some readers while repelling others will prove particularly germane here.[16]

The particular ways in which Díaz's writing meets with the challenge of diversities of readership will be the subject of the latter half of this chapter, but I will begin by considering in more detail some of the allegiances, stated and otherwise, which we can discern in his oeuvre. In particular, it will prove productive to incorporate some of the traditions of Caribbean thought which the last chapter discussed in relation to Harris: if one means of apprehending Díaz's political and aesthetic project in his fiction is through the institutional concerns of both the writing program and the literary establishment within America, then the other institution, less narrowly defined, is that of Caribbean writing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The latter, which has tended to lack direct acknowledgement thus far in the critical tradition around Díaz, will prove to illuminate some of the epistemological and linguistic underpinnings of his writing. The dialectical engagement with these two traditions, though, reveals some of the political convictions within the work, and begins to anticipate Díaz's response to and cultivation of his readership; to the extent to which Díaz seeks to distance himself from the establishment of writing within the United States, he consistently and openly proclaims his allegiance to his forbears in the Caribbean.

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The opening sentences of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* appear to lay out in full the novel's rootedness in the Caribbean, plotting a broad historical sweep of the region, peppered with several hallmarks of Díaz's style:

[16] Doris Sommer, *Proceed With Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999)

> They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, fukú – generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims; despite "discovering" the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices. In Santo Domingo, the Land He Loved Best (what Oscar, at the end, would call the Ground Zero of the New World), the Admiral's very name has become synonymous with both kinds of fukú, little and large; to say his name aloud or even to hear it is to invite calamity on the heads of you and yours.[17]

Within a few lines, Díaz lays out some of the linguistic-historical particularities of the Caribbean self-conception, acknowledging first the origins of the Atlantic slave trade and immediately afterward the eradication of the indigenous peoples of the Antilles which took place alongside it. Only then does the narrative zoom further into the New World, through Santo Domingo, finally seeing it through the eyes of his protagonist. If this establishes a solid geographical foundation within the Caribbean, though, it also serves to undermine notions of temporal and linguistic specificity. Moving seamlessly from macro- to micro-historical narrative and lurching back and forward through time, these lines anticipate the chronology of the novel, which will move between Oscar's

[17] Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (London: Faber, 2008), p.1. Subsequent references will appear parenthetically within the text.

childhood and youth in 1980s and 1990s New Jersey and the travails of his mother and grandfather in the Dominican Republic.

This opening also establishes a sense of linguistic slippage which proves to be inextricable from Caribbean history. Linguistic registers compete and are characterised by uncertainty, as exemplified by the parenthetical 'dique', which Maria Lauret has identified as a Creole 'so they say'.[18] Terminologies are mutually exclusive and in open competition with each other. The ironic repetition of the Eurocentric 'New World' to refer to the Americas is confronted by the fukú, a transhistorical curse which makes a mockery of stories of novelty and origin, being both African and European in origin, ushered into the Caribbean by Columbus who nevertheless became one of its 'great European victims'. The portentous 'Ground Zero' only further complicates the passage's multiple frames of reference: its specifically American, post-9/11 connotations post-date Oscar's death in the fictional narrative, but are entirely contemporary to the novel's writing and publication, hence unlikely to be interpreted in any other way by its readership.

Recent scholarship in world literature, such as Walkowitz's *Born Translated* cited above, has sought to emphasise the extent to which contemporary literary texts anticipate a great breadth of readership, and even these opening lines of *Oscar Wao* show that Díaz is no exception in his apparent recognition of diverse frames of reference. In his case, these range from the local – as a series of very particular experiences of the Dominican Republic or of Dominican diasporic communities in New Jersey – to the global – as part of a paradigm of for-translation writing situated within an increasingly globalised literary marketplace. In between, we find readings of Díaz as belonging to a more general tradition of U.S. American immigrant writing, with or without reference to his

[18] Lauret, p.247.

linguistic particularities, as a 'hemispheric' writer of the Hispanic Americas, and within certain distributed generic conventions, most notably fantasy and science fiction.

This passage will serve to show that Díaz appears unusually aware of this multiple framing. The various interpretive layers on display here serve to complement Díaz's frequent interventions in his own work's reception and the landscapes of American and world literature more widely, which build allegiances and emphasise certain interpretive traditions while downplaying others. These interventions, just like the work itself, are not necessarily internally consistent; as we have seen, Díaz is sharply critical of the creative writing institution, and yet alludes with the title of his novel to Hemingway's 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber', a modernist short story in the kind of stark and hermetic realist vein so stereotypically beloved of the writing program. At times it seems that Díaz's cultivation of his own writing persona rests not so much upon positioning himself within certain traditions, but, as the interview which began this chapter corroborates, fashioning a position as an outsider. The influences which he is unequivocal in acknowledging are few; postcolonial American modernists like Cisneros and Morrison, the 'nerd' genres of fantasy, sci-fi and graphic novels, and the regional sensibilities of writers from the wider Caribbean.

This firm allegiance to the Caribbean tradition appears to be corroborated by the opening of *Oscar Wao*, which is avowedly regionalist in its convictions, and yet to read Díaz as a continuation of a tradition of Caribbean modernism and Caribbean postcolonial thought in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is arguably to take a less well-trodden path. While plenty of Díaz's readers have acknowledged his allusions, explicitly or implicitly, to certain forbears in Caribbean letters – the epigraph to *Oscar Wao*, taken from Derek Walcott's 'The Schooner *Flight*,' seldom goes unnoticed, for example – it has thus far been much less common to consider Díaz's writing as a more

sustained engagement with traditions of Antillean thought. This is a particularly pronounced absence if we wish to consider, *pace* the novel's obvious prioritising of Spanish as its go-to source of linguistic alterity, the roles played within it by both Anglophone and Francophone traditions of thought.

To turn to Díaz's Caribbeanness, however, is not necessarily to relegate into the background his engagement with contemporary American writing and the institutions which have been instrumental in its fashioning as an ongoing tradition. Caribbean modernism has, after all, a long tradition of vexed engagement with institutions; the so-called Windrush generation of Caribbean writers in the United Kingdom achieved a great deal of exposure through the use of certain British institutions, notably the BBC and the *Caribbean Voices* programme, which ultimately allowed for the fashioning of a tradition of anti-imperial critique.[19] The American institution of the writing program is of passing similarity as a postwar intellectual institution which, following McGurl, served to incorporate and repurpose the modernist tradition, and it is thus notable that a series of Caribbean-American authors like Díaz, Edwidge Danticat and Marlon James have passed through it, even if they ultimately emerge as some of its sharpest critics.

Where the likes of George Lamming took as his subject 'the migration of the West Indian writer, as colonial and exile, from his native kingdom, once inhabited by Caliban, to the tempestuous island of Prospero's and his language,' Díaz has sought to encourage the work of a new generation of Caribbean-American (and, more generally, immigrant American) writing, while remaining sharply critical of both American imperialism and the institutions through which he honed his craft.[20] While offering his

[19] See, for the rise of black British writing in general, James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), and for the specific engagement with British cultural institutions, Peter J. Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters: British Literary Culture and the Emergence of Postcolonial Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. chapter 4.
[20] George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* [1960] (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p.13.

criticism of the writing program in 'MFA vs POC', Díaz slips into the same allusive idiom favoured by Lamming and his generation of Caribbean writers:

> When push came to shove, none of us Calibans were close enough, I guess, to really make an intervention. Instead of pulling together we Calibans had all descended into our own spaces, taking the bus home every chance we got…
>
> When I think on it now what's most clear to me is how easily ours could have been a dope workshop. What might have been if we'd had one sympathetic faculty in our fiction program. If we Calibans hadn't all retreated into our separate bolt holes.[21]

Díaz thus fashions a direct antagonism between the two traditions of Caribbean writing and American writing institutions, but the more dialectical pairing of the two is clear: Díaz's ongoing engagement with creative writing institutions, both as a faculty member at MIT and a founder of the alternative Voices of Our Nation workshop, displays a commitment to their continuing evolution as institutions which can foster racially and linguistically diverse writers and ways of writing.

This ongoing dialectic helps to makes sense of some of the narrative peculiarities of *Oscar Wao*. The text's footnotes provide one useful example. In what might seem a curious indictment of the text's economy, some of the most notable events in the history of the Dominican Republic are banished to the novel's footnotes, where they form part of its historical scaffolding, but also coexist with conjecture, rumours and personal anecdotes. Díaz has commented directly on his approach to footnotes, seeking to distance himself as a footnote-user from 'Vollman and Danielewski and the postmodern white-boy gang,' declaring a debt instead to his 'favorite of Caribbean

[21] 'MFA vs POC'

writers,' Patrick Chamoiseau.[22] More recently, Díaz has restated this allegiance, helpfully expanding upon the specifics of his use of paratextual apparatus as an assertion of a particularly Caribbean tradition:

> I encountered Patrick Chamoiseau's work, especially in *Texaco*, where he basically tells the story and then tells the story an entirely different way in his footnotes. That inspired me more than anything. I had been reading a lot of William Vollmann, a writer I deeply admire and even though he used footnotes like mad he didn't spark me the way Chamoiseau did. Chamoiseau was using footnotes in a very Caribbean way…Instead of using the footnotes as a badge of his intelligence, he used them to tell narratives in different frequencies. Chamoiseau was often using his footnotes not for the sake of erudition but sometimes for the sake of gossip. And gossip is an important way that people understand the world and negotiate it.[23]

Again, Díaz casts a feature of his work in terms of an antagonistic relationship between an American tradition and a Caribbean one. He appears to pre-empt a temptation on the part of the reader to attribute this feature of his writing to the writing-program tradition – Mark Z. Danielewski is an MFA alumnus, although William T. Vollman, whom Díaz is more willing to acknowledge a debt to, is not – and to consider the footnotes as an act of hermeneutic deferral, provoking a further search for meaning in lieu of the more traditional academic function of providing closure of interpretation with recourse to an authority. But, in addition to a more direct chiding of the reader than we might expect from footnotes – and this relationship with the reader is a preoccupation I will return to later in this chapter – they also perform two

[22] Edwidge Danticat, 'Junot Díaz', *BOMB* 101 (Fall 2007), p.92.
[23] Henry Ace Knight, 'An Interview with Junot Díaz', *Asymptote* January 2016.

quintessentially Caribbean rejections: firstly, the demotion of sequential, episodic history to somewhere on a par with hearsay and gossip, and secondly, they mostly refuse obstinately (the exceptions are notable) to provide any translation or explication of the novel's multiple registers of language. Again we can discern two different modernist trajectories – with the classic paratextual example of *The Waste Land* as one hypothetical point of origin – and Díaz aligns himself thoroughly with the Caribbean, where a political and ethical project trumps the postmodern 'badge of intelligence'.

The more experimental features of *Oscar Wao* continue to represent specifically Caribbean instantiations of modernist form. Returning to the novel's opening, it is clear that its formal features are bound to a particularly Caribbean representational sensibility, echoing Simon Gikandi's emphasis upon 'the cultural and narrative forms Caribbean writers have developed both to represent and to resist the European narrative of history inaugurated by Columbus and the modern moment'.[24] Thus the extract's historical concerns – the history of colonialism, the arrival of the superstitiously-unnamed Columbus and the erasure of the Caribbean's pre-Columbian populations – are encapsulated by the formal device of the fukú. This latter is of more than passing interest, and indeed, the curse of the fukú emerges as the very metaphysical foundation upon which the novel is built – in mythically tying together the traumatic events of the Caribbean under this one term, Díaz makes an argument for a new understanding of Caribbean history, in which new developments in the subjugation of Caribbean people are not understood from a perspective of European modernity, but through the resurfacing of a recurring myth. The fukú is notable, though, for its linguistic as well as its historical novelty; the etymology of the word is as nebulous as the historical entity which it denotes. Numerous of Díaz's readers have been content to dismiss the term as

[24] Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.2.

a Díaz coinage – Maria Lauret describing it, somewhat perplexingly, as both 'creole' and 'made-up'[25] – and possibly, as Oscar himself discovers upon '[rolling] the word experimentally in his mouth', a play on 'fuck you' (304). Díaz himself, though, has rejected this in an interview with Edwidge Danticat:

> Well, the fukú has been one of those Dominican concepts that have fascinated me for years. Our Island (and a lot of countries around it) has a long tradition of believing in curses. The fukú was different in that it was the one curse that explicitly implicated the historical trauma of our creation, as an area, as a people…For a writer like me, the fukú was a narrative dream come true. I'm not the only one: when the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtusenko visited Santo Domingo and learned about the fukú it inspired him to write a book-length poem called – surprise, surprise – *FUKÚ*. (I've read it; it's pretty damn good.)[26]

Whether this is Díaz acknowledging the true folk origins of the fukú or merely a highly sustained act of misdirection, what is clearly underscored here is the commitment both to the regional sensibility it is intended to convey – the creation and ongoing trauma of the Caribbean 'as an area, as a people' – and to its role as a mythic underpinning of history which destabilises the epistemological primacy of history as conceived instead from a European perspective. The novel's opening thus serves to upset certain received wisdoms or totalising narratives regarding the history of the Caribbean in general and Santo Domingo in particular – a series of gestures on Díaz's part which mark 'a departure not only from the narrative of Columbus 'discovering' America, but also from any other attempt to appropriate this denomination for an autochthonous project of

[25] Lauret, p.246. Lauret re-emphasises her conviction that fukú is a neologism in "'Your Own Goddamn Idiom": Junot Díaz's Translingualism in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*', *Studies in the Novel* 48.4 (Winter 2016).
[26] Edwidge Danticat, 'Junot Díaz', p.90. Yevtushenko's poem can be found in *Almost at the End*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis and Albert Todd (London: Marion Boyars, 1987).

self-definition'.[27] Thus the novel offers a rejoinder not only to the erasure enacted by colonialism, but to the very notion of origin stories – the fukú is deliberately nebulous ('they say..', 'dique'), and yet it performs very concrete historical acts ('the death bane of the Tainos', that is, the eradication of pre-Columbian Caribbean populations).

In establishing from the outset this contingent, anti-teleological approach to history, Díaz situates his novel within a wider tradition of Caribbean postcolonial thought. Derek Walcott's essay 'The Muse of History' is an important touchstone here:

> An obsession of progress is not within the psyche of the recently enslaved…The vision of progress is the rational madness of history seen as sequential time, of a dominated future. Its imagery is absurd. In the history books the discoverer sets a shod food [*sic*] in virgin sand, kneels, and the savage also kneels from his bushes in awe. Such images are stamped on the colonial memory.[28]

Díaz's fukú enacts a similar rejection of the European colonising notions of progress to which colonial states were subjected (the extract above quite openly sneers at the notion of 'discovery' underpinning the colonial project), but also of this idea as a particularly European metaphysics of time. The fukú becomes a response to Walcott's 'madness of history seen as sequential time', a rejection of the temporality which underpins historical subjugation – as Walcott continues, 'if the idea of the New and Old becomes increasingly absurd, what must happen to history itself, but that it, too, is becoming absurd?'[29]

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[27] María del Pilar Blanco, 'Reading the Novum World: The Literary Geography of Science Fiction in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*' in *Surveying the American Tropics: A Literary Geography from New York to Rio* ed, Maria Cristina Fumagalli et al, p.51.
[28] Derek Walcott, *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber, 1998), p.41.
[29] Walcott, p.41.

A second interlocutor, in the form of Edouard Glissant, serves to further elaborate Díaz's preoccupation with time. Indeed, Glissant is explicitly referenced in *Oscar Wao*, in an allusively dense footnote which takes the unusual step both of italicising Glissant's French and offering an immediate editorial translation:

> My shout-out to Jack Kirby aside, it's hard as a Third Worlder not to feel a certain amount of affinity for Uatu the Watcher; he resides in the hidden Blue Area of the Moon and we DarkZoners reside (to quote Glissant) on "*la face cachée de la Terre*" (Earth's hidden face). (92, fn. 10)

Díaz further acknowledges an intellectual debt in a 2007 interview with Edwidge Danticat which immediately followed the publication of *Oscar Wao*. Díaz makes reference to the following passage from Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse*:

> The past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is, however, obsessively present. The duty of the writer is to explore this obsession, to show its relevance in a continuous fashion to the immediate present. This exploration is therefore related neither to a schematic chronology nor to a nostalgic lament. It leads to the identification of a painful notion of time and its full projection forward into the future.[30]

Glissant's commentary seems to share in Walcott's rejection of a linear or teleological progression of time in its acknowledgement of the presentness of the past and its apparent dismissal of any 'schematic chronology'. What Glissant adds, though, is a greater sense of the role of the writer in confronting the realities of Caribbean history, which appears to prompt Díaz to make an unusually explicit acknowledgement of his ethical project in writing *Oscar Wao*:

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[30] Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), pp. 63-4.

> For me, though, the real issue in the book is not whether or not one can vanquish the fukú – but whether or not one can even see it. Acknowledge its existence at a collective level. To be a true witness to who we are as a people and to what has happened to us. That is the essential challenge for the Caribbean nations – who…have been annihilated by history and yet who've managed to put themselves together in an amazing way.[31]

For Díaz, then, the task of writing appears to lie in this being a witness, in somehow offering or recuperating a true picture of Caribbean identity, which fundamentally involves the acknowledgement of the transhistorical trauma which has characterised the region's experience; a subtle refinement, perhaps, of the categories of voyeur and native informer which we saw Díaz eschew earlier.

Díaz, in his depiction of Caribbean history as radically contingent, ephemeral and distributed, takes up and advances, then, the problematisation of history which lies at the heart of Caribbean postcolonial thought. It is another particularity of Caribbean thought that this ultimately proves inextricable from language, and arguably what we see in the opening of *Oscar Wao* is the bringing together of these two issues: the disinvention of Eurocentric history goes hand-in-hand with the disinvention of European language, and the assertion of a new vocabulary must take place alongside the assertion of a new history. Díaz thus confronts both the historical abyss identified by Walcott and the formative Caribbean babelisation identified by Harris. Characters in *Oscar Wao* play as freely with history as they do with language, whether in the case of Yunior's narrative, which shifts back and forward in time, telling Oscar's story chronologically but interspersing it with those of his mother and then grandfather, or in the case of the de León family itself; we learn that 'when the family talks about it at all –

[31] Edwidge Danticat, 'Junot Díaz [Interview]', *BOMB* 101 (Fall 2007), 90.

which is like never – they always begin in the same place: with Abelard and the Bad Thing he said about Trujillo' (211). The narrative here seems to acknowledge the family's ability to establish its own history, corroborating this fact in a footnote which seems initially to contest it:

> There are other beginnings certainly, better ones, to be sure – if you ask me I would have started when the Spaniards "discovered" the New World – or when the U.S. invaded Santo Domingo in 1916 – but if this was the opening that the de Leóns chose for themselves, then who am I to question their historiography? (211, fn.22)

Of course, we as readers already know where Yunior's narrative starts, having already read this far, but here the text seems to explicitly divulge the contingency of the historicising project in which it is engaged. While the novel's 'historiographies' appear to be vying for primacy with each other, in the temporal scheme of the novel there is ultimately no great inconsistency in waiting 200 pages to state that this, in fact, is where the story begins.

The sugar cane fields of the Dominican Republic, which recur darkly throughout *Oscar Wao*, ultimately convey in the novel the particularities of Caribbean thought outlined above. The canefields are a quintessentially Caribbean chronotope – used in the novel as the site of repeated acts of violence against Oscar and multiple generations of his family, they convey a fraught history which projects further back in time, through wars and border disputes with Haiti and ultimately as far back as the colonial plantations worked by slaves. Díaz is of course not alone in his recognition of sugar as symbolic of the experiences of generations of Caribbeans, drawing on a tradition of thought which has seen Lamming describing sugar as 'that mischievous gift'

and referring to the region as 'the sad and dying kingdom of Sugar.'[32] Thus when Oscar is finally led to his doom in the canefields by two secret police officers, it is with a sense of portent which bears witness to this history:

> Nighttime in Santo Domingo. A blackout, of course. Even the Lighthouse out for the night. Where did they take him? Where else. The canefields.
>
> How's that for eternal return? Oscar so bewildered and frightened he pissed himself.
>
> Didn't you grow up around here? Grundy asked his darker-skinned pal. You stupid dick-sucker, I grew up in Puerto Plata.
>
> Are you sure? You look like you speak a little French to me. (296-7)

The kind of cotemporality set up above is in clear effect here – 'how's that for eternal return?' – with a particular emphasis on the trauma of repeated violence, just as later we learn that 'the cane had grown well and thick and in places you could hear the stalks clack-clack-clacking against each other like triffids and you could hear krïyol voices lost in the night.' (320) This latter serves to further emphasise the tying-together of linguistic alterity with history; the 'krïyol voices' – orthographically spelled to resemble Haitian creole – recall the linguistically-plural history of the region, even as this is clearly tied together with its history of violence. This is further complicated by notions of race – the 'darker-skinned' assailant thus must fend off his partner's implicit accusation that he is of Haitian descent.

This combination of French language and African-diasporic features as markers which draw discrimination is one which recurs frequently throughout the novel, reflecting both Díaz's ongoing political commentary concerning the state of Dominican-Haitian relations and the extent to which such discrimination relies on the

[32] Lamming, p.22.

coexistence of linguistic and racial markers. Oscar, who must consistently reassert his claim to Dominicanness in the face of challenges to this identity, first encounters such prejudice upon his first return to New Jersey from the Dominican Republic: 'At JFK, almost not being recognized by his uncle. Great, his tío said, looking askance at his complexion, now you look Haitian.' (32) This is language which is closely echoed much later in the novel, when the entire family return again to Santo Domingo:

> His mother took them all to dinner in the Zona Colonial and the waiters kept looking at their party askance (Watch out, Mom, Lola said, they probably think you're Haitian – La única haitiana aquí eres tú, mi amor, she retorted) (276)

In both cases linguistic markers are used to euphemistically indicate racial prejudice: 'looking askance' becoming a coded gesture toward looking with a racializing gaze, and each comes with a subtle reinscribing of the difference in skin tone through recourse to language, with a switch to Spanish standing in for a reassertion of Dominicanness against both blackness and Haitianness.

Racism in Hispaniola indeed emerges as another appearance of the fukú, again asserting a chronology which reaches as far back as the arrival of Europeans to the Caribbean and the establishment of European racial thinking and the islands' racial dynamics. Thus Oscar's mother Beli, born to a doctor beaten and tortured for criticising the Trujillo regime, embodies the family's cursedness through the darkness of her skin:

> The family claims the first sign was that Abelard's third and final daughter, given the light early on in her father's capsulization, was born black. And not just any kind of black. But *black* black – kongoblack, shangoblack, kaliblack, zapoteblack, rekhablack – and no amount of fancy Dominican racial legerdemain was going to obscure the fact. That's the kind of culture I belong to: people took their child's black complexion as an ill omen. (248)

Again the extensive intertwining of race and language are apparent here, with Beli's blackness asserted through a series of expressions which recall the enforced language politics of the Caribbean: the multiple soubriquets referring to Africa, to Hindi and to the native peoples of the Caribbean. We might read this gesture as a kind of productive creolisation, but must also be aware that this also reflects the depths to which European racial thinking are inscribed within Caribbean thought: Glenda Carpio has acknowledged 'the playfulness with which Díaz describes Beli's darkness', but it is also clear that blackness is regarded as a linguistically-embedded phenomenon regardless of the language in which it is asserted.[33]

It is not necessarily surprising, then, but certainly arresting that the sections of the novel concerning Oscar, in particular, are liberally infused with gestures to Francophone writing from both Europe and the Caribbean. The chapter of the novel in which Oscar enters Rutgers University, becoming Yunior's roommate in the process, gestures to Flaubert, titled 'Sentimental Education 1988-1992' (167). The episode in which Oscar and family return to Santo Domingo late in the novel not only bears the title 'The Condensed Notebook of a Return to A Nativeland', but also contains a mischievously unsubtle reference to European modernism, stating that 'the beat-you-down heat was the same, and so was the fecund tropical smell that he had never forgotten, that to him was more evocative than any madeleine.' (273)

Césaire, indeed, proves to be a particularly important touchstone, even as he is acknowledged only in passing in *Oscar Wao*, because he must surely be recognised as the originator of an adversarial relationship to language which has characterised much

[33] Glenda R. Carpio, 'Now Check It: Junot Díaz's Wondrous Spanglish' in Hanna et al, *Junot Diaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), p.277.

postcolonial writing ever since, in the Caribbean as well as farther afield. Indeed, James Clifford's reflections of Césaire could almost be referring to Díaz himself:

> Césaire…sends readers to dictionaries in several tongues, to encyclopedias, to botanical reference works, histories, and atlases. He is attached to the obscure, accurate term and to the new word. He makes readers confront the limits of their language, or of any single language. He forces them to *construct* readings from a debris of historical and future possibilities. His world is Caribbean – hybrid and heteroglot.[34]

Surely, we can see that Díaz, too, possesses an attachment to the 'obscure, accurate term' – just consider the multi-faceted figuring of Beli's blackness above – as well as to 'the new word' as he forces a term like 'fukú' into the conversation surrounding the post-colonial and post-totalitarian Caribbean. Césaire also leads us back to Chamoiseau, who acknowledged Caribbean literature's debt to Césaire in collaboration with Jean Bernabé and Raphaël Confiant in 'In Praise of Creoleness', asserting that 'Césairian Negritude is a baptism, the primal act of our restored dignity. We are forever Césaire's sons.'[35] This acknowledgement of Césaire is notable not only in its recognition of the centrality of Césaire's linguistic hybridity and experimentation, a tradition which persists in Caribbean writing all the way to Díaz and the present day, then, but also in its anticipation of a position toward the reader that, as the manifesto argues, marks another of the central conditions of Caribbean writing:

> Caribbean literature does not yet exist. We are still in a state of preliterature: that of a written production without a home audience, ignorant of the

[34] James Clifford, 'A Politics of Neologism: Aimé Césaire' in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.175.
[35] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, 'In Praise of Creoleness' trans. Mohamed B. Taleb Khyar, *Callaloo* 13.4 (Autumn 1990), 888.

> authors/readers interaction which is the primary condition of the development of a literature.[36]

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Seemingly taking to heart this pronouncement concerning the 'primary condition of the development of a literature', Díaz's fiction tends to appear unusually aware that it is going to be read, and that it is going to be read in particular ways. Particularly in *Oscar Wao*, Díaz's garrulous recurring narrator Yunior addresses readers directly, sharing jokes with them which can be both outwardly mocking and inwardly self-deprecating, and the paratextual apparatuses which we have already seen anticipate a particular thoroughness of reading, seeking to engage the reader in an ongoing conversation which plays at the margins of text and narrator, and text and outside world. This notion of an 'authors/readers interaction' thus finds its adoption both in the kind of relationships which the texts themselves cultivate with their readership, and accompanying pronouncements which Díaz has offered concerning his relationship with the reader, which have suggested not only that 'I really love the idea that my reader would collaborate with me', but also that 'as a writer, I always feel like I'm talking very intimately to my reader and I tend to assume my reader has a lot of my same knowledge'.[37]

A brief reading of 'Ysrael', the opening story of the collection *Drown*, will serve to illustrate not only some of the multilingual effects which characterise Díaz's fiction, but also the ways in which it forces a consideration of mono- and multilingual readership, and a questioning of where we might consider the boundaries of each to lie. As in

[36] Bernabé et al, 886.
[37] 'Junot Díaz and Karen Russell on writing short stories' – the *New Yorker* Festival, YouTube 7 Nov 2013, Henry Ace Knight, 'An Interview with Junot Díaz', *Asymptote* January 2016.

several stories in the collection, the narrator Yunior reflects on his family life and upbringing, both in New Jersey and, here, in the Dominican Republic:

> Mami shipped me and Rafa out to the campo every summer. She worked long hours at the chocolate factory and didn't have the time or the energy to look after us during the months school was out. Rafa and I stayed with our tíos, in a small wooden house just outside Ocoa; rose bushes blazed around the yard like compass points and the mango trees spread out deep blankets of shade where we could rest and play dominos, but the campo was nothing like our barrio in Santo Domingo.[38]

The narrative here unfolds, then, in a straightforward, declarative English (which drifts into more lyrical territory with its recollection of the rose bushes and the mango trees), with a few insertions of Spanish words. These take the form of relatively commonplace nouns, rather than grammatically-complete code-switches, and even a reader with absolutely no knowledge of Spanish may find enough contextual clues here – the pastoral imagery, the apparently slow pace of life, the direct contrast with the city – to conclude, at the very least, that 'campo' means 'countryside'. Nevertheless, further help is available in the form of the collection's glossary, which will divulge the further necessary translations – 'uncle' for 'tío' and 'neighborhood' for 'barrio'.

There is already an insistent normalising project evident in the deployment of Spanish here. Spanish words will continue to appear as freely in the narrative voice as in dialogue, and they are never italicised – indeed, Díaz's outright refusal of any typographical marking of non-English words was instrumental in bringing about a change in house style at the *New Yorker*, where a number of his stories have been

[38] Junot Díaz, *Drown* [1996] (London: Faber, 2008), p.1.

published.[39] Díaz expands at length on his attitude to the use of Spanish in fiction in an interview conducted shortly after the appearance of *Drown*, taking issue with a fellow Hispanic-American novelist:

> Take Oscar Hijuelos, el cubano. In his early years, his usage of Spanish was just awful. I couldn't figure out why he had some words in Spanish and not others. No coherence. So I sought coherence. Also, for me, allowing the Spanish to exist in my text without the benefit of italics or quotation marks was a very important political move. Spanish is not a minority language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside my head. So why treat it like one? Why 'other' it? Why denormalize it?[40]

Díaz sets out, then, a normalising project from the micro to the macro scale – multilingualism, he asserts, is a fact to be acknowledged at every level, from the writer's own mind to the Western hemisphere. The former point, seemingly privileging 'coherence' as the standard by which successful multilingual writing ought to be judged, is perhaps the less transparent. We might reasonably ask, coherence in whose eyes? Already, Díaz appears to assume a certain kind of reader; one for whom a code-switching text remains coherent, which seems only to accommodate a bilingual reader. Díaz appears too, though, to demand an internal standard of coherence for the Spanish used, which is to say that there must be some reason, some narrative logic, for some words to be rendered in Spanish while others are not.

There is a tension already at work here, then: Díaz expresses resistance to the 'othering' of Spanish, and appears to seek to accommodate a reader already conversant in Spanish, and yet the opening pages of *Drown* invite the consultation of a glossary, and with it

[39] Walkowitz, *Born Translated*, p.29.
[40] Diógenes Céspedes and Silvio Torres-Saillant, 'Fiction is the Poor Man's Cinema: An Interview with Junot Díaz', *Callalloo* 23.3 (Summer 2000), 904.

offer the possibility that the non-Spanish speaker, too, can be accommodated. Though it might seem from these early forays that Díaz, while injecting a certain amount of the vernacular of the Dominican Republic which he depicts, is going to carefully walk the unacquainted reader through any moments of potential difficulty, though, a hypothetical monolingual reader may already be on their guard. We might have reason to suspect, given the carefully placed noun substitutions, that there is something about them that would not quite be conveyed by using English; that the campo-barrio distinction is not a straightforward rural-urban one, but that the campo, for example, is a very specific Dominican instantiation of what it means to be in the countryside. Even in the case of tío, which must surely convey the same biological relationship as 'uncle', it seems reasonable to suppose that this cultural understanding of one's parent's brother may be more specific.

Further difficulties soon arise, though, as the story continues:

> In the campo there was nothing to do, no one to see. You didn't get television or electricity and Rafa, who was older and expected more, woke up every morning pissy and dissatisfied…This, he said, is shit.
>
> Worse than shit, I said.
>
> Yeah, he said, and when I get home, I'm going to go crazy – chinga all my girls and then chinga everyone else's.[41]

This time, the non-Hispanophone reader is thwarted; turning again to the glossary, we will find no entry for 'chinga'. Again, contextual clues, both narrative and grammatical abound; the grammatical placement of 'chinga', and that this comes as part of a private, profanity-strewn conversation between two adolescent boys, suggest that it would be a reasonable (indeed, correct) guess that 'chinga' means 'fuck'. But nevertheless, Díaz

[41] *Drown*, pp.1-2.

already appears to have gone off-piste, and in the coming paragraphs, all rationale for translation or otherwise appears to disintegrate. Thus we learn that Rafa and Yunior 'caught jaivas in the streams' (untranslated) and 'set traps for jurones' (translated – 'mongooses'), and that 'Rafa had his own friends, a bunch of tígueres who liked to knock down our neighbors and who scrawled chocha and toto on walls and curbs' ('tígueres' translated, expressively, as 'street kids or straight-up hoods', 'chocha' and 'toto' left to the reader's imagination).[42]

If a strategy of coherence is at work here, already it seems difficult to discern, with a random element creeping in wherein some words are glossed and others, seemingly arbitrarily, are not. This is only the beginning of a pursuit of meaning which turns out to be rather convoluted. In order to translate 'jaivas', should we wish to, we must first establish that it is a nonstandard spelling of 'jaibas' (crabs). Not only this, though – should we now be tempted to check the translation of 'jurones', a degree of phonological leeway is again necessary to lead us to 'hurónes', which in European Spanish actually means 'ferrets'. Spanish may be common to the Western hemisphere, in Díaz's formulation, but it is apparently delivered in *Drown* with a great deal of regional specificity.

Of course, what we see here may not be best understood as conflicting attempts to court both mono- and bilingual readers, so much as a teasing at the boundaries of what such categories really mean. Moments identified above participate in something like what Makoni and Pennycook have deemed a 'disinvention' of language: a reader may well consult an Iberian Spanish dictionary (as I did) in seeking a translation of 'jaivas' or 'jurones', and while doing so may not prove useful, the words are nevertheless still Spanish. Similarly, the decision to translate 'tígueres' idiomatically as 'straight-up hoods'

[42] *Drown*, p.2.

may amount to a mere deferral for a reader who does not immediately recognise the urban American register, but this does not mean that the word has not been adequately translated. Rather, moments such as these reveal the inherent flimsiness of any appeal to a centralised authority, revealing language instead as radically distributed and ephemeral. It is not simply that Díaz is writing in a striking, creolised vernacular, but that the very ingredients of 'English' and 'Spanish' are being undermined and complicated, somewhat echoing Makoni and Pennycook's call to arms for disinvention:

> Since we are skeptical of the notion of language itself, the solution is not to normalize creole languages by seeing them as similar to other languages, but to destabilize languages by seeing them as similar to creoles...If anything we would like to argue that all languages are creoles, and that the slave and colonial history of creoles should serve as a model on which other languages are assessed. In other words, it is what is seen as marginal or exceptional that should be used to frame our understandings of language.[43]

Not only does this perspective serve to elaborate upon some of the undermining of language enacted in Díaz's writing, but it also recalls the inextricability of language and history already established by Díaz and his Caribbean forbears. It is of course notable that Makoni and Pennycook choose creole as their model for a new understanding of language, just as Díaz embraces Chamoiseau et al's positioning of creole at the centre of the tradition of Caribbean writing.

The heterolingual features of *Drown* tend typically to be confined to enacting Meir Sternberg's 'selective reproduction',[44] that is, the narrative tactically deploys linguistic

[43] Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook, *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007), p.21.
[44] Meir Sternberg, 'Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis', *Poetics Today* 2. (Summer-Autumn 1981), 225.

markers – campo, barrio – with the intent of conveying that the entire dialogue depicted is taking place in Spanish. While there are moments in *Drown* which begin to suggest a more complex depiction of bilingual practices, code-switching and learned language ('jewel love it', says a Peruvian cannabis dealer in 'Aurora'),[45] language clearly shifts into a more central focus in *Oscar Wao*. Not only is the narrator now fully immersed in the quotidian heteroglossia of the Dominican-American community in New Jersey, but the characters seem now to possess an awareness, even at times an obsession, with their own multilingualism. Oscar himself, an awkward English-Spanish bilingual but steeped in the constructed languages of Tolkien, becomes the novel's punner-in-chief upon becoming Yunior's college roommate:

> Hail, Dog of God, was how he welcomed me my first day in Demarest.
>
> Took a week before I figured out what the hell he meant.
>
> God. Domini. Dog. Canis.
>
> Hail, Dominicanis. (171)

We might see, then, that there is a greater degree of complexity at work in the multilingualism of *Oscar Wao*, but nevertheless, this is not necessarily an adversarial gesture. As an example such as this demonstrates, the shifting of a more conscious multilingualism into the dialogue of the characters allows for a slightly didactic approach, wherein the reader can learn to make sense of the novel's linguistic methods by watching its characters do the same. Even in the case of the more directly estranging 'fukú', Yunior offers extensive commentary on the term in ways which imply that he, too, is not entirely convinced by it, at times coming close to a postmodern anticipation of the ways in which the novel will be apprehended by the collective of its readers:

[45] Díáz, *Drown*, p.37.

> I have a tía who believed she'd been denied happiness because she'd laughed at a rival's funeral. Fukú. My paternal abuelo believes that diaspora was Trujillo's payback to the pueblo that betrayed him. Fukú…
>
> A couple weeks ago, while I was finishing this book, I posted the thread *fukú* on the DR1 forum, just out of curiosity. These days I'm nerdy like that. The talkback blew the fuck up. (5-6)

Expending considerable time piecing together linguistic puzzles and puns, pursuing references through mass media and the internet: the novel shrewdly anticipates the centrality of these processes to its being understood, but also seems to reassure the reader by depicting them being played out within the text itself.

But if *Oscar Wao* appears more self-aware in its multilingualism than *Drown* in ways which actually help the reader to grasp it, we can also see the opening up of a greater distance between the text and its readers. The glossary has been dispensed with (the choice of paratext for *Oscar Wao* is, instead, the aforementioned footnotes), and Spanish appears a much more insistent presence which is more resistant to simple translation. If in *Drown* we could see in evidence both a courting of a hypothetical non-Spanish-speaking reader's understanding as well as a tendency to keep them at arm's length and to force a consideration of the limits of translation, this dialectic appears much more fully adopted in *Oscar Wao*. The introduction of the titular character thus comes clad in a much more wide-ranging, allusive and freely multilingual narrative:

> You should have seen him, his mother sighed in her Last Days. He was our little Porfirio Rubirosa.
>
> All the other boys his age avoided the girls like they were a bad case of Captain Trips. Not Oscar. The little guy loved himself the females, had "girlfriends" galore. (He was a stout kid, heading straight to fat, but his mother kept him nice

> in haircuts and clothes, and before the proportions of his head changed, he'd had these lovely flashing eyes and these cute-ass cheeks, visible in all his pictures.) The girls – his sister Lola's friends, his mother's friends, even their neighbour, Mari Colón, a thirty-something postal employee who wore red on her lips and walked like she had a bell for an ass – all purportedly fell for him. Ese muchacho está bueno! (12-13)

The straightforward noun substitutions which characterise *Drown*, while still in evidence here, are joined by grammatical phrases, whole sentences and occasionally whole (if brief) conversations conducted in Spanish. Thus the collectivised, reported speech of the women of the New Jersey Dominican community here depicted is encapsulated in a phrase 'ese muchacho está bueno!' The detached, clinical sense of narrative distance which was evident in *Drown* has also been dispensed with. Here the narrator – ostensibly the same Yunior who narrates *Drown* – sits in much greater proximity to the events he narrates, relating them with recourse to a series of colloquialisms like 'the little guy loved himself the females' and 'cute-ass cheeks'. Also characteristic of the narrative voice in *Oscar Wao* are the allusions, both literary and historical – Porfirio Rubirosa, the playboy and rumoured assassin for the dictatorial leader Rafael Trujillo, is glossed in a lengthy footnote, while Captain Trips, the fictional biological weapon from Stephen King's *The Stand*, is left unexplained.

It has been noted that one of the shifts in preoccupation between *Oscar Wao* and Díaz's earlier writing is that the former seems to anticipate, and much more explicitly respond to, a diversity of readership. As Eugenia Casielles-Suárez writes:

> Díaz's use of Spanish in *The Brief Wondrous Life*…goes beyond gratifying the bilingual reader and approaches radical bilingualism, although in a different way, which I will call 'radical hybridism'. Rather than include whole paragraphs in

> Spanish, which a monolingual reader could simply skip, or offer a neat kind of code alternation…the quantity and quality of Spanish words and phrases which are constantly inserted in English sentences create hybrid phrases with the result that rather than alternating with English, Spanish becomes part of English.[46]

That *Oscar Wao*, with its more prevalent, sustained and distributed deployments of Spanish, appears much less accommodating than *Drown* to a monolingual reader seems relatively clear. Casielles-Suárez's point regarding Díaz's potential bilingual readers is potentially the more challenging: it is apparent that, in jettisoning the glossary of *Drown* and moving to a more grammatically-complex alternation of English and Spanish, *Oscar Wao* stands in a more adversarial position to the monolingual reader, but this appears to suggest that the bilingual reader, too, is going to face a less easy ride than they did before. It is to *Oscar Wao*'s more thoroughgoing confrontation with its readers that I thus now turn.

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For all that they are garrulous and witty, hospitable to their readers whom they invite as participants in a series of linguistic games, Díaz's texts reveal a stumbling-block which has as yet not been granted the attention it deserves in the form of their violence. And indeed, they are shockingly violent: for all their frank explorations of human sexuality, they depict domestic abuse and sexual violence; for all their affectionate portrayals of family relationships, they allude to child abuse, and show open violence between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. Of course, looming largest, particularly in *Oscar Wao*, is the terrible and indiscriminate violence of totalitarianism, even while bodies are further ravaged by sickness, drug use, and freak accidents.

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[46] Eugenia Casielles-Suárez, 'Radical Code-switching in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 90.4 (2013), p. 477.

This not a trite observation for a reader of Díaz, any more than it is a gratuitous gesture on the part of the author. Indeed, the interplay of violence and intimacy, or of hostility and hospitality, forms both the spine of Díaz's aesthetic and the true reflection of the reader-writer interaction which he pursues.[47] This is a concern, moreover, which can be traced through his career from its beginnings to the present day. While Díaz's criticism of the writing program in 'MFA vs POC', for example, is by no means lacking in conviction, the reflections it offers on his graduate school experience are positively family-friendly by comparison to his pronouncements from decades earlier:

> I even fought when I was in graduate school at Cornell's creative writing program…You know how it is. Everyone thinks they're men. People who never had a fight in their life think they're men. They look at you wearing glasses and you're nice, and they want to fight. Then you knock their teeth out. They suddenly wake up to the reality of poor people.[48]

It is difficult to separate the arresting image of knocking people's teeth out at Cornell from Díaz's wider reflections on the institutional politics of writing or the politics of form. While we have already seen some of his softer pronouncements on the kind of reader-writer relationship he hopes to cultivate, Díaz's reflections must again be complicated by further comments he has offered on the reading and writing process, suggesting that his language itself ought to be read as something rather more confrontational than we have seen thus far:

> When I learned English in the States, this was a violent enterprise. And by forcing Spanish back onto English, forcing it to deal with the language it tried to

[47] See Ana María Manzanas Calvo, 'Junot Díaz's "Otravida, Otravez" and Hospitalia: The Workings of Hostile Hospitality', *Journal of Modern Literature* 37.1 (Fall 2013), 107-123.
[48] 'Poor Man's Cinema', 895.

> exterminate in me, I've tried to represent a mirror-image of that violence on the page. Call it my revenge on English.[49]

Perhaps we don't yet see Díaz proposing direct confrontation with his readers – it is the language itself, here, which is the intended victim, rather than its readers or speakers – but his voluntary deployment of the notion of violence here in a specifically linguistic sense ought to be arresting, not least because this must join an extensive list of types of violence which we are to witness unfolding in the texts themselves. Furthermore, when Díaz goes on to suggest that the immigrant in the United States '[spends] a lot of time being colonized' but can subsequently 'begin to decolonize [themselves], he appears to slip into a very particular postcolonial idiom.[50] Specifically, these lines seem to echo the words of Frantz Fanon, who asserted in *The Wretched of the Earth* that 'decolonization is always a violent event'.[51] Forcing Spanish into the grammar of English narrative becomes a gesture of decolonising violence – as glossed by Díaz's interviewer, he enacts 'linguistic violence that makes readers read that which they may not want to read'.[52] Merely forcing readers to read words which are unfamiliar to them, though, while it may seem like a productive gesture, seems to account only in part for Díaz's linguistic project. To risk stretching the link a little further, Fanon goes on to write that 'decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder,' and it seems that, paradoxically, we can identify in *Drown* two competing, if not entirely contradictory, projects of linguistic coherence and linguistic disorder.[53]

All of this serves to emphasise what ought by now to be apparent, but which tends to fade into the background among discussions of Díaz's swaggeringly compelling

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[49] 'Poor Man's Cinema', 904.
[50] 'Poor Man's Cinema', 896.
[51] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961], trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p.1.
[52] 'Poor Man's Cinema', 904.
[53] Fanon, p.2.

language: reading Díaz is actually quite difficult. As Maria Lauret, one of the few readers to confront this fact directly, is keen to emphasise, 'really reading Junot Díaz is *work*.'[54] While this is an important fact to emphasise, though – and as we have seen, merely reading the first couple of pages of *Drown* can be quite an involved process – it is in danger, in and of itself, of enacting some misdirection. To state that a text is merely difficult is to suggest that this difficulty can be overcome, and that mastery of the text can be achieved if only sufficient effort is expended in the process. But increasingly what a text like *Oscar Wao* forces us to confront is that this may not be possible, and that to seek some complete hermeneutics of the text is to miss the point. This is a point made by Rune Grauland, who has argued against the Chinese-American poet Ha Jin's calls for 'an easily translatable literature of "universal significance and appeal"':

> This *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* certainly does not do, with its many diverse registers positively taunting its readers with a stubborn refusal to decode and explain. Consequently, rather than insisting on universality and inclusion, as Jin does, Díaz implements a politics of exclusion, actively forcing his readers to accept that parts of his text will likely remain indecipherable to them.[55]

Graulund here makes a persuasive argument for the centrality of unintelligibility to Díaz's wider project in *Oscar Wao*. So diverse and wide-ranging are the novel's language tricks and allusions, Grauland suggests, that the reader who is actually capable of deciphering them all and achieving some hypothetical complete understanding of the text would be so highly specific in their expertise as to be essentially non-existent. Furthermore, the processes of occlusion native to *Oscar Wao* – the refusal to italicise non-English words, the compounding of both English and Spanish with highly specific

[54] Lauret, p.249.
[55] Rune Grauland, 'Generous Exclusion: Register and Readership in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*', *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the US* 39.3 (Fall 2014), 34.

regionalisms, the rapid oscillation between high- and low-culture references, and between genre and literary allusions – seem designed to make a mockery of any concerted effort at hermeneutics. Crucially, though, Graulund goes on to argue that this is essentially a dramatic gesture on Díáz's part – a process Graulund terms 'generous exclusion' – and that 'by positioning all of his registers on a level playing field…all of these registers are deemed of equal importance'.[56] Thus, while any hypothetical reader coming to *Oscar Wao* is likely to encounter moments which are ultimately unintelligible, this is an experience common to all readers; conversely, this same multiplicity offers plural routes toward the same ultimate understanding – in Graulund's phrase, 'there is no such thing as an authentic reading to be gained from *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, no entry to the text that is more or less ideal.'[57]

Persuasive as Graulund's reading of exclusion in *Oscar Wao* is, it is the reconciliation of this with an ethic of generosity which I find ultimately less convincing. Far from presenting a range of cultural allusions from which an interested reader can pick and choose, buffet-like, it is at times difficult to avoid acknowledging that *Oscar Wao* reserves a particular scorn for certain sectors of its readership. We might locate the beginnings of this strategy in the gentle chastisement of the reader in which Yunior partakes from the opening pages of the novel. Comprehension may be offered, but only accompanied by assertions of the ill-suitedness of the reader to apprehend the given information; thus, the novel's first footnote, which introduces Trujillo, is directed toward 'those of you who missed your mandatory two seconds of Dominican history' (2, fn.1), and continues in an increasingly sardonic tone which serves to bathetically highlight some of the worst atrocities of Trujillo's career, which are listed as 'outstanding accomplishments' (3, fn.1). As Monica Hanna suggests, 'the "you" invokes

[56] Graulund, 34-5.
[57] Graulund, 41.

the reader's complicity in the historical ignorance surrounding Dominican history; as the novel is written in English…and relies heavily on United States popular cultural tropes, this interpolated "you" is likely to be a United States reader'.[58] This historical amnesia surrounding American imperialism is only further emphasised a few footnotes later, when again this interpolated 'you' is addressed directly: 'You didn't know we were occupied twice in the twentieth century? Don't worry, when you have kids they won't know the U.S. occupied Iraq either.' (19, fn.5)

Such a sense only continues to build as, still early in the novel, the narrative takes the unusual step of defining at length one of its many Dominican Spanish terms, as Oscar is described as 'the neighborhood parigüayo' (19):

> The pejorative *parigüayo*, Watchers agree, is a corruption of the English neologism "party watcher." The word came into common usage during the First American Occupation of the DR, which ran from 1916 to 1924…During the First Occupation it was reported that members of the American Occupying Forces would often attend Dominican parties but instead of joining in the fun the Outlanders would simply stand at the edge of dances and *watch*. Which of course must have seemed like the craziest thing in the world. Who goes to a party to *watch*? Thereafter, the Marines were parigüayos – a word that in contemporary usage describes anybody who stands outside and watches while other people scoop up the girls. The kid who don't dance, who ain't got game, who lets people clown him – he's the parigüayo. (19-20, fn.5)

The narrative extends an unusual degree of understanding to the reader by breaking one of its own rules and providing an extensive gloss on one of its more esoteric pieces of

[58] Monica Hanna, '"Reassembling the Fragments": Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*', *Callaloo* 33.2 (Spring 2010), 502.

vocabulary, but in doing so emphasises a lurking sense of similarity between the reader and the *parigüayo*, the American interloper who self-consciously stands on the sidelines. The reader, too, perhaps begins to develop a sense of themselves as a *parigüayo*, uneasily watching a performance of cultural difference which they are seemingly unable to enter. That this particular term is accompanied by a lengthy explanatory footnote again amounts to a kind of inversion of the footnote's normal paratextual logic – the definition doesn't so much provide the reader with hermeneutic closure as instil doubt and provoke distance between reader and text. If the novel essentially tells me on this occasion that it is making a joke at my expense, how many more times could it be openly laughing at me without my even knowing it?

Doris Sommer's *Proceed With Caution* provides the most thorough explanation of this kind of adversarial reader-text relationship, particularly as it appears in multilingual and minority American writing. Sommer's account is notable for the ways in which it overlaps with the kind of rhetoric favoured by Díaz, attributing to the text a potential for violence which is figured in almost-physical terms:

> Be careful of some books. They can sting readers who feel entitled to know everything as they approach a text, practically any text, with the conspiratorial intimacy of a potential partner…The slap of refused intimacy from uncooperative books can slow readers down, detain them at the boundary between contact and conquest, before they press particularist writing to surrender cultural difference for the sake of universal meaning.[59]

There is an even stronger assertion here of the kind of 'taunting' identified by Graulund and which we can see in some of the text's direct addresses to the reader. Sommer's

[59] Doris Sommer, *Proceed With Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.ix.

position sets up the possibility of an even more direct confrontation between author and text, in which the text itself can 'slap' and 'sting' the reader into recognising the limits of their own understanding. It is the opening-up of this distance which is, for Sommer, the very purpose of this kind of particularist writing: 'announcing limited access is the point, whether or not some information is really withheld.'[60] This seems only more persuasive as we consider the ways in which the physical violence depicted within the text is often accompanied by gestures of textual violence against the reader.

The same register we see unfolding above – a seemingly grudging offering of intelligibility, accompanied all the while by narrative interventions which explicitly taunt the reader's own lack of knowledge – continues in earnest throughout the novel, but appears to be reserved with particular vitriol for the academic reader. For this section of his hypothetical readership, Díaz apparently reserves a particularly crass sense of bathos; highly particular references and allusions which only serve to demonstrate how poor a frame of reference the academic one is for understanding the events of totalitarianism. Thus, in one of several anecdotes concerning graduate students (this time the dissident Jesús de Galíndez, who wrote a dissertation explicitly critical of Trujillo), the reader is awkwardly implicated:

> Long story short: upon learning of the dissertation, El Jefe first tried to buy the thing and when that failed he dispatched his chief Nazgul (the sepulchral Felix Bernardino) to NYC and within days Galíndez got gagged, bagged, and dragged to La Capital, and legend has it when he came out of his chloroform nap he found himself naked, dangling from his feet over a cauldron of *boiling oil*, El Jefe standing nearby with a copy of the offending dissertation in hand. (And you thought *your* committee was rough.) (97, fn.11)

[60] Sommer, p.8.

This last interjection, drawing a bathetic comparison between the thesis defence of a budding academic and the abduction, torture and probable murder of a political dissident, seems ultimately interpretable only as a devastating riposte to the academic reader's sense of hermeneutics – being an academic reader, the text seems to argue, means to approach the text from a frame of reference under which the more gruesome events of the Trujillo dictatorship are, quite literally, unimaginable.

The potential violence of the text's language, then, begins to overlap with the literal violence it depicts. The violence of totalitarianism cannot be apprehended fully by a reader unacquainted with the realities of totalitarian rule, and in its place is a kind of textual confrontation – a repurposing of violence which emphasises the gulf between the interpolated reader and the events depicted by the novel. This is starkly demonstrated in the novel's final visits to the canefields which, as we have already seen, are emblematic of Caribbean histories of physical and linguistic confrontation, histories which are experienced by successive generations of the family as first Beli, then Oscar are driven into the canefields to suffer acts of violence. The earlier event is shocking in the physical violence of its description, which even gestures to its own incapacity by describing the beating as 'the end of language' (147). The similar fate suffered by Oscar is again striking in its violence, but on this occasion is paired with a widely-noticed and highly-targeted allusion:

> All I know is, it was the beating to end all beatings…He *shrieked*, but it didn't stop the beating; he begged, and that didn't stop it either; he blacked out, but that was no relief…It was like one of those nightmare eight-a.m. MLA panels: *endless*. (298-9)

Readers of *Oscar Wao* have tended to consider this moment as a harmless, if slightly tasteless, joke on the part of Díaz or his narrator – a 'moment of complicity between

the narrator and the academic reader' for María del Pilar Blanco, which 'may not translate to all readers of the novel, but assures a knowing nod from a specialised arts and humanities contingent'[61] – but I would tend to read this as a rather more hostile gesture. While Graulund has pointed out that 'while most English majors will be aware that MLA refers to the Modern Language Association…a professor in biology or sociology is unlikely to decipher the acronym without a helping hand in terms of some form of glossing' in order to demonstrate this as another democratic gesture, it is surely equally germane to note how little either party has to gain from apprehending it.[62] What is surely most apparent is the staggering bathos in evidence here, moving from a barbarous act of physical violence to the complete banality of an academic conference. The academic reader may comprehend the reference, the text seems to say, but this doesn't move them any closer to understanding the events depicted. Again, it seems the only productive way of interpreting this gesture is to realise how essentially clueless is renders the target reader in understanding what is actually taking place.

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Linguistic violence, then, can be directed toward particular kinds of readers: the unfamiliarity of Dominican idiom is forcibly made familiar through *Oscar Wao*'s paratextual apparatus only to further exclude the reader, while a highly familiar allusion is rendered powerless through its inability to serve as a workable metaphor. The novel, though, as well as deploying such violence outward, explores linguistic violence intra-textually, forcing a consideration of the materiality of language and the inextricability of linguistic and physical confrontation. Oscar's final fate is thus the occasion for a

[61] Blanco, p.51.
[62] Graulund, 33.

multilingual pun, as his desperate plea for forgiveness – delivered in Spanish which is 'good for once' (321) – is ultimately ignored by his assailants:

> They waited respectfully for him to finish and then they said, their faces slowly disappearing in the gloom, Listen, we'll let you go if you tell us what *fuego* means in English.
>
> Fire, he blurted out, unable to help himself. (322)

What appears to be a mocking pun on the part of Oscar's assailants is in fact a much subtler acknowledgement of Díaz's linguistic project. The common-sense answer to the question, contrary to Oscar's self-condemning one, is in fact that *fuego* doesn't mean anything in English, because it's a Spanish word. But if we recall Díaz's intention to 'force Spanish back onto English', we can instead suggest that this is exactly what happens here – *fuego* is no longer just a Spanish word, but a word of Spanish origin within an English narrative.

This act of self-incrimination, though, is key: just as a particular kind of reader can in fact exclude themselves from identification precisely through the act of apprehending a reference, the novel depicts language as a tool of state power wherein participation within or exclusion from a linguistic community can represent the difference between life and death. This, essentially, is the logic of the shibboleth, a device which lies at the heart of popular conceptions concerning the Trujillo regime and its maintenance of power. *Oscar Wao* builds its allusions to this slowly, particularly through the aforementioned footnotes, the first of which acknowledges 'the 1937 genocide against the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican community' (3 fn. 1). These events are referenced more fully only much later, in a footnote which references Abelard Cabral's silence in the face of the regime's atrocities:

> In 1937, for example, while the Friends of the Dominican Republic were perejiling Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans and Haitian-looking Dominicans to death, while genocide was, in fact, in the making, Abelard kept his head, eyes, and nose safely tucked into his books (let his wife take care of hiding his servants, didn't ask her nothing about it) and when survivors staggered into his surgery with unspeakable machete wounds, he fixed them up as best as he could without making any comments as to the ghastliness of their wounds. (215, fn. 24)

The genocide of 1937, in which several thousand Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent (or perhaps 'half Haitian half Dominican, that special blend the Dominican government swears *no existe*' [26]) were murdered in the border region in the northwestern Dominican Republic, has come to be known, particularly in literary accounts, as the 'Parsley Massacre'. The name refers to the shibboleth reportedly used to identify potential victims as Haitian – soldiers would hold up a sprig of parsley and ask what it was; anyone able to pronounce 'perejil' was deemed Dominican, but Creole-speaking Haitians would likely struggle to pronounce both the trilled 'r' and the aspirated 'j': thus 'perejiling' and, elsewhere, Trujillo's 'horrifying ritual of silence and blood, machete and perejil' (224, fn. 27).

Although recent scholarship has cast considerable doubt upon the historical veracity of the shibboleth – the massacre itself certainly took place, but is referred to by Haitians as *kout kouto* and by Dominicans as *el corte*, both designations considerably more concrete than the more abstract 'parsley massacre' – the device has proved particularly durable in literary accounts.[63] Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* makes passing reference to

[63] Historian Lauren Derby, who has published widely on the massacre and the Trujillo period more generally, is quoted as saying 'It's a myth. No survivors or people who witnessed the massacre have said anything about parsley being used.' ('Hispaniola: Trujillo's Voudou Legacy', Jan 7, 2013 - http://therevealer.org/archives/16375)

it, while it forms the central preoccupation of both Rita Dove's poem 'Parsley' and Edwidge Danticat's novel *The Farming of Bones*. We might attribute this preoccupation with the shibboleth to the grimly efficient economy of discrimination it offers – the smallest possible difference in pronunciation leading to the greatest possible consequence – and to what it reveals about the very nature of discrimination. In one sense, the shibboleth acts as a succinct cipher for all manners of discrimination; it can, as Jacques Derrida writes in his essay on Paul Celan, be extended to 'every insignificant mark…as that difference becomes discriminative, decisive and divisive'.[64] Derrida continues, though, to outline the particularities of the shibboleth in its narrowest, linguistic sense:

> It is the ciphered mark which one must *be able to partake of* with the other, and this differential power must be inscribed in oneself, that is to say in one's body itself, just as much as in the body of one's own language, and the one to the same extent as the other. This inscription of difference in the body (for example by the phonatory ability to pronounce this or that) is nonetheless not natural, is in no way an innate organic faculty. Its very origin presupposes participation in a cultural and linguistic community.[65]

The shibboleth, then, rests upon a slender material reality – the actual acoustic difference in articulation, and the corresponding physical differences in the placement of the lips and tongue, from which in-group and out-group status can be determined. As Derrida shows, though, the discriminatory acts in fact rests upon the inversion of reality; it is, of course, the actual process of learning a language – or 'habitation of a language' in Derrida's phrase – which inscribes this particularity upon the working of

[64] Jacques Derrida, 'Shibboleth: for Paul Celan' in *Acts of Literature* ed. Derek Attridge (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.404.
[65] Derrida, p.404-5.

the organs of articulation, not the other way around. Thus, while phonological differences are similar to, for example, racial ones in that they work by reinterpreting points on a continuum as absolutes, they do have a particular power in their ability to write themselves into the body.

While the shibboleth carries with it the promise to reduce identity to a single phoneme, it appears also to embrace the ultimate untenability of such a conviction. Historian Richard Turits has written that 'in fact, ethnic Haitians with deep roots in the Dominican frontier pronounced "perejil" fluently and often indistinguishably from ethnic Dominicans in the area', and therefore concluded that the device can in fact be read as 'a pretext, a mock confirmation of the presumptions and fantasies of an inherent and radical distinction between ethnic Dominicans and Haitians clung to by outside officials and elites'.[66] This interpretation is central to Edwidge Danticat's account of the Parsley Massacre in *The Farming of Bones*, narrated by an orphaned Haitian who grows up as a maid in a wealthy Dominican household:

> At that moment I did believe that had I wanted to, I could have said the word properly, calmly, slowly, the way I often asked "Perejil?" of the old Dominican women and their faithful attending granddaughters at the roadside gardens and markets, even though the trill of the *r* and the precision of the *j* was sometimes too burdensome a joining for my tongue. It was the kind of thing that if you were startled in the night, you might forget, but with all my sense calm, I could have said it. But I didn't get my chance. Yves and I were shoved down onto our knees. Our jaws were pried open and parsley stuffed into our mouths.[67]

[66] Richard Lee Turits, 'A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82.3 (2002), 617. Indeed, Turits even goes on to suggest that 'the Spanish "r," moreover, has tended to be barely rolled even by ethnic Dominicans in the frontier and much of the Republic, when placed at the end or in the middle of words.' (617, fn. 95).
[67] Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones* (London: Abacus, 2000), p.193.

Here Danticat shows the fundamental slenderness of the 'perejil' shibboleth as an effective means of discrimination; the soldiers perpetrating the massacre, too, seem to realise that an element of chance underlies its successful deployment, and opt not to allow it the chance to fail, instead physically stopping the mouths of their victims in an almost heavy-handed literalisation. To call this a failure, though, is of course to miss the point – this element of accident is integral to the functioning of the shibboleth as a totalitarian device. In the attempt to manufacture a persuasive and absolute distinction between Haitian and Dominican, it matters little that the application of violence is ultimately arbitrary and capricious. Indeed, the random, accidental nature of this violence is key in manufacturing the fear which governs the experience of the totalitarian subject, founded not upon absolutes but the widely-distributed risk that totalitarian power may be abruptly visited upon the bodies it governs.

This in turn leads to a compelling reflection on the very nature of the multilingual. One of the cruelties at the heart of the shibboleth is the engendering of the idea that plurality, far from being something to celebrate unquestioningly, can in fact be something to be feared; it demands conformity just as it seeks to punish alterity. This begins to touch in turn upon what Jan Blommaert and others have recently dubbed 'dangerous multilingualism', a category which commands that we confront the divide between the assertion of the value of plurality on the one hand and the sometimes highly-negative and fraught experiences of its minority participants on the other. Thus the argument that 'even if multilingualism is *in general* and *in principle* a positive thing, it can *in actual fact* be a problem for individuals and social groups, Not all forms of

multilingualism are productive, empowering and nice to contemplate. Some – many – are still unwanted, disqualified or actively endangering to people.'[68]

Thus, when Oscar's grandfather is accused of speaking ill of the regime, the role of the shibboleth in maintaining its power structure is again acknowledged quite explicitly:

> Your own fucking neighbors could acabar con you just because you had something they coveted or because you cut in front of them at the colmado. Mad folks went out in that manner, betrayed by those they considered their panas, by members of their own families, by slips of the tongue. (226)

The portentous switches to Spanish here seem to mark quite visibly the potential collision of the quotidian – the colmado, their panas – with the sinister – 'acabar con you' ('finish with you'), a feature of this very distribution of fear which characterises totalitarian rule. This moment in the text, though, is quite explicit in its acknowledgement that linguistic errors could lead to potentially horrifying consequences in its deployment of the 'slip of the tongue' – a device which sounds like a metaphor, but in fact acknowledges the deeply material conditions and consequences of speech.

My contention is not only that Díaz uses the shibboleth as a means of representing the horrors of totalitarianism, or even that, in extending questions of pronunciation and mispronunciation into the literary, he succeeds in demonstrating that the fragility and contingency of identity persist in the Dominican community even long beyond the Trujillo era. Rather, I would propose that what we can discern in Díaz's more recent texts is a radical repurposing of this central element of chance as the embrace of an aleatoric model of reading. This is a principle which we can see at work

[68] Jan Blommaert, Sirpa Leppänen, Päivi Pahta and Tiina Räisänen (eds.), *Dangerous Multilingualism: Northern Perspectives on Order, Purity and Normality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.1

as far back as *Drown*, which deploys a breadth of languages and registers, complicating them further with a partial glossary, such that the precise experience of reading which arises becomes a function of the interaction of multiple linguistic registers with multiple readers of varying linguistic backgrounds and capabilities. This is only further complicated in the case of *Oscar Wao* which, as we have seen, incorporates a broader range of language tricks as well as wide-ranging literary and cultural allusions. Just as in the case of the shibboleth, there is ultimately a degree of chance in recognising just what combination of the novel's allusions will register with a reader, as well in which code-switches and phonological puns they are able to acknowledge. And, like a shibboleth, each of these gestures arguably posits a moment of possible entry into a field of cultural and linguistic capital. However, it would be a mistake to suggest that any reader can 'pass' all of these, or even that, in each case, there is only one 'correct' articulation of the gesture. Instead, *Oscar Wao* embraces a plurality of readers; what stands for the distribution of fear under Trujillo comes to represent the distribution of possibility in the age of diaspora.

The most compelling example of this is to be found in the novel's title, which references a nickname unwittingly granted by Yunior himself:

> Harold would say, Tú no eres nada de dominicano, but Oscar would insist unhappily, I am Dominican, I am. It didn't matter what he said. Who the hell, I ask you, had ever met a Domo like him? Halloween he made the mistake of dressing up as Doctor Who, was real proud of his outfit too…I couldn't believe how much he looked like that fat homo Oscar Wilde, and I told him so. You look just like him, which was bad news for Oscar, because Melvin said, Oscar Wao, quién es Oscar Wao, and that was it, all of us started calling him that… And the tragedy? After a couple of weeks dude started *answering* to it. (180)

Oscar's nickname seems to arise from his constant attempts to reassert his identity, both through reasserting his Dominicanness against a claim that he is simply not Dominican (a motif which recurs regularly), and through maintaining his outward performance of 'nerd' convention even in the face of criticism from his peers. Yunior's attempt to make a passing reference to Oscar's apparent resemblance to his namesake Oscar Wilde is granted greater permanence, though, because of his jarring mispronunciation. The inadvertent Hispanicisation of the name 'Wilde' gives rise to the brand new, ephemeral signifier 'Wao' which Oscar ironically becomes free to inhabit.[69] When later we learn, too, that Oscar, upon his return to the Dominican Republic, has to deal with 'the surprise of waking up to the roosters and being called Huáscar by everybody (that was his Dominican name, something else he'd forgotten)' (276), it becomes impossible to ignore the extent to which Oscar as a protagonist embraces a radically contingent sense of identity.

This repurposing of the shibboleth and embrace of linguistic contingency establishes a curious sense of kinship between the narrative logic of the text and the identitarian logic of Trujillo, a point which is pondered by Yunior in yet another footnote:

> What is it with Dictators and Writers, anyway? Since before the infamous Caesar-Ovid war they've had beef…Rushdie claims that tyrants and scribblers are natural antagonists, but I think that's too simple; it lets writers off pretty easy. Dictators, in my opinion, just know competition when they see it. Same with writers. *Like, after all, recognizes like*. (97, fn. 11)

While there is a well-trodden point to be made here regarding writing and dictatorship as similar acts of narrative-building, which tactically exclude those components deemed

[69] There may be something, too, in its proximity to 'Mao', which recalls both a totalitarian leader and a card game designed to be impossible for outsiders to learn.

undesirable in the building of the story or of the nation, this comparison is given an unusually formalist leaning in *Oscar Wao*. Just as parsley becomes a defining image of the Trujillo regime for its literary, rather than historical credentials, the shibboleth as a potential enactor of political power becomes the central device which Yunior and Trujillo share. And yet, if the shibboleth as a political device is supposed to shore up the status quo by forcing outsiders to reveal themselves, it appears to have the opposite effect upon Yunior's narrative. The same kind of mispronunciation which would have supposedly dire consequences in 1937 proves, instead, to furnish Yunior's narrative with a chaotic, uncontrollable component. The name 'Oscar Wao' suggests a kind of aleatoric function – Yunior loses control over his own narrative when he accidentally gives his protagonist a new name and a new identity which he was never supposed to have.

Conclusion

Among the narratives we can draw from this study, one productive thread is a reciprocity between the texts I consider from the first half of the twentieth century, and those from the second. It may feel glib at this juncture to say that both Harris and Díaz 'write back' to Conrad and Rhys, but it is a fact just as apparent as it is that both Conrad and Rhys 'write forward' in anticipation of an emerging moment of decolonisation and of new kinds of language diversity.

Rhys and Díaz each left behind a childhood in their namesake Caribbean islands and pursued life as immigrants in Europe and the United States respectively. There each found very different immigrant experiences, and had different formative experiences of multilingualism. Each, though, found in the novel the means of articulating these migratory experiences, and each did so by writing askance to the metropolitan writing communities they found there: the nascent movement of high modernism for Rhys, and the institutionalisation of modernist practice, which has become a writing industry, for Díaz. Each author crafts characters who are brought into relief by their linguistic interactions, and each casts language as the means by which the individual can engage with, contend with and apprehend narratives far greater than themselves; of community, politics, nation and migration.

Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* is surely mindful of its intertexts with a novel like *Heart of Darkness*. The colonial waterways of Conrad's Africa are exchanged for Guyana, but again we follow a voyage of discovery on the part of the narrator into the heart of an unfamiliar landscape. But while *Heart of Darkness* may feel myopic or bewildered, even if productively so, *Palace of the Peacock* amounts to a conscious recovery of voices lost in a history of empire, an archaeological pursuit of those threads of language which have been subsumed into the register of the colonising project. This is a process which

continues to unfold across the *Guyana Quartet*. This is not to say that Harris's work enacts anything so simplistic as a 'corrective' to Conrad's, or the sudden arrival of the 'post' in postcolonial, but reading these texts alongside each other allows us to position them both as part of a productive dialogue wherein the languages of colonial history are encountered, foregrounded and worked through.

The resemblances in thinking about language we can trace across the corpus of this study, I hope, go to show the embeddedness of negotiations of language across a long history of the novel. If on the one hand we can discern the recurrence across the twentieth century of modernist strategies for negotiating linguistic difference, then on the other this very fact of multilingualism understood as such a preoccupying concern demonstrates the need for a much deeper archaeology of the novel as form, and for a wider chronology which subsumes modernism as one trend within it. These piecemeal resemblances, though, are decidedly no grand narrative, and while I have drawn influence across this project from various scholarly accounts which have sought to explore productively the linkages, and indeed the gulfs, between European modernism and Caribbean postcolonialism, I have quite consciously resisted taking a polemical position which asserts what the modernist or the postcolonial ought to be.

Wilson Harris in fact wrote a response to Chinua Achebe's dismissal of *Heart of Darkness*, in which he asserts the power of the novel to intervene in the space between sovereign, monologic entities and the discontinuous reality of human community:

> The crucial hurdle in the path of community, if community is to create a living future, lies in a radical aesthetic in which distortions of sovereign ego may lead into confessions of partiality within sovereign institutions that, therefore, may begin to penetrate within sovereign institutions that, therefore, may begin to penetrate and unravel their biases, in some degree, in order to bring into play a

> complex wholeness inhabited by other confessing parts that may have once masqueraded themselves as monolithic absolutes or monolithic codes of behaviour in the old worlds from which they emigrated by choice or by force.
>
> It is in this respect that I find it possible to view *Heart of Darkness* as a frontier novel. By that I mean that it stands upon a threshold of capacity to which Conrad pointed though he never attained that capacity himself. Nevertheless, it was a stroke of genius on his part to visualize an original necessity for distortions in the stases of appearance that seem sacred and that cultures take for granted as models of timeless dignity.[1]

With some characteristic complexity, Harris offers here an exceptionally bold way of reading the novel as a form. The novel, it seems, can be part of this radical aesthetic which takes as its target assertions of the 'monolithic' on the part of sovereign institutions like empire and the nation. There is something here, too, of what I identified in my introduction as a productive way of thinking about modernism – as a means of thinking through writing about the limits of communicability. It is therefore no stretch at all to extend Harris's analysis to the question of language in particular; the attempt to assert the monoglot or to manage linguistic diversity is a project whose folly is revealed through the novel, which cannot help but to give rise anew to an ever-present multilingual reality. We are left not with a cacophony, but with a complex wholeness.

A writer like Harris, though, also forces us to reject any simplistic opposition between the monoglot and the polyglot, and one of the threads which has run throughout this project has been always to question and to complicate narratives which associate the

[1] Wilson Harris, 'The Frontier on Which *Heart of Darkness* Stands', *Research in African Literatures* 12.1 (Spring 1981), p.87.

polyglot with the easily progressive, the multilingual with the utopian. To think in terms of a complex wholeness instead allows us to recognise the fact of language diversity as an aporia in which the novel can productively intervene. This is to say that, if I have remained resistant throughout to any simplistic oppositions between the politics of mono- and multilingualism, this study can be taken as a much more direct assertion of the potential of the novel as form. After all, one way to think about this study is simply as a reading of the ongoing possibility of the novel to reinvent itself, and to reimagine its ability to represent the world and to challenge the orthodoxies of thought which it finds there. There is sometimes all too great a readiness to frame literary critical questions in terms of crisis, but we ought to remain mindful of the particular vocabularies we find in literature itself to respond to such crises.

All of this has been in the service of what I consider to be a much more immediate and necessary impulse; to root my analysis first and foremost in close reading. Now is not the time to embark anew upon a survey of the tendencies emerging in global literary scholarship, but in the debates therein I side firmly with those who continue to advocate for the importance of close reading. I don't believe a study such as this, which has attended nevertheless to a globally-distributed, shared and historical problem, could have proceeded without ongoing recourse to the intricate workings of the novel. In so doing, I hope, the analysis thus maintains a sense of what is distinctive about each of a corpus of novelists who are nevertheless highly individual, taken from across a wide sweep of history and of geography. The novel emerges here as a potent resource to theorise the nature of language itself, and while there may be no shortage in theory of questioning what linguistics has to tell us about the novel, I hope to have shown, too, that the novel has a great deal to tell us about linguistics.

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