(Be)Coming Home.
Figurations of Exile and Return
as Poetics of Identity in Contemporary Anglo-Caribbean Literature

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Chapter 1

Hermeneutics of return and return as hermeneutics

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time. (from T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" (1949 [1942]), V *l.*26-29)

> The truth of a "return" does not lie in an absolute geography or an absolute history but rather through windows into a composition of reality that can never be seized even as it energizes the imagination into densities and transparencies that release other proportion or windows or doors within the protean imagination. (Wilson Harris, quoted in Mihailovic-Dickman 1994: no pagination)[1]

The above-quoted lines from the fifth and last section of T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" beautifully introduce the object of this work: odysseys, homecomings, or journeys of return where the points of departure and the points of arrival simultaneously coincide and differ. Literary figurations of lifelong exiles and never-ceasing explorations of the terrains of language, literature and history – as these journeys emerge in Eliot's poem – they give shape to the imaginary, discrepant homes from which they start and in which they also end.

The words of the Guyanese writer, poet and essayist Wilson Harris that provide the second epigraph above trace the same motif of the returning exile's differing, dissonant vision of home, but in a different way. Both Eliot and Harris attribute a specific cognitive value to the motif of return. For both poets, the journey home is a journey that forces an alienated, travelling self to go along a circular path of repatriation through expatriation, a path in which this self acquires, in its estrangement, a new capacity of seeing. For both poets, the journey home thus takes self-knowledge as its ultimate goal, although without implying conceptions

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Extract from a "Letter to the Editor" of the volume *Return in Post-Colonial Writing. A Cultural Labyrinth* dated 23.12.1992 (Mihailovic-Dickman 1994)

of identity and belonging as stable. Yet, while for Eliot the truth of a return resides in the very possibility of ending the journey – "Little Gidding" is the last of the *Four Quartets*, the final poem of a cycle, and its main concerns are precisely how to end, the possibility of redemption, and the idea that the writer may eventually find his place within history and tradition (cf. Cooper 2008) – for Harris the truth of a return resides in the kaleidoscopic vision that multiplies and diffracts the home to which the travelling self will come back. Harris' words are charged with the historical experience of a people whose idea of home is haunted by the memory of the deprivation of an original homeland. The uprootings, dispossessions, and forced migrations together with the violent encounters and the turbulent processes of hybridization which gave shape to the Caribbean make *home* a most complex, composite, even disturbing concept, a concept which, nevertheless, emerges as crucial in the process of articulating collective and individual identities with which Caribbean literature engages. More than the arrival *per se,* Harris emphasizes the lifelong exile which forces travellers to conduct never-ending explorations and which also protracts itself beyond the very possibility of a return. Indeed, for Harris, any return involves a different form of exile, another form of alienation from the self, the eerie experience of "know[ing] the place for the first time" (Eliot V *l*.29) which is given not by the acquisition of experience, but by the fragmentation of experience and vision.

This study will engage with precisely the question of how, in contemporary Anglo-Caribbean literature, the intersections and reciprocal transformations of the themes of home, exile, and return envisaged in Wilson Harris' words are expedient for the construction of hybrid, post-colonial and post-modern poetics of identity. The word "poetics", from the Greek verb *poiein*, "to make", is used in this context to highlight how literature may function as a weapon of intervention upon reality, how it may serve as a privileged site to renegotiate processes of production and articulation of hybrid subjectivities, of cultural and linguistic translation, as well as of cultural exchange. This study will engage with literature as a "way of worldmaking", to use Nelson Goodman's formulation (cf. Goodman 1988), that is, as a way of bringing into being what Harris, in the above quoted lines, calls "a composition of reality that can never be seized" as well "the imagination [energized] into densities and transparencies that release other proportion or windows or doors within the protean imagination". According to Harris' lines – lines condensing very well the preoccupations underlying the search for

home that characterizes the artistic endeavours of many Caribbean writers – there is no absolute geography or history of home which precedes the artist's vision. It is the artist's task to articulate a vision of the return home against whose dissonance and polymorphous quality collective and individual Caribbean identities may be positioned, and the trauma of history, the controversial legacies of a past of uprooting, colonialism and slavery, as well as the spectres of European cultural hegemony may be renegotiated.

Harris' idea that the "truth of a return" may be attained by looking through windows that open onto "a composition of reality" which, in turn, opens onto "other windows or doors within the protean imagination" is the inspiration for the three, interconnected main theses around which this interrogation of an Anglo-Caribbean poetics of identity has been constructed. First, the return is never a direct act, but it is always mediated. The self can come home only by taking a *detour*, by traversing the space of the *other*, a space in which the other functions as a mediator (as a "window", as Harris puts it) of the vision of home. Secondly, the issue of the return is expedient for a meta-reflection on the way the return is conveyed in literature. The idea of windows leading through to other windows evokes the image of a self-reflexive chain, of a literature talking about literature talking about literature. The issue at stake in Caribbean homecoming journeys is a reflection on literature as the very instrument of vision through which the return is attained. Thirdly, the self – which is significantly absent from Harris' quote – does not pre-exist the vision of home, but comes into being together with the articulation of this vision. The self takes shape through an act of positioning within a "composition of reality" which is always changing, always transforming itself, always in the process of becoming.

The first of these three theses – i.e. that the return is always mediated – introduces the issue of the *other* as a crucial point in this analysis of Anglo-Caribbean returns. The aspect privileged by a Caribbean poetics of return to be scrutinised here is that of exile and return as relational activities, as activities that force the individual to explore the fragile, unstable boundaries between selfhood and otherness. The journey home is in fact a journey toward knowledge of the self through a continuous interrogation of the other. In a cultural area like the Caribbean, where so many different cultures converge and collude, the space of home emerges as a space explicitly and inevitably shaped by the presence of the other. Reading Eliot's claim that to "arrive where we started" (V *l*.28) means to "know the place for the first

time" (V *l*.29) against the backdrop of the Caribbean experience requires acknowledgement of the fact that the claim of possessing the space of the self is impossible, as this space is always-already a space that can come into being only in relation to somewhere else: to the Africa of the deported slaves whose descendants constitute the majority of the Caribbean population, to the Asia of the indentured labourers who replaced them in the plantations after the abolition of slavery, to the Europe of the colonizers, to the Americas for which the Caribbean represents a sort of geographical and cultural bridge to the Old World. To discover home, consequently, means to be ready to engage in a quest for the other which takes as its destination cultural spaces which are linked to the Caribbean by an intertwined history of uneven, often conflicted relationships.

To traverse the space of the other in order to come home also means, conversely, to explore the space where the self is perceived and represented as an other. It means to explore how home and self have been produced through multiple, discursive inscriptions of otherness. To mediate a return home within the kaleidoscopic composition of windows mentioned by Harris also means to assume the othering gaze that centuries of colonization and cultural hegemonies have imposed on Caribbean selves, in a way that is mimicking and deconstructive at the same time. There are certainly manifold cultural influences that should be taken into consideration while addressing Caribbean literature. Yet, as signalled by the juxtaposition of some lines by T. S. Eliot with Wilson Harris' passage that opens this chapters, the present study will be concerned more specifically with the particular relationship that links the Caribbean to the literary tradition it has inherited from its former colonizers. Indeed, the controversial relationship to European cultural and literary tradition has been a constant preoccupation throughout the development of Caribbean literature. The choice and the necessity to resort to European literary models and genres, as well as the impossibility of disregarding a canon which has been used in the colonial educational system for hidden ideological purposes which have profoundly acted upon the perceptual framework of colonial people, has been thematized and dealt with numerous times, even by those intellectuals, such as Edward Kamau Brathwaite, who throughout their own career have advocated a rediscovery and acknowledgement of the African component of Caribbeanness (cf. Brathwaite 1984). Caribbean literature shares, in this sense, the "continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression" which, according to Bill

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Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin, who coined the very term "post-colonial", characterizes "all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present days" (1989: 2).

Transforming the European othering gaze into one in which it is possible to enter a space of return calls for a reciprocity which undermines and subverts the duality of the relationship of colonizer/ colonized, cultural producer/ cultural receiver. In this sense, Caribbean homecomings are comparable to the particular voyage of hybridization through the space of the other which Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) calls the *voyage in*. The term "voyage in" designates the movement of many Third World intellectuals, writers, and thinkers to the metropolis as well as their successful integration there. An inversion of narratives depicting journeys to the interior of Africa and to the most obscure parts of the self undertaken in the name of colonialism, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Said's phrasing suggests that the way in which the exiled intellectual can write back to the centre (cf. Ashcroft 1989) by traversing back and forth a liminal space separating the First and Third Worlds. The *voyage in* is a journey of self-discovery, but self-discovery of a very peculiar kind. It is a journey outside the self, a journey aimed at exploring how the self has been constituted in a relation to the other and at the same time at re-configuring this very relation by occupying the very space of the other. It is, to put it another way, a journey of transformation and metamorphosis, in which the spaces of the self and of the other cross and mingle. To undertake a *voyage in* means to embark on a journey of hybridization, a journey which may have as its target the places traditionally considered as the only centres of cultural and literary production, but which in fact disrupts the Third World's history of passivity and makes it an active producer and contributor to the production of culture:

> The voyage in, then, constitutes an especially interesting variety of hybrid cultural work. And that it exists at all is a sign of adversarial internationalization in an age of continued imperial structures. No longer does the logos dwell exclusively, as it were, in London and Paris. No longer does history run unilaterally, as Hegel believed, from east to west, or from south to north, becoming more sophisticated and developed, less primitive and backward as it goes. Instead, the weapons of criticism have become part of the historical legacy of empire, in which the separations and exclusions of 'divide and rule' are erased and surprising new configurations spring up. (1994: 295)

The semantic field that Said uses to describe the *voyage in* is, significantly, that of war and struggle: he speaks of "adversarial internationalization in an age of continued imperial

structures" and of "weapons of criticism" (ibid). As the history of colonialism shows, hybridization is not a peaceful process. Encounters between cultures usually entail a struggle for power and assertion, antagonism and violence. Coming home in a culture that is at the same time alien and familiar is certainly not a peaceful enterprise, and requires an attitude of criticism and resistance.

Most importantly, what connects Caribbean journeys of return with Said's concept of the *voyage in* is that their space – as is suggested in the second thesis which introduces this study – is not just the physical space in which the migration of the intellectual takes place, but also, and above all, the space of the text. The whole of Said's work may be read as a *voyage in* to the space of the Western intellectual and literary tradition, a voyage aimed at the simultaneous retrieval and transformation of that very tradition. With his concept of contrapuntal reading – a word which Said borrowed from music, where the word "counterpoint" designates the technique of setting, writing, or playing a melody in conjunction with another – he configures a possibility of reading the canonical texts of English literature by taking into account intertwined histories and perspectives, developing "an awareness of both the metropolitan history that is narrated and of the other stories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (Said 1994: 51), and enabling a reading of the text that involves adopting the perspectives both of the colonized and of the colonizer, both with and at the same time against the presence/ absence of colonial references throughout the text. Said's critical project is relevant and ethically compelling also for its capacity to turn the marginality of the colonial experience into an angle of vision and visibility from which the privileged Western outlook that informs many well-established academic disciplines and branches of knowledge is de-naturalized and de-centred.

By the same token, the journeys of return that are taken into consideration in this study engage with the possibility of developing and performing a hybrid, multi-voiced Caribbean hermeneutics that draws on the Western literary tradition. The site of the return in the voyages discussed here is often not just a geographical space, but is also embodied in artistic and linguistic artefacts, works of art and texts that have entered the canon of the European tradition. Coming home means enacting a resemanticisation which disrupts the assumed centrality of European perspectives and to reconstitute the marginality of Caribbean experience as a new way of seeing and being seen. Casting European artefacts against a

Caribbean experience means to perform an act of displacement, of translation, of struggle over meaning. The process of reception becomes a process of re-siting: reading European literature from the Caribbean means to read a literature that has migrated and that with this migration has changed in most interesting ways. Post-colonial re-readings which lie at the basis of Caribbean journey of return place the artefacts with which they engage within a complex inter-textual and cross-cultural process, they enrich and revivify them through a deconstructive process which triggers off creative, ethically compelling rewritings of stories which have entered the canon of European art and literature.

T. S. Eliot's modernism has certainly exerted a significant influence on the ways in which Caribbean homecomings engage in a meta-reflection on the necessity of coming to terms with the problem of taking one's place in a shared literary tradition. Caribbean homecomings often follow in reverse the path by which tradition has been constituted and legitimized through the exclusion of the other, in order to let the other emerge in ways that destabilize and put into question the issue of tradition itself. As Eliot famously wrote in his essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), tradition is defined as the "ideal order" in which literature finds its meaning and its sense of historical belonging (1960: 50). This order is certainly not stable, as it can be modified with the introduction of a new work of art. Yet every writer who wishes to enter the perfect order of tradition, in Eliot's view, "must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past" (1960: 50); they must, to put it differently, pay their due to the greatest writers of the past whose works are always simultaneously present in each literary endeavour that follows them. When Caribbean journeys of return take literary tradition as a point of departure and arrival they certainly do so in a way that disrupts the ideal order imagined by Eliot's conceptualization of tradition. As tradition is implicitly white, European and mostly masculine (whenever Eliot refers to the artist, he uses the personal pronoun "he"), Caribbean writers find themselves in the uncomfortable position of seeking inclusion in a space which has served as an instrument of exclusion.

In order to make a literary tradition their home, Caribbean writers have to disrupt the perfect circle described by Eliot by exposing precisely what it hides; that is, the issue of the unaccommodating, often disturbing presence of the other. Caribbean homecoming cannot ignore the fact that literature has been deeply involved in the process of othering that has discursively marginalized the Caribbean, transforming it into a place outside history. A short

analysis of the following lines from the fifth section of "Little Gidding" will outline some of the main interrogatives which the Caribbean literature of return takes up from modernism and re-elaborates in the light of a post-colonial, post-modern experience:

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.
> The end is where we start from. And every phrase
> And Sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
> Taking its place to support the others,
> The word neither different nor ostentatious,
> An easy commerce of the old and the new,
> The common word exact without vulgarity,
> The formal word precise but not pedantic,
> The complete consort dancing together)
> Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
> Every poem is an epitaph. And any action
> is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat
> Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.
> We die with the dying:
> See, they depart, and we go with them.
> We are born with the dead:
> See, they return and bring us with them.
> The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree
> Are of equal duration. A people without history
> Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
> Of timeless moments. [...] (Eliot, V *l*.1-22)

These lines anticipate at least three of the meta-reflections with which the Caribbean literature of return engages. Firstly, they deal with a meta-reflection on how literature is embedded in a conception of history and on how, at the same time, it contributes to the very constitution of this conception of history. Secondly, they position the text within a chain of other texts in a way which contributes to sustaining and illuminating not just the single poem, but the whole tradition in which this poem is embedded. Finally, they assert the word as the central element onto which the whole chain of literary tradition is grounded.

The issue of the mutual intersections of literature and history presents itself as a central issue in the Caribbean literature of homecoming in terms of the problematic way in which the Caribbean has been excluded and marginalized by history as a writing enterprise. Negotiating a return home in Anglo-Caribbean literature is not just a matter of acknowledging that one belongs within the flux of time and history, but it rather implies configuring literature as a site for the development of a counter-discourse on history. If, as Eliot suggests, the truth of a literary return consists in the capacity to see the past simultaneously with the present, the

problem that comes to the fore in Caribbean homecomings is that of the impossible retrieval of histories which the European discursive, written appropriations of history contributed to obliterating. The mostly unwritten memories of the histories of the native Caribbean populations who were massacred after the arrival of the Europeans, or of the histories of the Africans enslaved, deported and forced to forget their native lands, or of the histories of the millions of people who died at sea, usually enter history books only as marginal episodes dissolved in the greater project of modernity. Eliot's lines, "A people without history/ is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern/ Of timeless moments" (V *l.*20-22) are all the more compelling because of their paradoxical pertinence to Caribbean experience. The very fact that Eliot envisages the possibility of being "a people without history" (V *l.*20) reveals history as a discourse of exclusion, a discourse controlled by those who have the power to determine what history is. Being without history, in fact, means to have been deprived of the possibility of writing history; that is, of controlling the process through which history is given shape. The redemption from time that literature promises is a redemption that Caribbean writers may look for by following the path described by Eliot, i.e. that of the discovery of the past within the present, of being able "to die with the dying" (V *l.*15) as well as to be "born with them" (V *l.*17), but in order to do so they first have to deal with writing as an instrument of historical exclusion and silencing.

Secondly, Eliot's meta-reflection on the fact that no literary text can exist on its own also emerges as a central theme in the Caribbean homecomings scrutinised in this study. What comes to the fore in Eliot's lines is the idea of the dependence of each literary performance on the literature which came before and to that which will follow: every sentence leans on what has been written before, and "every poem is an epitaph" (V *l.*12) to the poetry that has not been written yet. Caribbean writers carry this reflection even further. They cannot ignore the fact that literature cannot be isolated from the social, historical and political context in which it has come into being and that it is inevitably connected to a variety of discourses (political, economical, social, and so on) going beyond the space of the literary text. Caribbean texts which explicitly position themselves against the backdrop of past literature cannot ignore how literary texts are often tainted by the hidden process of "worlding" – that is, an othering process which attempts to disguise its own workings so as to naturalize and legitimate Western dominance at the expense of Third World experience an awareness of both the

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metropolitan history that is narrated and of the other stories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse act – which Gayatri Spivak has described as a by-product of many literary works arising in a context deeply permeated with the discourses of imperialism (cf. Spivak 1985).

Thirdly, Eliot's "Little Gidding" also anticipates Caribbean homecomings in so far as it puts the word at the centre of its meta-reflection of literature and tradition. For Eliot, a return is accomplished when "every word is at home,/ Taking its place to support the others" (V *l*.4-5). Language is the very bricks from which literature is constructed, its most basic and fundamental part. At the same time, literature is a privileged site for reflecting on language, as well as on how human experiences take shape and are ordered in language. Yet the idea that language may be at home figures in Caribbean literature in a most paradoxical way. Coming home by traversing an extraneous literature and culture means, above all, to come home in a language that is also *other*. This study is based on the premise that language is an external, trans-personal, and historically connoted phenomenon. If a language is a bearer of a culture, a language that has been imposed as a means of domination and control cannot but openly show the taint of power, the signs of its history of violence, and the mark of its foreignness. Choosing English as a language in which to configure a journey of return – a choice which many writers consider the only viable one – inevitably requires engaging with English as a foreign language, as a language which is also a carrier of alien experiences and that must therefore be appropriated and revitalized through the vernacular experience of the Caribbean.

The third main thesis of this work, which is inextricably linked to these considerations on language as the central experience on which Caribbean literature reflects, asserts that the subjects of the homecoming analysed here take shape precisely by undertaking a journey through language. Caribbean homecomings are journeys of subjectivation – to use a word which will figure prominently in the following chapters – in which language emerges as the very site through which the homecoming subjects come into being.

The starting point of this reading of Caribbean figurations of exile and homecoming is the idea that poetry, literature and language go beyond the individual experience of the artist or of the single speaker. When, in "Little Gidding", Eliot stresses the centrality of the word, he stresses the priority of poetry as an impersonal medium rather than as an instrument at the service of the personality of the individual writer. Eliot formulates the aim for the writing of

poetry in the following terms:

> to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or poetry so transparent that we should not see the poetry, but that which we are meant to see through the poetry, poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem *points at*, and on not the poetry, this seems to me the thing to try for. To get *beyond poetry,* as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get *beyond music*. (quoted in Cooper 2008: 145).[2]

For Eliot, the word is the fundamental instrument that poetry works through in order to reach an intensity that goes beyond personal experiences and emotions. Indeed, Eliot claims, "[t]he poet has not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways" (1960: 56). While in Eliot's view an artist has to extinguish his own personality in order to become a medium that goes beyond the individual self – "[w]hat happens to the artist is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable" (Eliot 1960: 52-53) – for Caribbean writers the impersonality of the medium precedes the very possibility of articulating the personality of the individual artist. Drawing on the theories of subjectivity of the French philosophers Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault and on the materialist philosophy of language that the French Marxist Jean-Jacques Lecercle bases on them, this study will engage with how the very coming into being of an awareness of both the metropolitan history that is narrated and of the other stories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse act Caribbean, hybrid subjects occurs precisely through the medium of language. Impersonality – the exterior, shared, trans-personal quality that language and literature have – is fundamental for the process of becoming-subject that homecoming journeys represent and enact.

Claiming that language is an external, material and shared medium does not imply that language is impermeable to individual contributions, however. A language is not a stable system – as maintained by the fetishized conceptions of language and linguistic standards that are often connected to the global diffusion of English as a *lingua franca* (cf. Lecercle 2006) – but rather a phenomenon in a continuous state of variation, prone to being transformed through the single performances of its speakers, through its vernacular appropriations, and through continual acts of displacement. To come home in language, this study argues, means

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2 Extract from an unpublished lecture on "English Letter Writers" (primarly Keats and Laurence), which was delivered in New Haven, Conn., during the winter of 1933.

to exert a torsion on language, to become nomads in language, to embrace language as a form of radical exile which can only be traversed in ways that are never secure or stable.

The following chapter, which has been conceived as a general discussion of the broader literary, cultural and theoretical terrain, draws on a definition of what is meant by impersonality of language, writing and literature in order to cast light on *exile* as the condition in which Caribbean homecoming journeys assume their meaning and sense. Using the word "exile", in fact, not only involves talking about the representation of the real-life experience of forcibly leaving one's home, as in the diasporas that have shaped the demographic asset of the Caribbean, or as in the migratory waves that have concerned many people from the Caribbean, as well as many artists and intellectuals. Exile is an extremely polysemic word which includes also the epistemological conditions in which Caribbean homecoming journeys are embedded. Dealing with exile in the Caribbean also means to be able to see the self by adopting the external perspective of the other – for example by using a language that is blatantly marked by the presence of the other.

The title of the theoretical chapter – "Looking for the other in language, literature and culture" – reveals that its main concern will be with the first and the second theses on which this study is based. The third thesis, on the journeys of return as journeys of subjectivation, will be anticipated, but dealt with in more detailed ways in the subsequent chapter, with reference to the specific literary figurations of return produced in each individual work. The chapter, to put it another way, will deal with the literary journey home as a journey of self-discovery which cannot leave aside the issue of the other, as well as an investigation of how self and other are produced through language, writing and literature. These meta-reflections on language, writing and literature as a site of otherness are certainly not only a peculiarity of Anglo-Carribbean literature. Nonetheless, in this specific, post-colonial context, they are inextricably linked to the role that writing has played as an instrument of separation, classification, and mapping; cultural operations that have supported the colonial enterprise, as well the forms of exclusion from subjectivity that have been performed against Caribbean colonized people on the basis of their ethnicity.

Michel de Certeau's reflections on *The Writing of History* will introduce some considerations on writing as a practice that is never at home, always installed in the impossible unity of reality and representation. The work of the French philosopher will

introduce the question of how the other is produced in writing as an object of knowledge with the same gesture that marginalizes it and transforms it in ways that may be functional to the expansion of a system of power. Besides this, it will also introduce the question of how the other always threatens to elude the borders of representation and to reappear in the form of what has been repressed and hidden. Coming into being as selves in the Caribbean means to traverse the multiple inscriptions of otherness that European writing has imposed on its colonial space of expansion. As a consequence, the theoretical chapter will address how the issue of exile is textualized – that is, how the text deconstructs processes of othering by making them visible, and by undermining the representation of self, home and identity that the literary texts taken into consideration convey.

The theoretical chapter will also provide a brief contextualization of how the term "exile" has figured in literary and critical discourses on the Caribbean, dwelling in particular on the work of two Caribbean writers and essayists who have elected *exile* as a fundamental constituent of Caribbean identity. The first of them is the Barbadian writer George Lamming who, in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), discussed subjectivity not as an innate condition but as something *produced* through language, thus anticipating at least a decade earlier Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and state apparatuses as well as its most recent appropriation by Althusser's student Jean-Jacques Lecercle. This chapter will show how Lamming's influential reading of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* defines the language that the colonizer has imposed on the colonized as a site of exile, and how it is precisely language that makes the colonial into a colonial subject. Yet, Lamming is able to re-semanticize the word "exile" and to transform it from a signifier for exclusion into a signifier for a different, "transformative juncture" (Pouchet Paquet 1992: xiv) between colonized and colonizer, the latter of which, Lamming claims, also finds himself, unaware, in a condition of exile in language. Language, once it becomes a shared experience between both parties involved in this struggle over subjectivity, becomes the site in which new, joined possibilities for identity may come into being, new connections and new forms of mutual exchange may be envisaged. The works of the Martinican poet, novelist and theorist Edouard Glissant and of the Cuban intellectual Antonio Benítez-Rojo multiply and diffract Lamming's idea of the transformative juncture with the other replacing the duality of the relationship between colonizer/colonized with the Deleuzian concept of the rhizome. "Relation" is a term with which Glissant denotes the

rhizomatic, multiple relations that connect the Caribbean to the rest of the world, connections through which the text comes into being in the form of surfaces connecting to other surfaces, discourses connected to other discourses, within a machine of sense by which continuous processes of territorialization and deterritorialization determine endless transformations of sense. Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and Benítez-Rojo *The Repeating Island* will be considered alongside Deleuze's discourse on Minority Literature, and will allow us to account for how the transformation of language and literature that Caribbean journeys of return perform may be read in terms of a "becoming-minor" (cf. Deleuze 1986).

Following the Deleuzian perspective outlined in the first chapter, the analysis of V. S. Naipaul's novel *The Enigma of Arrival* will concentrate on how an autobiographical narrator constructs his own self, as well as his own vision of home, through positioning the self within an ever-changing reality. The journey of a Caribbean writer who has elected the English countryside as his home will be read as a journey in which he makes England his home by putting himself within a series of mediated representations of the landscape, i.e. of literary texts and works of art. The novel thematizes the very act of textual and artistic interpretation as the means through which the self accesses the possibility of writing. The circular structure of *The Enigma of Arrival* complements the multiple processes of revision and interpretation that the narrator superimposes in order to represent his self as something in continuous transformation.

The second novel, David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress*, also follows a narrative structure in which a fictitious autobiographical subject constructs his self within a highly mediated reality and yet, unlike Naipaul's novel, it figures homecoming in language and writing as an impossibility. A parody of eighteenth-century slave narratives, the novel explores how a hybrid subject may interrogate and undermine the structures of subjectivation which inform his epoch. A central theme of the novel is the idea of language as a means through which the protagonist is transformed into a subject and, because of his black skin, simultaneously excluded from any claim to subjectivity. His attempt to narrate and to come home is a struggle against the word of a well-intentioned abolitionist who represents the way power tries to force the story of the young man into an accommodating narrative structure which, nonetheless, is perceived by the latter as a further form of oppression.

The work of a feminist poet and novelist dealing with the issue of return from the

point of view of body and affect will be addressed in the chapter that follows. While Marlene NourbeSe Philips' collection of poetry *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, investigates how language colonizes and alienates a gendered, racialized body, her novel *Looking for Livingstone, an Odyssey of Silence* investigates silence as a means for reunion with the lost ancestors. The novel introduces an extended metaphor of pre-colonial Africa as the sexualized body of the narrating voice, who travels "to the interior" (ibid.) in order to discover her ancestors as well as her true self. The odysseys among imaginary African tribes turn into a search for the explorer Dr. Livingstone, who is accused both of silencing the African and of stealing their silence. This chapter will deal with the contradictions and the paradoxes involved in the representation of a search for an essence which, in fact, cannot leave aside the issue of the other.

Finally, the last analysis will deal with the most ambitious literary work ever produced in the Caribbean, Derek Walcott's epic of return, *Omeros*. In *Omeros* the issue of return is expedient for re-mediating a poetic mode for narrating the history of the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia. This poetic mode will be discussed as a mode which subsumes, absorbs and annuls the different ways in which the history of the Caribbean has been told before, fostering a confrontation with a variety of traditions and geographical areas in a way that shows a lot of continuities and similarities with Glissant's "Poetics of Relation". A heteroglot, polymorphous work, *Omeros* is a hybrid appropriation of a variety of texts – from the Homeric epic poems, to Dante's *Comedy*, to the classics of English and American literature, among them works by Eliot, Joyce, and Melville – as well as of a variety of extra-literary discourses on history, ethnicity, and media representations. The poem strives to inhabit, in different ways, the utterances performed about, for and against the Caribbean. Besides, Walcott's poetic rendition of history will be discussed as a poetics of immanence which, deeply influenced by Eliot's modernism, celebrates the possibility of seeing, within a single moment, the multiple connections of past, present and future.

The texts have been chosen for their meta-reflections on language as a site of homecoming and as a site for subjectivation. While Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* deals with language as a locus of mediation and, as the chapter will explain, of provisional self-translation onto an elusive, foreign landscape, David Dabydeen's novel *A Harlot's Progress* depicts language as an unequal, fallacious medium of exchange between foreign cultures

whose relation is based on mutual conflict and untranslatability. Marlene NourbeSe Philips deals with the issue of language as body and affect, while Derek Walcott perceives language as heteroglossia, as a multiplicity of different, superimposed utterances. In each of these works, language transforms and is transformed; literature emerges as a site not only of reflection on those reciprocal transformations, but also as the very place in which they come into being.

The title of this study, "(Be)coming Home", emphasizes precisely the idea of transformation that the theme of return entails. The expression "(Be)Coming Home" indicates that home is not simply something with a fixed position that can be reached but always also something involving transformation. The transformation is not only of the place, but of the self, in what Harris, in the epitaph above, terms an act of "protean imagination". Home is thus a concept in continuous movement, a place to dwell, but also a place of exile. Coming home never results in an arrival or in the conclusion of a journey towards subjectivity, but rather in the discrepant circularity of the experience of "knowing the place for the first time" (Eliot V *l.*29).

Chapter 2

Looking for the other in language, literature and culture

> Thou shall leave each thing
> Belov'd most dearly: this is the first shaft
> Shot from the bow of exile. Thou shalt prove
> How salt the savour is of other's bread,
> How hard the passage to descend and climb
> By other's stairs [..] (*Paradiso* XVII, *l.*55-60)

It is a feeling of deepest grief and affliction which emerges from the famous tercets of *Paradiso* XVII, in which Cacciaguida degli Elisei prophesies Dante's exile. No more than a year and a half after his imaginary journey through the three realms of the afterlife, Dante would be forced by his political opponents to leave his beloved Florence forever and, together with his family, would have to spend the rest of his life far away from the place where he was born and to which he had committed himself since his youth.[3] The words pronounced by the soul of Cacciaguida, the ancestor whom Dante meets in the fifth Sphere of Heaven among the Warriors of the faith, translate in an astonishingly concrete and corporeal way the feeling of intolerable pain caused by separation from the homeland. Exile is compared to a "bow" (*l.*56) unrelentingly shooting shafts destined to tear apart the flesh of the poet. The site of the poet's suffering is, in fact, not just his soul, but first and foremost his body. If the first shaft fired by exile – the parting with what the poet loved most dearly – may already seem cruel enough to

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    Dante's journey through Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso is imagined to take place on the Easter week in the year 1300, the year of the climax of Dante's political career as well as of the first Jubilee year proclaimed by Pope Boniface VIII. Dante, a White Guelph opposing the interference of the Pope in the internal affairs of Florence, was exiled from his city in 1302, after a *coup d'état* organized by the Black Guelphs with the assistance of Charles of Valois, brother of King Philip IV of France, and the complicity of Pope Boniface. Deprived of his home, his wealth and of his objects of affection, Dante was left with a death threat hanging over his head if he ever decided to cross the borders of the city. For further information cf. Lansing 2010.

endure, other arrows – the many humiliations suffered by having to live among strangers – will directly pierce Dante's organs. It is as if the poet, by mentioning the salty taste of other people's bread and the fatigue of descending and climbing other people's stairs, were giving a description of a somatized psychological distress. The unbearable burden of exile is translated into the metaphors of a bitter taste in his mouth and of a pain in his chest coming from climbing the steep, alien stairways.

"Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience", wrote the American-Palestinian critic Edward Said in an essay titled precisely "Reflections on Exile" (2001: 137). Inded, exile is a territory of non-belonging stretching between the impossibility of identifying with the old homeland and the impossibility of identifying with a new one. If identities are built around nets of relations, the sudden and abrupt cutting of all ties – emotional, national, cultural, political, economical, and so on – endangers the very possibility of action that a person may have constructed throughout his or her life. One of the cruellest facts about exile is that the separation between an individual and a territory also threatens a complete loss of sense and meaning. If Dante's values strictly depended on the position he occupied within his city, it is easier to understand how the punishment that his enemies had prepared for him was a punishment aimed at stripping him off his dignity, to annihilate him to the point that all his future achievements would be forever overshadowed by his exile.

A starting point for the reflections on exile conveyed in this chapter can be found in a question that Edward Said asked in the above quoted essay: "But if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture?" (2001: 137). Said refers to "modern" culture without really specifying the temporal limits of what he considers to be "modern".[4] The adjective "modern" refers, in this essay, to a time which he defines as "spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement" (ibid.). From his perspective, representatives of modernity include Nietzsche and Freud but also, for example, the intellectuals who escaped from the Second

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4 The word "modernity", as the Italian scholar Maria Cristina Fumagalli notes, has been used in many different ways: "A number of possible beginnings have been suggested: the Roman or the Imperial break, Descartes' *cogito*, the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, Galileo, the emergence of capitalism, Luther, German idealism, the 'conquest' of the Americas" (Fumagalli 2009: 1). Simon Gikandi, author of an influential monograph on Caribbean literature, uses the word "modernity" and "modernism" interchangeably (cf. Gikandi 1992). Dealing with modernity from a Caribbean experience means to deal, most of all, with a variety of discourses from which the Caribbean is partially excluded and which Caribbean literature and art strive to go beyond.

World War in Europe and took refuge in the United States. Exile in this context figures mostly as an individual experience, as the experience of artists as wanderers across cultures who flee the horrors and the barbarism of their own society to become interpreters of a widespread unease. Exile connotes the capacity to acquire a trans-national and cross-cultural vision, a capacity which Said is prone to attribute also to exiles in ages preceding his acceptance of the word "modern". Dante's exile, in this sense, participates in this individualist, almost heroic, connotation. It is precisely the bewilderment brought in by his exile which endows the poet with the vision necessary for his greatest poetic enterprise, the *Comedia*. It is exile which allows Dante to see through the social and political unrest of his time, as well as beyond the localism of his own love of his native soil, and to produce his masterpiece.

This study, instead, engages with a different kind of "modern" exiles, exiles that are not just lived, individual experiences but rather a collective trauma which has settled itself in the collective memories and in the discourses of identity of Caribbean people. Asking Said's question with reference to the Caribbean implies, in fact, stretching and twisting the word "modern" to include an area which, as the Italian scholar Maria Cristina Fumagalli argues, is both *excluded from* and *beyond* modernity (cf. Fumagalli 2009). It is excluded in the sense that European and Western discourses of modernity have petrified it and configured it as their other. A necessary cog in the machine of progress – with its plantations of sugar, cotton and tobacco, the Caribbean provided Europe with the riches that allowed the latter to transform itself into an industrial and capitalist economy[5] – the Caribbean nonetheless remains outside the discourses of progress as a place of perpetual backwardness and primitivism. Yet, it is

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5   The prominence of the Caribbean in the passage from a mercantilist to a capitalist economy has been highlighted by many scholars and historians of the region (cf. Fumagalli 2009). As C.R.L. James reminds us, the sole island of San Domingo, at the time of French Revolution, was the most wealthy colony in the whole world (1982: 45 ff.). Antonio Benítez-Rojo describes the economic role of the Caribbean in the modern age as follows: "Let's be realistic: the Atlantic is the Atlantic (with all its port cities) because it was once engendered by the copulation of Europe – that insatiable solar bull – with the Caribbean archipelago; the Atlantic is today the Atlantic (the navel of capitalism) because Europe, in its mercantilistic laboratory, conceived the project of inseminating the Caribbean womb with the blood of Africa; the Atlantic is today the Atlantic (NATO, World Bank, New York Stock Exchange, European Economic Community, etc.) because it was the painfully delivered child of the Caribbean, whose vagina was stretched between continental clamps, between the *encomienda* of Indian and the slaveholding plantation, between the servitude of the coolie and the discrimination toward the *criollo*, between commercial monopoly and piracy, between the runaway slave settlement and the governor's palace; all Europe pulling on the forceps to help at the birth of the Atlantic: Columbus, Cabral, Cortés, de Soto, Hawikins, Drake, Hein, Rodney, Surcouf... after the blood and salt salt [repetition of salt correct?] water spurts, quickly sew up torn flesh and apply the antiseptic tinctures, the gauze and the surgical plaster; then the febrile wait through the foaming of a scar: suppurating, always suppurating" (Benítez-Rojo 1996:5).

beyond modernity in the sense that the whole cultural area has been an extraordinary hotbed of accelerated globalization which has anticipated in many interesting ways phenomena such as trans-nationalism, syncretism, and cross-culturalization. Caribbean culture is, in this sense, extraordinarily multi-lingual, hybrid and composite. From its dissonant perspective, the writing produced in the area shows an amazing, cross-cultural awareness of the many contradictions ingrained in discourses of modernity, the way power informs them, as well as their constructedness and limitations in a way which may be defined post-modern *ante-litteram*.

What differentiates Caribbean exiles from the sort of exiles described by Said is, above all, a matter of scale. Caribbean modernity began with a diaspora of a multiplicity of people from their original homelands – African, Asian, European. Exile is consequently not just an experience of individuals stripped of their familiar, social and territorial ties. It is rather an experience shared by millions of people, an experience of a time past, but at the same time an experience which, following the pattern of a trauma, has been repeating itself indefinitely.

Exile thus includes and replaces two other words which are sometimes used in connection with Caribbean literature – *diaspora* and *migration* – in order to highlight the continuity and interconnection of these two experiences. The many waves of migration from the Caribbean started as early as the late eighteenth century and have incessantly continued until the present day – Alexandra Bronfman thus speaks of "transnational citizenship" (2007: 38). These waves of migration seem to repeat and displace the spatial disjunction in which the culture of the Caribbean has its origins. Accordingly, the influential work of Simon Gikandi, author of the monograph on Caribbean Literature *Writing in Limbo* (1992), also reads the movement of artists, writers and intellectuals who left their native Caribbean islands to produce what Gikandi considers "the most important documents in the Caribbean tradition: Aimé Cesaire's *Cahier,* Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, C. R. L. James's *The Black Jacobins*, V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas*, and George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*" (Gikandi 1992: 33).

What this study is concerned with is the textualization of these experiences of exile; that is, how they enter literary constructions of identity through singular and discrepant perspectives to (re)construct the elusive space of home. The object of this chapter, differently

put, is to explore how exile can be transformed from a real experience of dispossession and a discourse of collective disempowerment into a positive foundation for a literary construction of Caribbean identity. Caribbean writers leave their homeland not to pursue a pointless flight from reality, or to find abroad the truth of an origin which history has taken away from them. The flight becomes a search for truth which finds its realization not in the reconstruction of a bond with the territory but rather in an uprooting of the self carried to its extremes. By the same token, literary flights from home are searches for truth aimed at deconstructing fixed ideals of home, selfhood and identity. "Exile" – a term which in the Caribbean is also inevitably connected to some the most dehumanizing experiences in history the barbarism of slavery, as well as colonialism and its aftermath of political instability and totalitarianisms – is appropriated to serve new notions of humanism, becoming a constitutive part of the very concept of "home". Indeed, in the journeys described in the following chapter, exile figures as a site of critical engagement, of resignification and reconfigurations of identity, as well of the transformation of the very concept of home. It is transformed into a significant cognitive instrument, a privileged, cross-cultural point of view on the world.

Fictions of exile and home as separated geographical and cultural spaces are, in fact, at odds with the Caribbean's history of migration and hybridization. Exile and return,"*déracinement* and *enracinement*", as the American scholar Michael J. Dash argues, have been two of the major themes which traverse the literary production of the whole region since the very dawn of Caribbean writing (1997: 451). "Indeed", Dash claims, "it could be argued that the existential experience of exile and the essentialist temptation of home are inscribed more generally within a thematics of the quest for identity in all Caribbean culture" (ibid). Dash claims that exile was introduced in Caribbean literature as the negative pole in a dialectical, mediative exercise from which new conceptions of home and identity may emerge: "Exile and the lure of home, fall, and redemption enable the individual to confront the insecurities left in the wake of slavery, colonization, assimilation, and in more recent times, totalitarian politics" (1997: 451).At the root of this literary dialectics between exile and return is the idea of the artificiality of the conditions of being forced away from a 'real' native land – an artificiality equally thematized in the work of writers of African, European and Asian descent – as well as the failure of the creation of new, national discourses or unitarian models of national identity. Exile entered Caribbean literature in the form of a disruptive and

threatening alterity, a territory of non-belonging, which prevents self-realization within a community.[6] The threat connected with the word "exile" is that of never gaining access to one's identity, of being forever relegated to the space of non-being. From this perspective, the word "exile" refers to a dangerous stage to be overcome. Yet the fact that Dash ascribes this conception of exile to a dialectics anticipates the fact that its opposition to home would soon give way to more complex and sophisticated forms of interaction. The opposition between home as being and exile as non-being was soon to replaced with multiple figurations of processes of becoming which intersect and combine both poles. It is for this reason that dealing with exile, as a matter of fact, not only means dealing with the precondition in which the Caribbean journeys of return are embedded, but also with their point of arrival. Exile is the condition of the never-ending exploration which allows, to quote Eliot's "Little Gidding" once more, "[..] to arrive where we started/ and know the place for the first time" (V, *l*.28-29).

Talking about textualizations of exile does not just mean to deal with exile just as a theme, but rather to understand how it is internalized, as an epistemological condition, into the very practice of writing. Discourses on exile are conveyed, in the literary texts addressed here, in the reflections on the way exile permeates the very relationship of Caribbean writers to language, literature and culture. Exile and return, as asserted in the previous chapter, function to the outline and develop meta-discourses on literature and on language, as well on the legacies that colonialism left them with. Exile figures in the texts addressed in the following chapters precisely as the awareness of the impossibility of concealing the issue of the other which informs the access of Caribbean writers, from their historicized, post-colonial and hybrid perspective, to writing. Accordingly, the following sections of this chapter will engage

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6   The initially negative connotation of the word *exile*, Dash claims, should be regarded also as the result of the great influence of Romanticism and of the ideal of nationhood, patriotism and belonging developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe. These considerations seem to Dash particularly pertinent with regard to the writing produced in Haiti, the first nation in the Caribbean (and the second in the Americas) to gain independence, in 1804, in the wake of the French Revolution. Similar notions of community and belonging are, nonetheless, easily noticeable in the first writings produced in the Anglophone Caribbean, for example in the first slave narratives produced by West Indian slaves and popularized on the European market, as well as in the works of vehement criticism that rose up against James Anthony Froude's *The English in the West Indies, or the Bow of Ulysses* (1887). For instance, John Jacob Thomas' *Froudacity: West Indian Fables by James Anthony Froude* (1889), a remarkable work that lays bare all the inaccuracies of Froude's insulting, racist arguments against the establishment of self-governement in the British West Indies, is also very much embedded in romantic ideals of patriotism (Tomasi 1999: 929). Besides, the same detrimental conception of exile as being opposed to the plenitude of home converged in the Pan-Africanist movements which caught on in the area starting from the early twentieth century thanks to figures like the Jamaican publisher, journalist and entrepreneur Marcus Garvey and to religious movements such as Rastafarianism.

with a definition and a contextualization of the word "exile" in Caribbean literature, and this will constitute the premise on which the readings of homecoming journeys in the following chapters will be based.

Starting from this premise, this chapter will deal with how the space of exile is transformed from a space of separation between self and other into a space of "transformative juncture" (Pouchet Paquet 1992: xiv). As the title of this chapter suggests, the main site of this analysis of exile will be language, writing and literature. Therefore, while dealing with exile, this chapter will introduce some of the key concepts which will account for the specificity of the literary discourse for fostering for reconfiguring the very issues of home and identity. The work of Michel de Certeau will allow us to understand how exile permeates these practices; how, in other words, the language, writing and literature are practices of production of otherness which are at the same time troubled by the very elusiveness of otherness. After that, a reading of George Lamming's collection of essays *The Pleasures of Exile* (1992 [1960]) will provide some insights into how Caribbean figurations of exile undermine the fragility of the borders between self and other, and will allow us to conceptualize exile as both alienation and reconnection. The chapter will then introduce the work of Édouard Glissant and Antonio Benítez-Rojo, who embed the discourse of exile as reconnection and transformation in a perspective which multiples and diffracts the duality of colonizer and colonized, self and other. In particular, Glissant concept of "Relation" will make it possible to reconfigure the concept of intertextuality and tradition which Eliot's "Little Gidding" anticipated in the previous chapter.

Exile as epistemology of the other

> Writing is born from and deals with the acknowledged doubt of an explicit division, in sum, of the impossibility of one's own place. It articulates an act that is constantly a beginning: the subject is never authorized by a place, it could never install itself in an unalterable cogito, it remains a stranger to itself and forever deprived of an ontological ground, and therefore it always comes up short or in excess, always the debtor of a death, indebted with respect to the disappearance of a genealogical and territorial "substance" linked to a name that cannot be owned. (De Certeau 1988 [1975]: 327)

Engaging with exile means engaging with an extremely polysemic term, the common semantic trait of the many meanings it assumes in its different contexts of usage highlighted

here being the trait of "otherness". Exile is an inescapable constituent of Caribbean culture, the component of otherness which is never completely dissolved in the hybrid condition of Caribbean subjects. Edward Said defined exile as a "discontinuous state of being" (2001: 140), a condition which implies being neither totally removed from one's roots, nor completely assimilated to a new context. This consideration is the starting point of an ethical interrogation on the border between self and other, the blurring of which becomes the site of a resemanticization of the very issue of home and identity.

Heterologies is the term that Michel de Certeau coined to refer to a "science of the other" (Giard 1991: 217), an unfinished project that the French philosopher carried on throughout his life and whose field of investigation crosses the boundaries of a variety of disciplines, approaches, methodologies and theories. Addressing the issue of the other opens a variety of questions on representation, discourse and even on identity formation stretching across the individual and the collective. The word "science" may perhaps not best define the complexity and the range of de Certeau's interrogations – he himself preferred to use the term *heterologies* in the plural rather than in the singular, highlighting the fact that the word "other" eludes any possible unity of conceptualization. More than a science, heterologies emerge as a set of counter-discourses aimed at unveiling the different forms and locations that otherness may take: as the real which escapes representation, as the repressed that returns and destabilizes discourse, but also, as de Certeau's collaborator Luce Giard claims, as "God, other men in other societies, or that alterity in oneself against whom the most painful battles are played out" (1991: 213). Indeed, de Certeau addressed the way alterity is hidden and located even in the self, in what Freud described as the self-dividedness of subjectivity (cf. Freud's topographical division of the psyche in Freud 1999) or in the constitution of the ego as always-already alienated from itself, as in Lacan's L-scheme (cf. Lacan 2002).

De Certeau's *heterologies* find a most significant affinity and continuity in the literature and reflections on literature which have developed over recent decades in the Caribbean. Indeed, the New World, which the French scholar had chosen as a paradigmatic example to describe the functioning of the writing of history, has become the site of a series of multifarious interrogations, re-significations and re-inscriptions of otherness. Indeed, the inadequacy of representation and the disorienting reality of otherness appear as a central issue in the literature produced in the Caribbean to the point that the Caribbean has been

increasingly read as a cultural area in which the post-colonial intersects with the post-modern in most interesting ways. The relationship with writing as a product of a Eurocentric modernity is recurrently addressed and thematized as something that Caribbean intellectuals cannot set aside, but which they deal with in such a way that, according to Michael J. Dash, one of the most prominent voices in the field of French Caribbean studies, they may be seen as "natural deconstructionist[s] who praise[..] latency, formlessness and plurality" (2002: 335). Dash reads the highly self-reflexive quality of Caribbean writing as a strategy of resistance to the discursive annihilation of otherness, a way of showing "the futility of all attempts to construct total systems, to assert the powers of the structuring subject" (ibid.). In this sense writing openly deals with what de Certeau called "the acknowledged doubt of an explicit division" (de Certeau 1988 [1975]: 327) between the word and the world, as well as between the self and the other, in order to "demonstrat[e] the opacity and inexhaustibility of a world that resists systematic construction or transcendent meaning" (Dash 2002: 335).

Images of disjointed space and unstable territoriality abound in Michel de Certeau's exploration of how the presence of the *other* informs and unsettles writing. The epigraph which introduced this section is about precisely how writing is a practice that is not only based in, but also constantly haunted by, the way difference has fractured the space of Western thought, language, and subjectivity. Writing, for de Certeau, is never at home, never rooted in an unequivocal unity of thought and being. "The acknowledged doubt of an explicit division" (1988: 327) from which writing is born and which writing can never really get rid of becomes the site of an ethical and epistemological interrogation which takes this very rupture and perturbation as its mark and which aims at constructing non-fetishized horizons of intelligibility delineating the other.

In *The Writing of History* (1988 [1975]), de Certeau concentrates on historiography as a field of analysis that is particularly significant in the way that it puts together in oxymoronic and paradoxical ways two opposing fields – history and writing, the *real* and *discourse* – whose juncture, following the Lacanian perspective which de Certeau assumes, can only come into being in the form of a lack. The French philosopher and historian discusses and analyses historiography as a highly heterogeneous and fragmentary discourse that takes many different forms and approaches. Yet, all these "heteronomous variants" (1988: 3) emerge as practices of spatial separation, dwelling in different ways in the cleavage between a the

written word and the world. If the writing of history is necessarily unable to articulate the real, its aim will be to produce "autonomous linguistic artifacts", necessarily separated from but able to act upon and transform the things from which they have been distinguished (1988: xxvi).

The separation between a *will to write* and a *written body* (or a *body to be written*) which lies at the heart of historiography, as well as of most scientific discourses which have developed within a Eurocentric tradition, is interpreted by de Certeau as a practice of *othering*. Writing creates its others in order to make them intelligible. Yet, their intelligibility is attained only in the form of what discourse has repressed and which can only be known in that to which they have been opposed and that from which they have been separated. "A labor of death and a labor against death" (1988: 5): with this formula de Certeau recapitulates the paradoxicality of a discourse that repeats and affirms its separation from the object that it wants to know while at the same time claiming for itself the privilege of restating and recovering it in the form of a knowledge on the basis of which a course of action may subsequently be taken. Therefore, to write about the past is made possible through a gesture which cuts off the past from the present, which silences the past and then tries to interpret its opacity by displacing it to the site in which the historiographical discourse is produced and legitimized. The same may be said about the many others – "the savage, the past, the people, the insane, the child, the Third World" (de Certeau 1988: xxvi) – produced not only by historiography, but also by its cognates explicitly named by the French scholars (psychiatry, pedagogy, ethnology, etc), as well as in the many discourses which these writing inform.

It is an allegory of colonialism which, in *The Writing of History,* introduces the *othering* potential of writing. The book opens with a reproduction of an allegorical drawing by Jan van der Straet representing Amerigo Vespucci's landing in America. The drawing sets up the image of the Italian explorer – armed with the weapon of knowledge and religion and backed by the vessels which will bring back to Europe the treasures of the New World – and the indigenous America – against a nude woman, "unnamed presence of difference, a body which awakens within a space of exotic flora and fauna" (1988: xxv). The gesture through which the presumed subject of knowledge demarcates his separation between himself and the body to be written is a gesture that makes the nude woman of Van de Straet's drawing come into being – indeed she awakens and stretches towards Vespucci as if the encounter with the

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explorer had suddenly aroused her to consciousness for the first time – in the form of an already exiled and estranged self. It is thus a twofold act of estrangement that enables the colonizer to manage the potential threat of the unknown and to reconstruct this unknown in ways that may be conducive to his own expansion. Not only the subject who provisionally occupies the position of knowing – or *sujet-supposé-savoir*, as de Certeau, drawing on Lacan's terminology, calls it in the original French version (1975: 10) – separates himself from the written object of knowledge, but this object is produced as already alienated from itself. De Certeau interprets this drawing as a figuration of what he calls *écriture conquérante* (1975: 3), or "*writing that conquers*" (1988: xxv), a writing which invades the body of the other and turns it into a white page onto which the desire of the colonizer and the discourse of power may be inscribed. The *écriture conquérante*, de Certeau claims, "will transform the space of the other into a field of expansion for a system of production" (1988: xxvi) – an expression which, applied to the specific geographical and cultural area of the New World addressed in this study, certainly recalls the impressive quickness with which this process of transformation took place: the genocide of the Caribs, the Arawak and the Taino tribes, as well as the introduction of the plantation system which made the Caribbean one of the most central cogs in what the Cuban intellectual Antonio Benítez-Rojo described as the machine of Atlantic capitalism, were perfected within no more than fifty years of Columbus's 'discovery'.

The term "exile" recalls and displaces the alienation of the Caribbean self that de Certeau had attributed to the work of *écriture conquerant.* As the Guyanese writer Jan Carew wrote in an influential article published on *Journal of Black Studies* in 1978, the estrangement performed through writing becomes the epistemological condition in which the work of Caribbean writers is unavoidably embedded ("the Caribbean writer today is a creature between limbo and nothingness, exile at home and homelessness at home, between the people on the one hand and the creole and the colonizer on the other", Carew 1978: 453). The argument that Carew presents to support his interpretation of the role of the Caribbean intellectual concerns the way writing itself was introduced to the region in the form of an act of linguistic and cultural dispossession. Carew claims that the Caribbean has been transformed into a space of exile with a primordial, linguistic act of robbing of which the very name "America" is the first, significant sign. "America", argues Carew, was not a name invented to pay homage to the Italian explorer Vespucci, but rather an already existing name

used by local, pre-Columbian people. As evidence of that, Carew refers to an Amerindian tribe who are nowadays still known as *Los Amerriques*, as well to a mountain range in Nicaragua called *Sierra Amerrique*. The fact that Vespucci changed his own first name from Alberico to Amerigo and pretended to impose it onto a "virgin land" (Carew 1978: 456) is part of a self-aware fiction of discovery which finds its on legitimization precisely in writing. Carew compares the "intense, humorless, turgid, occasionally poetic writing of Columbus" (1978: 455), who was not aware of the range of his own "discovery", to the more self-aware writing of Vespucci:

> Vespucci, on the other hand, composing his Quatuor Navigationes (c. 1504-1505) [Marcou, 1888: 12] in Portugal did not write in the white heat of his experiences. He gave us an elegant, retrospective, and very persuasive view, and he was never averse to plagiarism if the accounts of other people's voyage could enhance his own. Vespucci invented a colonizer's America, and the reality that is ours never recovered from this literary assault and the distortion he inflicted upon it. The fiction of a "virgin land" inhabited by savages, at once a racist one and a contradiction, remains with us to this day. (Carew 1978: 456)

Vespucci's fiction of discovery and his renaming, a highly self-aware act which significantly took place in Europe *after* the discoverer's return – it was therefore clearly separated in time and space from the actual voyage, differently from what Van de Straet's drawing may suggest – was consciously aimed at expropriating the indigenous people of their capability of producing name. "To rob people or countries of their names is to set in motion a psychic disturbance which can in turn create a permanent crisis of identity", claims Carew (1978: 457-58), and this disturbance has become constitutive of today's "indigenous writing", a writing issued from "a mosaic of cultural fragments – Amerindian, African, European, Asian", in which the European fragment "is brought into a sharper focus, but it remains a fragment" (Carew, 1978: 454).

The separation between the self and the other, the *sujet-supposé-savoir* and the *corps su*, emerges from de Certeau's studies, nonetheless, as a most provisional construct. De Certeau's *écriture conquérant* fabricates the illusion that the other may be contained and comprehended though writing, and yet "the other is increasingly revealed as fantasmatic, and tantalizingly recedes as we get closer to it" (Terdiman 1992: 6). It is not possible to fetishize the other or cancel its presence by erecting a linguistic monument to it, as the historiographical discourse is meant to do. The separation from which writing issues does not

put writing on a solid foundation, and certainly does not root it in a stable ontology. On the contrary, writing is a continuous gesture of appropriation which has to repeat itself and affirm a territoriality which is never fixed or stable. The "dealing with" the "implicit division" from which writing issues (de Certeau 1988: 327) can never be completed , as the other always threatens to reappear and re-present itself, troubling and unsettling the discursive representations that are meant to contain and know it.

Simon Gikandi, who repeatedly refers to Carew's article in his monograph *Writing in Limbo*, remarks that "Caribbean literature and culture are haunted by the presence of the 'discoverer' and the historical moment he inaugurates'" (1992: 1). The figure of the discoverer is also all the more haunting in so far as, like Lacan's *Nom du Père*, it is the contradictory locus of a forced, necessary identification as well of the prohibition of this very identification. A short extract from the section "The Cracked Mother" of Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poem "Limbo" is adduced as an epigraph to Gikandi's monograph to illustrate the double bind that links Caribbean cultural production to the figure of the discoverer:

> My mother said I'd be alone
> and when I cried (she said)
> I'd be Columbus of my ships
> and sail the garden round
> the tears that fells into my hand (Brathwaite I, *1*.1-5)

Brathwaite is introduced by Gikandi as a poet who, although engaging in a search for new modes of expression and representation that might revalue ancestral sources from Africa, is highly conscious of the impossibility for Caribbean intellectuals of rejecting the inscription of discovery *tout court*. "In this context, it was perhaps inevitable that the mother of the poetic speaker in Brathwaite's poem [...] would sooner or later invoke the name of Columbus in her attempts to show her son ways of navigating a Caribbean world that Europe had tried to refashion in its own image", Gikandi argues. The lyric "I" who is struggling to assert himself – his being left alone may indeed suggest his rupture of the imaginary bond that links him to the figure of the mother – has to confront himself with the haunting presence of this putative father of his continent, and at the same time with the fears and anxiety that this confrontation implies. Columbus is an absence, a linguistic position that the "I" has to occupy to navigate across this garden, but also the threat of an imminent death – the poems later mentions the

"black silk sails" of the three caravels navigation on "the horizon of my fear" (I, *l*.8) and the slaughter brought by other adventurers in the New World ("Pirates in smiling ships, they'd rob the world I ruled/ and not a trick I brought would bribe their cruel slaughter/ for still the black silk walked towards me on water", I *l*.13-14).

The verb "haunt" as it is used by Gikandi is also a particularly meaningful semantic choice in that it foregrounds the predicament implied by the prefix "post" in both the word "post-colonial" and "post-modern", i.e. the impossibility of completely overcoming the paradigms of which these two discourses configure themselves as 'going beyond'. The gesture of estrangement implicit in writing has overdetermined the Caribbean's coming into being within a globalized modernity in ways which cannot be simply dismissed, forgotten or replaced. Any attempt to recompose through writing the fracture created by what de Certeau called *écriture conquérante* is always-already tainted with the paradox of displacing and re-affirming this very fracture. Gikandi thus claims that "because the colonized subject has also been entrapped in a colonial hermeneutics – previously, knowledge was only possible 'under Western eyes' – self-understanding in the projected decolonized culture demands the appropriation of exile as a form of meta-commentary on the colonial condition itself" (1992: 38). With the reference to "meta-commentary", a concept which he draws from the work of the American Marxist Fredric Jameson, Gikandi claims that the only way of overcoming the condition of exile that writing has brought about in the Caribbean is to radicalise it, to comment on it, and to expose it. Caribbean intellectuals have to endorse their epistemological exile and comment on it in order to justify their own position within writing, as well as to dismantle any possible idea that this exile may be rooted in a Parmenidian conception of identity between thought and being.

The haunting quality of the figure of the discoverer and of the inscription of discovery emerges as even more significant insofar as it allows us to understand how exile moves from the field of the production of space to enter the very field of the production of subjects. The cultural significance of the gesture of colonial inscriptions reverberates, in fact, also on the very self-perception of colonial subjects. De Certeau's claim that "the subject is never authorized by a place, it could never install itself in an unalterable cogito" (1988: 327) locates the exile of writing at the very heart of Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of subjectivity. Exile, to put it differently, is internalized as a psychical disjunction, inscribed in a

phenomenological scheme of perception in which the relation to otherness becomes central and constitutive.

Frantz Fanon, a Martinican philosopher, psychiatrist and revolutionary, borrowed precisely this idea of psychic exile to account for how the otherness inscribed by the introjection performed by the discoverer's gaze acts upon the self-perception of black people. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967 [1952]), Fanon draws on phenomenological claims to argue that "[c]onsciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty" (1967: 109). The movements that a body performs in space are the result of a mental schema of perception in which the body is perceived as outside-itself, in the middle of a spatial and temporal world. What Fanon calls "third-person consciousness" (ibid.) – the idea that the self occupies both the place of the "I" and that of an external observer through which it can coordinate its movement within a space – becomes a consciousness of the self in a third place as this schema of corporeal perception is juxtaposed to the othering gaze that is cast upon black people in a white-dominated context. It is a casual encounter with a little boy afraid of blackness which starts a reflection of how the gaze of the white introduces a further level of estrangement onto the body of a black person:

> My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger is going to eat me up". (Fanon 1967 [1952]: 112-113).

The use of free indirect speech that Fanon displays in this passage elegantly signals the way in which the *othering* gaze of the child is indistinguishable from the perception of the self that the black man has internalized. This is the historical and cultural schema which black people introject with the white man's gaze, the gaze of the discoverer, a gaze always-already charged with the idea that "black" is an indelible mark of difference, a signifier of inferiority through which black people learn to see themselves.

It is a literary work which first engaged with the effort to rework the estranging gaze of the other and reconstitute the estranged body and estranged self. Aimé Cesaire, the poet

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who, with his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939), performed what has been emphatically defined as "the archetypical and definitive moment of return in the poetry of the Caribbean" (Frazer 1994: 7). Perhaps the words "definitive" and "archetypical" are out of step with a work that is extremely open and multi-layered, although the *Cahier* certainly represented a key moment in the reflection on writing and alterity which subsequent generations of poets, writers and intellectuals have had to confront.[7] The way this poem left a mark upon Caribbean literature was through opening up the concepts of "exile" and "home". Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, a forty-page-long poem arising from the poet's experience of the realization of his own alienation as a black person amid other people in Paris, describes return not as a reunion with the self based on an ontological foundation but rather as a complex and precarious process of transformation.

Michael Dash defines the *Cahier* as an attempt at the reconstitution of a dismembered body through an act of re-membering that does not imply a fixed identification with a past, irretrievable idea of a pan-African original identity, but rather a constitutive process that takes the displacement of the subject as its starting point. More than a physical return, and a real re-conjunction with the self (and his Caribbean island as well as the Africa of his origin), the poem seems to convey "a discovery of a new consciousness that unites opposites and suggests unceasing metamorphosis" (Dash 1997: 452). The return to Martinique is, in this sense, a far cry from a return to an original *pays natal*. Rather, it re-configures Martinique and the Caribbean within the flux of a continuous relationality, a relationality that makes the *retour* (return) a process of constant *detour* through the space of the other. Indeed, although Césaire is considered as the founding father of *négritude* – a highly influential movement of francophone intellectuals revolving around the idea that a shared black heritage of members of the black diaspora would prove the best cultural weapon against European cultural hegemony – his *Cahier* already takes him much further than the essentialist ideology with

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7 Although the influence of Césaire's *Cahier* was enormous in the francophone Caribbean, Robert Frazer concentrates on the influence of Césaire in the anglophone Caribbean, in particular in the work of Derek Walcott and Edward Kamau Brathwaite. Frazer calls the *Cahier* "definitive" for two reasons: "The first is that, though the Cahier [italics?] calls itself a journal of return, the return envisaged is less a physical event than an act of commitment, a reordering of priorities, a convulsion and revulsion of the will. Summoning up distant Martinique in the eye of the mind while physically still in Paris, Césaire takes the island to himself: 'J'accepte, j'accepte tout cela'. The second reason is this: that what Césaire is accepting is not simply his own island but all that has happened to it, hence to himself. The poem records no literal return, but a mental return to the origins." (1994: 7).

which *négritude* is associated.[8] As the British scholar Jane Hiddleston puts it, Césaire dissolves what may be thought of as the specificity of *négritude* and "describes negritude as an opening out and a gesture of contact with otherness" (2010: 90), an active process described through a number of neologisms created by the author to define the transformation that this contact with otherness entails.

It is undeniable that the *Cahier* should be considered a milestone for the way it influenced a variety of literary works and also paved the way for the cultural and literary debates that followed. The transformation of language that Césaire performed in his poetry certainly inspired the reflections on language as exile which the Barbadian writer George Lamming produced in his essay *The Pleasures of Exile*, while Césaire's idea of the interconnectedness of different cultural and geographical spaces highly influenced Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*. The following two sections will engage with precisely the ways in which Lamming, Glissant and Benítez-Rojo re-elaborated Césaire's poetic figuration of the return to construct a literary theory of exile and return as interrelated spaces, and with how the issue of the search for the other in language, literature and culture is embedded in their analysis.

Language as a space of exile and reconnection: George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*

The study of exile and of the way exile contributes to the construction of subjectivities is at the heart of the literary and theoretical work of George Lamming. A writer who observed and analysed exile from a colonial point of view, in his work Lamming put forward the idea of subjectivity itself as something produced, not innate, and highlighted the importance of

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8 Jane Hiddleston highlights how the movement of négritude was born as a reaction against the universalizing rethorics that France after World War I was trying to impose on to its colonies, at the same time discriminating against and particularizing African identity. *Négritude,* the movement founded by Césaire and Leopold Senghor, had thus as its aim to propose another, universalized way of thinking about African identity. Césaire, whose poetic endeavour already make him at odds with the finalities of the movement that he had contributed to found, commented on *négritude* as follows in an interview with Lilyan Kestlewood: "It's an obvious fact: negritude has brought dangers. It has tended to become a school, to become a church, to become a theory, an ideology. I am in favor of negritude seen as a literary phenomenon, and as a personal ethic, but I am against building an ideology on negritude […]. If negritude means a kind of prophecy, well then no, because I strongly believe there's a class struggle, for example, and there are other elements, philosophical elements, that certainly determine us. I absolutely refuse any sort of confused, idyllic Pan-Africanism […]. As a result, although, I don't reject negritude, I look on it with an extremely critical eye. Critical, that's basically what I mean: lucidity and discernment, not confusedly mixing everything. In addition, my conception of negritude is not biological, it's cultural and historical. I think there is always a certain danger in basing something on the black blood in our veins, the three drops of black blood" (quoted in Clifford 1988: 178).

language in the process through which subjects come into being, anticipating in most interesting ways, from his historicized and localized experience, the theories that would be later developed by Louis Althusser, Michel Foucalt and, in most recent years, Jean-Jacques Lecercle. One of the most remarkable aspects of Lamming's work is the way he did not consider exile as the experience of colonial people only, but rather an experience differently shared by colonizer and colonized, as well as a site for the redefinition of the power relations among all agents involved in colonialism. The apex of his intellectual engagement was reached between the mid nineteen-fifties and the late sixties, precisely at the moment of culmination of the process towards independence of many British ex-colonies. Years before the field of study which was later to come to prominence in academia as "post-colonial studies", Lamming raised some of the fundamental questions on the cultural, linguistic and literary legacy which colonialism would indelibly leave on the societies affected by it, producing some of the most brilliant post-colonial (*ante-litteram*) re-readings of European and American literary classics, and anticipating reflections on cultural hybridity.

The Pleasure of Exile (1960) is the paradoxical, oxymoronic title that Lamming gave to "a work of self-inquiry and cultural assessment", as Barbara Pouchet Paquet defined it in the "Foreword" to the 1992 edition (1992: vii), in which the personal experience of the author's own migration to England, his own cultural alienation and estranged perception of the self are the starting points for a variety of reflections on colonialism, politics, language and literature. A collection of writings spanning across different genres – autobiographical accounts, literary criticism, cultural, historical and political essays – *The Pleasures of Exile* displaces the meaning of the word "exile" from the individual condition of the writer to a collective, generalized experience embracing, in different ways, all the agents involved in colonialism. Lamming progressively dismantles the idea that the form that exile takes against the backdrop of colonization is an experience that belongs to the colonized alone: "For colonization is a reciprocal process. To be a colonial is to be a man in a certain relation; and this relation is an example of exile" (Lamming 1992: 156). By inscribing exile within a relationship characterized by reciprocity, Lamming deconstructs and reconfigures the rift between *sujet-supposé-savoir* and *corps su* which de Certeau figures as the basis of *écriture conquerant*, and makes the provisional quality of this rift itself the very site of a different involvement with the other.

Lamming's famous claim that "[t]he pleasure and paradox of my own exile is that I belong wherever I am" (1992: 50) implies that while colonialism may have forever disrupted the (imaginary) communion that linked individuals to their original home and community, it has also allowed them to walk the different paths of becoming that may emerge through a relationship to the other, whatever form this other may take. To foreground his involvement with the other, and to present himself as a privileged interpreter of a precise historical moment (the book was written against the backdrop of the beginning of a process of decolonization in many British-Caribbean countries), Lamming introduces the 'I' which controls the narration as both a personal and a collective 'I', already constituted within a net of relations, among which the 'you' of the reader also plays a significant role:

> This book is based upon facts of experience, and it is intended as an introduction to a dialogue between you and me. I am the whole world of my accumulated experience, vast area of which probably remain unexplored. You are the other, according to your way of seeing me in relation to yourself. There will be no chairman. Magic is permissible. Indeed, any method of presentation may be used. There is one exception. Don't tell lies. From time to time, the truth may go into hiding; but don't tell lies.
>   We have met before. Four centuries separate our first meeting when Prospero was graced with the role of thief, merchant, and man of God. Our hero was 'the right worshipful and valiant knight sir John Haukins, sometimes treasurer of her Majesties navie Roial'; and it is his first Voyage in search of human merchandise. (Lamming 1992: 12)

By defining the 'I' as the "whole word of my accumulating experience, vast areas of which probably remains unexplored", Lamming implies that the experiences of exile that he describes in his book do not only relate to his own personal experience and the actual occurrences of his life. His analysis of colonialism is based on a provisional position he may take within a shared, collective experience – the experience of language, as it will later emerge from the text – and this positioning is highly dependent on the role that the 'you' may take. The 'I' of Lamming's multivoiced text is not a unifying entity, but rather, as Barbara Pouchet Paquet puts it, a "plurality of texts, generating a multiplicity of meanings that determines the text's shifting value in and out of time as method and document of cultural and intellectual history" (1992: ix). The 'you' on whom the narrator relies and with whom he starts an imaginary dialogue is not defined, thus embracing a variety of possibilities for identification ("you are the other, according to your way of seeing me in relation to yourself", 1992: 12). By leaving this 'you' undefined, Lamming implicitly invites his readers, whatever

their perspective or their relationship to colonialism may be, to join him in his process of constructing of the meaning of his analysis of exile, as well as to supplement his discussion of colonialism and de-colonization with their own experience and point of view. The "dialogue between you and me" (ibid.) remains open until the end, indicating the instability of both language and exile.

In this perspective, the reference to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* – the re-reading of which occupies vast sections of the book – does not reassert the dualistic identification of Prospero with the colonizer and Caliban as the colonized which had characterized previous readings of the play.[9] *The Tempest* is interpreted as a scene in which the theatre of colonialism unfolds itself, and in which the roles of master and slave depend on the contingency and the dialectics of their relationship. Prospero is introduced as someone who has made the first encounter between the 'I' and the 'you' possible, but neither the 'I' nor the 'you' can be said to identify with the magician and Duke of Milan, or his servant Caliban. Instead, they are both, somehow, a product of the master-slave dialectics issued from their relationship, a

9 Despite the relative dearth of attention in the years following its writing, since the 19th century *The Tempest* has attracted the attention of numerous intellectuals concerned with the representation of power conveyed in the play, particularly in the subplot of Caliban's attempted rebellion against his master Prospero, as well as to read it as an allegory of colonialism. Indeed, the problematic representation of power and alterity conveyed in *The Tempest* has made Shakespeare's last play into one of the most discussed, analysed and even re-written works in the whole Shakespearean corpus. Among the re-readings and rewritings preceding Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*, perhaps it is worth mentioning the imaginary sequel to Caliban's story *Caliban. Suite de "La Tempête",* written by the French political philosopher Ernest Renan, who imagined that Caliban, instead of remaining on his island after Prospero's departure, follows his master and, exposed to proper language and thought, becomes a symbol for the progress of man in democracy. Marxist re-readings of the play started being produced in Latin America as early as the 1930, with the work of the Argentinian Philosopher Aníbal Norberto Ponce (1898-1938), who identified Caliban with the exploited masses, and who, in many significant ways anticipated the famous re-reading published by Roberto Fernández Retamar in 1970.
It is, nonetheless, the deeply controversial analysis of colonialism produced by Octave Mennoni in *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950) that mostly influenced Lamming's own work. Mannoni suggested that the relationship of dependence established between colonized and colonizer was not the result of the circumstances of colonization, but rather already implied in the very structure of both colonizer's and colonized's societies. In Mannoni's view – a view which he developed during his stay in Malaysia, and which was later sharply criticized because his complete ignorance of local culture had led him to a series of gross misunderstandings (cf. Philip Mason's foreword to the English translation of 1956, as well as Mannoni's admission of errors in the "Author's Note to the Second Edition" of 1964) – societies may be divided into static societies, which are characterized by a high level of dependence (like Caliban) and competitive societies, characterized by an insatiable need to expand themselves beyond their borders (like Prospero). This is why they are prone to accept colonization as part of their own social pattern. Mannoni claims that colonization positively inserts itself into a social order already characterized by a series of ties when the colonizer replaced the old bonds to old divinities or ancestors with a bond of a different kind. Mannoni reads the failure of this replacement as a cause for the failure of colonial orders, as well as for the series of armed revolts that in those years were causing bloodshed in many colonial countries. Mannoni compared those revolts to Caliban's association with Trinculo and Stephano, i.e. as a search for a new bond of dependence which, nonetheless, may turn out to be completely inadequate.

dialectics in which the roles are open to future possibilities.

The special value that Lamming assigns to Shakespeare's play concerns the fact that "[t]he Tempest is a drama which grows and matures from the seeds of exile and paradox" (1992: 95) and that exile is something shared between the master Prospero and the slave Caliban.[10] Prospero is the exiled Duke of Milan who, together with his daughter Miranda, has taken refuge on a small, semi-deserted island somewhere in the Mediterranean[11] following the usurpation of his throne by his brother Antonio. Yet, while in exile, Prospero uses his magic to make himself at home, to force the two other inhabitants of the island – the deformed Caliban and the airy spirit Ariel – to submit to his power and to assume control of the island in a way that replicates in the limited space of the island the function of command which he already had in his Dukedom. Caliban, conversely, is an exile in his own home. The son of the witch Sycorax, the previous ruler of the island,[12] he was born on the island but deprived of his own right of succession by Prospero's magic and then forced to work as a slave for his newly-acquired master.

Exile, nonetheless, is not only the condition in which the play unfolds but also its very conclusion. Caliban and Prospero's return home are proffered as a possible conclusion, but whether or not Prospero should see Milan again is left at the discretion of the audience, who, with their prayers, may or may not help the magician who has given up all his charms.[13] By

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10 Little relevance is given to the character of Miranda and her own personal exile in Lamming's re-reading of Shakespeare's play. As Pouchet Paquet notes, "[d]espite the complexity of the text, resistance and liberation are an exclusively male enterprise in *The Pleasures of Exile*. The autobiographical framework generates a self-conscious, self-celebrating male paradigm that goes unchallenged in the text. [..] Miranda shares Caliban's creative potential to the degree to which she shares his innocence and ignorance of Prospero's magic, though their difference in status turns their common experience into an oppositional space" (1992: xxii).

11 The tempest to which the title refers takes place as the ship on which Alonso, the king of Naples who had helped Prospero's brother Antonio to usurp the throne, approaches the island where Prospero is living with his daughter Miranda. That the island should be located in the Mediterranean is suggested by the fact that Alonso was on a return trip from the wedding of his daughter with the king of Tunis. Yet that the tempest may actually have been inspired by the colonial enterprise that had begun in the Renaissance is a fact that George Lamming seems to take as granted. *The Tempest* might as well be imagined to take place in the Caribbean Sea rather than in the Mediterranean, as the assonance of the word "Caliban" with the word "Carib" - the name of one of the people who inhabited the Caribbean before its discovery – suggests. (See also Retamar 1989 [1971])

12 Sycorax is not a native of the island, but rather an exile herself, forced to leave Algier, who gives birth to her son Caliban on the island in which *The Tempest* is set. In this sense, Caliban's fate also resembles that of the African deported to the West Indies. The legitimacy of his claim, "This island is mine by Sycorax my mother" is not a claim issued from the natural possession of an island legitimized through a dynasty of rulers. It rather follows the condition of external circumstances.

13 Cf. the epilogue to *The Tempest*: "Please you, draw near./ Now my charms are all o'erthrown, /And what strength I have's mine own, /Which is most faint: now, 'tis true,/ I must be here confined by you,/ Or sent to Naples. Let me not,/ Since I have my dukedom got/ And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell/ In this bare island by

the same token, Caliban may or may not be left alone on the island. For both of them the future is open:

> Will the magic of prayer help Prospero and his crew safely towards Milan where the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand may remind them that Innocence and Age are two sides of the same coin; that there are no degrees of forgiveness; that compassion will not exclude any? Will Prospero, no longer interested in temporal success, enter his grave without admitting that his every third thought remains alive? For where, we wonder, is our excluded Caliban? And what fearful truth will Caliban discover now the world he prized has abandoned him to the solitude of the original home: the Island which no act of foreign appropriation ever could deprive him of? (Lamming 1992: 96)

Exile has transformed both Caliban and Prospero, and both characters may, in turn, have transformed their exile into a new way of understanding each other and themselves. The possibilities that are disclosed to Caliban and Prospero are certainly determined by an encounter with the other that could not leave them unchanged, but the evolution of the two characters belongs entirely to the future, as the recurrent question marks that Lamming utilizes suggest. The greatness of Shakespeare's work, claims Lamming, lays in its capacity not only to absorb and give an artistic shape to the issues of "England's experiment in colonization" (Lamming 1992: 13), a topic which was certainly feverishly discussed in Shakespeare's time, but also to prefigure the scenario of uncertainty and of open possibilities which would follow the end of colonialism: "And it is Shakespeare's capacity for experience which leads me to feel that *The Tempest* was also prophetic of a political future which is our present" (ibid.).

The Tempest figures already in the introduction to the book, where Lamming imagines his dialogue between an 'I' and a 'you' in the form of an imaginary trial in which the issue at stake is not mentioned. References are made to the Haitian ceremony in which the souls of the dead are summoned by the living in order to come to terms with some debt from the past, calling into question precisely some of the most compelling issues concerning Caribbean past and its present identity: "Revenge, guilt, redemption, and some future expectation make for an involvement which bind the Dead and the living together" (1992: 10). The first and most

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your spell;/But release me from my bands/ With the help of your good hands:/ Gentle breath of yours my sails/ Must fill, or else my project fails,/Which was to please. Now I want/ Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,/And my ending is despair,/Unless I be relieved by prayer,/Which pierces so that it assaults/ Mercy itself and frees all faults/ As you from crimes would pardon'd be,/Let your indulgence set me free." (*l.* 2404-23)

urgent step taken in this trial appears to be the attempt to understand the role of the different agents who are taking part in it – in other words, to establish who may be considered a victim and whom a perpetrator, who should ask forgiveness and who may give forgiveness. In the account of this imaginary trial the testimonies of different people overlap and contradict themselves, until one witness claims "extraordinary privileges" (Lamming 1992: 11) for himself by assuming the roles of both Caliban and Prospero:

> He wants to assume Prospero's privilege of magic, while arguing in his evidence that no man has a right to use magic in his dealing with another. On the other hand he sees himself as Caliban while he argues that he is not the Caliban whom Prospero had in mind. This witness claims a double privilege. He knows he is a direct descendant of Caliban. He claims to be the key witness in the trial; but his evidence will only be valid if the others can accept the context in which he will give it. For it is only by accepting this special context that his evidence can reveal his truth. What is the context which he proposes?
> He says: I am chief witness for the prosecution, but I shall also enter the role of the Prosecutor. I shall defend the accused in the light of my own evidence. I reserve the right to choose my own Jury to whom I shall interpret my own evidence since I know that evidence more than any man alive. Who then is most qualified to be the Judge? For the Law itself, like the men involved, is in some doubt about the nature of this charge. The result may be capital punishment, and I shall be hangman, provided I do not have to use the apparatus that will put the accused to death. It is likely that the accused, when he is found and convicted and forgotten, may turn out to be Innocent. That is unfortunate, for I am working on the fundamental belief that there are no degrees of innocence. (Lamming 1992: 11)

The witness described in the passage is both the locus and the agent of an ongoing identification, occupying at once the role of defendant, jury, prosecutor and defence. He is the Caribbean subject whose subjectivity has been denied and repressed by centuries of colonial domination, slavery and dispossession and who is now cast under the panoptical, disciplinizing gaze of the jury and the jury itself. He is, in other words called on to affirm himself not only in front of others, but first and foremost in front of himself. It is necessary for him to restore a sort of unified and unifying self-image from the many fragments of his identity, about which a judgement – inevitably a judgement of culpability – may be made, paving the way for a new pact of identity. This pact will be, as he anticipates with the statement "I am working on the fundamental belief that there are no degrees of innocence" (1992: 12), a pact of total involvement with the other, in which the differences between the roles played by the ancestors will be overcome to privilege the idea of a shared inheritance. For this reason, the legitimacy of his role as a witness, and consequently of his being accepted by all the agents involved in the trial, is strictly dependent on both his assimilation to Prospero

and his identification with Caliban, of whom he claims to be a direct descendant, as much as from the distance that he may be able to take from them.

The imaginary witness who has in his hands both Prospero's and Caliban's inheritance is left with an impasse: "He wants to assume Prospero's privilege of magic, while arguing in his evidence that no man has a right to use magic in his dealing with another" (Lamming 1992: 11). Assuming that Prospero's magic was contained in his books, and that his power was therefore connected with his capacity to write and to transform things with writing, the conundrum formulated by Lamming could be translated as the three impossibilities which, according to the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, are the conditions in which a minor literature comes into being. The expression "minor literature" refers, in the sense highlighted by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, not to a literature from a "minor language" but "rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze 1986: 16). These three impossibilities, which the two philosophers formulate in regard to the work of Franz Kafka, are "the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise" (ibd.). It is impossible not to write because "national consciousness, uncertain or oppressed, necessarily exists by means of literature" (ibid.). Literature is the very site of the trial of Caribbean identity that Lamming imagines in *The Pleasures of Exile*. It is through literature that his witness is going to assert himself and claim his role as key witness, defence, and prosecutor. Secondly, for Anglo-Caribbean writers it is not possible to use Prospero's language without being aware of the oppression that this language has brought about, and of the distance they still retain from the culture that produced this language. English is a "paper language", spoken by an elite partially cut off from the masses, and also a "deterritorialized language, appropriated for strange and minor use" (Deleuze 1986: 17). Thirdly, it is impossible to write other than in English because other alternatives may not be viable or adequate.[14]

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14 In an interview by Maria Cristina Fumagalli, Derek Walcott claims that his first intention would have been to write his masterpiece *Omeros*, an eight-thousand-line poem which many consider to be the Caribbean epic, in Creole. Yet after a while he had to give up his attempt partly because vocabulary in Creole was not rich enough, partly because he could feel the artificiality of his operation: "I began to feel that I was doing that effort out of some kind of national duty and I missed the excitement that I would have had in writing in English. Then I sort of reminded myself that what was important was not the language but the *tone* of the language and that speaking in English with the right tone would have been the same as speaking in Creole. Now, I don't feel that there is any dialogue or any part of the narrative section in *Omeros* that is in any way affected into a rhetoric. In other terms, and I hope this is true for my poetry in general, I feel that I have never gone away from the sound of my own language: I am not saying the vocabulary but the sound, the tone" (Fumagalli 2001: 278).

The parallels between Prospero/ major language and Caliban/ minor use make it possible to highlight how Lamming puts the issue of language at the very heart of his interpretation of *The Tempest*. Indeed, the locus of Prospero's magic and Caliban's exile is not the island *per se*, but rather 'Language'. Lamming refers to Language with a capital 'l' to indicate Language as it was handed over as a gift from Prospero to Caliban. 'Language', as opposed to 'language', is entirely the product of a dominating culture and of a world-view. It may be elevated to its major role as a result of a political struggle in which a concept of nationality or nation-state is affirmed and, in turn, may also contribute to the affirmation of what causes it to emerge (cf. Lecercle 2006). Yet, once it is established as a standard, it undergoes a process of idealization and universalization which conceals its relativity ("a tradition of habits that becomes the normal way of seeing", Lamming 1992: 157).

Caliban enters Language as a regime of symbolic exclusion and separation. This dyglossic or semi-dyglossic experience of Language creates, on the one hand, an insurmountable, symbolic distance between individuals and the pre-colonial Caribbean, or pre-colonial Africa or India, for that matter. Also, as the Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite remarked, it tends to privilege and affirm the hegemony of the culture of which it is a bearer at the expense of the experiences of its colonial speakers:

> Paradoxically, in the Caribbean [...], the people educated in this system came to know more, even today, about English Kings and Queens, than they do about our national heroes, our own slave rebels, the people who helped to build and to destroy our society. [...] And in terms of what we write, our perceptual models, we are more conscious (in terms of sensibility) of the falling of the snow, for instance – the models are all there for the falling of the snow – than of the force of the hurricane that takes place every year. In other words, we haven't got the syllables, the syllabic experience, to describe the hurricane, which is our own experience, whereas we can describe the imported alien experience of the snowfall. It is this kind of situation that we are in. (Brathwaite 1979: 8-9).

English, as it is transmitted in traditional, colonial education systems, is not meant to be adapted to the experience of its new speakers. Language functions as a sort of prison in which the experience of colonized people should be contained and restricted: "For Language itself, by Caliban's whole relation to it, will not allow his expansion beyond a certain point. This kind of realization, this kind of expansion, is possible only to those who reside in that state of being which is the very source and ultimate [*sic*] of the language that bears them always forward" (Lamming 1992: 110).

It is this conception of Language which lies behind Lamming's argument that the master-slave relationship between Prospero and Caliban is not an innate one, conjured by the intrinsic psychological structures of the two characters (as the French psychologist Octave Mannoni had claimed in his controversial *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*),[15] but rather that it was induced at the moment in which Prospero met Caliban on Caliban's island and taught him his Language. Lamming argues that Caliban's submission to Prospero is the result of a process of colonization, estrangement, and exclusion taking place precisely in Language. A slave, Lamming argues, "is a project, a source of energy, organized in order to exploit Nature" (Lamming 1992: 15). As Caliban is introduced to Language he is called into being as a slave and as a monster, submitted not only to physical but also to psychological torture. This is why, when, in *The Tempest*, Prospero threatens him with physical pain ("For this, thou shalt have cramps, side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; [...]", *l.*475 ff.), Caliban replies by reproaching his master and his daughter for teaching him their Language:

> This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,
> Which thou takest from me. When thou camest first,
> Thou strokedst me and madest much of me; wouldst give me
> Water with berries in't, and teach me how
> To name the bigger light and how the less
> That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee
> And show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle,
> The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile.
> Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
> Of Sycorax-- toads, beetles, bats-- light on you,
> For I am all the subjects that you have,
> Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me
> In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
> The rest o' the island. (*l.*481-94)

Caliban reproaches Prospero because it is the treacherous gift of Language – slyly slipped in with affected gentleness – that has separated him from his mother, Sycorax, from Nature and from his island. Indeed, even though Caliban may be referred to as a "child of Nature" (Lamming 1992: 96) – and as such imprisoned in the bestiality, coarseness, and animal lewdness which is at the opposite pole to Prospero and Miranda – he is a far cry from Nature.

Yet, this passage from *The Tempest* contains the same paradox and duplicity that

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15 See footnote 7.

Lamming inscribed in the title of his book *The Pleasures of Exile*. The line "For I am all the subjects you have" (491) is the very site of the twofold quality of Prospero's gift of language. The word "subject", which Caliban uses to define his own condition, is in fact marked by an ambiguity which Lamming did not formulate but which seems to spring up from his writing. The word subject resonates with both passive and active significance: a subject is both someone who has been submitted to a regime of power and someone who, through this very submission, has acquired the capacity to act in a society (cf. Foucault 1975). Through the language that he has learned from Prospero, Caliban has been subjected to both what Althusser, ten years after the publications of *The Pleasures of Exile*, would define as "Ideological State Apparatuses" and "Repressive State Apparatuses" (Althusser 1970). Yet it is precisely through this submission that he has come into being and acquired a new knowledge of the world around him ("thou [..] teach me how/ to name the bigger light and how the less", Shakespeare *l*. 484-85) and, as Lamming puts it, he has been "made aware of possibilities" (1992: 109).

Lamming, to put it differently, seems to endorse the philosophical premise of the expulsion of the centrality of the individual subject in favour of a collective, transformative conception of subjectivity whose agency is externalized. Althusser's theory of interpellation, according to which ideology addresses the pre-ideological individual and produces (interpellates) him or her as a subject, is completed with an assertion by which language takes up the very role of what Althusser called ideology. Caliban is produced as a subject precisely by the language that Prospero taught him; Caliban is spoken by Prospero's language. Or, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle, the French philosopher who in *A Marxist Philosophy of Language* (2006) re-read Althusser's concept of ideology in the light of a materialist, historicized conception of language, puts it: "language is the site of subjectivation through interpellation" (128).

The premise to this is the idea that language is not the endeavor of a single speaker, as Prospero may think, but it is always the product of a praxis issuing from a social interaction. Prospero provisionally occupies the position of sujet-supposé-savoir: he places himself at the centre of language and power, creating the illusion that he may use Language as an instrument with which he may assert his control over the island. Yet, in the very moment he gives his gift of language to Caliban, he immediately also loses the privilege of owning language:

> This gift of Language is the deepest and most delicate bond of involvement. It has a certain finality, Caliban will never be the same again. Nor, for that matter, will Prospero.
>
> Prospero has given Caliban language; and with it an unstated history of consequences, an unknown history of future intentions. This gift of Language meant not English, in particular, but speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards area of the self which could not be reached in any other way. It is this way, entirely Prospero's enterprise, which makes Caliban aware of possibilities. Therefore, all of Caliban's future – for future is the very name for possibilities – must derive from Prospero's experiment which is also his risk. (Lamming 1992: 109)

When Prospero gives Language to Caliban, and with this language "an unstated story of consequences" (1992: 109), Prospero also realizes that Caliban has become a threat to him. Prospero is aware that he cannot live without Caliban and he is afraid of him "because he knows that the encounter with Caliban is, largely an encounter with himself" (1992: 15), Lamming claims. Prospero and Caliban are the same not because Caliban is the repressed savage who threatens to return and make Prospero aware of his own bestial nature. On the contrary, they are the same because they are spoken by the same language, by the same "speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards areas of the self which could not be reached in other ways" (Lamming 1992: 109). Indeed, Prospero is made aware that language is not just an instrument at his service, but that, as for Caliban, Language may also be the site of his own exile. The fact that at the end of the play he claims, "Now my charms are all o'erthrown" (*l.*2404)) and has to ask for the audience's help, may be read as a sign that he has lost his own illusion of being at the centre of power.

What is more, at the moment when Prospero gives Language to Caliban it opens language to a political struggle. Jean-Jacques Lecercle reminds us that interpellation is not just a mono-directional process, but that the speaker may counter-interpellate language from his or her own position:

> The subject becomes a speaker by appropriating a language that is always-already collective – which means that she is appropriated by it: she is captured by a language that is external and prior to her, and on which she will leave her mark – possibly even a lasting mark – through linguistic or literary creation. Possession here is a transitive relationship, something clearly marked by the ambiguity of the word I possess: I possess the language in as much as I am possessed by it. (Lecercle 2006: 142-143)

The Caribbean speaker is interpellated by a language that is partially foreign, but at the same time it can make it his or her own. If, as Brathwaite puts it, the English language transmitted through school as what Althusser would call a State apparatus lacks the "syllabic experience"

(Brathwaite 1984: 9) to describe the hurricane that is part of Caribbean experience, the aim of the poet will be to push English to its limits, to inhabit English in a different way, and to enable it to express even foreign experiences or experiences of in-betweenness. Lamming sees Caliban's enraged speech and his attitude of resistance as a sign that he has already started a process of counter-interpellation. Besides, he reads Caliban's (failed) attempt at taking the power from Prospero as the result of a "deep sense of betrayal" (1992: 15): it is precisely this betrayal which will give him the possibility to assert himself and to access the "unknown history of future intentions" (Lamming 1992: 109) that Language has endowed him with. Indeed, the real moment at which he will be able to make English his own is only after Prospero leaves his island to him.

The very fact that Lamming based his own theory of exile and alterity on a re-reading of a canonical text is already a sign of the "deep sense of betrayal" (Lamming 1992: 15) which characterizes the Caribbean intellectual's access to language, reading and writing. Indeed, reading and writing are interconnected practices through which Caribbean subjects may renegotiate their own position in the world by inserting themselves in a practice of interpretation, thus taking the the source of meaning away from the author and the culture that produced the text, and re-staging the text in the light of a post-colonial experience. Post-colonial re-readings and re-writings of canonical English texts foster a radical engagement with the way power is encoded in literature, inspiring new ways of reading literary texts through which it becomes possible to detect the social antagonisms hidden behind the surface of literary representations. They may erode many of the assumptions that support conventional notions of language, literature and culture. Also, they elaborate on possible strategies of resistance to and emancipation from the heavy, cultural burden of colonialism that still informs the perceptual framework of a world bearing the marks of its past.

At this point, it should have become clearer why the witness who Lamming introduces in his imaginary trial on Caribbean identity assumes that he is "working on the fundamental belief that there are no degrees of innocence" and that "[i]nvolvement in crime, whether as witness, or an accomplice, makes innocence impossible. To be innocence is to be eternally dead. And this trial embraces only the living" (Lamming 1992: 11). It may well be that the moment of Prospero and Caliban's encounter started the story of Caliban's dispossession, but from the moment Caliban has language he also accepts it as a shared experience. The exile

which is implied in language is affirmed not as a univocal, disempowering form of dispossession, but rather as the site in which a dialectics of transformation may unfold and open new possibilities for existence going beyond the dual distinction between master and slave, home and exile, self and other.

"How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gipsy in relation to one's language?"[16] (Deleuze): Édouard Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo and the radicalization of Caribbean poetics of exile

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature, introduced above in the discussion of Lamming's *The Pleasure of Exile*, becomes even more interesting as a way of understanding the work of the Martinican poet, writer and theorist Édouard Glissant and of the Cuban novelist and essayist Antonio Benítez-Rojo. Acute interpreters of the work of the two French philosophers, Glissant and Benítez-Rojo go even further than Lamming's conceptualization of exile as transformative juncture. Indeed, Glissant and Benítez-Rojo multiply and diffract the master-slave/ Prospero-Caliban relationship described by Lamming, locating the conflict within a language that is already a composite conglomerate of languages, dialects, accents, power-relations. Besides, while Lamming transforms the fracture of writing and language into a form of connection with one single other, Glissant theorizes this fracture as a form of multiple, transformative relation to otherness. For Glissant and Benítez-Rojo, exile is a conscious choice to embrace the thought of the other in all its multiplicity, with the awareness that this multiplicity is an inexhaustible source of difference, as well as that difference is the very site of a never-ending becoming-minor.

The works of Glissant and Benítez-Rojo are both concerned with the development of a Caribbean poetics, as well as with the definition of the specificity of the Caribbean experience within a wider historical and global context. *Poétique de la Relation* is the title of Edouard Glissant's most influential theoretical work, a work which re-perspectivises Caribbean literature not just in the light of its colonial history, but also in the light of the process of

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16 Deleuze 1986: 19. Deleuze's quotation introduces the topic of nomadism in relation to language – a central issue in Deleuze's philosophy that has a clear bearing on the works of Édouard Glissant and Antonio Benítez-Rojo.

globalization of which the Caribbean has been a protagonist and a privileged site.[17] At the centre of Glissant's *Poétique* is an idea of literature as *tout-monde*, i.e. of literature as being able to recreate and account for the relation of a single, local place with the totality of the world. The word "Relation" has been maintained also in the English translation by Betsy Wing (1997). Glissant opposes the English word "relationship", which he considers inadequate to describe the entanglement of the Caribbean within a multiple space, to the French "Relation", which, he claims, functions "somewhat like and intransitive verb" (1997: 27). The Relation is always-already there, it function as a principle of connection, and it involves, as Glissant puts it, neither the thought of the One, nor the thought of the one who becomes two, but rather the thought of multiplicity. In *The Repeating Island*, Benítez-Rojo similarly engages with an attempt at dispelling the notion that the Caribbean is simply the product of its complex roots. To do this, he takes up the notion of Deleuze and Guattari's machine, a device made up of innumerable smaller machines working together, which in turn revolve around even smaller machines and parts: "Which is to say that every machine is a conjunction of machines coupled together, and each one of these interrupts the flow of the previous one; it will be said rightly that one can picture any machine alternatively in terms of flow and interruption" (1996:6). The working of these machines (desiring machines, abstract machines, production machines, war machines, etc.) has determined the persistence of certain patterns of development in the whole area, and reflects itself also onto Caribbean literature. Benítez-Rojo's attempt to define how these regularities repeat themselves is always marked by his specification "in a certain kind of way" (1996: 10), a way which he deliberately leaves open and unexplained, refusing to essentialise or to reify the patterns of transformation that he detects within the Caribbean and in Caribbean literature (cf. Sprouse 1994: 80). The Caribbean is thus defined as an archipelago in which a single island repeats itself indefinitely, each time with a difference, thus creating a multiplicity of differences.

To explain what they mean by "Relation" and "Repeating Island", Glissant and Benítez-Rojo resort to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *rhizome*. The image of the rhizome – "a continuously growing horizontal underground stem which puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots" (*OED*) – is utilized by the two French philosophers not as a model, but rather as a geographical metaphor for mapping non-hierarchical thought and for privileging

17 See note 3.

the multiple over the dual. The rhizome differentiates itself from the root-thought, or the root-book, whose spiritual reality is inherently a logic of binary division, a logic of the one which becomes two and then perhaps three, or four, or five, but always presuming a central unity or an origin that makes this division and this generative model possible. Prospero's book is, accordingly, presumably a root-book, an image of the world which reflects the world and projects itself onto it, transposing onto it also the series of dichotomies that imprison Caliban in his alterity (culture/nature, purity/corruption, docility/subversion, etc.). The rhizome, by contrast, is "an assemblage of connected multiplicities, without center or origin, and is always in process of becoming" (Sprouse 1994: 83). A rhizome does not imprison alterities because a rhizome is, in itself, a connection of alterities. In this sense, the rhizome also becomes the model of what Glissant and Benítez-Rojo perceive as creolization, the coming together of different people in the Caribbean leading to the emergence not of an homogenous form of national identity, but rather to an affirmation of diversity, difference, and continuous becoming.

It is precisely the standpoint of multiplicity which makes it possible to inscribe Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* within a wider discourse on minor literature which differentiates Glissant's concept of "Relation" from T. S. Eliot's concept of tradition which was briefly outlined in the previous chapter. There are three characteristics which, for Deleuze and Guattari, define minor literatures. First, minor literatures are *collective* (1986: 17). The word "collective" suggests that the two French philosophers, like Eliot, go beyond a conception of literature as an individual endeavour to privilege instead the idea of literature as a series of words leaning upon other words. Nonetheless, literature as a collective endeavour for Deleuze and Guattari does not lead to the idealization of tradition that Eliot had in mind, or to its unifying and sense-making perfection. Literature rests on what they call a "collective chain of utterances" (ibid.), it is not limited to the textual surface but it enters a numbers of what they call machines. The literary discourse does not lead to an unifying process, but rather to a process of continuous diffraction and propagation.

The second characteristic of minor literature that Deleuze and Guattari highlight is that of being *deterritorializing* (1986: 16). Eliot's idea that in literature "every word is at home" (V, *l.*4) is replaced by the idea that, in a minor literature, the conflict with the major language

is worked through with an act of continuous deterritorialization. With the word "deterritorialization" the French philosophers describe the continuous taking away of order and control from language and the decontextualization of sets of previous relation to prepare words to be reterritorialized, or re-inhabited, in a different way.

Finally, the two philosophers claim that in minor literature everything is *political* (1986: 17). The individual's concerns vibrate with a variety of other concerns (commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical, etc.) which connect minor literature immediately to politics. The harmony implied by Eliot's concept of tradition is replaced by the idea of literature as a form of conflict.

Both Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and Rojo's *The Repeating Island*, in fact, implicitly include these three characteristics of minor literature in their attempt to define a Caribbean poetics precisely by referring to the model of the rhizome. Both of them utilize the rhizome to explain the collective quality of Caribbean literature – that is, its interconnectedness to a multiplicity of machines, as well as its deterritorializing potential. In addition, both of them read the individual concerns displayed in the literary text as connected to the political struggle with the cultural, political, and economical legacies of a colonial past. Following the multiple path of the rhizome is for both of them a way of radicalizing their exile in language and writing, or as Deleuze and Guattari put it, "to become a nomad, and an immigrant and a gipsy in relation to one's own language" (1986: 19).

The idea of the collective quality of Caribbean literature is attributable to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the "principle of connection and heterogeneity" as well as by the "principle of multiplicity" (2004: 7 ff.). By these principles, the two scholars mean that, since no generative point and no arboreal structure of dichotomous division are given in a rhizomorphic structure, all points in the rhizome can and must be connected. A multiplicity can be defined as such only if it has got no connection whatsoever with the One[18] as a subject or as an object. The rhizome thus describes the structures of collective chains of enunciation and of machinic assemblages. That is why there are no fixed points or positions as there would be in a root-structure. In a rhizome there are just lines of flight. A rhizome never ceases to connect semiotic rings, linguistic, perceptive, mimic acts, power structures, machines of production, chains of enunciation. The fact that the Caribbean has been since the very

18 With the word "One" Deleuze and Guattari refer to the principle of unification which lies at the basis of what they call "root-though".

beginning a place shaped by the multiple encounters of different peoples, languages, and systems of production has made it a place in which the spatial layout of the rhizome is easily detectible.[19]

The following passage, taken from Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island,* highlights how the Caribbean is always-already a space in a rhizomatic connection with the rest of the world. Indeed, the passage casts a significant light on how the space of home is always a space elsewhere:

> […] the Caribbean is not a Common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago (an exalted quality the Hellas possessed, and the great Malay archipelago as well), and as a meta-archipelago it has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a center. Thus the Caribbean flows outward past the limits of its own see with a vengeance, and its *ultima Thule* may be found in the outskirts of Bombay, near the low and murmuring shores of Gambia, in a Cantonese tavern of circa 1850, at a Balinese temple, in an old Bristol pub, in a commercial warehouse in Bordeaux at the time of Colbert, in a windmill beside the Zuider Zee, at a café in a barrio of Manhattan, in the existential saudade of an old Portuguese lyric. (Benítez-Rojo 1996: 4)

To claim that the Caribbean is a meta-archipelago is to perceive the Caribbean as a space that always reveals its own entanglement with the rest of the world, with the multiple connections of semiotic rings, chains of enunciation, machinic assemblages and power structures. From this perspective, home and abroad coincide in a most compelling way. Talking about the

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19 Interestingly, both Glissant and Benítez-Rojo apply these principles also to comment on the geographical structure of the Caribbean (an "island bridge connecting, in 'another way', North and South America", Rojo 1996: 2) as a sign of its multiplicity. For Benítez-Rojo, the Caribbean is a "discontinuous conjunction (of what?): unstable condensation, turbulences, whirlpools, clumps of bubbles, frayed seaweed, sunken galleons, crashing breakers, flying fish, seagulls squawks, downpours, nighttime phosphorescences, eddies and pools, uncertain voyages of signification; in short, a field of observation quite in tune with the objectives of Chaos" (ibid.). The geography of the archipelago, differently put, makes it a place in which an incessant pattern of disorder repeats itself *ad infinitum*, each time with a difference. Glissant instead opposes the Caribbean Sea to the Mediterranean, a sea surrounded by lands, a sea that concentrates and that gives way to the thought of the One (all the three great monotheistic religions have generated in the Mediterranean).The Caribbean is instead an archipelago that diffracts: "It is not merely an encounter, a shock [..], a métissage, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and somewhere else, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry" (Glissant 1997: 34). This diffraction is an aspect that touches upon every aspect of Caribbean life: even religion takes syncretic forms, combining elements from Christianity with African, Amerindian, and Asian elements, a sign that in the Caribbean the other is always being superimposed onto the self.Benítez-Rojo devotes a whole section of his book to the cult of the Virgen de la Caridade del Cobre, a cult still followed by many Cubans. This cult combines elements of European Catholicism (the Virgen of *Ilesca*), Taino religions (the Taino deity Atabey or Atabex), and African (the Yoruba *orisha* Oshun). Benítez-Rojo claims that this cult is "not original, but originating" (ref). By that he means that all these three figures are already syncretic objects, and that their unification in the new syncretic signifier of the Virgen de la Caridade del Cobre opens to a variety of new syncretic significations which are newly called into being each time this cult is performed. (1996: 12-16)

Caribbean means simultaneously talking about somewhere else, using a language, literary models and discourses that are also from somewhere else, and appropriating them by performing a further movement of estrangement. This entanglement is not meant to cancel the differences and the idiosyncrasy of these different cultural areas. On the contrary, "the homogenizing tendencies of the centrifugal forces implied by the term connection are opposed by the insistence on the heterogeneity of the rhizome" (Sprouse 1994: 83). This means that the positioning of the self within this multiplicity is never a stable one, but always a way of following a path that leads towards difference.

In the above quoted passage Benítez-Rojo also utilizes the word "textuality" (1996: 2) – from the Latin *textere*, "to weave" – to imply that that the Caribbean is woven with the rest of the world. "Textuality" suggests that to be a "meta-archipelago" (1996: 4) not only refers to the capacity of the Caribbean to go beyond itself or to undertake a process of continuous transformation, as implied by the prefix "meta" in "meta-archipelago". It also means that a Caribbean poetics should always be meta-reflexive, that it should *talk about* this interconnectedness, this entanglement to the rest of the word. Each single linguistic performance is already a collective utterance which should bear the mark of its being interwoven with a variety of other utterances, texts, machines of sense and representation.

This insistence on movement, interconnection and transformation rather than stasis allows us to account for how the second characteristics of minor literatures – i.e., their being "deterritorializing" – may be applied to a Caribbean poetics. To deterritorialize, as suggested above, means to take something away from its territorial belonging and from the sets of relations in which it is ingrained, in order to prepare it for further possible processes of reterritorialization. It means, differently put, to introduce a state of provisional exile. Creoleness emerges as a state of continuous becoming, of continuous intermingling – "what is rhizomatic is the process, not the static fixed state" (Sprouse 1994: 83) – and this becoming is precisely the result of an alternation of processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization which also take place in the literary text. To embrace the thought of the Relation means to transform oneself together with the other, to make a rhizomatic connection with them, like a wasp with an orchid, or like a virus with a germ cell to transmit itself into the cellular genes of a complex species (cf. Deleuze 2004: 11 ff.). In other words, making a rhizomatic connection with the other, in the Deleuzian perspective adopted by Glissant, means not just to imitate the

other, but to capture their codes, to become-other, to start a process of reciprocal deterritorialization and reterritorialization. By describing becoming-other as a process of continuous deterritorialization and reterritorialization of and by the other, the two philosophers imply that the encounter with the other frees schizophrenic libido from pre-established objects of investment and re-invests this libido within a process that pushes this becoming ever further away: "There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that cannot be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying" (Deleuze 2004: 11)

The emphasis that deterritorialization puts on the process of becoming is mirrored in the emphasis that many Caribbean writers give to performance. Benítez-Rojo claims that "[t]he people of the sea, or better, the Peoples of the Sea proliferate incessantly while differentiating themselves from one another, traveling together towards the infinite. Certain dynamics of their culture also repeats themselves and sail through the seas of time without reaching anywhere. If I where to put this in two words these would be: performance and rhythm" (1996: 16). Rhythm, music and performance are an essential part of Caribbean culture insofar as they provide a fluid space within which processes of deterritorialization and reterriorialization are made possible. Benítez-Rojo speaks of "polyrhythm" to indicate the way African rhythms of percussion – which used to beat in time with the work in the plantation – deterritorialize other rhythms, creating something new with each performance. Polyrhythms are always composite, always changing, making and then breaking new connections. The Cuban scholar gives this special prominence to performance and rhythm in the many ways they enter Caribbean literature too. For example, it should not be forgotten that some of the most refined Caribbean poets such as Louise Bennett and Edward Kamau Brathwaite also insist on the importance of public readings, in which the artist uses his or her voice to engraft new rhythms and new accents onto the written text, in ways in which each single performance may reterritorialize it in a different way. This multi-accentuation of these performances can also be incorporated in the text, for example in the single interpretations of canonical European literary texts or works of art, which are deterritorialized and reterritorialized through the exiled perspective of Caribbean writers.

Benítez-Rojo's concept of polyrhythm is also beautifully illustrated by Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poem "Limbo", and more precisely by its section titled "Caliban" (1973: 194-

95). Limbo, a term coming from the Latin expression "in limbo", means "in the border, outside". The Limbo is a place of exile, for lost, or forgotten or unwanted things or people, an unknown intermediate condition between two extremes. Limbo becomes the condition of the Africans on board of the slave-ship which will take them away forever from their original homeland, as the refrain of the poem (repeated eight times) suggests: "*limbo/ limbo like me/*". The poem represents the moment in which some African deportees engage in a liberating dance on the deck of the slave-ship, a dance which allow them to deterritorialize the language of the slaver as well as the power-relations which inform the whole situation. In the poem, Caliban's task is to transform "Limbo" into a new condition of existence, a condition in which language also becomes a primary weapon of resistance. Brathwaite's poem puts the emphasis on the appropriation of the language of the slaver by taking away the classical rhythm of traditional poetry and replacing it with African rhythms. It is the polyrhythm created by the sound of African percussion and the sound of English words in a rhizomatic connection which saves the new Caliban who is taking his Middle Passage to a future of slavery and uncertainty.

Brathwaite's poem, like the work of the writers presented in the following chapter, uses the deterritorializing potential of writing to transform history from something imprisoned in a historical memory of a past that is over and celebrated with tombstones, into a part of the present, a lived reality of the rhizome. Indeed, Brathwaite's poem shows that as rhythms can be broken by other, different rhythms to create *polyrhythms*, the rhizome can be broken at any point but it revives again, finding one line of escape or another. Glissant and Rojo apply this idea in his interpretation of the fragmentations and cracks that have marked each aspect of Caribbean culture, as well, de Certeau's passage quoted before suggests, its colonial relationship to writing. In his poem, Brathwaite reveals the Middle Passage, the most important rupture in the lives of millions of Africans deported to the West Indies as slaves, as the moment at which a new rhizomatic form of the Relation came into being. Indeed, as Glissant also argues, the slave-ship is the a matrix of a Relation that is in the process of becoming: in its holds, in the shared suffering of people who were forcibly brought together, is the beginning of a shared knowledge of the other. Even those who were swallowed in the abyss of the sea are retrieved as part of a history that proceeds by making and breaking connections, deterritorializing and reterritorializing the past.

The reference to Brathwaite poem shows how the concept of the rhizome does not

dissolve the conflict implied in the issue of alterity, and thus enables us to introduce the last characteristics of minor literature – that is, its being political. The main political concern that haunts Caribbean literature is that of the legacy of a past of colonialism, which risks being perpetrated through the use of the language and literary models of the colonizer. The model of the rhizome overcomes and replaces the myth of derivation which has dominated Western epics and myth and, as Glissant claims, belongs to the regime of thought of the One. A rhizome does not follow any structural or generative model, and as such it is alien from any genetic axis. Literature and history are transformed from something to which the writer has to pay homage and in which he will be judged – as Eliot suggested in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" – into a battlefield, an agon for a neverending struggle for the word.

Along these lines, the Saint Lucian poet and Nobel laureate Derek Walcott asserted that "[t]he future of West Indian militancy lies in art" (1998: 16), also raising the question of what form of militancy art may provide. In his essays "What the Twilight Says" (1970) and "The Muse of History" (1974) Walcott sharply criticizes the work of writers who develop their work from the recrimination of the history of slavery and exploitation. In his view, by doing so, these writers perpetrate the generative model and the binary logic in which slavery and exploitation were rooted. From Walcott's essay, instead, struggle emerges as a form of becoming-minor which overcomes the Oedipus complex that haunts Caribbean writers, and that liberates literature from the burden of history. Walcott thus advocates a way of inscribing the political struggle that necessarily haunts the literary productions of Caribbean writers in a peculiar form of acceptance of the inheritance left by colonialism, an acceptation of history which is, nonetheless, also a form of alienation from it:

> I accept this archipelago of the Americas. I say to the ancestor who sold me, and to the ancestor who bought me, I have no father, I want no such father, although I can understand you, black ghost, white ghost, when you both whisper "history," for if I attempt to forgive you both I am falling into your idea of history which justifies and explains and expiates, and it is not mine to forgive, my memory cannot summon any filial love, since your features are anonymous and erased and I have no wish to and no power to pardon. (Walcott 1998 [1974]: 64)

A poetics of creoleness, as it emerges from these lines, should be able to assimilate and forget at the same time. The struggle with the ancestors is a way of assimilating their codes but also of enacting a struggle for appropriating and distorting those codes and of refusing being

incorporated in their vision of history as something which "expiates and justifies" (ibid.). Walcott's is a refusal of history as a linear succession of events, in which the logic of causality may give somebody the power to forgive. The thanks that Walcott later gives to his ancestors ("I give the strange and bitter and yet ennobling thanks for the monumental groaning and soldering of two great words, like the halves of a fruit seamed by its own bitter juice", ibid.) reconstitutes history as an unstable, ever-changing map for cartographically representing and reading the immanence of the present, onto which none of the ancestors may have a privileged point of view.

Language is the battlefield in which art may become capable of performing the kind of militancy described by Walcott. Becoming-minor emerges from Walcott's essays as a way of radicalizing exile within language as the very material of which literature is made, the material through which a new concept of Creoleness may come into being. Talking about the blindness of "the New World Negro" (1998 [1970]: 15) who chooses to use literature as a site of recrimination, Walcott highlights that the artistic failure of the latter consists in absorbing without reflections the codes of the colonizer without really subverting them from within. In this regard, Walcott claims:

> What would deliver him [the New World Negro] from servitude was the forging of a language that went beyond mimicry, a dialect which had the force of revelation as it invented names for things, one which finally settled on its own mode of inflection, and which began to create an oral culture of chants, jokes, folksongs, and fables; this, not merely the debt of history, was his proper claim to the New World. For him metaphor was not a symbol but conversation, and because every poem begins with such ignorance, in the anguish that every noun will be freshly resonantly named, because a new melodic inflection meant a new mode, there was no better beginning.
> It did not matter how rhetorical, how dramatically heightened the language was if its tone was true, whether its subject was the rise and fall of a Haitian king or a small island fisherman, and the only way to re-create this language was to share in the torture of its articulation. This did not mean the jettisoning of 'culture' but by the writer's making creative use of his schizophrenia, an electric fusion of the old and the new. (Walcott 1998 [1970]: 15-16)

"[T]he forging of a language that went beyond mimicry" (ibid.) is indeed the result of a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the language that the artist has inherited. It is possible to see that underlying Walcott's words is the idea that the language in which the text is shaped is not an immanent system in which meaning is given as such, but rather a system in which meaning comes into being as *formations of meaning*. Replacing the concept of "meaning" with that of "formations of meanings", as Jean-Jacques Lecercle

claims, allows us to call attention to language as a system of continuous variations, as "an unstable state of tension an contradictions", and as a terrain of complex social, political, cultural and historical struggle" (ibid.). The artist may intervene in the process of this formation, as Walcott puts it, by "sharing the torture of [the] articulation" of words (Walcott.1998 [1970]: 16). In this sense, to come home in language means to be able to use old words in such a way that they may express new meaning, transforming them altogether into new words and new experiences. Walcott claims that this process is not "the jettisoning of 'culture' but the writer's making use of his schizophrenia" (ibid.), a schizophrenia strictly related to the writer's simultaneous belonging and non-belonging in the language he speaks and from which he is spoken, but also a schizophrenia (as Deleuze and Guattari would theorize two years later) able to liberate words from their established uses.

The experience of language which Walcott puts at the centre of the form of militancy that art may assume is indeed the central issue that emerges from this transversal reading of the concept of minor literature. The three characteristics of minor literatures (their being collective, deterritorializing and political) as they have been read against the grain of Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island*, put language and the potential for transformation within language at the very centre of the literary experience. Lamming's reading of Caliban allowed him to anticipate Jean-Jacques Lecercle's idea that language is "the site of subjectivation through interpellation" (2006: 128). It is precisely the possibility of transforming language, of putting it in a state of internal tension and radicalized exile which allows Caribbean writers and artists to undertake their journey home through literature.

On the way to language. Journeys of return as journeys of exile in language

> I had no nation now but the imagination.
> After the white man, the nigger didn't want me
> when the power swing on their side.
> The first chain my hand and apologize: 'History';
> the next said I wasn't black enough for their pride.
> Tell me, what power, on these unknown rocks -
> a spray-plane Air Force, the Fire Brigade,
> the Red Cross, the Regiment, two, three police dogs
> that pass before you finish bawling 'Parade'?
> I met History once, but he ain't recognize me,

a parchment Creole, with warts
like an old sea-bottle, crawling like a crab
through the holes of shadow cast by the net
of a grille balcony; cream linen, cream hat.
I confront him and shout, 'Sir, is Shabine!
They say I'se your grandson. You remember Grandma,
your black cook, at all? The bitch hawk and spat.
A spit like that worth any number of words.
But that's all them bastards have left us: words. (From Derek Walcott's "The Schooner 'Flight'" 1993[1979] III, *l*.1-19)

This chapter has engaged in a discussion of exile as an epistemological condition of writing, and focused on how the Caribbean poetics here presented have tried to transform exile from an instrument of exclusion and othering to a instrument of transformation and rhizomatic connection with the other. Dealing with the other in Caribbean literature is not just a matter of unveiling the presence of the other, but, first and foremost, of envisaging the possible transformations that the Relation with the other may entail. In this view, Rimbaud's famous claim "Je est un autre" assumes, in the light of the considerations made in this chapter, a completely new meaning. Claiming "I is another", not only externalizes the subject, projecting him onto the always-already collective experience of language. To embrace the thought of what Glissant calls "Relation" means to transform oneself together with the other, to make a rhizomatic connection with them.

The concept of minor literature as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari radicalizes the fracture that Michel de Certeau had placed at the very heart of writing, multiplies it, and spatializes it in the figure of a rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari claimed that "we might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (1986: 18). By asserting that a minor literature is a literature that forces itself into a major language, Deleuze and Guattari make language the focus of their discourse: the language through which the world is transformed and which in turn transforms the world. Language, to put it differently, is not only an instrument for representation but also a weapon for intervention. It is both an awareness of language and literature as weapon for intervention, and an awareness of language and literature as discourses that can never really get rid of their instrumentality, that sets in motion Caribbean literary figurations of home and exile.

The choice of radicalizing exile to make language a site for a multiple relation to the

other makes the homecoming journeys which will consequently be addressed in the following chapters journeys *unterwegs zur Sprache* – ("on the way to language"), to borrow Heidegger's expression – in a very unorthodox way. Being on the way to language means to embark on an endless journey toward the multiple, unstable, fragmentary praxis through which language is constituted collectively in a continuous Relation to the other. "Die Sprache spricht" ("language speaks") – a sentence which, as Lecercle notes, contrasts with the commonsense idea that "I speak the language" – becomes an exhortation to consider the way language speaks the subject, but also to work through this way (cf. Lecercle 2006a: 143). Dealing with journeys of homecoming means to deal with journeys in which hybrid subjectivities take shape within language as an external, collectively shared medium and, at the same time, contribute to put language in a state of variation, transform it and make it suitable to express new experiences. To come home, to inhabit language, is never a stable act, but rather always a way of making and breaking connections, of deterritorializing and reterritorializing language, as Deleuze and Guattari would put it.

As Lecercle claims, the field in which the knowledge produced by literature is unique and irreplaceable is certainly the field of language (cf. Lecercle 2006 and 2006a). Literature provides access to a knowledge of language as a lived, shared experience, as a practice embedded in social relationships, political struggles, historical conjunctures, and cultural contexts. Language is the site in which human experiences take form along the dialectics of the private and the public, the collective and the individual. It is the site of individuals' subjectification by culture and its apparatuses. The mutual articulations and redefinitions of personal and collective turning points are staged in literature as a dialectics between the way the individual is captured by the always-already collective experience of language and included or excluded by the regime and structures of subjectification that inform his epoch. For this reason, literature itself will function as a form of lived experience insofar as it "encapsulates, inscribes and develops an encyclopedia (a system of knowledge and belief) and structures of feelings" (Lecercle 2006a: 119). The social, realistic function of literature is that it "mirrors, thematizes and repeats" the formation of subjects and experiences in and by language (2006a: 120).

Literature, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle transversely claims in all his works, is inherently and constitutively a locus for an active confrontation with language as the site of the other,

whereas the word "active" implies that literature also modifies language, and produces knowledge through language and of language. It is the analysis of an autobiographical novel by the Italian writer Luigi Meneghello which provides Lecercle with a metaphor to describe the peculiar way in which the literary text triggers off this process. Meneghello's *Il dispatrio* thematizes the author's experience of voluntary exile in England in the form of a continuous linguistic confrontation in which his experiences take shape within the three idioms in which his life unfolds (which are revealed as linguistic and cultural formations): the dialect of his hometown Vicenza, Italian, and English. Responding to this, Lecercle claims that literature is in itself a form of *dispatrio*. The word *dispatrio* is a coinage that Lecercle interprets as deeply ambiguous, by which the prefix "dis-" implies and subsumes both the negative idea of being deprived of one's fatherland ("patria"), and the positive idea of multiplying and projecting the lost fatherland onto new ones. *Dispatrio* indicates the necessity for a writer to "expatriate", to go out of his or her language-culture, and at the same time the impossibility of doing so, because of an inevitable counter-movement that brings him or her back home: "Thus, [the word *dispatrio*] is particularly apt to name the dialectic of identity and alterity, of exclusion and integration, of exile and nostalgic return, of catabasis and anabasis which [...] the operation of literature achieve" (Lecercle 2006b: 129). *Dispatrio*, in Lecercle's view, is a good metaphor to describe the way literature may work as an encounter with the other taking place in language in the form of a "clash, unbridgeable separation and paradoxical fusion" (Lecercle 2006a: 121):

> What is at work in the literary operation is a dialectical spiral, the dialectics of recognition and de-recognition, if you pardon me this coinage, which is the dialectics of alterity and identity. The passage back and forth between one language culture and another involves a system of slippages, displacements, outright contrasts, in the interstices of which the knowledge of self and other is established. The literary operation is deeply paradoxical, which is its main interest: it is about the communicability of incommunicability. (Lecercle 2006a: 129)

Of course, Meneghello's novel is particularly significant as it thematizes the continuous exchange and untranslatability of three clearly separated linguistic and cultural spheres of experience. What is at stake in Caribbean literature, as in any minor literature, is the emergence of one language, English, which already involves the simultaneous presence of multiple others. In both cases, nonetheless, the repatriation involves an implementation of knowledge deriving precisely from what Lecercle calls "a system of slippages, displacements,

outright constrasts" (ibid.).

The journeys of homecoming presented in the next chapters will emerge precisely as journeys of *dispatrio*, journeys in which the dialectics of expatriation and repatriation, of exile and return, will take a rhizomorphic shape. This means that the figurations of return to language, writing and literature will never allow the possibility to come back to the One, but will rather lead to a rhizomatic multiplicity in which no beginning and no end are possible or thinkable. Home will therefore emerge from its diffraction and from its continuous variations. Recognizing home as a conglomerate of differences makes home the site of a continuous interrogation, of a never ending quest for and confrontation with the other. Home and identity will therefore emerge as a positioning within the flux of history, literature and culture, a positioning which is always, nonetheless, conscious of its provisional quality and of the multiple dialectics through which it can be reached.

The lines quoted above, taken from the third section of Derek Walcott's poem "The Schooner 'Flight'", provides, in the light of these considerations, a nice epigraph to introduce the journeys of homecoming in the next chapter. The poem exposes the meta-reflexivity of the journey home; it puts at its very centre the way in which literature works. The protagonist is Shabine – a creole[20] sailor who has left his home, his family and his lover in a "vain search for one island that heals with its harbour/ and a guiltless horizon" (XI, *l.*32-33) – to the experience of Caribbean poetry itself. His two-folded refusal of and from History ("I met History once, but he ain't recognize me", III, *l.*10), Shabine – and with him the poet who articulates his own Caribbean experience of exclusion at the hands of *The Writing of History* – signals the beginning of a journey through writing in search of the other who has been excluded by history, and in search of ways of letting this other emerge in different ways. Shabine's journey is precisely a journey outwards which turns out to be a journey aimed at going along the patterns of transformation that have brought Shabine, "the red nigger" (I, *l.*38), into being. Poetry, and in more general terms literature, will be the locus of an endless journey in which Shabine's and the poet's belonging, their home, and their identity will be articulated. The only instrument which both Shabine and the poet have at their disposal for articulating their own imagination and for deploying it against the space of exile that they are

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20 Shabine, as the poem reports, is "the patois for/ any red nigger" (I, *l.* 37-38) – "red nigger" being, in the Caribbean, someone of clearly European and African descent, just like the poet Walcott himself. Shabine says: "I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,/ and either I am nobody, or I am a nation." (I, *l.* 42-43)

about to explore is what their forgetful grandparents have left them with: "words" (III, *l*.19.). Words, therefore, have to be the starting point of their journey and also the point of their arrival. Words, as inherited by the other with whom Shabine has made rhizome, will have to be de-territorialized and re-territorialized in order to be inhabited differently, so that they can become the site in which the alterity of Shabine, of the poet, and of the Caribbean subject may emerge.

"I had no nation now but the imagination" (III, *l*.1), the line which opens the third section of "The Schooner Flight", highlights the condition in which the following homecoming journey unfold themselves. Exile is both a necessity and a choice which leaves the artists in the condition of utilizing his or her own imagination to give shape to possible narratives of home and return, of collective and individual identities. In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant wrote that "thinking thought usually amounts to withdrawing into a dimensionless place in which the idea of thought alone persists. But thought in reality spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of people, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning (*sic*), in them its risk becomes realized" (1997: 1). This is precisely the challenge that thinking about a return implies, and this is the challenge which, as the following readings will show, is taken up in Caribbean homecoming journeys precisely by intervening in language as the site in which subjects and reality come into being.

Chapter 3

The elusiveness of landscape and the positioning of the subject in V.S. Naipaul's autobiography *The Enigma of Arrival*

"Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come", professed Deleuze and Guattari in their essay on the *rhizome* (2004: 5). A book, the two philosophers claim, is not just the production of a single set of contents, but rather a conjunction of different surfaces and materials whose relationships are first and foremost external; it is the locus where processes of articulation, segmentation, de- or re-territorialization may take place. Indeed, if we understand a book as an abstract machine of enunciation connected to other machines (of war, of love, of revolution, etc.) the question to ask is not what it means, but rather how it connects itself to other multiplicities, how it produces new multiplicities, or how it metamorphoses its own. This means, differently put, that it is necessary to consider a book in a pragmatic fashion, to see how it produces subjects, how it enters the multiple language-games of interpretation, and how, in a way, it has an effect on its external reality.

Following the idea that the world is "not an automatic given, but a changing organism that speaks differently and reinvents itself according to different times and cultures: now as arena, now as living corpus, as system, as milieu", the French scholar Frédéric Regard focuses on the geographical quality of autobiographical writing (Regard 2002: 2). Regard envisages autobiographies as a peculiar kind of writing aimed at performing linguistic acts of self-placement within a polymorphous, ever-changing reality. Writing the self is an act that Regard describes in terms of an "assignations to residence" (Regard 2002: 1). Yet the word "residence" emerges as a most unstable construct, not a fixed abode but rather a provisional

positioning linked to an unfinished process of subjects-production.

Regard suggests that a geographical analysis of autobiographies should cast a new light on the discussion about how the border between truth and fiction is configured within this literary genre. For this purpose, the French scholar reconsiders the specific "pact of truth" which characterizes autobiographical writing, and which Philip Lejeune articulated in his influential *Le pacte autobiographique* (1975). For Lejeune, the "truth" of an autobiography is the result of an implicit pact established between the author and the reader, the latter accepting that the author, the narrator and the character are to be identified as the same person. The identity of the narrator is guaranteed not only by the "honored signature" reported on the cover jacket of the book, but also by the necessary premise of the "identification of the self with the self, all the more affirmed because it is repeated, uncovered, and recovered through a series of events" (Regard 2002: 4). This premise of *ipseity,* which Lejeune considers to be the product of an historical narrative (he defines autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative that a real person creates about his own existence when he emphasizes individual life, particularly the history of his personality", Lejeune 1975: 14)[21] is reinterpreted by Regard instead as a result of a spatial conjuncture, at the basis of which is not an author but an author-function, and implicitly not a reader, but a reader-function. Both the author-function and the reader-function are, in fact, ways of positioning the self within discourse, representation, and language. By the very fact of pronouncing the word "I", the author-function inserts itself within a schema of relations with an imaginary you – the implied reader of his writing. In turn, this positioning is made unstable by the reader-function insofar as the reader cooperates with the writer to construct the meaning of the text, and interpellates, from his or her own reader-position, the "truth" of the "author-function" by an act of interpretation.

To account for his concepts of author-function, Regard draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *becoming,* rather than of *being*. An author-function, in other words, is not an entity existing outside of the text, but is a heterogeneous formation, a co-function connected to a series of machine of enunciation, itself constantly generating new machines of enunciations. It is produced within multiple acts of interpretation, language-games which Jean-Jacques Lecercle describes as the interaction in which other actants play a significant

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    Quoted in Regard 2002. Translation by Frédéric Regard.

role: language, the text, the reader, the encyclopedia. "The Deleuzian theory has the immense merit", Regard claims, "of allowing us to bury away the author's pure self preserved in the autobiographical tome, to foreground its schemas – its wanderings, intersections, gaps, tunnels, forks in the road, connections, combinations" (2002: 9).

In the light of Regard's reflections on autobiography, V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987; *EA*) emerges as an extraordinary meta-reflexive text. More than an autobiography, Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* may indeed be read as a *mise en abyme* of the unfinished becoming of a subject never coinciding with himself, struggling to assign to himself an unstable residence in the world as well as in writing. Naipaul's settling in Wiltshire, a rural area to which the writer seems to be attracted because of its apparent remoteness from his hybrid and cosmopolitan experience, serves as a narrative fulcrum around which the book unfolds itself. The story of the writer's move from Trinidad to England at the age of eighteen and the later development of his literary career is only narrated in rare, occasional flashbacks. Most of the novel is occupied with the writer's reflections, observations and growing familiarity with the place he has chosen as his residence, as well as with the stories of other people – not real friends, not people playing a significant role in the life of the protagonist – but rather casual acquaintances whom the writer meets in his otherwise rather isolated life. The chronology of the development of the personality of the narrator is secondary to the issue of his positioning himself within a certain landscape – geographical, cultural and, above all, linguistic. This positioning emerges as the central issue in the text insofar as it preludes to the narrator's becoming a writer and orientates his access to language, discourse and representation.

Language as a site of exile and mediation.

The ambiguity of a title like *The Enigma of Arrival* already configures exile as the main subject of the narration, not in terms of its spatial connotation, but as an internal disjunction of the narrating 'I'. Indeed, the title combines in an oxymoronic way the idea of relative safety and accomplishment usually associated the word "arrival" with the eerie quality of the word "enigma". An "enigma", in fact, exists only insofar as it is not solved. By the same token, arrivals – even in his cottage in Wiltshire, the place which the narrator insists on considering

his home and around which he has decided to arrange his emotional life – are depicted not as accomplishment but as deeply estranging, unsettling experiences. Exile emerges as a force that brings about the displacement of a subject from himself, from his fantasies and from his conceptions of the world, and that makes him observe and interpret the reality around him from an estranged perspective. Exile is therefore not to be understood just as a real-life experience of a writer who has constructed his reputation around his personal uprootedness,[22] but rather as a way of seeing and as a constitutive part of his writing to be considered in its textualization.

The book begins with a retrospective, micro-narrative of the arrival of the narrator in the English countryside, an arrival whose enigma is inscribed directly in language. The narrator configures himself as an alien presence by confessing his initial ignorance of the vernacular, and his inability to call things by the exact names utilized by the locals:

> For the first four days it rained. I could hardly see where I was. Then it stopped raining and beyond the lawn and outbuildings in front of my cottage I saw fields with stripped trees on the boundaries of each field; and far away, depending on the light, glints of a little river, glints which sometimes appeared, oddly, to be above the level of the land.
> The river was called the Avon; not the one connected with Shakespeare. Later – when the land had more meaning, when it had absorbed more of my life than the tropical street where I had grown up – I was able to think of the flat wet fields with the ditches as "water meadows" or "wet meadows", and the low smooth hills in the background, beyond the river, as "downs". But just then, after the rain, all that I saw – though I had been living in England for twenty years – were flat fields and a narrow river. (*EA*: 5)

Blindness is the main theme of the first paragraph. The impossibility of seeing, which seems determined by the heavy rain of the first four days after the narrator's arrival, is followed by a difficulty in deciphering the landscape. This hindrance, which appears at first to have been

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22 The word "exile" has been used with reference to Naipaul's writing several times by different critics to serve different purposes. For this reason, a contextualization and a delimitation of the field of analysis is a necessary premise to an analysis of *The Enigma of Arrival*. As Rob Nixon, author of a monograph on V. S. Naipaul, highlights, Naipaul "has come to be celebrated as the most comprehensively uprooted of twentieth-century writers and the most bereft of national affiliations [...]. Certainly in Britain and in the United States, where his influence has been strongest, critics commonly focus on the pathos of his circumstances and embrace him as simultaneously coming from nowhere and everywhere" (1992: 17). Yet, the American critic suggests, such a reputation constructed on familial and personal uprootedness has provided the rationale for "ignoring the shapes of his commitment" (ibid.). The rhetoric of exile, or rather, what Nixon sarcastically calls "the licence of exile", has served as a consolidating strategy to endow Naipaul with the authority to speak as a metropolitan writer with a privileged viewpoint on the so called Third World – the viewpoint of someone who is both an insider and an outsider. In this sense, exile has often served to shift the attention toward the construction of the personality and biography of the author rather than to cast new light on the textual implications of his work.

caused by the effects of the light on the fields is revealed in the second paragraph as a cognitive problem. The narrator is not unable to see, but unable to speak. He is not able to conceptualize the "ditches" as "water meadows" or "wet meadows", an cannot call the hills "downs", even though his presumptive command of the English language and his familiarity with English culture is asserted by his assurance that he "had been living in England" (the progressive form stresses the extension and continuity of his stay) for about two decades.

The second paragraph instead synthesises a successful process of *homing*, of establishing a bond between the narrator and the landscape, in terms of a translation accomplished both in language and in the self. The linguistic passage from "ditches" to "water meadows" is a passage which the narrator justifies with the expansion of his horizon of experience, as he claims that it became possible "when the land had more meaning, when it had absorbed more of my life than the tropical street where I had grown up" (*EA*: 5). The use of the verb "absorb" is extremely significant, because it implies the reciprocity of the development of the self and of his linguistic capacities. Language is not just a mirror of the widening of the horizon of experience of the narrator, but also the very site in which his own experience of the world comes into being. Differently put, it is not the narrator who attributes meaning to the landscape, but rather that meaning as an external, shared construct *takes in* the narrator and allows for him certain new possibilities of existence.

The translational, circular structure which is introduced in the first two paragraphs is repeated constantly throughout the whole book. The beginning of the book already prefigures the ending of the narrator's story, while the ending of the novel sends us back to the reasons why the narrator decided to begin his autobiography. *The Enigma of Arrival* does not proceed in a linear, chronological way, marking progress, so to speak, in the life of the narrator, or organizing his development around specific turning points. It rather presents a series of disconnected observations whose temporality is expanded and revised. Each event is presented from the point of view of both the narrator's past and present self, juxtaposing the different ways of seeing that the narrator claims he has developed throughout a life of observation. Helen Hayward, author of a monograph on V. S. Naipaul, compares the writing of Naipaul's autobiography to a revision of a literary text:

> The writing of autobiography is shaped by an interplay between the desire to assert a connection between a past and a present self – to establish a continuity over time which could be thought to

define the very notion of identity – and an opposing sense of distance from the earlier self. The revision of a literary text similarly implies a dialogue between past and present selves, and a continuity of concerns – those of the earlier writer remain those of the later writer – which is balanced by the assumption that the older writer is better able to express what the younger writer has endeavoured to articulate, or that the emphases are now different. Revision need not involve a disowning of the writing of the earlier self; the work of the younger writer is not necessarily superseded by the efforts of the older. Both autobiography and revision invite meditation on the nature of identity within difference. (2002: 39)

Indeed, *The Enigma of Arrival* performs both a reworking of a life and the editing of certain episodes, as well as a textual revision and re-contextualization of the work produced by the narrator's earlier self. The "meditation on the nature of identity within difference", for Hayward (ibid.), is the result of a circular process of interpretation that the narrator repeatedly performs throughout the whole text, connecting each episode to a wider conception of the narrator's life and vision, and then coming back to the way the narrator is able to articulate this process in his writing.

That language may be the real site of the narrator's process of revision and interpretation is asserted and repeated throughout the text. Immigration as well as the narrator's presence in the English countryside are explained as a consequence of his being an English speaker:

Fifty years ago, there would have been no room for me in the estate; even now my presence was a little unlikely. But more than accident had brought me here. Or, rather, in the series of accidents that had brought me to the manor cottage, with a view of the restored church, there was a clear historical line. The migration, within the British Empire, from India to Trinidad had given me the English language as my own, and a particular kind of education. This had partly seeded my wish to be a writer in a particular mode, and had committed me to the literary career I had been following in England for twenty years. (52-53)

If being a speaker also means to be spoken by a language, English has allowed Naipaul certain possibilities of existence which would have been unthinkable only half a century before. Language is directly mentioned as the site of the narrator's emergence as a subject as well as a reader.

The knowledge of the English language is nonetheless explicitly mentioned as an indirect knowledge, a knowledge that the speaker has acquired from afar and embedded in a very different experience of the world than the one required to inhabit his cottage in Wiltshire. On the one hand, the narrator learnt English in Trinidad and, as he claims, reconstructed from

his tropical, colonial island the meaning of words of which he had no direct experience, such as "winter" (cf. *EA*: 5 ff.), words whose imaginary scope turned out to be very different from his experience of the winter he knew in England ("The idea of winter and snow had always excited me; but in England the word had lost some of its romance for me, because the winters I had found in England had seldom been as extreme as I had imagined they would be when I was far away in my tropical island", *EA*: 5). On the other hand, the narrator gets acquainted with the English spoken in the countryside through his philological expertise, an expertise acquired through books and research, but still somehow disconnected from his experience, creating an horizon of expectation which proves somehow unfitting: "I knew that 'avon' originally meant only river, just as 'hound' originally meant a dog, any kind of dog. And I knew that both elements of Waldenshaw – the name of the village and the manor in whose ground I was – I knew that both 'walden' and 'shaw' meant wood. One further reason why, apart from the fairy tale feel of the snow and the rabbits, I thought I saw a forest", *EA*: 7). As this passage suggests, the possibility to recognize something through the dim light which illuminates the otherwise obscure English landscape is mediated by the narrator's literary studies first in colonial schools and later in England. Yet these studies expose the narrator to the experience of linguistic inadequacy, which causes him to access only a distorted, unrealistic view of the landscape: "So much of this I saw with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature. A stranger here, with the nerves of a stranger, and yet with a knowledge of the language and the history of the language and the writing, I could find a special past in what I saw; with a part of my mind I could admit fantasy" (*EA*: 18). Literature, differently put, represents for the narrator a special form of exile, something that both connects and separates him from the place he wants to call "his home" as well as from the people who live there.

The foreignness of language and experience that the narrator finds in literature is presented both as source of frustration and of attraction. The narrator describes his relationship to literature in the episode of his short stay in New York before leaving for London, as he immediately manages to find a book which he had despaired to find in the emporia of Trinidad. The book, *South Wind* by Norman Douglas, is presented as a fetish of a world that was foreclosed to the narrator in his life in Trinidad, and which the narrator buys immediately. Yet the act of buying the book is not followed by a real possession, but rather by the impossibility of reading a book which is destined to remain foreign:

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South Wind! But it remained unread. My first attempt to read it was like the attempts I made later: it showed me that – like the books of Aldous Huxley and D.H. Lawrence and certain other contemporary writers whose names had come to me through my father or through teachers at school – this book, with a young man called Denis and a bishop, and an island called Nepenthe, was alien, far from anything in my experience, and beyond my comprehension. But the alienness of a book, though it might keep me from reading it (I never read beyond the first chapter of *South Wind*), did not prevent me from admiring it. The very alienness, the inaccessibility, was like a promise of romance – a reward, some way in the future, for making myself a writer. (*EA*: 118-119)

The narrator buys the book because it was recommended to him "by an English teacher who knew of his writing ambitions" (*EA*: 118). The book is invested with meanings and expectations. It is implied that the book would introduce the narrator into the literary universe which he would have been required to know if he would have wanted to be included in it. Yet, the desire to become a writer is sustained by expectations created in absence, whose fulfilment is destined to be deferred indefinitely. Later, the narrator claims that "so much of my education had been abstract that I could live like this and feel like this" (*EA*: 119). To illustrate this, he mentions his passionate studying of French Drama or Soviet Cinema as a study carried out "without having any idea of the country or the court" (ibid) that had produced them.

<u>"Man fitting the Landscape". The narrator's encounter with Jack and the beginning of the process of self-translation.</u>

The starting point of the process of the self-translation of the narrator onto the landscape is therefore a process already taking place on the basis of a highly mediated and estranged experience: "But knowledge came slowly to me. It was not like the almost instinctive knowledge that had come to me as a child of the plants and flowers of Trinidad; it was like learning a second language" (*EA*: 30), claims the narrator as he accounts for his becoming more and more familiar with the place where he has chosen to live. Yet, the imaginary, spontaneous process of learning that the narrator ascribes to children who shape their first experiences in a language which they can only think of as unified and meaningful, never really figures in the text. The narrator's "assignation of residence", i.e. the learning of the vernacular of the English countryside, is made possible because the narrator already speaks a

second language, the language of literature, art, representation. The learning of the vernacular is, in fact, made possible through a process of multiple linguistic mediations, which in fact contrasts with any possible ideal of spontaneousness.

The inauthenticity of the narrator is presented as a potential threat to the landscape he has decided to inhabit. The narrator often comments on the oddity of his presence in a place that had been built to accommodate a very different kind of people, local families whose lives would have been full and meaningful in their untouched, rural, Edwardian context. "The builder of the house and the designer of the garden could not have imagined, with their world view, that at a later time someone like me would have been in the grounds" (*EA*: 52), claims the narrator, ascribing to himself the falling apart of a world order. As an old lady visits the place where she used to spend her youth and cannot recognize it any more, the narrator accuses himself as follows:

> Embarrassed, in the presence of the old lady, by what I had done, I was also embarrassed to be what I was, an intruder, not from another village or county, but from another hemisphere; embarrassed to have destroyed or spoilt the past for the old lady, as the past had been destroyed for me in other places, in my own island, and even here, in the valley of my second life, in my cottage in the manor grounds, where bit by bit the place that had thrilled and welcomed and reawakened me had changed and changed, until the time had come for me to leave. (*EA*: 318)

In this passage, the narrator not only defines himself as the product of diaspora and exile, a person to whom the possibility of being perfectly integrated in the landscape of his birth has been taken away by history. He also refers to himself as being in exile, a condition which he projects onto the place where he lives and which makes his sojourn unbearable.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of the narrator's exile is the figure of Jack. Jack, a middle-aged English farmer and a gardener whom the narrator occasionally meets on his walks in the countryside, is a character apparently perfectly integrated in his social, cultural and geographical context, an image of plenitude whose perfection will be questioned, deconstructed and re-signified throughout the narration. Very little is told about this character, and most of the narrative about him is contained in the first chapter, titled precisely "Jack's Garden", in which the narrator tells of Jack's cyclical, seasonal work in his garden repeating itself every year in the same way until his sudden illness and subsequent death. As the narrator introduces him, a remarkable joining of the farmer with the place is established: "Jack

himself, however, I considered to be part of the view. I saw his life as genuine, rooted, fitting; man fitting the landscape. I saw him as a remnant of the past (the undoing of which my own presence portended)" (*EA*: 15). Jack is fashioned by the narrator's view on him as traditional, instinctive, unchanging, although it is immediately also stated that this view would change. His life is full because it follows a pre-existing, pre-determined pattern that may have been the same for centuries. Jack belongs to the stereotypical British context, and in this sense the narrator never explicitly introduces him. Nonetheless, the fact that the real encounter between the two men is postponed and anticipated by two other encounters ("It was his father-in-law I noticed first" (*EA*: 21); "But before I got to know Jack I got to know the farm manager", *EA*: 25) serves as a prelude for the fact that the solidity of Jack's presence may soon be replaced by an elusiveness which will become the site of the re-signification of the character.

Jack's integration with the landscape is initially configured as an idealized absence of the mediation between him and language. The empathy between the farmer and the narrator is not formed through words, but rather through gestures. It is after Jack becomes acquainted with the odd presence of the narrator – who tries to imagine himself from the viewpoint of the old man working in the garden as "a stranger, a walker, someone exercising an old public right of way in what was now private land" (*EA*: 28) – that they start exchanging some extra-linguistic, and yet extremely meaningful signs of sympathy and recognition: "But after some time, after many weeks, when he felt perhaps that the effort wouldn't be wasted, he adopted me. And from a great distance, as soon as he saw me, he would boom out a greeting, which came over less as defined words than as a deliberate making of noise in the silence" (*EA*: 28). Jack never speaks, the only direct utterances about him are those produced by his wife after his death, words which by their unexpected change of viewpoint will reveal a completely different aspect of Jack to the narrator.

It is Jack's apparent lack of a need for language that makes him perfectly integrated, and differentiates him from his neighbours. By imagining Jack as outside of language, the narrator also grants him a privileged condition of freedom to which no one else could aspire. As he compares Jack to Pitton, a neighbour who performs similar farming work but who is instead a more accomplished speaker whose existence unfolds not just in nature but also in a social context informed by power relations, the narrator highlights the difference between the two characters as follows:

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But Jack was free in a way Pitton wasn't and now could never be. Perhaps it was Jack's intellectual backwardness, his purely physical nature, that made him content with what he had. And that was not little. Jack was lucky in his circumstances: his cottage, the land he could till, and above all, his isolation, the silence and solitude he went to sleep in and woke up to. These circumstances of Jack's together with the nature of the man, made his life appear like a constant celebration. That labor in his garden, after his paid work on the farm, that exhaustion, the pleasure then of food and the drive to the pub, the long, muzzying drinks, the sight year after year of the sweet or beautiful – and profitable – fruits of his labor: why not, then, the bare back in the summer, as much as the fire in winter? (*EA*: 233)

Pitton's relative cultural superiority is presented as the mark of a submission to a system of values by which Jack appears to be untouched. Along similar lines, the dairyman and his family who suddenly disturb the life of the community by moving into a cottage previously inhabited by an old couple are described as follows: "How could people like these, without words to put their emotions and passions, manage? They could, at best, suffer dumbly" (*EA*: 34). The scarcity of words is presented as a much contemptible condition here than the idealized absence of language which characterizes Jack's life. This family, coming from outside, cannot aspire either to the perfect integration with the landscape which appears as a prerogative of a local like Jack, or the process of self-translation that the narrator may enact thanks to his literary/ exiled expertise. Words make these strangers' lives mean, and imprison them in a dumbness which Jack avoids because of his perfect communion with the landscape and by the fact that he does not have any need to express anything that goes beyond his limited field of experience.

The ideal of the perfectly integrated, non-linguistic presence represented by Jack is explicitly revealed as the construction of the narrator's fantasy and subsequently denied in the same moment in which Jack is introduced: "Jack lived among ruins, among superseded things. But that way of looking came to me later, has come to me with greater force now, with the writing. It wasn't the idea that came to me when I first went out walking" (*EA*: 15). The reason why the narrator first sees Jack as an image of harmony is because decadence is a concept that the narrator first attributed to himself: "That idea of ruin and dereliction, of out of placedness, was something I felt about myself, attached to myself: a man from another hemisphere, another background, coming to rest in middle life in the cottage of a half-neglected estate, an estate full of reminders of its Edwardian past, with few connections with the present" (ibid.). Jack plays a fundamental role in the process of self-translation that the

narrator enacts in the book – the performativity of which is highlighted even more strongly by saying "that way of looking [..] has come to me with greater force now". The use of the temporal deictic "now" indicates that the act of writing is still an unfinished act, producing itself under the eye of the reader and the writer, and that the vision of Jack remains a provisional one. The narrator mediates his own 'I' by putting himself in relation with this representation of Jack that he has constructed through writing.

Paul Eakin, author of *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, defines *The Enigma of Arrival* as a "stunning, groundbreaking variation" of what he calls "relational autobiographies", autobiographies thematizing the forming of identities as relational constructs (1999: 91). The peculiarity of Naipaul's novel is, in Eakin's view, the way in which the narrator seems rather untouched by the people living around him. Indeed, Naipaul points out not his possible identification with the others but rather his difference, his alienation from them:

> The mood of the narrative is cool, detached, brooding; the writer's vision is profoundly historical. Here, truly, the relational life is seen *sub specie aeternitatis* – Naipaul's, anyone. Change – social and cultural – is the greatest theme in these pages, and Naipaul argues that his "I"-narrative is properly understood as a tiny part of the great diaspora of our time: "in 1950 in London I was at the beginning of that movement of peoples that was to take place in the second half of the twentieth century – a movement and a cultural mixing greater than the peopling of the United States, … a movement between all the continents (141). (Eakin 1999: 91).

Eakin considers Naipaul's narration as "cool" and "detached" (ibid.) because of the almost casual ways in which accidents occurring to other people are reported. None of the characters Naipaul meets occupies a central role in the plot, and none of their stories figure prominently as a central narrative core. Even Jack is not directly involved in any specific episode occurring to the narrator, but is just there, as a product of the narrator's capacity of seeing, defined by it and through it.

Eakin attributes to the narration both a "deeply historical" and "*sub specie aeternitatis*" quality (1999: 91), a contradiction in terms which may be explained through the way the 'I', the focalizing agency of the whole narration, emerges as a provisional result of an unfinished process of negotiation. Eakin's observation that Naipaul's "'I'-narrative is properly understood as a tiny part of the great diaspora of our time" inscribes Naipaul's book within a wider exploration of the contradiction of what Homi Bhabha called "the conflictual economy

of colonial discourse" (1994: 122). This economy, according to the Indian philosopher, is characterized by the tension between, on the one hand, "the synchronic, panoptical vision of domination" - i.e. the demand for a solid, unchanging identity – and, on the other hand, "the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history", i.e. change and difference (ibid.). Exile, as a fragmentary, disjunctive experience, is paradoxically presented as a choice of the narrator, a choice by which he looks for his own synchronic discourses of identity – as in his construction of the characters of Jack – and at the same he differentiates himself from characters like Pitton or the linguistically deficient neighbours. Yet, exile is also embedded in a precise historical, social and cultural phenomenon (which Eakin calls "the great diaspora of our time"; 1999: 91), preventing the narrator from any possible identification with these self-constructed rhetorics of rootedness.

Mimicry is what Bhabha defines as an ironic compromise between these two contradictory imperatives of colonial discourse, the a-historical, dominating, disciplinizing gaze of the colonizer and the historicized, differential appropriation of the colonized. *Mimicry*, a term which Bhabha draws from Lacan's essay "The Line and the Light", refers to the formation of identity through imitation, through the introjection of the image of the Other. Colonial mimicry, supported by colonial strategies of reform and discipline, produces colonized subjects who, in relation to their colonizers, are "*almost the same but not quite*" (Bhabha 1994: 122; italics in original). Imitation does not involve the harmonization or repression of difference, but rather a form of resemblance which entails a difference that colonial discourses also wish not to erase. Mimicry is therefore the sign for an identification which can never be completed, but always produces its slippages, "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other" (ibid.) who nonetheless cannot and should not be completely assimilated.

The menace of mimicry is that of a double vision which in revealing the ambivalence of colonial discourse, threatens to disrupt its authority. The disciplinized subject can never be perfectly submitted to the controlling gaze of the colonizers, but displaces it: "the look of the surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence" (Bhabha 1994: 127). In fact, Bhabha claims, mimicry has its specific function in colonial society, but it is a psychic mechanism of identification which is far more generalized. At the heart of Bhabha's articulation of mimicry is a conception of identity as

relational and unstable, articulated, as Lacan put it, along the axis of metonymy. Identity, to put it another way, does not pre-exist but rather forms itself through a series of identifications. "Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask", claims Bhabha, referring both to the colonizers and the colonized. Identity does not pre-exist the relational identification with the Other for any of them, and emerges as the product of a disciplinizing gaze which can, nonetheless, "shatter the unity of man's being through which [it] extends [its] sovereignty" (1994: 126).

Language and writing are the site of the production of the narrator's mimicry, as well as of his becoming a subject. As Bhabha puts it, "[t]he desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry – through a process of writing and repetition – is the final irony of partial representation" (1994: 126). The coming into being of a subject by introjecting an external form of discipline emerges as a central motif as the narrator talks about his desire to become a writer as a most "imprisoning" and "corrupting" desire:

> Children, whose experience is so limited, readily accept an abused condition. Even his play can encourage a child to live with his abused situation: can encourage masochism in someone meant to be quite different.
> Thinking back to my own past, my own childhood – the only way we have of understanding another man's condition is through ourselves, our experiences and emotions – I found so many abuses I took for granted. I lived easily with the idea of poverty, the nakedness of children in the street of the town and the roads of the country. I lived easily with the idea of the brutalizing of children by flogging; the ridiculing of the deformed; the different ideas of authority presented by our Indu family and then, above that, by the racial-colonial system of our agricultural colony.
> No one is born a rebel. Rebellion is something we have to be trained in. And even with the encouragement of my father's rages – political rages, as well as rages about his family and his employers – there was much about our family life and attitudes and our island that I accepted – acceptances which later were to mortify me.
> The noblest impulse of all – the wish to be a writer, the wish that ruled my life – was the impulse that was the most imprisoning, the most insidious, and in some ways the most corrupting, because, refined by my half-English half-education and ceasing then to be a pure impulse, it had given me a false idea of the activity of the mind. The noble impulse, in that colonial setting, had been the most hobbling. To be what I wanted to be, I had to cease to be or to grow out of what I was. To become a writer it was necessary to shed many of the early ideas that went with the ambition and the concept my half-education had given me of the writer. (*EA*: 244-245)

The reflection that children "easily accept an abused condition" is formulated with reference to the narrator's observation of the "pain of memory" (ibid.) haunting a character named Bray, with whom the narrator occasionally exchanges some views on politics and society. As Bray talks about his childhood memories, he is ashamed to admit that he worked as a servant in the big manor house when he was still very young. The narrator recognizes the shame that Bray

feels about himself as the same shame that permeates the narrator's experience as a colonial. Servitude is a condition that is perceived, in its most open and explicit forms, as deeply humiliating by adults who have developed into ambitious individuals such as Bray or the narrator himself. Yet, servitude is something that they both imbibed as little children by being put into a system of relations that not only tolerated but also fostered forms of submission to discipline and rules.

Interestingly, rebellion is not described as a spontaneous reaction, but as something that must also be introjected like discipline. The narrator has to learn rebellion from his father in the same way as he learned to accept the idea of poverty, the brutalizing or ridiculing of those who somehow diverged from any introjected model of discipline, and the very ideas of authority connected with the racial-colonial-cultural system of his own Caribbean island.

The desire to become a writer is described, therefore, as a double-bind. This desire is dictated by the narrator's imprisonment by the gaze of the other, a gaze which he considers as the most restraining and the most corrupting, but outside of which he is aware that he could not exist. He defines himself as a product of a "half-English half-education" (*EA*: 245), an education which will put him in a situation in which he could never really achieve the ideal that he had constructed in his mind, and which will give him only a half-command of the language and of the culture. His colonial background will always be the mark of his difference. "To be what I wanted to be, I had to cease to be or to grow out of what I was", the narrator claims (ibid.). "To cease to be" means, in this case, to replace the idea of identity as something "to be", and therefore a paradigm of fixed identity and presence like that ascribed to Jack, with that of "becoming". His desire to write displaces him from being under the lenses of the disciplinizing gaze of the colonializer to the position of the observer but in a way which deeply unsettles the premises on which the disciplinizing gaze is based, shattering the very conception of unity which it subsumes.

The passage describes the transformation of the narrator from a passive recipient of colonial discourse – more specifically of the colonial discourse carried through literature – to that of an active producer of discourse. This transformation cannot be attained through a simple exchange of the two positions – the act of rebellion that he claims to have learnt from the father is just another form of discipline which cannot really produce a liberating discourse. The narrator rather constitutes his own "I-function" (cf. Regard) by unsettling these two

apparently fixed positions of receiver/ producer and positions himself in a continuous exchange between the reader-function and the author-function. Reading/interpreting and writing emerge as interconnected acts in which the self-writing subject develops a way of feeling and perceiving, as well as a sense of home. The narrator positions himself both as a reader of the reality around him – which he accesses through discourse and representation – and as a writer.

The pragmatics of interpretation and the narrator's self-translation onto the landscape

Interpretation is what allows the narrator this dynamic exchange between the reader- and the author- function. Interpretation emerges from *The Enigma of Arrival* as a process at the centre of which is not the deciphering of a text, but rather, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle has theorized it, a pragmatics in which the text acts as a prop for a language-game in which the author and the reader are produced as *places* within a structure of interpellation. In Lecercle's view, interpretation is to be understood as translation and intervention. The reader is not just a passive recipient of the presumed meaning produced by the author, but actively contributes not just to the construction of the meaning of a text, but also to the creation of a fiction of an author. Jean-Jacques Lecercle's formulation of the theory of interpretation goes beyond even Iser and Jauss' reception theories insofar as it reads interpretation as a process taking place within a structure which comprehends the following five elements, the initial letters of which significantly compose the word ALTER: Author, Language, Text, Encyclopedia, Reader. What circulates within this structure is not meaning, but rather interpellation. Both the author and the reader are captured as places within this structure, but this capture is not a static one, as it involves a continuity of counter-responses.

When, for example, in the above quoted episode involving the narrator's exchange with Bray about the condition of servitude, the narrator claims that "the only way we have of understanding another man's condition is through ourselves, our experiences and emotions" (*EA*: 244), he already conceptualizes interpretation as a dynamic structure of reading in which the polarity of reader/ passive recipient and author/ active producer of meaning is dissolved. The other, the person whom the narrator/ reader wants to understand (in this case, Bray), is not just a pre-existing author of an utterance – an utterance about Bray's service in

the manor as a child which in this case is actually missing ("And then the pain of the memory overcame Bray's wish to tell me his story; and the days he had spent as a servant in the manor remained secret"; EA: 244) – but is someone that comes into existence through the projection of the reader's (narrator's) self onto him. By the same token, it is already implied that what the narrator calls "ourselves, our experiences and emotions" (ibid.) is not a pre-existing entity, but rather the result (through literature, education, colonial discourses, etc.) of an *external* process of subjectivation projecting itself onto the thus-constructed *inner life* of the narrating self. The inner-life of the narrator, his conscience, his feelings, his perceptions are, in other words, always-already embedded in a social, external relationship to the other. It is in fact the observation of the others and the (partial) mimicking of their attitudes that makes the narrator change his own vision of the world, and allows him to translate himself onto the landscape he has elected as his home. Therefore, just as the reader/narrator creates the author/Bray, the author/narrator is created through the projection of certain structures of feeling onto him (cf. Williams 1977).

As the positioning of the narrator as reader and as writer is presented as that of a "mimic" from the very beginning, in *The Enigma of Arrival* the reflection on the authenticity of the narration has to start, paradoxically, from a declaration of inauthenticity. By exposing the fictionality of his book, Naipaul also exposes the provisionality of the positioning of the self that is performed through writing. In this sense, Naipaul's decision to subtitle his book "A Novel", may be read, not as a denial of the "pact of truth" that in Lejeune's view characterizes the genre of autobiography, but rather as an inversion of values. The truth of the episodes narrated – some of which may already be known or recognizable to the reader who is familiar with Naipaul's previous writings or with the literature produced about him: interviews, essays, monographs and so on – is not to be found in their correspondence with real-life events but rather through the performance of an act of interpretation which re-signifies them within a narrative structure. This is why, towards the end of the novel the narrator thematizes the writing of his own autobiography as a construction that started from some fantasies which he had re-elaborated several times and in different ways in his writing:

> I had thought for years about a book like *The Enigma of Arrival*. The Mediterranean fantasy that had come to me a day or so after I had arrived in the valley – the story of the traveler, the strange city, the spent life – had been modified over the years. The fantasy and the ancient-world setting had been dropped. The story had become more personal: my journey, the writer's journey, the writer defined by

> his writing discoveries, his ways of seeing, rather than by personal adventures, writer and man separating at the beginning of the journey and coming together again in a second life just before the end.
>
> My theme, the narrative to carry it, my characters – for some years I felt they were sitting on my shoulder, waiting to declare themselves and to possess me. But it was only out of this awareness of death that I began at last to write. Death was the motif; it had been the motif all along. Death and the way of handling it – that was the motif of the story of Jack. (*EA*: 343)

This passage depicts interpretation not just as the necessary premise of Naipaul's book, but also as the very object of his writing. These lines illuminate and complete an episode narrated in the second chapter of the novel, a chapter titled "The Journey", in which the retrieval of the reproduction of a painting by the Italian surrealist artist Giorgio de Chirico becomes the pivot around which the narrator organizes random fantasies and ideas about a book, interpreting them in the light of his own life and experience of arrivals. The Mediterranean fantasy to which the narrator refers is precisely the fantasy that has arisen from his interpretative transformation of the visual artefact that he finds by coincidence in his cottage into a written artefact (*ekphrasis*). This translation from the visual to the literary gives way to further translations which develops into a series of stories that develop into other stories, converging then into the biographical narrative produced in *The Enigma of Arrival*. The interpretation of a painting gives way to fiction, which in turn gives way to new interpretations which give way to the coming into being of the narrator's 'I'. The "Mediterranean fantasy" developing from the *ekphrasis* serves as a prelude to a pragmatics of writing which subsumes, as well, a pragmatics of reading and interpreting.

The assertion Naipaul makes concerning the "writer and man separating at the beginning of the journey and coming together again in a second life just before the end" (*EA*: 343) puts the episode of the *ekphrasis* of the De Chirico's painting at the very centre of the narration. Indeed, the *ekphrastic* interpretation of the De Chirico painting – a painting titled precisely *The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon* – is much more than an excuse for a title or theme. The American scholar Robert Hamner has argued that the textual rendition of the painting constitutes a "pivotal axis of ekphrasis" around which "we must attend to three levels of meaning: the narrator's candid act of explication, its authorial and autobiographical application, and the implications of interrogating the artistic motive behind the entire novel" (2006: 37). The fact that this ekphrasis is cited again at the end of the novel, and that the narrator speaks of it as the site in which "man and writer" were first separated at the

beginning of the novel only to be reunited "just before the end" (*EA*: 343) connects the second and the third level of which Hamner speaks in an indissoluble way. "The artistic motive" (Hammer 2006: 37) behind the entire novel is indeed an interrogation and a constitution of the self and of the spatial and temporal construction of the 'I' narrative, and interpretation is the way in which this is attained.

That the *ekphrastic* rendition of de Chirico's painting should emerge as an interpretation is made clear by the very condition in which the episode takes place. The narrator does not limit himself to the description of an object, but provides a context for it, and also includes some of the comments that others have produced about the image:

> The cottage at that time still had the books and some of the furniture of the people who had been there before. Among the books was one that was very small, a paperback booklet, smaller in format than the average small paperback and with only a few pages. The booklet, from a series called the Little Library of Art, was about the early paintings of Giorgio de Chirico. There were about a dozen reproductions of his early surrealist paintings. Technically, in these very small reproductions, the paintings did not seem interesting; they seemed flat, facile. And their content was not profound either; arbitrary assemblages, in semi-classical, semi-modern settings, of unrelated motifs – aqueducts, trains, arcades, gloves, fruit, statues – with an occasional applied touch of easy mystery: in one painting, for instance, an overlarge shadow of a hidden figure approaching from round a corner. But among these paintings there was one which, perhaps because of its title, caught my attention: *The Enigma of Arrival*. I felt that in an indirect, poetical way the title referred to something in my own experience; and later I was to learn that the title of this surrealist painting of Chirico's hadn't been given by the painter, but by the poet Apollinaire, who died young in 1918, from influenza following a wound, to the great grief of Picasso and others. (*EA:* 97-98)

The context that the narrator outlines is the context of his own retrieval of the painting and of his own personal act of interpretation. The source of the painting, its author, remains in the background as a secondary aspect, to the point that the narrator does not even seem to realize that his elision of the prefix "de" the second time he mentions the surname of the Italian painter is actually a deliberate elision (the surname should be de Chirico, and not just Chirico). In the forefront is the "flat, facile" reproduction of the painting found by the narrator, and most of all, the title that the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire gave to it. The mentioning of Apollinaire is particularly significant. By saying that the French poet had given a title to the painting, the narrator already quotes an interpretation given by somebody else. Besides, the title given to the painting doubles the painting, and becomes a second text for the interpretation of the narrator.

Following the scene of recovery, both the title and the reproduction of the painting are

appropriated by the narrator's personal vision. The paragraph quoted above produces a sort of *zoom in* from the external condition of the recovery, the glossing of the painting (i.e. the information about the title and about Apollinaire), and the way both the painting and its glossing catch the narrator's attention. In the second paragraph, where the *ekphrasis* of the painting is performed, the narrator establishes a new connection between the painting and Apollinaire, himself and the painting, himself and Apollinaire:

> What was interesting about the painting itself, *The Enigma of Arrival*, was that – again perhaps because of its title – it changed in my memory. The original (or the reproduction in the Little Library of Art booklet) was always a surprise. A classical scene, Mediterranean, ancient-Roman – or so I saw it. A wharf; in the background, beyond walls and gateways (like cutouts), there is the top of the mast of an antique vessel; on an otherwise deserted street in the foreground there are two figures, both muffled, one perhaps the person who had arrived, the other perhaps a native of the port. The scene is of desolation and mystery: it speaks of the mystery of arrival. It spoke to me of that, as it had spoken to Apollinaire. (*EA*: 98)

In claiming that "it [the painting] spoke to me of that [the enigma of arrival], as it had spoken to Apollinaire" (ibid.), the narrator performs at least three important functions. First, he postulates, years after Apollinaire had given a title to the painting, what Lecercle calls "a constructed mythical moment of origin" (1999: 22), which is, in fact, a double moment. Naipaul imagines that the painting is the bearer of an original meaning which de Chirico gave to the painting, and which emerged verbally through the title that Apollinare gave to it. Secondly, by claiming that he knows what the French poet had meant by 'The Enigma of Arrival', he produces a representation of the author Apollinaire which has an imaginary relation to the poet's real condition of existence and which is highly mediated by ideology. Thirdly, the narrator usurps the role of the author Apollinaire by proclaiming his own identification with the French poet. The identification with Apollinaire emerges as much more significant than any possible identification with de Chirico not only because both the narrator and Apollinaire are writers, working with language rather than with image, but also because their production is revealed as a form of reading and interpreting someone else's artefact.

The first premise on which Jean-Jacques Lecercle's theory of interpretation as pragmatics is based is that of *indirection*. It is not the speaker who masters the meaning of his or her utterance, but the utterance that masters the speaker. Differently put, "the speaker means something different from what she says, or something more, or something less; and she

says something different from what she means" (Lecercle 1999: 76). This happens because language, the means through which interpretation takes place, cannot be mastered by the speaker either. The meaning of the text is thus separated by the author's original meaning. The narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* does not have to "re-construct" the meaning of the painting or of Apollinaire's title, but rather to construct it. The word "construction" is used by Lecercle with reference to Freud's theory of interpretation, which he considers "not a simple matter of adequacy (and Freudian interpretation *cannot* be the recovery of an *intention* of meaning), but rather of the effect of an absent cause" (1999: 20). The absent cause to which Lecercle refers is both Apollinaire's relation to the painting and the painting itself.

Secondly, interpretation is inevitably informed by the idea of *vagueness*. "Natural languages are vague", Lecercle argues, "[n]ot only because they perform what linguists call 'hedging' (as in 'he is kind of nice'), but because they sometimes deliberately reject clarity of expression and univocity of reference" (1999: 77). A title like *The Enigma of Arrival* could evoke multiple possible associations, all of which would have to be constructed by an interpreter according to a context and to specific conjunctures. By the same token, the painting bears this mark of vagueness too. Naipaul describes the reproductions in his art booklet as "flat, facile" (*EA*: 97). The figures in the scene of the painting he describes are "muffled" and his interpretation of them is marked by the use of the word "perhaps" (ibid.). Vagueness is indeed a characteristic of the artistic movement to which De Chirico belonged. Metaphysical art, often assimilated to surrealism, is an art that sets itself the goal of representing what goes beyond the physical appearance of reality and beyond the experience of the senses. As opposed to Futurism, the artistic and literary movement that dominated the Italian intellectual panorama of the first two decades of the twentieth century, in Metaphysical painting, stasis and immobility are predominant. Through a return to the most traditional instrument of painting and perspective, in metaphysical paintings, space and things are represented as standing still, petrified in an atemporal dimension. The multiplication of vanishing points forces the observer to interrogate him/herself about the dispositions of the images in the composition.

What interpretation performs is described by Lecercle as a form of translation and intervention happening through *re-contextualization*: the text is de-contextualized and re-contextualized by every act of reading. This implies that "[m]eaning varies (increases and

multiplies, or wilts and wanes) with every link in the chain of the serial arrangement" (Lecercle 1999: 78). The narrator indeed claims: "What was interesting about the painting itself, *The Enigma of Arrival*, was that – again perhaps of the title – it changed in my memory. The original (or the reproduction in the Little Library of Art booklet) was always a surprise" (*EA*: 98). When the narrator says that "[t]he scene is of desolation and mystery: it speaks of the mystery of arrival" (ibid.), what is implied is that this "desolation" and mystery" also change according to the different scene in which the story is re-contextualized.

The story that the narrator constructs right after describing the de Chirico painting may be considered as a second *ekphrastic* interpretation of the painting unfolding itself in narrative form. In this story, the enigma of arrival is bound to a context which reproduces the classical, atemporal atmosphere of the image:

> My story was to be set in classical times, in the Mediterranean. My narrator would write plainly, without any attempt at period style as historical explanation of his period. He would arrive – for a reason I had yet to work out – at a classical port with the walls and gateways like cutouts. He would walk past that muffled figure on the quayside. He would move from that silence and desolation, that blankness, to a gateway or door. He would enter there and be swallowed by the life and noise of a crowded city (I imagined something like an Indian bazaar scene). The mission he had come on – family business, study, religious initiation – would give him encounters and adventures. He would enter interiors, of houses and temples. Gradually there would come to him a feeling that he was getting nowhere; he would lose his sense of mission; he would begin to know only that he was lost. His feeling of adventure would give way to panic. He would want to escape, to get back to the quayside and his ship. But he wouldn't know how. I imagined some religious ritual in which, led on by kindly people, he would unwittingly take part and find himself the intended victim. At the moment of crisis he would come upon a door, open it, and find himself back at the quayside of arrival. He has been saved; the world is as he remembered it. Only one thing is missing now. Above the cutout walls and buildings there is no mast, no sail. The antique ship has gone. The traveler has lived out his life. (*EA*: 98-99).

The story should be linked to the painting in an *ut pictura poesis* way: the pictorial techniques utilized by de Chirico should be reproduced in the text ("My narrator would write plainly, without any attempt at period style as historical explanation", ibid.). The image is translated into words in a way that reveals a transformation of a static image into a recontextualized narrative. The characters are not precisely identifiable; the reason why the traveller finds himself in a foreign city are unknown or omitted; the incidents that occur on his way remain untold. These new elements added to the image are a production of the narrator/ interpreter's experience as well as of the specific conjunctures in which his reading and interpreting takes place.

The vagueness of this account of an uncanny arrival in a dangerous city and of the impossibility of departure constitutes the basis for a model that repeats itself in several variations and in different contexts in the chapter. First the narrator tells of a book he is writing about an African colony, a story in which he recognizes the same narrative pattern of "a sunlit journey ending in a dangerous classical city" (*EA*: 99) to the point that he is not able to recollect which of the two stories comes before the other. Then he realizes that the same story is the version of a recurring dream ("Nor did it occur to me that it was also an attempt to find a story for, to give coherence to, a dream or a nightmare which for a year or so had been unsettling me", *EA*: 100). Afterwards, the narration shifts to a story which he had been trying to write and which did not come out as expected, an episode in which Robert Hamner (2006: 44) recognizes the author's breakdown after his rejection of the manuscript of *The Loss of El Dorado* (1969). Finally the narrator relates his own uncanny experience of arrivals, first in New York – a short stop-over in the journey of migration that brought him, as a student, to England – and then to London.

The many versions of the story of the De Chirico painting emerge as a consequence of *différance* – the separation between the author and text as well as reader and text as formulated by Jacques Derrida. As Lecercle puts it "writing belongs to the realm of the different (there is no iteration without alteration), of differing and deferring (the contact between speaker and hearer occurs in praesentia; the absence of contact between author and reader is due, in the first instance, to a temporal gap), and of differends (the type of 'dialogue' that will ensue is agonistic, made up of verbal struggle and games rather than cooperative and irenic)" (1999: 78). Naipaul not only displaces the temporality of the action, but also intervenes and translates it onto different contexts which he refers to his own life. Each of these translations depends then on specific *conjunctures*, determined by the moment in which the reading of the De Chirico painting is performed.

Re-contextualization and *différance* are not, nonetheless, just the result of "an external process involving two occurrences of the same text in different conjunctures, but also [of] an internal one", which Lecercle refers to as *metalepsis* (1999: 78). With the word "metalepsis" Lecercle refers both to Austin's theory of the speech-act – claiming that a text is a multi-layered, extended speech-act in which several different speech-acts may take place at the same time (for example both illocutionary and perlocutionary) and to Genette's theory of

metalepsis as a contamination between the world of the telling and the world of the told. Metalepsis disrupts the distinction between the different levels of the narration, for example, by allowing the extra-diegetic narrator to intrude in the diegetic word. The example of metalepsis which Genette introduces in *Figures III* (1972) is a short story by the Argentinian writer Julio Cortazar titled "The Continuity of Parks". In the short story, a man sits in an armchair reading a detective novel in which two lovers prepare themselves to kill someone. The end of the short story shows the prospective murderer entering a house and approaching a man reading a novel on a sofa. Metalepsis plays a fundamental role in *The Enigma of Arrival* insofar as the narrator, through his acts of interpretation, transgresses not only different narrative levels, but also his role as reader, author, narrator, and character. Simultaneously, the narrator depicts himself as the observer of a painting (de Chirico's *The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon*), he identifies with the interpreter who gives it a title (Apollinaire), he becomes the author of a story which "speaks out" (the word "ekphrasis" etymologically means precisely "speaking out" or "telling in full", Heffernan 1991: 302) the events depicted in the painting as well as of a novel whose story is later revealed to him as another version of *The Enigma of Arrival*. Then the narrator becomes the protagonist of the story he experiences in his dreams, as well of the story of his own personal enigma of arrival first in New York and then in England.

Metalepsis becomes even more significant when Naipaul, at the end of the novel, utilizes it once again and declares: "The story had become more personal: my journey, the writer's journey, the writer defined by his writing discoveries, his ways of seeing, rather than by personal adventures, writer and man separating at the beginning of the journey and coming together again in a second life just before the end" (*EA*: 343). Metalepsis, as Lecercle claims, "inscribes within the text, in a paradoxical form, the possibility of interpellating more than one set of actors, of projecting from the same text more than one structure of actants" (1999: 81). In this case, metalepsis, which is embedded in the act of interpretation of the painting, in the version of the story that the narrator tells also becomes the means through which the extra-diegetic enters the diegesis, in which the narrator transforms what is subtitled as "a novel" into an autobiography, and which re-establishes the pact of truth which Philip Lejeune considers to be the basis of autobiography. Therefore, the narrator also interpellates the reader of his books and tells him or her to believe that the story he has just written is a story of his

own self. He invites the reader to produce him as author-function and interpellates the reader as reader-function.

To return to the issue of the geographical nature of Naipaul's autobiography, metalepsis functions as the main device through which the self-writing subject constructs himself as *place*. To claim that a subject is a place means that the subject comes into being as the result of a process of subjectification in connection with space. The subject emerges not as the source of the process of signification and writing, but rather as an effect of all this. He emerges in the dialogue between an image, the text produced about the image, the interpretation he gives about them, and the story he constitutes. His act of interpretation allows him to project himself onto the landscape and project his own foreignness into the open-ended act of interpretation.

Naipaul's fantasies of home. *The Enigma of Arrival* as reflexive nostalgia

In "Autobiography and Geography", Fréderic Regard asks himself the question: "does the act of writing oneself place the self-writing author at the heart of his works, as the passive product of these devices, or does it rather cause him to conceive of himself as a 'heterotopia' (cf. Foucault 2006), i.e. an agency constructing rival spaces in breaking with the dominant geographical order?" (2002: 3). Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* seems to entail both possibilities. The self-writing subject constitutes himself as place and as subjectified by the structure of ideology, he imbibes the language of the place, he learns to speak the language and the culture of the place. At the same time, he is also able to occupy more than one position at the same time. He can enter the language-game of interpretation from multiple positions. His counter-interpellation of the structures that have made him into a mimic subject happens in the moment in which he configures himself as master of language, and threfore able to traverse the porosity of the process of subjectification in which his colonial education had put him.

It is through this multiple positioning of the 'I'-function that the narrator constitutes his own home in writing. The enigma of arrival on which he elaborated with his interpretation of the de Chirico painting becomes the site of the narrator's homecoming, as the last paragraph in the novel seems to suggest:

Our sacred world – the sanctities that had been handed down to us as children by our families, the sacred places of our childhood, sacred because we had seen them as children and had filled them with wonder, places doubly and trebly sacred to me because far away in England I had lived in them imaginatively over many books and had in my fantasy set in those places the very beginning of things, had constructed out of them a fantasy of home, though I was to learn that the ground was bloody, that there had been aboriginal people there once, who had been killed or made to die away – our sacred world had vanished. Every generation now was to take us further away from those sanctities. But we remade the world for ourselves; every generation does that, as we found when we came together for the death of this sister and felt the need to honor and remember. It forced us to look on death. It forced me to face the death I had been contemplating at night, in my sleep; it fitted a real grief where melancholy had created a vacancy, as if to prepare me for the moment. It showed me life and man as the mystery, the true religion of men, the grief and the glory. And that was when, faced with a real death, and with this new wonder about men, I laid aside my drafts and hesitations and began to write very fast about Jack and his garden. (*EA*: 354)

Robert Hamner (2006) described this passage as a circular one, a passage in which the conclusion of the book sends us back to the very beginning of the novel, thus inviting the reader to another process of revision and reflection on difference. The passage certainly produces a semantic shift, transforming the issue of *arrival*, which had been the dominant theme in the novel, into the issue of *return*. The narrator, who has come back to his native Trinidad to assist and participate in the funeral of his sister, re-projects his story and his reflections on strangeness, home and alienation, against the backdrop of his own familiar and geographical background. This background emerges as a world created through the fantasies and the emotional investments of someone who has lived far away from it for many years, and who is afraid by the idea that this very world may soon fade and disappear, just like the English countryside where the narrator had perceived himself as a disturbing, disrupting presence.

As mentioned before, in *The Writing of History* Michel de Certeau defined history as "a labor of death and a labor against death" (1988: 5), a sentence which seems to be taken up as a challenge in Naipaul's autobiographical novel, as the passage above seems to suggest. In order not to forget, History erects monuments and dwells in the celebration of these monuments, compensating for the mourning of the past with artefacts which are also a sign of loss. This novel strives precisely to save history both from oblivion and from the temptation of filling the void of loss by creating fetishes. For example Jack, who in the text is first presented as a monument of a past that can no longer be, is re-signified as a site of projection and multiple identification in which the narrator may himself intervene and counter-

interpellate the structures of signification through which he had first seen him. Homecoming does not signify a recovery of identity. The journey in the space of the imagination does not end with an accomplished assignation of residence, but rather starts again by unsettling the very possibility of residence that language and culture has provided the narrator with.

In the above quoted passage, *The Enigma of Arrival* is revealed as a book about nostalgia, but a nostalgia of a very peculiar kind. The word nostalgia is a composite of two Greek roots: *nostos*, meaning precisely "return", and *algos*, "pain". The kind of nostalgia described here is a nostalgia dwelling much more on the pain than on the real return, i.e. on the processes through which the identity of a person is constituted rather than on the real possibility of coinciding with the image of plenitude which the idealized past of nostalgia represents. It is a form of nostalgia which the Russian artist and scholar Svetlana Boym would call "reflective nostalgia", a nostalgia concerned with "historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude" (2001: 49). It is, in other words, a nostalgia that deliberately postpones homecoming to an indefinite moment, thus dwelling in the the process of longing in ways that prove, nonetheless, that "longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgement or critical reflection" (49-50).

Naipaul's dwelling in this kind of nostalgia is a result of his critical engagement with the memories of a past that he has to construct out of some cherished fragments of memory. This past, in fact, can come alive only through an effort which does not only save these fragments from oblivion, but also allows the narrator to access his own hybrid subjectivity through the multiple processes of interpellation that this provisional construction envisages. Writing is the instrument the narrator has to insert himself in the flux of history, transforming both himself and his worlds by translating them onto the written page, and involving an effort of memory which may save them from the annihilation that time inevitably brings.

Chapter 4

Middle passages. The mediations of language and the impossible homecoming of a hybrid subject in David Dabydeen's post-modern slave narrative *A Harlot's Progress*

> [T]he real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambiance of the representer. If the latter alternative is the correct one (and I believe it is), then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the "truth," which is itself a representation (Said 1978: 272)

The paradox highlighted by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) is the starting point of a highly provocative trans-medial, trans-cultural, and, in many regards, transgressive rewriting of William Hogarth's series of paintings (1731, now lost) and engravings (1732) *A Harlot's Progress*. The novel of the Guyanese-born writer, critic and poet David Dabydeen, likewise titled *A Harlot's Progress* (1999; *HP*), deals precisely with how the inevitable mediations of representation invalidate the possibility of accessing an absolute truth. The "culture, institutions, and political ambiance of the representer" which Said mentions in the extract quoted above act always as a hidden, ideological – *sensu* Althusser (cf. Althusser 1971) – filter through which reality is accessed and comes into being.

The work of ideology is exposed in the novel from the trans-cultural perspective of a hybrid subject, himself an orientalized other, making his appearance as a secondary character – the black page dressed in a Moorish costume attending to the "Harlot" of Hogarth's series – in the second of the six plates composing the series. The truth in question in the novel concerns the possibility of the return home of Mungo, an African man deported to England at a young age, colonized by the language of his slavers and forced to spend over thirty years of

his life among foreign people. If a return to the land in which he was born cannot take place in reality – as Mungo sets out to tell his story, he is too old and weak to embark on a real journey to his native homeland, and his tribe has been exterminated in the raid in which he was captured – the site of his spiritual homecoming should be, at least, the possibility of narrating his story, of setting down in black and white the memory of a land which would otherwise disappear forever. Mungo's homecoming, in this way, should take a two-fold path: first toward the lost land of his childhood, which he will reconstruct in his narration, and secondly towards English, the language in which his narration will take shape. The latter, which is a pre-condition of the former, assumes in the narration an ever more prominent role inasmuch as Mungo unveils the inadequacy of English as an instrument to enable him to come home.

Language, the role it plays in the multiple mediations of representation as well as in the process of shaping a hybrid subjectivity thus becomes the central theme around which Dabydeen's critique of representation revolves. Mungo engages with a highly self-reflexive first-person narrative focused on his relationship to the language of his oppressors. His attempt to tell the story of his life in English thus results in a critique of language as a means of reaching a truth of any sort, as well as in a highly provocative, "revisionist" (Sommer 2001: 147) historical account of the slave trade as well as of eighteenth-century English society.

Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress* begins with a scene pregnant with the potentialities for a fruitful cooperation. Mr Pringle, a devout Christian and an enlightened eighteenth-century abolitionist, is ready to interview and ghost-write the autobiography of Mungo who, thirty years after the events depicted by Hogarth, has become the oldest black inhabitant of London. The writing of Mungo's story would presumably bring great advantages to both men. Mungo, because of the unsought fame which Hogarth's engraving brought him, appears to his prospective ghost-writer Mr Pringle as the perfect subject for one of those slave narratives which in the last decades of the eighteenth century were beginning to carve themselves an ever larger niche in the English literary marketplace.[23] Years earlier the portrait and fame of the black man, together with the many prurient series it spawned on the erotic adventures of

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Among some of the most well-known are also *The Interesting Narrative and the life of 'Olaudah Equiano' or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, by Olaudah Equiano (1789) and *The History of Mary Prince, a West-Indian Slave* (1831), to which Dabydeen's novel also refers.

Fig. 1. Hogarth, William. *A Harlot's Progress*, Plate 2. 1732. Etching and engraving. British Museum, London. Mary Hackabout, who has become the mistress of a Jewish merchant, distracts her protector to allow her younger lover to escape. On her left, Mungo watches the scene holding a teapot.

Mary/Moll Hackabout and her black page,[24] had been circulated among vast numbers of people across all many strata of English eighteenth-century society in thousands of legal or pirated copies. In his previous life, Mungo had also met some of the most gossiped about characters of his age, living on Captain Thistlewood's[25] ship and later serving in the house of the aristocratic Lord and Lady Montague, as well as in the house of the questionable Jewish merchant Mr Gideon. If published, is story would cause a huge sensation, exciting the morbid curiosity of his contemporaries and at the same time opening their eyes to the evil of the slave trade with its sincere testimony of suffering. Mungo, for his part, would get an extraordinary occasion to speak which would catapult him from the marginality to which Hogarth's portrait had relegated him – after all he was just a secondary character in the bottom right-hand

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24 Cf. Sommer 2001.
25 The figure of Captain Thomas Thistlewood is an imaginary character. Towards the end of the novel, Dabydeen anachronistically conflates the story of Thistlewood with that of the captain of the slave-ship *Zong,* Luke Collingwood. The novel relates how Captain Thistlewood's story was on everybody's lips because of a legal scandal, nowadays referred to as "The *Zong* Massacre", which at the time got a lot of publicity in the newspapers. As the overloaded slave-ship *Zong* set sail to Jamaica, an epidemic broke out among the slaves and the captain made the decision to throw 133 slaves over board with the excuse that this would prevent the contagion spreading among other voyagers. The ship's owners filed their insurance claim but the insurers refused to pay, and set in motion a trial for fraud. This episode, which happened in 1781, is mentioned in the novel by Lord Montague, at whose house Mungo claims to have been employed before meeting Moll. As Hogarth's series was painted in 1731, there is a discrepancy of about fifty years between Mungo's narration and the real *Zong* Massacre.

margin of the second of the six plates that make up *A Harlot's Progress* – to the role of the protagonist of his own story. Mungo would thus manage to project onto the written page a sort of spiritual reunion with his past and with his lost innocence. Besides, with the profit gained from the book and with the subsidy granted by the Abolition society he would certainly find relief from the poverty and privation of his present life.

Nonetheless, in spite of all the mutual interests which binds the two characters, the scene of their encounter does not show any sign of co-operation. The first lines opening the novel tell the reader that Mr Pringle and Mungo have met three times already, but Mr. Pringle has not yet been able to make a start in the drafting of the novel because Mungo, for some unknown reason, refuses to utter a word:

> 22nd April 17– . Mr Pringle sits at the table in Mungo's garret, a table which Mungo uses as a desk, a place to eat and a place to lay out his Bible. He shuffles his blank papers into a neat pile. He jabs the nib of his pen into the inkwell and stirs nervously, awaiting word. This is the third visit, but at least he has made a start, if only to record the date of the meeting. (*HP*: 1)

Pringle, who is getting more and more nervous because of the old man's unexpected refusal, starts procrastinating in a neurotic way, ordering his pile of paper, dipping his pen in the ink, writing the date of the encounter, as if to assert his frustrated desire to act, while instead he can only sit there, impotent, "awaiting word" (*HP*: 1). In this passage, narrated by a third person omniscient narrator but focalized by Mr Pringle, Mungo is mentioned only in a brief reference to the place he lives in, his garret, and to the table on which he would habitually perform his vital and spiritual functions, respectively eating and laying out his Bible. Lying in his bed and keeping silent, the old black man is nothing but an absence. His soul could not be further away from the persevering abolitionist who holds the paper and the ink in his hands and who is impatient to write. Doubt about whether the writing of Mungo's autobiography will really bring him home already begins to take shape in Mr Pringle's mind, as well as in that of the reader.

Mr Pringle paid Mungo in advance for the account of his life as a slave, and Mungo has accepted the payment: a pact in which words should be exchanged with money has been established between them, or so at least the zealous abolitionist seems to think. Indeed, Mr Pringle is convinced that he has acted well and in good faith, and that the exchange he has proposed to the black man is an honest one. He has established an equation between money

and words, apparently neutral means in an exchange based on transparency and sincerity. That is why he expects that the truth, or rather the "word" which he sits "awaiting" (*HP*: 1) should come out of the mouth of his investment ("'Something must be said,' Mr Pringle urges, 'there must be a story'", *HP*: 1). That is also why the free indirect representation of his thought ("True, a man, even a nigger, has got to be respectful to other people's charity, though he would prefer to hoard the past and squirrel on it through miserable season", *HP*: 2) shows that he is getting more and more maddened by Mungo's attitude. The only reasonable explanation that he can give to the black man's silence is that the trauma of slavery, the many years of misery in a foreign land, as well as the illness that is plaguing his old age may have turned him into a "ruined archive" (*HP*: 3), and made him dysfunctional.

In spite of the fact that the title of the novel contains the word "progress" there is actually no real progress in the relationship between Mungo and Mr Pringle. As the novel draws to a close, no sensible exchange may be said to have taken place between the two men. Even though Mungo claims that Mr Pringle's request for a beginning breaks over him "with such unexpected passion" that he had to "yield to him immediately" (*HP*: 8), it is clear that the narration that Mungo delivers in the following nine chapters is not destined to be collected by Mr Pringle. His implied reader/ listener is certainly not the eighteenth-century audience of which Pringle would also be part, and therefore Mungo imagines himself to be talking sometimes *to* the ghosts of his African tribe who torment him with memories and a sense of guilt for having survived their massacre, sometimes just *for* them. In the last pages of the novel, Mr Pringle is still waiting and nervously making marks on the same paper on which he had registered the date of his meeting with Mungo ("He draws and re-draws the moon, shading in its crown so that it resembles a skull-capped Jew or Papist. He draws ruptured circles and broken triangles. Collapsed shapes, twisted and ruptured shapes", *HP*: 276). Not a single word has been put down in black on white, and no single step has been made by either man toward the other.

Since Pringle's "awaiting word" (*HP*: 1) encompasses the whole of the novel, this "word" which the Englishman is so impatient to get and Mungo so unwilling to give him may be regarded as the object of the whole book. In fact, the narrative frame contained in the epilogue serves to outline the conflict between two different ways of relating oneself to "word" and therefore to language, incarnated by two characters who occupy two different

position vis-a-vis power and representation. One of them can claim to be a man of his time, whose identity might be described as embedded in a series of discourses on Christianity, rationality, and nationalism. The other is a hybrid subject who has become hybrid by his being simultaneously interpellated and marginalised, or even excluded, by the structures of subjectivation at work in his age. For Mungo, in fact, neither "word" nor "money" are or may ever be neutral in any way, as they are already embedded in a system of power in which he is imprisoned in a marginal role.

The first paragraph of the novel prefigures a scene of interlocution in which the Habermasian idea of *inter-subjective understanding* (Habermas 1981), criticised by Jean-Jacques Lecercle in *A Marxist Philosophy of Language,* gives way to a real *agon* upon language. The novel illustrates and performs a conception of language as activity, in which at least two interlocutors are necessary to produce an utterance. Although Mungo refuses to talk directly to Mr Pringle, Mr Pringle is revealed as his counterpart because, as a matter of fact, without him, he would never have the means to tell, or the reason for telling, his story. Nonetheless, the idea of *agreement*, on which Habermas founds his pragmatics of communication, is firmly denied by the very conditions in which the (missed) encounter between Mungo and Mr Pringle takes place.

Mungo's narration, in fact, does not honour the four universal claims to validity that Habermas describes as the pre-conditions for an act of communication: *intelligibility, truth, sincerity* and *accuracy.* Habermas claims that when these claims are not honoured, and consensus is not reached, we leave the domain of "communicative action" to enter what he calls "strategic action" (Habermas 1981). The strategic quality of Mungo's utterance emerges, nonetheless, not as an individual's precise choice to achieve his goals at the expenses of someone else, but rather as a precondition dictated by the way the interlocution scene has already been informed by power.

The *intelligibility* of Mungo's story is subjected to a paradox. Mungo knows that if he wants to be believed he will have to pretend, and speak in broken, childish, obscure English, as is expected from a semi-civilized black slave with little education. "[Pringle] cannot believe me capable of speech as polished as my teeth once were. No, nigger does munch and crunch the English, nigger does jape and jackass with the language, for he is low brow and ape resemblances", claims Mungo, interpreting what is going in his benefactor's mind (*HP*:

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Neither can Mungo's narration completely fulfil the *truth claim*, not even as a goal. Pringle already shaped the truth of Mungo's story in his mind, and should the words that he may hear from Mungo disrupt his perfect vision, he would either not be able to understand them, or turn a deaf ear to them. For this reason, as Mungo wants to tell him something about Lady Montague, he has to censor himself: "*Mr Pringle is a true gentleman, not the nigger that I am who makes baseness wherever I go, turning gold to dirt by heathen alchemy. To him, a Lady is not ever improper, and if she is, it can never be in print*" (*HP*: 226; italics in original). The "truth" of Mungo's story, to which Mungo himself has access only in a fragmentary and incongruous way, multiplies and escapes from him as he has not real control on the medium of his narration. The story of the characters he talks about follow divergent paths, different versions of the accounts of his life in Africa overlap and contradict themselves, his personal story becomes merges with the history of England, in the same way that Saleem Sinai's story in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* becomes confused with the story of India.

Finally, the *sincerity* and *accuracy claim* are contradicted by the fact that no framework of consensus may be created among the two men. Their access to language and representation are always-already pre-conditioned by their respective positions of marginality and centrality in the discourses of their time. Accuracy is not possible because the set of norms to which the two interlocutors should collectively subscribe is the very object of the contention between them. While Pringle wants to conform to the models and the standards of representation that characterise his age – including William Hogarth's series of engravings – Mungo is convinced that those models are not able to tell the truth about him ("Mr Pringle too will replicate Moll and me in lies, for he believes Mr Hogarth's prints and the dozen pirated versions of them"; *HP*: 275). Mungo is aware that both Hogarth's series and the biography that Mr Pringle is willing to write are embedded in the same cultural system which has turned him into a slave.

The impossibility of reaching a consensus between the two speakers appears determined by the fact that, although it may be true that they have a *lifeword* background which should be the basis of their discussion, their access to this *lifeword* is always-already pre-determined by the condition of their access to language. Mungo is aware that English, a

system which he entered as an outsider,[26] is, like any other foreign language, a "cultural shock" (Lecercle 2006: 51). As will emerge from his account of his life and of his coming into being as an hybrid subject through language, for Mungo language is not compatible with any form of rational agreement. It is rather only through struggle that he may be able to assert himself.

The very title of David Dabydeen's novel may be read as a representation of the struggle for meaning that the novel enacts. *A Harlot's Progress* quotes and re-sites the title chosen by William Hogarth for a series which the English painter himself defined as the first of his "modern moral subjects" (Paulson 2003: 27). Both the word "Harlot" and the word "Progress" are open to a series of conflicting identifications and interpretations according to who utters them. The following analysis will be structured as a reflection on how the title comes to signify at least three different things, from the perspective of Mr. Pringle, that of Mungo, and that of a twenty-first century reader, for whom the word "progress" has become one of the key terms of modernity, with quite different connotations from those it had in Hogarth's time. In the first part of the chapter the main issue will be the way in which Mr Pringle tries to replace the figure of the Harlot with that of Mungo in a composition that partially follows the same pattern as Hogarth's series. The second part will deal with Mungo's own appropriation of the role of the Harlot. His own description of his progress in what he calls "The New World of Whiteman" (*HP*: 36) will be expedient for a deconstruction of the system of representation by which Pringle may try to frame his story as a progress. Finally, in the last section, the main issue will be the representation of progress and modernity – in the customary sense for contemporary reader – emerging from Mungo's work of deconstruction.

"A Harlot's progress": Mr Pringle's perspective

Very little information is provided about the character of Mr Pringle in the novel. Even though Mr Pringle demands to know all about Mungo, Mungo, despite his ardent desire, is not allowed to ask a single question of the man who is sitting in front of him:

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26 The African language that he spoke in his childhood is not taken into consideration in the novel, as Mungo, who is above all a hybrid subject, has forgotten it. The object of his analysis is therefore Mungo's access to English.

Sometimes I want to appreciate more of him, but it is not my place to ask questions of his intimate life. Young in face, his eyes steady, his hand steady, a mask of composure, his heart and mind confirmed in Christ, and yet what is it that has so afflicted him that he comes to me for relief? Why his obsession with ruin? What dreadful thing has happened to *his* mother that makes him seek of me the story of my mother? What conflagration has engulfed *his* family that he insists on knowing my Ellar, my Kaka and others of my tribe? I sense that he carries an epic pain with him, but I am a black man, it is not my place to enquire, much less be ambitious of writing an Englishman's history (*HP*: 276).

There is an insurmountable asymmetry between the two men, an asymmetry to which Mr Pringle does not seem to pay attention, but which in fact prevents Mungo from really getting in touch with his interlocutor. Just as money can flow only from Mr Pringle to Mungo, words are not allowed to flow other than from Mungo to the abolitionist. Mungo, and therefore his implied readers/ listeners, are forever excluded from the possibility of enquiring or of knowing the other as a peer.

If Mungo cannot access Mr Pringle's individual story, he can, nonetheless, access the chain of enunciations in which the abolitionist's enterprise is embedded. Pringle's utterances, as revealed in the few representations of his thought, are imbued with both Christian and Enlightenment discourses. These discourses connect with the political, the religious, the economic, the social, the financial. Unknown to him, Mr Pringle is a cog in the machine of modernity, a machine that Maria Cristina Fumagalli compares to Medusa, a Gorgon who, "in order to legitimize itself, [..] petrifies those who stand before it, freezing them into a state of [...] perpetual backwardness, primitivism, or non modernity" (2009: 1). This is indeed the role Mr Pringle plays with regard to Mungo. In order to legitimize his own views and to sustain the machine of modernity and progress, Mr Pringle tries to transform Mungo into a primitive, backward other, an other whose threatening potential must be annulled by making him intelligible.

For Pringle, making sense of the other implies the possibility of including Mungo in his predetermined logical scheme. Mungo's story is framed within a structure that is already culturally determined, encompassing a beginning, a middle and an end. Before the two men start talking, as a matter of fact, Pringle has already outlined the story of Mungo's progress around a series of sense-making turning points:

Mr Pringle begins to write Mungo's murmurings into an epic, the frame of which he has already constructed in his mind. All he awaits are the droolings of a decrepit nigger. He has invested in an

expensive leather-bound notebook in which to record Mungo's story. It creates an image of dignity and professionalism which his previous loose-leafs of paper lacked. Although Mungo has uttered only cryptically so far and threatens to expire in body and speech at any moment, Mr Pringle does not regret his investment. He is, at heart, a Christian, and believes in the inexhaustible generosity of the Almighty Divine, that He will deliver up Mungo's true character and adventures, howsoever in the telling blemished by frailty of mind and heathen grammar. Mr Pringle, as the humble instrument of the Divine, will purge the story of its imperfections, to reveal Mungo in his unfallen state. He will wash the Aethiop white, scrubbing off the colours of sin and greed that stained Mungo's skin as a result of slavery.

He orders his notebook with a series of chapter headings:

1 Africa.
2 Voyage to the Americas in Slave Ship.
3 Plantation Labour.
4 Voyage to England with Captain Thistlewood.
5 Service in the Household of Lord Montague.
6 Purchase of Mungo by Mr Gideon, a Jew.
7 Debauched by Service to Moll Hackabout, a Common Prostitute.
8 Descent into the Mire of Poverty and Disease.
9 Redemption of Mungo by the Committee for the Abolition of Slavery.

He crossed them out and begins again.

1 The Beloved Homeland of My Birth: Africa
2 Paradise Lost: The Terrors of my Expulsion to the Americas in the Bowels of a Slaveship.
3 The Pitiless Sun: My Plantation Travails.
4 etc., etc. (*HP*: 6-7)

To Mr Pringle the structure of Mungo's story, and therefore the possibility of packaging it in a way that would be acceptable and appealing to its potential reader is even more important than Mungo himself. The ill man is addressed in Pringle's thought as a "decrepit nigger" and his utterances, which differ significantly from the structure already outlined in the young abolitionist's mind, are dismissed as "droolings" (*HP*: 6).

Although Mr Pringle's unwritten book would certainly report on its cover that Mungo is the narrator of his own story, the above quoted list reveals that the story, and the way it leads to Mungo's salvation, is much more important than Mungo *per se*. Mungo is only a character who has been put at the centre of the composition for the benefit of a reader whose interest may be aroused by the morbid plot or whose pity may be induced by the touching conversion which the story certainly displays. Mungo will be the object of the reader's curiosity in the same way Mary/Moll Hackabout figures at the centre of Hogarth's composition to please and gratify a spectator who may take pity on her, or be captivated by

her beauty, or just intrigued by her story.

Mungo's story, as conceived by Mr Pringle, also joins the story of Hogarth's Harlot Mary/Moll Hackabout in a more significant way than that suggested by the casual encounter outlined in point 7 of the list he drafts or in his complicity in her betrayal of the wealthy Jewish lover depicted on plate 2 of Hogarth's series. The stories of both characters, in fact, reiterate the very same structure. They both begin in a state of innocence. Just like Mungo in Pringle's scheme figures in his uncorrupted state in "the beloved homeland of [his] birth" (*HP*: 7), in plate 1 of Hogarth's series Moll/Mary is represented as a young woman from the countryside adorned with the symbols of purity and good will (a rose in her bosom, a light dress to highlight her purity, scissors and a pincushion hanging on her arm). Their fall should be imputed to the unfortunate encounters they have during their life, as well as to the corruption of their society. Guilty for Mungo's fall are the Jewish merchant Mr Gideon and the "common prostitute" Moll Hackabout. Instead, those held to be blameworthy for Moll/Mary's fall are the procuress Elizabeth Needham, who intercepts the young woman upon her arrival in London and sacrifices her to the lust of the notorious rake Colonel Francis Charteris[27] while a clergyman turns his back on the scene of corruption (plate 1). A whole lot of suffering follows these ill-fated encounters, paving the way for a possible atonement. Mungo should descend "into the mire of poverty and disease" (*HP*: 6) while Moll faces a life of prostitution (plate 3), prison (plate 4), and syphilis (plate 5). Finally, while Moll's story concludes with her death at the age of 23, Mungo's life is saved thanks to his redemption through being patronized by his benefactors from the Abolition society.

These thematic parallels show that the two narrations are linked insofar as they are produced by the same culturally pre-determined model, that of Christian *progress*, i.e. a model deeply rooted in the concept of *redemption*. Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* is read in terms of a *sacred parody* by the American art historian Roland Paulson, who suggests that Hogarth's use of literary references (John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*) and artistic models (in particular Dürer's woodcuts and engravings from *The Life of the Virgin* and *Life of Christ*)[28]

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27 Although Hogarth's Harlot is a fictional character, other characters were modeled after real-life personalities of Hogarth's age whose features were easily recognizable for the contemporary spectators as they had been the protagonists of notorious scandals.

28 The first plate, representing Mary/ Moll Hackabout's arrival to London and her encounter with a bawd who picks her up for the pleasure of a rake, is reread as a parody of the Visitation. The figures of the Harlot and the bawd, shows Paulson, are clearly modeled after Dürer's representation of the encounter of an hesitant Virgin Mary seeking reassurance for her exceptional pregnancy from her cousin Elizabeth, whose husband

allows for a double reading of the work. With the words "sacred parody", Paulson refers to the carnivalesque medieval practice (cf. Bachtin 1979) of inventing parodic equivalents of prayers, liturgies, or hymns. A constitutive characteristic of parodies is that they are always double-voiced. Sacred parodies not only mock forms of devotion, but also actually perform different forms of devotion whose existence is deeply rooted in a vernacular experience. By the same token, the story of the Harlot is, in Paulson's view, not just a *parody of redemption*, but also a form of *parody as redemption*. The story of the fall of Moll/Mary is also the story of an innocent lamb punished for the sins of somebody else but whose death may contribute in a positive way to the catharsis and salvation of her spectators.

The word "redemption" (from Latin *redimere,* a composite of the prefix *re-* and the verb *emere*, "to buy" and therefore "to buy again",' 'to recover,' see Paulson 2003: 2) is utilised in Christian theology to define mankind's deliverance from sin through Jesus Christ's incarnation, passion, death and resurrection. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed the flourishing of new, rationalist approaches to theology by which *belief*, i.e. the possibility of explaining religion through logic, was beginning to be privileged over *faith*, which is rather based on unconditioned trust in God. In this context, Jesus's teachings were read for their ethical content ("thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself") rather than for their promises of salvation. Nonetheless, as Roland Paulson puts it, [t]he Redemption, whether in beliefs or parody or blasphemy, represented to eighteenth-century Englishmen a story or set of images and symbols that enabled them to cope with fears and anxieties concerning death and what might follow – salvation or damnation or nothing" (Paulson 2003: xvi).

Redemption served as a "set of images" in the work of a deist like Hogarth, too. Paulson argues that the Enlightenment utilized the doctrine of salvation in order to recover its moral teaching. In fact, the doctrine of salvation was appropriated in even more subtle ways, becoming part of a system for the formation and production of subjects, a scheme that was also later transformed into a practice of analysing, structuring and writing history.

From this perspective, the use of the word "progress" in both Hogarth's work and

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stands in the doorway in the same position of the rake depicted in the plate. The rose that Mary wears on her bosom is also a Marian symbol. Plate 3 is reread as a parody of an Annunciation, whereas the figure of Magistrate Johnson coming to the boudoir of Mary to arrest her for prostitution is compared to the Archangel Gabriel announcing the imminent divine birth. Plate 4, in which Mary serves her time in Brideswell and is harassed by the jailer and his wife is compared to the Flagellation, while in plate 5 the pose of the dying Mary Hackabout is a reference to the pose of Mary mourning at the foot of the cross. Finally, the sixth plate, representing Mary's wake, reminds one of Dürer's engraved copy of Leonardo's last supper.

Dabydeen's novel is extremely significant, since it conflates both religious and secular meanings, the latter of which was not yet fully articulated in Hogarth's time. The first usage of the word "progress", which first entered the English language in the late Middle Ages, conveys the idea of a spatial rather than a temporal movement. Derived from the Latin verb *progredior* ("to walk forward", "to move on"), in the late Middle Ages the term designated a state journey or an official tour, especially by royalty. John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the spiritual autobiography of a man seeking his own redemption, sanctions a new metaphorical use of the term, and it is this sense of the term that is the object of Hogarth's parody in *A Harlot's Progress*. The journey forward became a journey of moral growth, personal advancement and redemption. Paradoxically, although its trajectory may seem a straight line, it actually leads, in the end, to the uncorrupted state where it should have begun – that of a human being purified from both his or her sins, including original sin, and perfectly reconciled with God.

"Progress" in a Christian sense unfolds in time rather than in space, a semantic shift that Reinhart Koselleck (2006: 173 ff.) highlights as fundamental for the transformation of "progress" into a modern category, for which the contents of experience and the horizon of expectations did not exist before the eighteenth century. "Progress" replaced the concept of "decadence" (from a golden age) by which pre-modern man defined his relation to time, stressing the idea that mankind is always moving forward and that traditional experiences are outstripped by new ones at an amazing speed. Koselleck also defines "progress" as a trans-personal agency bringing together many experiences (historical, social, technological, etc.) in a single, unified expression. In Koselleck's view, progress is therefore one of the "collective singulars" (2006: 173) which, in the late eighteenth century, multiplied rapidly to subsume ever more complex experiences at an ever higher level of abstraction.

Pringle is convinced that redeeming Mungo – or rather, buying him back with an exchange of money against words – will contribute to the salvation of his own country. Like the Harlot in Hogarth's painting who becomes a sacrificial lamb to deliver her spectators from sin, the narration of Mungo's sufferings will have to "prick the nation's conscience" (*HP*: 144) and "hold up a mirror to the sins" (*HP*: 70) of the English people. Mungo's personal redemption from the life of sin to which Hogarth's series alludes will be instrumental to the redemption of all his contemporaries. In fact, Pringle would not even care for Mungo, if it

weren't for the fact that he expects that he will play some sort of role in the attainment of a greater good. The attitude of Mr Pringle prefigures the passage of the word "progress" from its old religious/spatial/individual meaning to its modern secular/temporal/collective acceptation. The purpose of the novel he is willing to ghost-write is the increase of "the Christian Charity of an enlightened citizenry" (*HP*: 5). To reach this target he couples the language of the doctrine of salvation with the language of profit, development, and nationalism. Mungo's progress, in other words, will contribute not just to the moral collective advance – political and economical – of Pringle's nation. Mungo is to "become a crucial instrument to rescue England from his enemies" (*HP*: 144), which are the nations who are benefiting from England's trade in human beings. Mr Pringle's philanthropy is revealed as the "philanthropy plus five percent" which C.R.L. James referred to as an insufficient means for the real emancipation of the slaves in Caribbean plantations (1982: 139).[29] The idea that all men are equal, and that society as a whole might improve with the acknowledgement of such equality, is in fact quite remote from Pringle's point of view.

The question of how Mungo's innocence may be bought back inevitably involves the monetary agreement that he has established with the Abolition society. Mungo will rejoin the "Beloved Homeland of [his] Birth" (*HP*: 7), or at least the state of innocence that preceded his fall by selling his word. If the word that Mr Pringle is expecting from Mungo is the foundation-stone on which this still embryonic machine of progress must be built, it is necessary to understand what kind of philosophy of language forms the basis of Pringle's request and constitutes the reason for his failure.

The word that Mr Pringle wants from Mungo must be a suitable means for an honest exchange. First of all, it is a word which could be easily transformed into a different word without becoming something different. Mungo's scanty vocabulary needs to be improved and the syntax corrected, but this sort of intervention is not perceived as a substantial mediation. Mr Pringle is convinced that he – and not Mungo himself – "will deliver up Mungo's true character and adventure, howsoever in the telling blemished by frailty of mind and heathen grammar"(*HP*: 6). Mungo's English is not adequate to express his story because Pringle considers English a standard language, any deviation from which would be dubious and incorrect. In this sense Pringle's attitude reflects what Lecercle calls the principle of

29 James referred to Cecil Rhodes famous claim "philanthropy is very well in his way, but philanthropy plus five per cent is better" (ibid.).

immanence, i.e. t the idea that the external phenomena which determines an utterance are just secondary and separable from the only standard form of the language. Secondly, the word that Pringle wants is a *functional* word. It is a word which may be put at the service of an informational narration, a narration which will tell about the important facts in Mungo's life (what Jacobson would call the *referential* function), which would move its readers to charity (the *emotive* function), and will convince them of the evil of slavery (the *conative* function).[30] Thirdly, the word Mr Pringle expects is a *transparent* word. Lecercle defines *transparency* as the capacity of language to make itself invisible. A reflection on how Mungo learnt English or on the way he mediates his thought within a language which he has learnt as a foreign language is not interesting for Mr Pringle's purposes. By the same token, to Pringle the linguistic changes that Mungo has undergone in his life are completely uninteresting (*synchronicity*), since what he wants is the point of view of a redeemed Mungo, which in fact would be the point of view and the language spoken by Mr Pringle himself. Finally, Mungo's word must be *systematic*. By *systematicity*, Lecercle means the idea that language is a set of rules. The fact that Mungo's word will have to be rephrased with a better grammar is not just a formal issue. Mungo's word will have to reflect the order of the world which this very grammar has established.

Only if the word that Pringle gets from Mungo satisfies all these principles (i*mmanence*, *functionality*, *transparency*, *systematicity*, *synchronicity*) which Lecercle ascribes to a dominant philosophy of language (2006: 64), will this word redeem Mungo. It will, to put it differently, make Mungo's story reversible, so that he may get back to the lost innocence of his childhood, and be delivered from the sins that he has committed in his debauched life. In this way Mungo will serve as a commodity – and therefore usurp the role that had been that of Hogarth's Harlot – to redeem England from its sins and to make it advance in the political and economical struggle against it enemies.

Nonetheless, Mungo presents himself as a sort of friction that would otherwise disturb a world that holds together thanks to its transparency and functionality. Significantly, the expression "ruined archive" which Pringle uses to label Mungo because of his failure to utter (*HP*: 3), is also used by Mungo to talk about himself, assuming a very different value in the black man's mouth. While Mr Pringle's vision of Mungo as a ruined archive is tainted by his

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30 cf. Jakobson 1966

idea that Mungo will not be a good investment, for Mungo, being a ruined archive means elaborating an account of sorts, of the many passages, or rather mediations, that brought him to such a state of ruin. "I would be the ruined archive of our tribe, but also his resurrected expression, writing the discovery of the New World of Whiteman", declares Mungo (*HP*: 36), suddenly defying Mr Pringle's expectations. If a story of any sort is to be told, that story will run counter to Pringle's expectations about identity and alterity. Mungo will focus not on his being an outsider in eighteenth-century England, but rather on the alterity of eighteenth-century England from his own point of view.

4.3. "A Harlot's Progress": Mungo's perspective.

Each of the nine parts of the novel – but not the prologue, whose focalizer is Pringle rather than Mungo – begins with one of these random fragments taken from Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress*: a young black page with a turban holding a teapot; the leg of a small table from which a fragile porcelain tea set is falling onto the floor; a young man doing a shushing sign with his right hand; a mask and the corner of a frame lying on table; a woman pouring water; a little monkey running away with some frills on its head; the puzzled expression on the face of a richly dressed gentleman with a cup and a saucer in his hand; a sick woman with a cloth wrapped with a shroud about her, a mean-looking woman stealing clothes from a younger one, winking at theft. Dissociated from the original whole, these fragments do not become part of a meaningful composition. Even the link to the text is not made explicit. The link between image and word which in Hogarth's series played a central role in the sense of the story[31] – Hogarth is sometimes even credited for creating a precursor of strip cartoons (Meskin 2012: xxi) – is completely broken.

By the same token, Mungo lays bare the fiction beneath the sequentiality of Hogarth's and Pringle's narrations and breaks up the illusion of truth that both works convey through image and word. He deterritorializes these representations thus freeing them from the constraints of their previous coding. The reader is challenged to abandon his previous knowledge about the story of Hogarth's Harlot and to see it from the fragmentary, deformed

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31 Words contribute significantly to the sequentiality of Hogarth's work. They define the setting of the Harlot's imprisonment – that is, the prison of Bridewell – and her illness, and her tomb explained that she died aged 23

and marginal perspective of a character who is probably the only remaining witness who can tell something about the events that led to Mary/Moll Hackabout death.

Both Hogarth's series of engravings and Dabydeen's novel may be called "parodies", although in very different ways. Hogarth's parody was discussed by Paulson as a sacred parody, and therefore read as a double-voiced discourse whose end may also be the redemption that it parodies. Dabydeen's novel is a post-modern parody in the sense highlighted by Linda Hutcheon. The American scholar argued that "through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference" (1990: 93). Hutcheon claims that although among many critics "[t]he prevailing interpretation is that postmodernism offers a value-free, decorative, de-historicized quotation of past forms and that this is a most apt mode for a culture like our own that is oversaturated with images" (1990: 94), post-modern parodies are endowed with the potential for strong epistemological and political critique. Hutcheon insists that parody serves as an instrument to *politicize* representation, illustrating the ways that interpretation is ultimately ideological. Parody unsettles all doxa, all accepted beliefs and ideology.

Mungo openly asserts that his task is to put into question Pringle's construction ("I envy Mr Pringle his quest for tidiness, but the truth is otherwise," *HP*: 111), although in fact he is also unable to provide any ultimate version of the truth either, and he even explicitly states that part of his story is a fabrication ("I can change memory, as I can change my posture", *HP*: 2). The object of the black man's critique is Pringle's mode of emplotment: no matter how rational, sense-making and economical it may be, Mungo questions its validity as a cognitive instrument for reaching the truth of what Kowaleski-Wallace defines as "not simply a story to be told, but a series of messy, overlapping narratives in which competing voices still struggle for dominance" (237). The slave trade is too complex and composite to be somehow compatible with the desire for closure which inspires Mr Pringle.

Mr Pringle is so engrossed in his desire to see the truth of Mungo's story that he ignores that the issue of people's commodification goes even further than the slave trade. Mungo's dependence on Pringle's money is not a minor detail for the black man. Money puts Mungo in a condition of dependency which reiterates the condition of slavery that the white man wants to oppose: "Mr Pringle wants to hear, first about Captain Thistlewood, then about

Lord Montague, and if I do not tell he will make hunger press upon my stomach not by iron weights (for England was barbarous then, without the benefit of commerce) but by the lightest of coins" (*HP*: 180-81). The situation replicates a form of submission. Mungo's benefactor, even if a Christian and an abolitionist, can easily slide into the role of the slaver, setting and controlling the rule of an exchange in which Mungo initially occupies the weaker role.

Remaining silent to Mr Pringle's reprimands, Mungo becomes, for a moment, "master of the situation" (*HP*: 1). His dishonest way of dealing with the pact, so to speak, makes him similar to Caliban who, for Lamming, "plots murder against Prospero not in hatred but out of a deep sense of betrayal" (Lamming 1992: 15). As long as he does not give his words to the man who has paid for them, he creates a situation in which the asymmetry of power goes, for a while, in his favour. He compares the arts of narrating to the art of prostitution that Moll practised: "Moll's hands were deft as she made knots and stays with silken cords, until her client was decorously trussed. She was as skilled with thongs as any grammarian is with language" (*HP:* 55). Like Moll, he tries entrap Pringle to frustrate his desire, although he knows that this pleasure of his (and of Moll's) is not destined to last: "[b]ut all was an illusion of restraint, for her client still twisted and strained rankly" (*HP*: 55), reports a disillusioned Mungo, aware of who has the whip in hand to wield over him.

Mungo seems to know better than Mr Pringle the implications of any form of mediation – financial, monetary, cultural, linguistic – because mediation played a central role in his life. It is precisely because of the many processes of mediation that he has undergone and partially failed in his life that he cannot identify his "word" with the "word" that the young abolitionist would have him utter. Mungo was born in Africa, spoke an African language, was captured and deported on a slave-ship, and then spent more than thirty years of his adult life in England. Forever deprived of his family and of his tribe, who were killed during the raid in which he was enslaved, Mungo does not belong either to what he calls "the world of Whiteman", for his black skin acts as an indelible sign of his difference. Mungo is not even allowed to be a "mimic man" in the sense that Homi Bhabha and V.S. Naipaul have outlined. Even though Mungo is better educated than many English people of his time – and as much in the passage quoted above, asserting his perfect knowledge of the King James Bible – he cannot even call himself "anglicized" (Bhabha 1994: 128). His role can only be that which Hogarth prepared for him in his engravings, that of an Oriental other paralysed in

stupor and silence.

Mediation is ignored by Mr Pringle on three different levels. First, he ignores the very context in which Mungo has been asked to produce his narrative, and therefore the implications of money and power. Secondly, the man who writes and the man who utters "I" are already separated from the first page of the novel. Pringle's intervention in the ghost-writing of the slave-narrative would be a major one, to the point that the truth to which he aspires will be nothing but the production of his own imagination. Thirdly, the man who utters "I" is different from the man who writes not only because they are actually two different persons, but also and foremost because Mungo is also unable in any way to perceive himself as a unified subject. To relate anything about himself, Mungo will in fact have to relate information about a multiplicity of persons: "I had many beginnings, all of them marked by a long and futile wailing – not from my mouth but from my father's", claims Mungo (*HP*: 27). In his life he had to be many different people: the child of a dead African warrior, the secret lover of a slave-ship captain, a slave put on sale on the slave market, a pet for the company of an annoyed aristocratic woman, a page in an engraving that would be replicated in thousands of copies, an old man lying in a garret and trying to recollect his past with an effort of memory and imagination. All these identities are associated with a different first name: Mungo is called Perseus, Noah, and by other names that he is not even able to recollect. Besides, all of these different identities are marked by Mungo's entering into a different regime of signs, and into a different relation to language, power and representation. Therefore, the language he speaks – or rather the language he is spoken by – reflects this sedimentation of beginnings and identities.

Throughout the novel, Mungo also speaks in different voices. Even though he is the main focalizer for most of the novel (with the clear exception of the prologue, which is mostly told from Mr Pringle's point of view), the author oscillates inadvertently between a first- and third-person narrator as if he were not in control of his own voice. His linguistic identity is characterized by great instability. In the beginning of the novel he claims: "I can write my story for myself, for I have imbibed many of your mannerisms of language, and the King James Bible is at hand to furnish me with such expressions as could set your soul aglow with compassion for the plight of the Negro" (*HP*: 5). Later on he assumes the kind of voice that Pringle would expect from him: "Pa is far. He is never here. He is tilling field or fighting

war." (*HP*: 11). It is always through the voice of the Other that Mungo speaks.

The narrative that Mungo produces about his many passages and his many beginnings is a narrative about words, and about how he entered language and was interpellated by it. Mungo's subjectivation is depicted as a process that leaves him entangled in a series of paradoxes and contradictions. He is a hybrid subject in a world that denies his hybridity, and as such he can inhabit language only in certain ways that are allowed to him in his condition. His ability to speak a language is determined by the conditions of the speaking.

The most significant, and the most explicit narrative about Mungo's entering the language is told in the episode of Mungo's branding on the slave-ship of Captain Thistlewood. Mungo has been brought to Thistlewood's ship after Thistlewood, participating in a raid in which all the members of Mungo's tribe were killed, apart from Mungo himself. The encounter with Thistlewood marks for Mungo the beginning of a new life, a life in which, nonetheless, the ghosts of his dead brethren will keep haunting him, accusing him of responsibility for their destruction – the disgrace is believed to have been brought on the tribe because Mungo has transgressed the tribal rules in venturing into the Katran bush, the place of the dead – or reproaching him, or just talking to him as if they were still part of his life. The reason why Thistlewood spared Mungo, as will be explained later, is that Thistlewood is attracted to Mungo with a passion that will drive him completely mad.

Captain Thistlewood emerges as a duplicitous character, both a saviour ("When for the first time in my life I opened my eyes, a whiskered face loomed over me" says Mungo as soon as he recovers from the shock of the raid, *HP*: 46) and a torturer. Thistlewood is a deeply disturbed man, a sadist and a paedophile, unable to control his passionate love for Mungo but capable of expressing it only through a series of unspeakable violences, mixing beating and rape with kisses, tears and pleas for forgiveness. In his mind, Mungo is convinced that Thistlewood not only killed his mother, but also, as the ghost of his tribesman Ellar suggests to him, that he actually ate her: "'Don't you remember? You saw it all, you were chained a few yards from her. Each night the Captain came below to feed on your mother, a little at a time. Her toes. Her feet. Her ankles. Her legs. Only her torso was left, fixed to floor by irons at her neck and hands" (*HP*: 121). Yet the killing of the mother is a prelude to Thistlewood's becoming Mungo's new father, as Mungo calls him on more than one occasion.[32]

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32 See, for example; "And yet they were not fully human, for none were baptised in the body of Christ, none reiceived the sacrament from Captain's Thistlewood's, my father" (*HP*: 49); or: "And Captain Thistlewood,

The scene of Mungo's branding suggests, significantly, that Thistlewood, more than just a paternal figure, becomes for Mungo what Jacques Lacan called "the name of the Father". He incarnates, differently put, the agent who marks the passage of Mungo from the regime of the Imaginary, that of the identification with the body of the mother, to that of the Symbolic, i.e. of the law:

> One day with a kind hand Captain tie my limbs and stuff my mouth with cloth. He light the coal pot, put a brand in it and when it shine red he raise it to my head. I faint with the shock and when I wake I faint once more with the smell of my own burnt flesh. Captain care me for days and days, rub oil in my skin to cool it and wet it with kiss, till I grow well, and then he fetched glass for me to see how he mark my forehead, TT, and his voice is love as I gaze at the strange bites, and he tells me soon Cross will join Cross when the flesh heal and stretch, and that I am now in life, and will be in death, his own. (*HP*: 66-67)

Mungo, who is the first person narrator of this passage, speaks in broken English, as if to highlight his powerlessness towards the doings of his master, Captain Thistlewood. Mungo, also bound to Captain Thistlewood by a love which Mr Pringle will never be able to understand or to put into words, submits to the act of branding because he has come to think that what the white man is doing to him may also be the prerequisite of his salvation.

The scene of the branding represents Mungo's subjectivation not as a result of an unfinished process of interpellation, but rather as a very definite moment in time, as if it could be conceived as a sort of rite of initiation. Mungo is initiated into language in the liminal space of a slave-ship, where he is completely removed from his old tribe but not really assimilated to a new context. This episode thus becomes a pivotal moment in Mungo's life. Mungo accepts that he must submit to the ritual performed by Thistlewood, and therefore accept his subjection (*sensu* Foucault) as the very pre-condition of his existence. He knows that, by having been singled out to perform this ritual, he will later acquire a capacity to act that his fellow slaves, chained in the holds of the slave-ship, will never be able to attain. Later in the novel, he will declare himself grateful for this initiation, and will even come to fear emancipation as a "terrifying freedom" (*HP*: 257)

Mungo calls the ceremony of the branding a wedding, because it establishes his communion with Captain Thistlewood, but also a baptism. "TT", the symbol that Captain Thistlewood's impresses upon Mungo's forehead to mark his entry into the white man's

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who fathered and delivered me onto a knowledge of Christ." (*HP*: 51).

world, recalls, significantly, a double sign of the cross. The black man's forced embrace of the Christian faith has turned him into a Creature of God: "I consumed the Eucharist on board and came to the knowledge that our true slavery was temporary slavery to death, our true freedom the acquisition of a soul manacled eternally to the will of God", says Mungo (*HP*: 51). The "TT" makes him similar to the white man, who is no less of a slave than he is, chained to his Christian consciousness and to the pastoral power exerted by the Church.

Thistlewood's "TT" is a syncretic sign because it combines both a Christian and a Euclidean significance. Thistlewood's "TT", which will become a Greek *Pi* "when the flesh heal and stretch" (*HP*: 67), also inaugurates Mungo's access to the language of logic, geometry, and rationality that the white man uses to decipher, classify, and conquer the world. Mungo comes to see geometry and faith as inseparably linked. "Only when the Christian came were we told that there was science to our suffering", he says, as he begins to see the word as a rational creation, where faith and logic concur to explain the sufferings of humankind (*HP*: 47). He becomes so convinced of this new order of the world that he even begins to despise his fellow Africans who do not realize its perfection: "If my African brethren still languish in a world of sensation in spite of your proselytizing, it is because they prefer chaos to the symmetry of Christian truth" (*HP*: 48).

Mungo is forced to enter the world of logic with the aid of Thistlewood's brute force. Yet Thistlewood's acts of force are not an external supplement to his teaching but rather a manifestation of the violence which is already implicit in language. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari claimed in their "Postulates of Linguistics" (cf. Deleuze 2004), the basic enunciation of language is the order-word, and any order-word is already joined to other orders, like in a self-sustaining machinic assemblage. The purpose of language, as the two philosophers claim, is not to give information, or be believed, but rather to make others obey. The authority of geometry to explain or of grammar to describe a language does not derive from their apparently neutral, informative quality, but from the fact that they are supported by a system of order-words from which derives their power to transform and act upon reality. The discourse of geometry orders, commands, decrees: its performative power is not a consequence of information, but it rather imposes semiotic coordinates in which the subject positions him- or herself and builds his or her relationship to the world.

The scene of Mungo's rebirth on the ship replicates in an interesting way the scene of coming into being of an hybrid subject through violence of the whip which Edward Kamau Brathwaite described in the section titled "Caliban" of his long poem "Limbo". "Stick is the whip/ and the dark deck is slavery" (III, *l.*20-21), says the collective, lyric voice in Brathwaite's poem to describe how the violence of the slaver is transformed by the slaves performing a limbo dance on the deck of the slave-ship. The limbo dance appropriates the slaver's brutality to transform it into a new, empowering dance allowing the newly-born subject to re-emerge as a different person after the Middle Passage, or to go "up/ up/ up"(*l.*44-46) after having been "down/ down/ down"(*l.*34-36). The deported people in Brathwaite's poem enter the language of their master by breaking it up and adapting it to the rhythm of an African dance, envisioning for themselves the possibility of inhabiting it in a different way. In Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress*, the Middle Passage instead appears as the passage of a single man. No newly created community will accept Mungo after Thistlewood has given him a treatment of favour. In fact, even if Mungo introjects the discipline of Thistlewood's teaching, he will never really become a full subject, capable of acting and interacting in what he calls "the New World of Whitemen" (*HP*: 36).

Mungo highlights the ambiguity of his own situation by explaining to the astonished washerwoman who is in charge of him after his arrival in England that "Euclid […] calculated, even before the birth of Jesus, that parallel lines will never meet. The godly and the savage are one, but will never meet" (*HP*: 107). According to the teaching he has received from Captain Thistlewood, Euclid's calculation is not just a statement of fact, but rather the result of a way of ordering the world, whereas the word "ordering" both signifies "commanding" – as any form of teaching is also to be understood as an exertion of power – and "arranging". Euclidean geometry and faith have joined in a machine that has created the "savage" (ibid.) as the other, and his identity will have to be kept separated from that of the godly. The question of where Mungo should be positioned in this dichotomy remains highly problematic. His baptism on the slave-ship made him a Christian. Yet, if the godly and the savages are like parallel lines destined never to meet, then Mungo's transgression of the order-word/ order of the world carried by Thistlewood's teaching will put him in a deeply contradictory situation, the articulation of which is the object of his whole narration.

The Middle Passage which has transformed Mungo into a new subject has put him in a

very problematic relation to the word. Language appears from Mungo's perspective not as the ideal system that Pringle has in his mind but rather as a very complex, heterogeneous and even contradictory phenomenon. Language, in other words, is embedded in a materialist philosophy that Jean-Jacques Lecercle describes as diametrically opposite to the dominant philosophy of language of which Mr Pringle is a bearer.

First of all, from Mungo's perspective, following what Lecercle calls the principle of *non-immanence*, "it is impossible to separate language from the world in which it emerges and of which it is an integral part" (2006: 70). Mungo is aware of this because he is a bilingual speaker, although he has almost forgotten the language of his tribe. He knows that by entering into Captain Thistlewood's language he has also accessed a new system of beliefs and representation. Similarly, he knows that his experiences in his African village cannot be narrated in the language of Mr Pringle, not just because of a matter of etiquette and convention – the image of his tribe that emerges from his narration is rather promiscuous, and quite far from the ideal of innocence that Mr Pringle would like to describe in his book – but also because the language of Mr Pringle expresses a fundamentally different kind of system of thought. As Mungo, inspired by the smell coming from Captain Thistlewood's cabin, is suddenly reminded of his lost homeland, he realizes that sensory experience cannot be translated in English. He can only communicate his experience to the ghost of his tribespeople, in the tribe's lost language: "And the smells and tastes of our village so revive our senses that speech returns, not in the grunting of whiteman but in the melody of our language" (*HP*: 99). So their memories of home are left untranslated in a language that cannot be understood by anybody but them because the experiences they are talking about cannot possibly be described in any other way.

Secondly, for Mungo, language is dysfunctional. According to what Lecercle calls *principle of dysfunctionality*, "[l]anguage is not an instrument at the speaker's disposal. It is an experience and an activity; it is not an object distinct from speakers and manipulated by them" (2006: 70). The fact that he cannot really use it as a tool is strictly dependent on the non-immanence of language, i.e. on the fact that a language already carries a vision of the world, or also carries, as emerged in the episode of the branding performed by Thistlewood, a way of ordering the world. When Mungo speaks English, his statements are guided by the language that speaks him, giving shape and meaning to his experiences. It is not Mungo who speaks

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English, but English that speaks Mungo, making him assume the point of view and the linguistic mannerism of eighteenth-century speakers of English.

Thirdly, language is never transparent for Mungo and it can never annihilate itself in the telling of his tale. Lecercle calls this the *principle of opacity*: "The speaker negotiates her expression with her language: we say what our language allows us to say; we speak with – but also against – our language; and the meaning of our utterance is always a compromise between what we would like to say and what we discover [...] that we actually did say" (2006: 71). The opacity of language is made into one of the main motifs throughout Mungo's narration because language is the very site of his hybridity. Speaking through the voice of the other and dismantling the other's position from within make Mungo transform the major language spoken by Pringle into a minor language (cf. Deleuze 1986).

Fourth, language emerges as a material (*principle of materiality*) and as an historical (*principle of historicity*) phenomenon. Language is a material phenomenon insofar as it is "not separable from its realization in the form of speech or performance", in the sense that "an utterance is always a vector of power" (Lecercle 2006: 71). This is the teaching of Mungo's subjectivation through the branding of his forehead. Also, this is the point that Mungo makes when he refuses to speak to Mr Pringle: the very issue at stake is indeed an assertion of power.

Fifth and sixth, language emerges from Mungo's narration as partially systematic (*principle of partial systematicity)*. By saying that language is not wholly systematic, and therefore not completely inscribed in the set of rules outlined in grammar and linguistics, language emerges as a "set of sub-systems or partial systems in continuous variation" (Lecercle 2006: 71), the sedimentations of which depend on the very historicity of its performances. The fact that Mungo cannot be contained in the order of the world that language simultaneously fashions and expresses, allows him, with his hybrid performance, to break the set of rules that Pringle has prepared for him and to put the English language in a state of continuous variation.

It is against the backdrop of these characteristics that Mungo's refusal to speak to Mr Pringle is to be read. Mungo refuses communication insofar as communication would make him transparent and relegate him, along with the contents of his experience, to the margins of representation, disempowered of his capacity to unsettle the language and the culture he speaks. By re-semanticising the scheme of Progress that Pringle has prepared for him, Mungo

makes an even more transgressive move. He not only usurps the position of the Harlot to tell her story of moral fall from a minor (*sensu* Deleuze) perspective. Significantly, he also gets out of the role in which representation has framed him and occupies the very place of the reader/observer. It is from this external perspective that he produces a deconstruction/ deterritorialization of the narratives of 'Progress' that order not only his experience but also the way his epoch is beginning to represent itself.

Mungo's enigma of arrival and the novel's post-colonial, post-modern critique of Progress

"Forget the land" (*HP*: 69) and "remember the land"(*HP*: 62): Mungo's journey to England is haunted by these two contradictory orders uttered respectively by Captain Thistlewood and by the ghosts of his lost tribe. Learning English as a foreign language will be for Mungo a exercise of mediation between these two poles. While Thistlewood makes it a condition that to be a new subject he will have to forget everything about his previous life, his fellow tribesmen keep warning him that the uprooting of the pictures of Africa from his memory will be even worse than dying. "'He will not kill you with blows but with new words'", his old friend Manu admonish: "He will plant in your mind pictures of his land and root up ours'" (*HP*: 65). Through the new words that he learns from Thistlewood, Mungo will inhabit a different language and a different horizon of experience, which will make him forever a foreigner among his own people. Manu prophesies that, however beautifully Captain Thistlewood may talk about England, his words will not be a new home for Mungo but rather a mortal prison, where he will soon succumb to their alienating force as he did not succumb to the violence of Thistlewood's whip.

Deciding between remembering or forgetting the land and the language will not, however, be a matter of free choice for him. Mungo's arrival in England will prove so uncanny to Mungo that all the categories that he had built in his mind while on Thistlewood's ship are destined to become blurred. Mungo's first experiences in his new country are even more enigmatic than those depicted in the De Chirico painting described in Naipaul's novel because the landscape around him does not even allow him any possibility for recognition or interpretation. As Captain Thistlewood finally decides to part from him, he is left completely alone in a cold, dark, damp cellar, without the possibility of seeing or being seen. When Betty,

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the washerwoman who has taken him into his custody, takes him out of the cellar Mungo seems already aware that in that place he will not even be recognized as a human being. "'Are you going to eat me?'" (*HP*: 106) he asks her, moved by a sincere fear. Betty appears from the first pages on to be an extremely naïve woman, debasing herself by doing what she considers to be the most demeaning among all chores: the washing of the "nigger boys" (ibid.) who are later going to be sold on the slave market. Although she says to Mungo, "This is England, everything makes sense" (*HP*: 136), she has not got much sense herself. She lives in the fear of the ghost of Mary, a younger woman who lived with her and whose story seems likely to follow the same pattern of moral fall as Mary/Moll Hackabout. She cannot count and she is sincerely distressed to hear that the young man in front of her knows much more than she does, and that he understands Euclidean geometry as well.

Later, as Betty goes on telling her and Mary's story, her narration becomes even more complex and enigmatic. If Mungo declares himself content to have escaped the ramblings of his fellow tribespeople because "[t]he world of logic was promised, the logic, however cruel, of slavery" (*HP*: 111), Betty's narration throws him in a further state of confusion. She contradicts herself, proving to Mungo that she can indeed count, confessing to cheating Mary on the soap, and of being guilty of what the young woman was accused of. Later on the story takes another different path, and she explains that she accused Mary because she was in love with a Jew who evidently preferred the younger and more attractive woman to her. Her story evades her, embracing the ordinary stories of thousands of women of her time and overlapping with the story of the Harlot in Hogarth's engravings as well as with the story told in novels like Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722): the threat of deportation, the prison, the fall into immorality and prostitution, slavery.

The enigma of Mungo's arrival involves not only the unease of a hybrid subject who finds himself at odds in a foreign world and in a foreign language, but also casts light on the contradictions of an epoch that is in a process of change and that perceives Mungo's hybridity as a potential threat to his stability. As Mungo befriends Betty, he suddenly realizes the validity of Manu's warning that "[a]ll the descriptions of his [Thistlewood's] land are false, he speaks noble and beautiful words, but he has been at sea for centuries, and England has coarsened in his absence" (*HP*: 66). When Mungo refers to "the New World of Whiteman" (*HP*: 36), he does not refer to England as "New" only because it was unknown to him before

he ever met Captain Thistlewood. England is new because it is entering a new phase in its history, a phase which will later be labelled as "modernity".[33] Major historical, political, and economic changes are about to take place in eighteenth-century England as well as in the rest of Western world, paving the way for what will later be known as "The Age of Revolution". Colonial empires are consolidating themselves, and the cheap labour force of African slaves deported to the West Indies as providers of an abundance of raw material to Europe, prepare the ground for the Industrial Revolution and the growth of a burgeoning capitalist economy. Mungo occupies an unstable position within language, but it is precisely because of this instability that he is able to see through the epistemological changes that are about to take place.

Although the word "progress" was used in the seventeenth century only in the individualist/ spatial/ religious acceptation, as in the title chosen by Hogarth for his series, Mungo engages with the term as if he could foresee the semantic changes that it would later assume. Mungo talks about progress ambiguously, as if he could see that progress is about to become a key term in the experience of modern men, indicating not just a spatial metaphor, but also a way of experiencing and perceiving a new relationship to temporality. Progress is recognized by Mungo as an agent of the changes that threatens a radical transformation in the language and in the experience of his time, a transformation that he would like to elude by eloping with Betty:

> And she [Betty] will speak of hurst and weald and holt, of briar and furze and rush that survive the axe and plough; the memory of England's originality preserved in the curious ancient names for plants and vines (local names that survive the Progress of ships which transformed him into Mungo, Noah, Boy and the like). (*HP*: 151)

In this passage, the word "Progress", significantly written with a capital letter, implies and subsumes two different meanings. The first, and most explicit, is of course the spatial one: the

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33 The word "modernity" is used with reference to the definition provided by Maria Cristina Fumagalli in *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity. Returning Medusa's Gaze*. Fumagalli suggests that a number of "narratives of modernity" are produced in historical, philosophical, economic or even political discourses, and consequently a number of possible beginnings of modernity have been suggested (see note 5 chapter 2). "Modernity" is a term that indicates a break in temporarality, the entering of a new phase in history. Whereas the "when" of modernity is rather difficult to pinpoint, Fumagalli argues, the "where", or even the "who", is nonetheless absolutely clear. "Modernity" is an exclusively/ western (European and American) category. Just like the mythical Gorgon, Modernity has the power to petrify its others, immobilizing them into a sort of non-modernity.

ships move forward across the sea and the ocean, while plants and vines remain anchored in the soil and are allowed to preserve their 'original' names. The second meaning implies that "Progress" is a trans-personal agency inextricably linked to the movements of ships, goods, and people and to the global connections between Africa, Europe and the Americas.

In this short passage, Mungo produces a micro-narrative of his life which is completely opposed to Pringle's construction. Mungo does not cede to the temptation of putting himself at the centre of his life and presenting himself as the product of a process of redemption. On the contrary, he emerges as a subject shaped by an external agency completely independent from his will, but rather dependent on the situation in which he finds himself, and on the names which his new fathers give him: "Mungo, Noah, Boy and the like".

Mungo's micro-narrative also discloses that the name "Mungo", with which the narrator has been introduced since the very beginning, is not linked to the black boy's original identity, but is rather a product of "the Progress of ships" (*HP*: 151). Mungo is a nickname that Betty gave him as she did not know what to call him. Although all the ghosts of his African tribe who accompany Mungo throughout his life are always called by their presumably original, African names, Mungo cannot recollect what he used to be called when his village still existed. "So what was I before I came to you?" asks a puzzled Mungo to a perplexed Betty (*HP:* 64). "Don't ask me, you should know. Whatever it was you didn't seem to care. Whenever I called you Mungo you sat up," she replies (ibid.). Significantly, his identity is bound to an order. "Mungo" is what he thought white people called all Africans, and whenever they addressed him as such he immediately responded to their command. His origin is either irretrievable or non-existent, and Mungo, who has become a hybrid subject, is unable to think about himself outside of the structures of linguistic subjectivation by which he was interpellated as he entered into his new language.

Although the passage suggest that, differently from Mungo, the identity of rural England seems chained to the names of plants and wine which in the local dialect have preserved their original names, neither this dream of stability is allowed to last. Progress will soon eat it up. In fact, Mungo cannot know that the Yorkshire that he pictures as an idyllic place untouched by the passage of time will soon be radically transformed by the very same "Progress of ship" (*HP*: 151) that carried him from Africa to England. Betty's rural homeland will soon become an industrialized area, where the raw cotton fibres coming from the colonial

plantation will be processed and sent again into the same circle to furnish other markets in India, West Africa, China, and the Americas. Betty also reveals that enclosures and hunger is threatening her Yorkshire, which is not an hospitable place for her any more. Betty is herself a product of progress, just like the Harlot in Hogarth's series, of which she claimed that she wore the same clothes and of which she shared the same attitude toward strangers when she came to England in a wagon packed with other Yorkshire girls: "'I wore a stuff frock and a white apron and a tucker over my shoulder and – she will laugh gaily – "a rose in my bosom to catch any stranger's fancy'" (*HP*: 151-52), confesses Betty. Again, Betty unsettles the expectation of the reader who so far has identified her – by Mungo's physical descriptions and by her account of the role she played in the events that brought about the hanging of her younger assistant Mary – with the maid who in plate 3 of Hogarth's series attends to Mary/ Moll Hackabout. Betty is also another version of the story of Hogarth's harlot.

Progress threatens rural England not only with the imminence of the Industrial Revolution, but also by the disorder caused by Mungo, whose effects are most devastating on the character of Captain Thistlewood himself. The places that the old Captain had painted as a locus of reason and harmony in his account of them to Mungo become the very theatre of his own ruin. As the old captain leaves Mungo, the world he had constructed with the precision of geometry and with the exactitude of a seasoned tradesman – he loved to contemplate with Mungo the perfection of the triangle binding together Africa, England and the Americas and the globe so perfectly defined within this triangle – crumbles like a house of cards. It is his passion for the black boy that disrupts all Thistlewood's certitudes and makes him – or at least one of the paths that Thistlewood's story takes, since the other one leads to madness and suicide in a different way[34] – retire and go progressively mad in an estate in the countryside. Far from living the life of a wealthy landowner which most retired tradesmen of his time would lead, Captain Thistlewood embraces a state of disorder and uncouthness:

> And if you go to Hampstead, and come upon his estate – as Moll and I once did – you will see scenes of such desolation that you will be convinced by Mr Pringle's account. It is a veritable jungle, the gardens grows wild, the house strangled by vines. Captain Thistlewood has courted ruin, revelling in a disdain for Progress. Whilst others of his rank plant and embellish and gentrify, he presides over weeds. Whilst other stock their land with deer, he encourages mole, polecat, sow – beasts of no status or value, beasts that stink or maul or scavenge. Those who have seen him are few, for he has withdrawn from polite and vulgar society. The odd tradesman who serves him with candlewax or

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34 See footnote 23.

tobacco reports a creature overgrown with hair. His eyes are lowered as he addresses you in the modest voice of a woman. The more superstitious of his neighbours speak of him as a witch, and only his reputation as one of England's formidable sea-captains, a true patriot in the service of commerce, saves him from harm. (*HP*: 111)

Captain Thistlewood is said to live in "disdain for Progress" when it comes to the advancement of "others of his rank" who "plant and embellish and gentrify" (ibid.). Nonetheless, it is clear that his disdain is addressed mostly against the way the world is turning in the direction outlined by the ships he once presided. His choice is one of a decadence which opposes the discourses on advancement that will later be developed to accompany and define his modernity.

Mungo's own description of progress – and of the modernity in which both his personal and mankind's progress in general are embedded – contrasts with the concept of advancement to which it is usually associated, too. "Look at the whitemen, look at what they do," the ghost of his African fellow Manu tells him. "Day and night they work the sea but they catch nothing but wind, they make nothing but speed" (*HP*: 62). The movement of the ship which turns him into "Mungo, Noah, Boy and the like" is to him not a movement forward, but rather an acceleration of his life, which begins to rotate in a vortex of continuous changes and metamorphosis. The same could be said of the sailors, cogs in a machine that devours their labour, chained to toil so that the ship may move. Also for them this movement will prove pointless, and modernity will not bring them any immediate, concrete benefit.

By the same token, Mungo refuses to make sense of his experience in terms of progress. Redemption is not perceived by him as the final achievement of his progress. He refuses to bestow redemption on himself and on his implied reader:

All or part of Mr Pringle's conception of my Progress is, or may be, true, but I will not move you to customary guilt, gentle reader, even though you may crave that I hold up a mirror to the sins of your race. You will reward me with laurel and fat purses for flagellating you thus, especially should I, with impoverished imagination, evoke for you the horrors of the slaveship hold, the chained Negroes, their slobbering, their suffocation, their sentimental condition. No, they laughed, they chattered, they gossiped, they cried, they desired, as they had always done in the villages in Africa. There were chains there too. They merely exchanged their distress for yours, when you packed them on your boat. And perhaps your distress will eventually prove to be more creative: I prophesy a time not when we will sire your kings and queens, nor lead your army into battle, for such is a fool's gold and a counterfeit ambition. I prophesy a time when the love I bore to Moll will be a common compact, that the ache of the nightingale's song will give way to blessed union. It is your love that I greed for, not the coinage of your guilt. (*HP*: 70)

Mungo's revisionist, highly controversial refiguration of the "Progress of ships" (*HP*: 115) that turned millions of Africans into new people claims that "Progress" is neither a movement forward, nor a fall for those who, like him, were uprooted from their homeland. It is just an exchange of old pain for new, a replacement of one submission to one system of signs and order-words with another submission to a different system of signs and order-words.

If Mungo interprets the direction that humankind is following in terms of an exchange, the question about his role in this exchange remains open. In fact Mungo perceives himself both as a disrupting factor in the unfolding of the history of England and as a consolidating figure. "I became an historical and memorable figure in the birth of Democracy in the British realm" (*HP*: 274), claims Mungo. Marginalised and disempowered in the representation that Hogarth made of him, his otherness contained by the representation of him produced in writing and in painting, Mungo is going to become a household character in the society of his time.

The remorse that he attributes to himself for the disruption of his tribe is the same sense of guilt that makes him claim that "a simple nigger like me was deemed to be the undoing of England" (*HP*: 242). Mungo is aware of being a transgressive character. It is his transgression of the order that the Katran bush should not be crossed, as it represents the border between life and death that brought disgrace onto his tribe. By the same token, it is his crossing of the border between "godly" and "savage" (*HP*: 107) established by Thistlewood's teaching that makes him into a potential threat to the order of England.

A crisis arising from his unsettling presence occurs when Mungo, bought by the diplomat Lord Montague to replace a dead monkey in the affection of his wife, rebels against the harassments he has to suffer from the hand of the other house servants who take advantage of his sub-human condition to submit him to any sort of violence. Mungo, who has learnt to his expense that to become free he has to suffer in his body as well as in his soul, decides to cut off his ear and to accuse a maid of the deed. His cut ear becomes, in the eyes of his master Lord Montague, the very ear that Robert Jenkins, captain of a British merchant ship, exhibited to the Parliament to denounce the treachery of Spanish navy, breaking the pacts on the slave trade established with the England and attacking English fleets carrying their business in the Caribbean Sea:

> A war came when a Spaniard ruffian cut off the year of one Mr Jenkins, sailorman and true servant of the King going about his proper business in the Caribbean Sea. And Lord Montague who did go abroad to make peace and spend so much effort to heal whatever sickness grip the foreigner, whatever make him want to rave and froth and bite up like a rabid dog, now face great trouble which undo all his great work. Like the foreigner is chronic, you can't balm him, that thought passed through Lord Montague's mind when he look upon me and see the missing ear. He look on me as if my black art caused the war, that the very hour the dago put a dagger on Mr Jenkins. Oh, how his heart grieve to think of me as evil sprite or at best omen of disaster, for he did not buy me out of true pity reading the crosses on my forehead (which now appear as upside-down crosses, for my growing skin stretch with time, sure mark of devilry. (*HP*: 244)

It is precisely Mungo's gesture of producing his own cut-off ear that makes Lord Montague go out of his mind. It is his fault if the situation between Spain and England, which Lord Montague had tried to protect, crumbles, giving way to what historians will later call "the war of Jenkins' ear".[35] By endorsing the guilt for the war, Mungo deterritorializes the construction of history bequeathed in history books. Mungo disinvests the war of its political and commercial causes and makes them into the scared reaction of an old man who feels threatened by a potential loss of sense.

Mungo decides to leave Lord Montague's house as soon as he to be perceived as a devilish figure: "No, he must rid me for he think I bring chaos to his house, corrupt his wife, and one day I may even rise up to slay him for I have the instincts of a savage, no feathered turban, silk and silver ornament can enslave them for too long" (*HP*: 245). It is under these circumstances that he meets two characters that will later figure, like him, in the series of engravings produced by William Hogarths. Mr Gideon, the Jew whom Hogarth depicted as the wealthy lover of Moll/ Mary Hackabout, figures as a quack doctor who visits Lord Montague's house to offer his cordial to heal an unexplicable disease which is afflicting Lady Montague. Quite the opposite of the mature Jew in Hogarth's painting, Gideon is the director of a sanatorium where he takes in prostitutes suffering from syphilis or other infectious diseases for no other apparent reason than his unconditional love for humankind. It is there, in that place outside of the world that Mungo meets Moll. Moll is not the sinner who appears in Hogarth's painting. On the contrary, Moll appears to Mungo's eyes as the very image of the Virgin whom he saw in the house of Lord Montague.[36] Moll is described as a suffering woman

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35 There is actually a chronological inaccuracy in Mungo's account. The war lasted three years, from 1739 to 1742. Mungo's servitude in the household of Lord Montague precedes his being portrayed by Hogarth, but Hogarth's engravings dates back to 1732.

36 Mungo's observation certainly Paulson's study on the influence of Christian models of representation in

whose illness is not so much a physical as a spiritual one. "As soon as I saw her I recognized the imprisonment of her spirit", Mungo says (*HP*: 265), suggesting that Moll, like him, has been transformed into one of the others of modernity, that she has been imprisoned, like Mungo, by the structures of subjectivation informing their epoch but also excluded by them, never really acquiring the capacity to act freely that a full subject should gain.

Mungo, the Jew, and Moll are equally exiled by a society that does not have a space for them. All of them seek refuge in a place at the margins, not only of the city but also of society. Mungo meets Moll in the Mr Gideon's sanatorium after he escapes Lord Montague's house. The empathy which binds Mungo and Moll together is indeed a feeling going beyond the understanding of Mr Pringle. The love which draws Mungo and Moll Hackabout together, which Mungo hopes will one day become a "common compact" (*HP*: 70), is indeed outside of any kind of social order and outside of any conception of good and evil. It is a love without constraint for which Mungo breaks the law and the Christian commandment by killing Moll to relieve her of her sufferings.

Mungo's critique of language, representation and power opens out into a prophecy and a utopian wish. The provocative claim he makes by saying "I prophesy a time when the love I bore to Moll will be a common compact, that the ache of the nightingale's song will give way to blessed union" (*HP*: 70) suggests that freedom will not be attained through exchange. The oppressed will not be delivered from their sufferings by occupying the power positions which used to be somebody else's. That would just be an illusion of power, since power remains a trans-personal agency which informs a system to which the so-called powerful themselves must also submit to in order to belong to it. Mungo refuses to be at home, preferring to cultivate his isolated deterritorialization, and not submitting to the trap that Pringle has prepared for him. Nonetheless, his choice of deterritorialization prevents him from coming home. Caught in a continuous process of becoming, he manages to deterritorialize the language he speaks, but the movement of deterritorialization is not followed by any reterritorialization of any sort. For this reason, the unfolding of Mungo's story may be interpreted as a successful counter-interpellation but as a failed homecoming.

A Harlot's Progress, like V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, may be defined as a study of exile and of the possibility for a spatial "assignation of residence" (cf. Regard 2002)

Hogarth's painting. The American scholars also highlights how the character of Mary Hackabout reproduces and parodies in many interesting ways the representation of the Virgin Mary.

for a self-writing author. It is obviously not possible to call Dabydeen's novel "an autobiography" in the same way as Naipaul's novel, as in fact no *autobiographical pact* sensu Lejeune is ever concretized in the British-Guyanese writer's book. Nonetheless, both works share the same concerns about the very conditions that lay at the basis of the writing of an autobiography – i.e. the issue of representation, the positioning of the subject through an act of interpretation, and the relationship to language. Like Naipaul's novel, Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress* may be called a self-reflexive novel about the coming into being of a hybrid subject through the act of writing. While for Naipaul, writing represented a way of negotiating a position for a hybrid subject within a system of representation, Dabydeen's novel is rather concerned with the dismantling of the "positioning" in which other writings – as well as other forms of representation – have imprisoned the narrator, freezing him in a paralysis of silence and otherness. Mungo's positioning in the autobiography that Mr Pringle wants him to write would in fact be, as Gillian Whitlock puts it, "a forceful example of just how the access of post-colonial subjects to the status of autobiographer is negotiated through a kind of middle passage, from which the subjectivity emerges bearing the imprints of experience and culture, self and society" (Whitlock 1997: 330).[37] Differently put, to access the place of speaking which his so-called benefactor has prepared for him, Mungo's subjectivity would have to be produced according to an historically and institutionally defined scheme, a scheme in which he, nonetheless, does not want to belong.

Of course, some important discriminating remarks must be made on attributes of exile and home in Naipaul's and Dabydeen's novels. While it is true that both novels conceive of exile as a linguistic experience and that its exploration may cast light on the hidden presence of the other in language, the political angle of their conceptions of exile is actually very different. Naipaul manipulates his cultural and linguistic exile to sustain his own reputation as a cosmopolitan writer, as well as to construct his inhabitable fantasies of home. Dabydeen, by contrast, exploits exile as an oppositional category. His character, Mungo, remains an exile throughout the whole of the narration. Although he manages to deterritorialize English and

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37 Whitlock, author of the essay "From Prince to Lord: The Politics of Location in Caribbean Autobiography", refers to the biography of Mary Prince, published some fifty years later than the imaginary encounter between Mr Pringle and Mungo. *The History of Mary Prince, A West-Indian Slave, Related by Herself* may in fact have served as a reference for Dabydeen's novel. The character of Mr Pringle may actually have been modelled after the Scottish abolitionist Thomas Pringle who employed the Bermudan ex-slave Mary Prince and convinced her to deliver her story to a memher of the Abolition Society who transcribed and edited it, making it into one of the best sellers of his time.

put the language in a state of continuous variation, his attempt to come home in language is doomed to fail because of the historical conditions in which his story unfolds. His narration will not be collected by Mr Pringle, and Mungo will not be able to reterritorialize Mr Pringle's language from his hybrid perspective. Mungo, differently put, will never be able to make English his home.

Chapter 5

Exploring the silence of the ancestors: The hybrid writing of Marlene NourbeSe Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* and *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*

"Language is impersonal: its working through and across us is indifferent to us, yet in the same blow it constitutes the fiber of the personal" (Riley 2005: 1): this paradox, phrased by the English poet and philosopher Denise Riley, may well express the fundamental preoccupation beneath the work of the Tobagoan writer Marlene NourbeSe Philip. Underlying Riley's statement is the idea that language is a form of praxis, a process issuing from social interaction rather than from individual speakers, a vehicle of culture and a vector of power, as well as a set of dialects, registers and styles that transcend the individual. Yet, language is also a material phenomenon, involving bodies: bodies who speak and bodies who are in turn spoken by language. Language speaks the most intimate parts of the self, its feelings, its emotions, its desires, or as Riley puts it, "its affect" (ibid.). Therefore, language effects a torsion on its speakers, "it courses like blood" through them, claims Riley (ibid.), thus subverting the idea of an unconscious springing up from the privacy of the body and soul of each individual speaker and advancing the idea of an outward, relational unconscious hovering between people.

The main issue addressed in the hybrid writing of Marlene NourbeSe Philip – hybrid in particular with reference to her use of literary genres: her poetry incorporates prose and the essay form, while her novels contains substantial sections of poetry – is the way language acts as a weapon in a symbolic struggle, the object of which is a gendered, racialized body. "Language", Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues, "tells us a story of body and affects, of oppression and liberation, of struggle and *rapports de force*" (Lecercle 2004:3). This emerges as a particularly significant observation in the light of the experience of those who have been

enslaved, mutilated, deprived of a native language and forced to live in a foreign language, a language which has acted as a carrier of both racist and a patriarchal bias, a language in which the body of the black woman has become a site of double estrangement and a site of dispossession through the discourses of colonial desire. Philip's poetics dwells in the investigation of the borders between the inner and outer body. It concentrates on how language inhabits and colonizes the bodies of black women as a form of affect, on how it defines their most intimate experience (sex, menstruations, maternity), and also on how what Riley calls "impersonal passions" (cfr. Riley 2005) not only create a black woman's body, but also alienate it from her. Secondly, the question that Philip addresses concerns the very possibility of decolonizing the body through the re-appropriation of language. Philip prospects the possibility of enacting a process of counter-interpellation of the foreign language and the foreign culture which has not only alienated but also mutilated the bodies of black women, a process which she describes as a search for a mother tongue within the English language.

Rememoring the mother tongue as a way of coming home

In Philip's collection *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989) – a collection which, while still a manuscript, earned the poet from Tobago the prestigious *Casa de las Americas Prize* – the issue of a search for a mother tongue is displayed as an effort to actively question and reconstruct the past, particularly of how African-Caribbean people were deprived of their historical memory through enforced linguistic dispossession. As the American scholar and poet Noemi Guttman puts it, the discourse of historical amnesia (collective, cultural) which emerges from Philip's writing is strictly connected with that of an historical aphasia (both individual and collective) ingrained in the body (Guttman: 1996). If a language is a vehicle and a carrier of a culture, depriving African-Caribbean people of their own language also made it impossible to express cultural, but also emotional and corporeal, experiences that could not be translated into the language of the oppressor: "to speak another language is to speak another consciousness", as Philip puts it (1989: 81). Philip posits her poetry "against a dominant mythology which is ready to privilege the voice of easy communication and blame the suffering for their silence" (Guttman 1996: 53). This dominant

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mythology is precisely the mythology of a universalizing and universalistic logic of language, which conceals and excludes the very issue of the untranslatability of languages, cultures and experiences, considering it just a minor friction in what should be the neutral, informative function of language. Philip, on the one hand, interrogates this logic, regarding it as the result of an historical product of dominant, racist discourses aimed at keeping the oppressed always looking backwards and at blaming them for their exclusion. On the other hand, she also utilizes this induced aphasia as a locus for the re-emergence of a lost memory, in a way that recalls Toni Morrison's concept of rememory: "an active revisioning of history and mythology to parallel and counter the myths of Black inferiority" (Guttman 1996: 53).

The poem "Discourse on the Logic of Language" (Philip 1989: 30-33) exemplifies how Philip interrogates and deconstructs the way the foreign experience of English settles itself in the bodies of black people and transforms it into an historicized, both personal and shared form of aphasia. "Discourse on the logic of language" is constituted by a juxtaposition of texts, graphically arranged so that a central column beginning on the first page and continuing on the third – the only column presenting first person pronouns, as well as the only one properly in verses – is set side by side with other columns, mimicking the discourses of law, science and psychoanalysis. This juxtaposition is resumed on the last page, where the verticality of the columns takes instead the form of the horizontality of a multiple choice quiz, in which all the above quoted discourses are re-staged to define the meaning of the word "tongue" from the intermingled perspectives of biology, history, power, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Philip's poetry, which exploits the page-layout and makes use of different font variants, is certainly influenced by the Sycorax Video Style developed by Edward Kamau Brathwaite, i.e. the particular use Brathwaite makes of different typographic fonts within his poems, which may be read as an attempt to translate into the visual the rhythm that pertains to the oral performance. In Philip's work, this feature is more than a technique to create a visual rhythm in the writing: it is appropriated to visualize the heterogeneity of these discourses. If the central column about the individual experience of the speaker is also the most important part of the poem, what the other texts perform is a rendition of how the experience of the individual speaker is always-already embedded in a chain of enunciations, entangled in a series of machinic assemblages which sustain and give meaning to it.

"English/ is my mother tongue" is the apparently straightforward statement which

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opens the central column. The sentence appears as a simple, informative statement, as if the speaker were giving her particulars – an act usually performed when questioned about one's identity. It is only the enjambement that separates the word "English" from the rest of the strophe which reminds the reader that the sentence is part of a poem, and that creates a significant pause. This pause not only creates a suspension after the enunciation of the word "English", but also separates it from its nominal predicate "is my mother tongue". The suspension, the short moment of silence between the word "English" and the possibility of claiming English as a mother-tongue, is precisely the issue at stake in the whole poem.

As Deleuze and Guattari argued, no statement is characterized only by a referential function: if, as the two French philosophers claim, the elementary unit of language is the order-word, the statement "English/ is my mother tongue" is characterized by ordering and commanding as its co-extensive function: what is asserted is not that "English/ is my mother tongue", but that English should be the speaker's mother tongue, that it has become so because the order of speaking English as been grafted onto a series of order-words. On the right-hand side of the column, the discourse of the Law, in the form of two edicts issued to rule the relationship between masters and slave, momentarily fills the blank created by the enjambment. The edicts make explicit how English has become a mother tongue precisely as a result of an enforcement:

EDICT I
Every owner of slaves
shall, whenever possible,
ensure that his slaves
belong to as many ethno-
linguistic group as
possible. If they can-
not speak to each other,
they cannot then foment
rebellion and revolution

EDICT II
Every slave caught speak-
ing his native language
shall be severely pun-
ished. When necessary,
removal of the tongue is
recommended. The of-
ending organ, when re-
moved, should be hung
on high in a central place,
so that all may see and
tremble (Philip 1989: 30-32)

Philip does not tell the reader the origins of her quotations. Her mimicking of the discourses of the oppressor challenges the reader to recognize the irony of the colonial situation. The mentioning of the separation of slaves from their communities, so that "if they cannot speak to each other, they cannot then foment rebellion and revolution" immediately recalls the

colonial policy of *divide et impera* ("divide and rule"). In the second edict, meanwhile, the annihilation and forceful forgetting of African languages is materialized in the mutilation of a tongue, a scene of maiming and torture which recalls the many inhuman physical punishments to which slaves were commonly subjected in the plantations, and which C. R. L. James so vividly describes in *The Black Jacobins*. The reference to the second edict reminds the reader that English began to speak the body of its African-Caribbean speakers precisely in the form of maiming and threat. The image of the mutilation crosses back and forth between the regime of the physical and of the psychological: these public acts of legalized violence not only effected a physical mutilation of a person's body. They were also meant to mutilate their very soul projecting onto them the humiliation of being dispossessed of their bodies, and castrating any sparkle of resistance that may still inhabit their spirit.

The impersonality and assertiveness of the discourse of the Law is mirrored, in the second page of the poem, by the discourse of science. While the discourse of the Law imposes English onto the body of its speaker with an explicit act of enforcement, the discourse of science imposes English – and with English, what Lamming called "speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards area of the self which could not be reached in any other way" (Lamming 1992: 109) – as an apparently neutral discourse to access the body as a field of knowledge. References to the work of Broca and Wernicke, the two nineteenth-century scientists after whom the corresponding area of the brain were named, present speech as a biological function located in the brain and apparently expurgated of its pragmatic and social aspects. Yet, these pragmatics and social aspects emerge in the form of the repressed which returns through the historical filter through which Philip quotes the work of these two scientists: "Dr. Broca believed the size of the brain determined intelligence; he devoted much of his time to 'proving' that white males of the Caucasian race had larger brains than, and were therefore superior to, women, Blacks and other people of colour" (Philip 1989: 31). Broca's studies on language as a biological function, as Guttman notes (1996: 58), were carried out on the corpses of people who had been affected by some form of aphasia in their lives, and in which the French scientist discovered serious damage to specific areas of the brain. Broca studied the body with an apparently scientific, "neutral" purpose. Yet, the fact that these studies were aimed at somehow demonstrating the inferiority of women and of non-Caucasian

people undermines the idea of their supposed scientific neutrality.[38] Philip presents Broca's work as the endeavour of an amnesic discourse, which not only engages in an active forgetting of history, but, as Guttman puts it, "manages to hide its own agenda from itself" (1996: 57).

The text on the left-hand side of the central column is also a discourse on the body, but a discourse of a very different kind. Language is presented in its connection with the body, not merely as a biological function, but rather in the form of the desire which drives a child's attempt to access her mother tongue:

> WHEN IT WAS BORN, THE MOTHER HELD HER NEWBORN CHILD CLOSE: SHE BEGAN THEN TO LICK IT ALL OVER. THE CHILD WHIMPERED A LITTLE BUT AS THE MOTHER'S TONGUE MOVED FASTER AND STRONGER OVER ITS BODY, HE GREW SILENT – THE MOTHER TURNING IT THIS WAY AND THAT UNDER HER TONGUE UNTIL SHE HAD TONGUED IT CLEAN OF THE CREAMY WHITE SUBSTANCE COVERING ITS BODY
>
> THE MOTHER THEN PUT HER FINGERS INTO HER CHILD'S MOUTH – GENTLY FORCING IT OPEN; SHE TOUCHES HER TONGUE TO THE CHILD'S TONGUE AND HOLDING THE TINY MOUTH OPEN, SHE BLOWS INTO IT – HARD. SHE WAS BLOWING WORDS – HER WORDS, HER MOTHER'S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHER'S BEFORE – INTO HER DAUGHTER'S MOUTH (Philip 1989: 30, 32)

Guttman acutely notes that this text is not simply juxtaposed with the central column, but that it is written in the margin of the page and perpendicularly to the text of the other columns, so that, in order to be able to read it, the reader must turn the text sideways. This page layout spatializes and disrupts the discourses of science and the Law: "It is as if this discourse is standing with its back to the other discourses, as if it is calling into question the relevance of the other discourses; indeed, reading the other discourses from this perspective would be impossible, which shows how important perspective is in reading, as in culture, and how one culture's 'margin' is another culture's space in which to write" (Guttman 1996: 65-66). Indeed, it is precisely in this margin that Philip will later construct her discourse of homecoming and the search for a mother tongue in her novel *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*.

As Jean-Jacques Lecercle observes, psychoanalysts may not have invented the expression "mother tongue", but with their theories they have certainly imparted meaning to

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  To support her claims, Guttman refers particularly to Stephen Jay Gould's study "The Mismeasure of Man" (1981). Gould describes Broca as "an excellent scientist totally blinded by his own prejudice" (Guttman 1996: 97), which Guttman reads as a sign of a "fascinating story of the amnesiac discourse in action" (ibd.)

it, investigating how access to language is linked to the body as a site of cognitive, emotional, and enunciative operation (Lecercle 2006: 178). "Mother tongue" is an expression which affirms the materiality of language, its connection to the body, or more specifically, to what Lecercle calls the *erotic body* of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. To talk about a "mother-tongue" implies the idea that the speaker is inhabited, is colonized by the language of the mother, and that he or she is spoken by the language of the mother. The word "territorialization" is a concept that Deleuze and Guattari draw from the theories of Lacan: for Lacan territorialization is "the imprint of maternal nourishment and care-giving on the child's libido, a process which creates charged erogenous zones and objects out of organs and orifices" (Holland 1991: 56). The two passages quoted above envisage the moment of the child's access to language as a moment of territorialization, in which the mother eroticizes the body of the daughter by licking it with her tongue, and by forcing words into the child's mouth, as if words were a source of nourishment. A scene told first in the past and then in a narrative present, it suggests that the passage of words from the body of the mother (and of "all their mother's before") to the body of the daughter is a highly sexualized act, involving a specific conception of femininity. The instability of the eroticization and sexualization of the body of the daughter, nonetheless, is highlighted by the fact that this scene of territorialization is, in fact, also a highly deterritorializing and re-terrritorializing scene: the mouth as an organ for breathing is deterritorialized by its function and reterritorialized as an organ for eating, then as a site for sexual pleasure, and finally as an organ for producing sounds and language. The body of the mother makes rhizome with the body of the daughter: they don't become one, but they evolve along parallel lines of flights.

A similar process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization is presented in the quiz that concludes and summarizes the poem. Four different questions replicate and restage the discourses which the poem has juxtaposed:

 A tapering, blunt-tipped, muscular, soft and fleshy organ describes
(a) the penis.
(b) the tongue
(c) neither of the above
(d) both of the above

In the man the tongue is
(a) the principal organ of taste
(b) the principal organ of articulate speech

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(c) the principal organ of oppression and exploitation
(d) all of the above.

The tongue
(a) is an interwoven bundle of striated muscle running in three planes.
(b) is fixed to the jawbones.
(c) has an outer covering of mucous membrane covered with papillae.
(d) contains ten thousand taste buds, none of which is sensitive to the taste of foreign words.

Air is forced out of the lungs up the throat to the larynx where it causes the vocal cords to vibrate and create sound. The metamorphosis from sound to intelligible words requires
(a) the lip, tongue and jaw all working together.
(b) a mother tongue.
(c) the overseer's whip.
(δ)   all of the above or none. (Philip 1989: 33)

What is remarkable in Philip's poetry is precisely its capacity to put these many different discourses together and to let them contradict and deterritorialize one another. It is not just a form of heteroglossia that allows for a multivocal reading of this text, but also the very fact that these discourses deconstruct one another, showing a continuous disinvestment and reinvestment of meaning and sense as well as of desire. In the first question, Philip displaces and corrodes the idea of the "phallus", which in Lacanian psychoanalysis is of central importance in describing the child's process of entering into the order of the symbolic, and juxtaposes it with the "tongue", an image which is used in the poem to suggest an exclusively gendered/ feminine relationship to language. The tongue, which is central to Philip's image of the child being inhabited by her mother tongue, emerges from these lines as the site of a pre-symbolic form of language, as in Kristeva's *chora* – thus also recalling the idea of poetry as controlled psychosis. Yet, the tongue is not totally excluded from the symbolic sphere either, signalling not only the communion between the body of the mother and of the child, but also prefiguring the symbolic separation that will be attained through the Nom du Père (the tongue is [..] "the principal organ of oppression and exploitation").

What is most significant in this poem is that even the *biological body* or the *erotic body* on which the relation between the self and language is established is never reduced to biological or individual functions. In *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*, Lecercle speaks similarly of a concept of a body as a *labouring body.* "Labouring" is a term that the French Marxist utilizes to subsume both the Marxist concept of *labour* – thus to talk about the body itself as a material product of "institutions and apparatuses, in that they produce discourses

and speech acts" (175) – and *labour* as the function of giving birth – one of those bodily functions that the sanitized, western bourgeois idealization of the body tend to repress and forget, and that Deleuze and Guattari famously refer to in the incipit of the Anti-Oedipus. The *labouring body*, like Deleuze and Guattari's "body without organs" (i.e. the body of desire), is not just an individual entity, but is shaped and fashioned by social forces and relations, the product as well as the agent of a social praxis.

Talking about a *labouring body* with reference to Philip's poetry, in which images of maternity and feminine bodily functions recur, make it possible to account for the way she uses birth and the womb as a metaphor for describing the birth of speakers taking place – not without suffering, not in the anesthetized form that ideas of language as abstraction may suggest – through language. Re-framing what Guttman describes as a discourse of aphasia in the poetry of Marlene Philip within the paradigm of the *labouring body* allows for a different perspective in the central column of the poetry in the light of the discourses of language performed in the other, juxtaposed texts. In the column, the body of the speaker is both transformed by and transformative of the discourses of Law, Science and Psychoanalysis. If these discourses carried by English (with a capital E) simultaneously inhabit the body of the speaker, the speaker, in turn, creates a torsion in the English:

English

is my mother tongue.
A mother tongue is not
not a foreign lan lan lang
language
l/anguish
anguish
–   a foreign anguish.

[..]

but I have
a dumb tongue
tongue dumb
father tongue
and english is
my mother tongue
is my father tongue
is a foreign lan lan lang
language
l/anguish
  anguish
a foreign anguish

```
        is english -
        another tongue
        my mother
                mammy
                mummy
                moder
                mater
                macer
                moder
        tongue
        mother tongue

        tongue mother
        tongue me
        mothertongue me
        mother me
        touch me
        with the tongue of your
        lan lan lang
        language
        l/anguish
          anguish
        english
      is a foreign anguish (Philip *1*.1-71)
```

Indeed, although the poem begins with an assertion that "a mother tongue is not/ a foreign lan lan lang/ language" (*l*.3-5), the conclusion to the process of fragmentation that the poem performs – which mimics precisely the way someone potentially affected by aphasia might speak – is a request that english (with a small 'e') should become not just a father tongue but also a mother tongue. Aphasia becomes an induced context in which language as affect traverses the body of the speaker and makes this body speak in a way that deconstructs it phonetically, transforms it into sound and intensities, makes it take certain unexpected directions. Beneath the stammering "not a foreign lan lan lang/ language" (*l*.4-5) it is possible to read the territorial separation that brought English and made it into a mother tongue. Indeed, the reader might be tempted to complete the series of "lan"s with a 'd' rather than with a 'g'. Envisioning language as a foreign land is a way of positioning the self within the language, of asserting one's foreignness while at the same time performing a deeply de-territorializing gesture. The word "l/anguish", broken into two parts by a slash which graphically reproduces the idea of cutting, suggests both the separation which causes English to be a site of neurosis, and the idea of losing vitality, of being forced to live in an unpleasant place. Yet the very fact that this separation is a "foreign l/anguish" also separates it from the

self, making it the site for a possible reterritorialization. Similarly, beneath the transformations that the word "mother" assumes ("mammy/ mummy/ moder/ mater/ macer/ moder", *l*.52-57), it is also possible to see the transformation that English as a mother tongue performs upon itself: from a childish "mammy" (*l*.52) to a fetishized "mummy"(*l*.53), to then be revitalized into the vernacular word "moder", reasserted twice in the poem.

When Noemi Guttman introduces the word "aphasia" in her discussion of Marlene NourbeSe Philip's "She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks", she does so with extreme carefulness. The word, she claims, seems particularly pertinent with reference to the passage in the poem "Discourse on the Logic of Language" in which Philip mentions Broca and Wernicke, whose scientific discoveries were based precisely in studies of patients unable to understand or produce speech as a result of brain damage. Yet, Guttman feels that she has to make a qualification about her use of a term that is usually connected to a rather disabling illness to talk about the way African-Caribbean people access language. Her use of the word "aphasia" may wrongly suggest that Caribbean demotic, a way of speaking English which is characterized by a use of grammar and syntax that diverge from standard English, could be interpreted as a sign of a "lack of fluency", or worse, an "inferior conceptual ability in the speaker of Caribbean demotic" (Guttman 1996: 57). What she fails to see is the way Philip utilizes, in the end of the column, the word "english" with a small letter, to imply that aphasia is not just an induced process taking place in the singular experience of the speaker, but that it may become the very site of the deterritorialization that a minor language may perform on a major language (cfr. Deleuze/Guattari 1986).

In a short essay "The Absence of Writing or How I Almost became a Spy", published as a theoretical epilogue to *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, Marlene NourbeSe Philips defines the role of the artist precisely in the light of his or her capacity to intervene within language. Fundamental to any form of artistic creation, she claims, is the possibility of creating new links between images, or rather, as Philip prefers to call it, *i-mage*, and word:

> Is this process is as it should be, then the autonomous i-mage maker serves the function of continually enriching the language by enlarging the source of i-mages – in particular, metaphorical i-mages. If we accept that living language continuously encapsulates, reflects and refines the entire experiential life and world view of the tribe, the race and consequently of society at large; and if we accept that the poet, the story-teller, the singer or balladeer (through their words), express this process in their work, then we must accept that this process becomes one way in which a society continually accept,

integrates and transcends its experiences, positive or negatives. For it is through those activities – poetry, story-telling and writing – that the tribe's experiences are converted and transformed to i-mage and to word almost simultaneously, and from word back to image again. So metaphorical life takes place, so the language becomes richer, the store of metaphor, myth and fable enlarged, and the experience transcended not by exclusion and alienation, but by inclusion in the linguistic psyche, the racial and generic memory of the group. (Philip 1989: 80)

The passage describes indeed a circular process in which language acts as a site of subjectivation through interpellation (as Lecercle would put it, cf. Lecercle 2006), and in which the artist, in turn, is called upon to counter-interpellate language by pushing it to its limits, by enriching it with new experiences, and by intervening in the process of signification. With the Middle Passage, Philip claims, "[t]he bridge that language creates, the crossover from i-mage to expression was destroyed, if only temporarily" (Philip 1989: 81). When European languages replaced the African language that had been recently removed, and when new, artistic attempts at establishing a relation between word/i-mage were started, "this process would take place through a language that was not only experientially foreign, but also etymologically hostile and expressive of the non-being of the African" (ibid.).[39] Indeed, Philip claims, the autonomous production of i-mages in the Caribbean has been inhibited for centuries by the alienation of a language in which African could come into being as primitive, inferior.

For Caribbean artists, to be able to write and to recreate their historical experience and their myths means to engage in a struggle over language. Here the word "recreate" emphasizes, not just a re-constitution of the memory of a past, but the very possibility of translating, modifying and constructing this memory in the light of the present experience of the speaker. In order to re-establish links between word and *i-mage*, Caribbean writers cannot but first engage with and reflect the multiple structures of violence of which language has been a vehicle: they have to reveal English as a language tainted by colonialism and slavery, and at the same time they have to explore exile as a linguistically creative force: "In the vortex of New World slavery, the African forged new and different words, developed strategies to impress her experience on the language. The formal standard language was subverted, turned inside out, and even sometimes erased. Nouns became stranger to verbs and vice versa; tonal accentuation took the place of several words at a time; rhythm held sway"

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39 The aggression on language has been so powerful, Philip claims, that the only form of African art which could survive the middle passage was music, precisely because of its non-verbal nature.

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(Philip 1989: 83). This process, which Philip considers to be, in part, one in which the African language has an influence on English, is the signal of an active deterritorialization of the language of the colonizer. While the experience of most Caribbean people remains dyglossic – divided between a standard language and a dialect or patois in which the influence of old African languages are more detectable – the best language for an artist to use to re-member (or re-memory, to use Toni Morrison's expression) the mother tongue is, paradoxically, English. Dialects and patois are the sign of a parallel and closed experience, which remains confined to the rather limited number of their speakers. English, instead, works as a shared experience, whose internal dislocation and destruction – as the one that Philip performs in the poem "Discourse on the Logic of Language" – makes it available for the creation of new *i-mages*.

The hyphen that Philip puts in the word i-mage may indeed be interpreted as both a sign for the separation from the mother tongue that Philip imputes to the imposition of English, and as a possible, tentative means of reconnection. The decision to separate the 'I' from the rest of the word, nonetheless, is a direct reference to the Rastafarian linguistic habit of pronouncing or rewriting word with a special emphasis on the "I" (as, for example, in the expressions "I and I", meaning "we", or "I-dren", meaning "brethren") in order to highlight the creative force of the speakers, and their ability to command the self. The "I" in Rastafarian culture has a performative function – it creates new identities and selves for the speaker – which may be compared to the cohortative mood of Hebrew[40] (cfr. McFarlane 1998: 8). Besides, for Rastafarian religion, 'I' is the symbol of God and of the number '1', and is also homophone with the word 'eye'. This reference to Rastafarian religion configures *i-mage* both as a the site for the creation of an empowering image of the self, as well as a site for articulating 'vision', the newly acquired ability to see things differently through language.

Secondly, the "I" accompanied by the hyphen may also refer, in a deeply ambiguous way, to Chomsky's concept of the I-language, in which the letter "I" refers to three adjectives that characterise it: internal, individual, intensional. I-language, according to Chomsky, is the opposite of E-languages, or External languages, like English, or German or Japanese, which he dismisses as epiphenomena linked to specific social, political and cultural contexts. The I-language, instead, is an expression that Chomsky uses to locate language within the

40 Indeed, Semitic influence on the linguistic use of Rastafarians may be explained by the special role that Ethiopia plays in this Caribbean religion. (cfr. McFarlane 1998: 8)

mind/brain, as an internal faculty which every individual of the human species possesses, and which makes the basic structure, as well as "the meaning of words and the nature of sentences" (Chomsky 2001: 207) of all languages similar. It is, in Chomsky's view, precisely because of this similarity that the learning of foreign languages is possible at all. The poem "Universal Grammar" engages with precisely this presumed universal, biological quality of language. Like "Discourse on the Logic of Language", a poem constructed by the juxtaposition of texts reading other texts, "Universal Grammar" re-quotes and rewrites Chomsky in the light of the experience of the Black Caribbean Woman:

> MANY FACTORS AFFECT AND DETERMINE THE ORDER OF WORDS IN A SPOKEN SENTENCE: THE STATE OF MIND OF THE SPEAKER; THE GENDER OF THE SPEAKER; HIS OR HER INTENTIONS; THE IMPRESSION THE SPEAKER WISHES TO MAKE; THE BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN SPEAKER AND LISTENER AND, NOT LEAST OF ALL, THE CONSTRAINT OF UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR
>
> THE THEORY OF UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR SUGGESTS THE WAY WE LEARN LANGUAGE IS INNATE – THAT THE CONSCIOUS MIND IS NOT AS RESPONSIBLE AS WE MIGHT BELIEVE IN THIS PROCESS. OUR CHOICES OF GRAMMATICAL POSSIBILITIES AND EXPRESSION ARE, IN FACT, SEVERELY LIMITED; IT IS THIS VERY LIMITATION THAT ENSURE WE LEARN LANGUAGE EASILY AND NATURALLY (Philip 1989: 37, 39)

The use Philip makes of Chomsky's theory of universal grammar, in particular the idea that languages are learnt easily and naturally, goes hand in hand, in an ironic way, with her description of how language was forced onto African people in the form of what she describes as a linguistic rape. Claiming that the learning of language is easy means deliberately ignoring and forgetting that language is a weapon in a struggle in which identities and rapports de force emerge. The term "Universal Grammar", therefore, becomes the signifier of a constraint, not coming from the internal, innate faculty of language, but rather from a history of dispossession.

In "Universal Grammar", Philip engages in a peculiar way with the concept of "deep structure" that Chomsky elaborates in his theories of generative grammar. "Deep structures" emerge from the poem not as a theoretical construct that seeks to unify several related structures, but rather as the possibility of re-membering a mother tongue that has been forgotten:

> **Parsing** – the exercise of telling the part of speech of each word in a sentence (Latin, pars, a part)

The – distinguishing adjective, limiting the noun, cell.

Smallest – adjective of quantity, superlative degree, qualifying the noun, cell (unsuccessfully)

cell – common noun, neuter gender, singular number, third person, nominative case governing the intransitive verb, remembers. (Long-term memory improves cell growth in nerve cells.)

remembers – regular verb, transitive, active voice, indicative mood, present tense, singular member, third person agreeing with its nominative, cell which remembers and so re-members.

O – sound of exclamation as in O God! Made by rounding the lips; first syllable of word name of African goddess of the river – O/shun (Philip 1989: 38)

The reference to body and cells is used not to assert the biological, interior nature of affect, but rather the constitution of affect through language, through a shared, historical experience. The "O" to which this exercise of parsing leads is not the sign of a pre-historical, primitive exclamation of emotion (an expression of bodily needs, as it could be put), but rather a structure in constant variation, able to host the exclamation "O God" – with whatever affects may be connected to it, and signalled by the context of enunciation as well as the intonation of the speaker – and the re-membering of the African goddess O/shun. Written with a slash separating the O from the final part of the word, Oshun, is not a stable sign of an African inheritance passed through the genes of African-Caribbean people, but rather the site for a search that may lead the African-Caribbean Writer to re-create Oshun through her poetry in a language in which O/shun is inevitably other.

<u>"I will open a way to the interior or perish". Looking for the self in the silence of the ancestors</u>

Whereas "O" is the smallest linguistic sign which Philip explores in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, her search to re-member a mother tongue, the object of her novel *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (1997) is the absolute absence of sound. Silence as pure affect, as the dissolution of both language and exile, and as a form of perfect communion between the self and the body – silence as the relevant moment of language which nonetheless remains beyond the comprehension of any philosophy of language, as Jean Jacques Lecercle puts it (Lecercle 2005: 3) – is the objective that an imaginary woman Traveller looks for in an imaginary journey back home to her African ancestors.

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The quest for silence is presented in the book as a quest for the truer, inner self, a self which escapes language and representation; yet the discovery of this imaginary self is always-already tainted with the presence of the other. Dr. Livingstone, the Scottish explorer who is credited with having gone deeper into the interior of Africa than any other white person before him, is the Other that the Traveller has to meet and face in order to discover the silence of the ancestors:

> THE FIRST AND LAST DAY OF THE MONTH OF THE NEW MOONS
> (OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE LAST AND FIRST MONTH)
> IN THE FIRST YEAR OF OUR WORD
>
> 0300
>
> My own map was a primitive one, scratched on animal skin. Along the way, some people had given me some of theirs – no less primitive – little pieces of bark with crude pictures of where they thought I would find what I was searching for. I had some bones and various pieces of wood with directions incised on them. And a mirror. Where was I going? I had forgotten where I had come from – knew I had to go on. "I will open a way to the interior or perish." Livingstone's own words – I took them now as my own – my motto. David Livingstone, *Dr.* David Livingstone, 1813-73 – Scottish, not English, and one of the first Europeans to cross the Kalahari – with the help of Bushmen; was shown the Zambesi by the indigenous African and "discovered" it; was shown the falls of Mosioatunya – the smoke that thunders – by the indigenous Africans, "discovered" it and renamed it. Victoria Falls. Then he set out to "discover" the source of the Nile and was himself "discovered" by Stanley - "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" And History. Stanley and Livingstone – white fathers of the continent. Of silence. (Philip 1997: 7)

Silence emerges from the first lines of the novel as a double sign: the sign of something that goes beyond language, and the product of a silencing imposed from outside. Dr. Livingstone is described as a "white father of the continent. Of silence" (ibid.) to remind us that, if language is the agon of a struggle for power, so too is silence. Livingstone, as the quote that Philip reports from *The London Journal* of 1856 illustrates, was celebrated in his times for having transformed what had been a land of silence (of "burning solitudes, bleak and barren, heated by poisonous winds, infested by snakes and only roamed over by a few scattered tribes of untameable barbarians", Philip 1997: 7) into "a high county, full of fruit trees, abounding in shade, watered by a perfect network of rivers" (ibid.). The power of silence resides precisely in its self-referential quality: the violence of silence is the violence of exclusion: if you cannot name something, it means that it does not exist. Livingstone's cannibalization of the name of Victoria Falls, his claim of having discovered them, performed the effect to annihilate and exclude the indigenous African from History.

The sentence "I will open a way to the interior or perish" and its double appropriation by Livingstone and by the Traveller as first-person narrator functions as a key motif throughout the text. An entry originally taken from an *The London Journal* of 1856, this sentence uttered by the Traveller re-stages the colonial, sexist metaphorical representation of Africa as a dark continent – a "Heart of Darkness", to use Conrad's phrasing – as well as of the images of the exotic, eroticized black woman that are often associated with it. Philip uses the gender-specific terms of gender aggression to transform them into a space of resistance. What the Traveller sets out to discover is her own interior, her own body, her own silence as well as the forgotten silence of her ancestors, both in the form of their authenticity – as the narrator implies by her insistent, controversial use of word "being" – as well as in the form of their being produced by language. Yet, paradoxically, the very fact that her journey is already founded on the utterance of somebody else's already undermines the possibility of coming home without a detour through the space of the other, or through the external medium of language. Silence is, to put it differently, already plurivocal.

The distinction between interior and exterior is the unstable line that the Traveller has to walk to undertake her Odyssey to re-possess her silence. *Looking for Livingstone* is a text very much influenced by French feminism, and particularly by Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974). Isabel Hoving, who analyses the novel in the light of its psychoanalytical implications, remarks that Philip engages in the search for silence as a space of irreducible difference, of the feminine Other which phallogocentrism excludes and which returns to unsettle representation. The Traveller's accusation that Livingstone brought "phallused words" to Africa (1997: 27), the strongly sexually-connoted imaginary displayed, and the insistence on maternity and on the womb may indeed suggest that Philip is engaging with an exercise of *écriture feminine*. Philip's novel seems to aim at enacting "the passage beyond the phallic mimicry of the monologic propriety of logos to the possibility of an affective language in and through to think difference without reducing it to the normative fantasy of oneness" (Athanasiou/Tzelepis 2010: 3). The very decision to head each chapter with a reference to a time going beyond the way western thought measures and conceives of time, and rather referring to cycles of the moon, may be read as an attempt to perform alterity in the form of an affect linked to the bodies of women. The Traveller's journey through the desert may be read as a journey through the "monstrous liminality and indeterminate

strangeness of *teras* (*teras*: both horrible and wonderful) that calls into question the closure of intelligibility" (Athanasiou 2010: 3).

Silence, as it emerges from Philip's novel, certainly has much in common with the concept of the "feminine" as elaborated by Irigaray. In the economy of representation that Irigaray outlines, the "feminine" emerges as that which is both created and excluded by the binary structure of language and thought. The feminine is the unspeakable condition of figuration, that which must remain outside representation, insomuch as it represent a field of disruptive possibilities. It is, in Irigaray's view, this very exclusion that sustain and confirm "a phallogocentric project of autogenesis" (Butler 1993: 36). Images of the feminine that may be produced in the binarism of phallogocentric systems of representation are always the site of the very erasure and disempowerment of the feminine. By the same token, silence – which is always referred to as the field of the feminine, not only to the Traveller's feminine self, but also to the women who help, house and teach her how to discover silence – is presented in Philip's novel as the product of a colonial inscription, as an erasure and as a fetish, but also as that which brings about a field of disruptive possibilities.

In the encounter between Livingstone and the Traveller which concludes the novel, the quality of Silence is the object of a series of interrogations that the Traveller subjects Livingstone to. In the passage, Livingstone is ironically addressed as "Livingstone-I-presume", a naming that alienates Livingstone of his own self in a two-fold way. "Dr. Livingstone, I presume" is the sentence that Stanley has been credited with having pronounced upon his encounter with an ill, enfeebled Livingstone, thus robbing Livingstone of the possibility of introducing himself. In the wording "I presume" is also inscribed a history of assumed cognitive superiority, which Livingstone may himself endorse but which the narrator nonetheless ironically deprives him of, using "I presume" as an empty label which she attaches to Livingstone's name. The encounter functions as a sort of subversion of roles, in which the Traveller takes the role of the subject in the position of knowing, while Livingstone is the one who does not know how to answer her question:

> "I have two riddles for you, Livingstone-I-presume – a riddle, a riddle, a riddle ma ree: what is both noun and verb as well as sentence?"
> "Noun, verb and sentence?" he repeated to himself under his breath.
> Around us it has now become quite dark – the fire lit up his gaunt face, leaving his thin, raddled body in darkness. As he puzzled over the question his face seemed to float -

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"Give up?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Silence."

"Silence?"

"Yes, Silence. Silence is a noun, yes?" He nodded. "To silence is a verb, and silence is a sentence."

"How sentence?"

"As in punishment – Livingstone-I-presume – or sanction – you know, I silence *you*."

He laughed, "Clever – very clever."

"Another one?"

"Yes."

"What kind of sentence can only be broken, not appealed?" The sound of crickets was now loud around us – I put some more wood on the fire.

"Well, I know now it has to do with silence … and you said that silence was a sentence – one breaks silence, doesn't one?

"One? I, *me*, Livingstone-I-presume, I break my silence – the sentence of my silence."

(Philip 1997: 71)

Silence, like Irigaray's feminine, is something that, once framed in representation, is also broken. Yet, the passage envisages the possibility of reversing Silence, of using it in a performative way against the very person who imposed it onto the body of the Traveller and on her ancestors. When the Traveller explains to Livingstone that the word "Silence" is a sentence and uses an explanation that refers to punishment, what she performs is an act of symbolic castration. Livingstone is deprived of his power to claim possession of Silence.

Looking for Livingstone certainly works through and re-stages the very contradiction that lays at the foundation of Irigaray's concept of the feminine. Irigaray, as Butler notes, "tend[s] to mime the grandiosity of the philosophical errors that she underscores. The miming is, of course, tactical, and her re-enactment of the philosophical error requires that we learn how to read for the difference that her reading performs" (Butler 1993: 36). The Traveller also, in her own way, mimics Livingstone, claiming that her journey is of a different nature, and inviting the reader to reflect upon the difference between her own endeavour and Livingstone's – the paternal figure, the Nom du Père. The character of Livingstone is a constant presence in the narration, and indeed the Traveller declares that she wants to follow in his footsteps and discover him again precisely because he might have discovered Silence before her. The questions that arise as to whether this mimicking of Livingstone is really successful are the same that Judith Butler asks with regard to the work of Luce Irigaray:

Does the voice of the philosophical father echo in her, or has she occupied that voice, insinuated herself into the voice of the father? If she is "in" that voice for either reason, is she also at the same

time "outside" it? How do we understand the being "between," the two possibilities as something other than a spatialized entre that leaves the phallogocentric binary opposition intact? How does the difference from the philosophical father resound in the mime which appears to replicate his strategy so faithfully? This is, clearly, no place between "his" language and "hers", but a disruptive *movement* which unsettles the topographical claim. This is a taking of his place, not to assume it, but to show that it is *occupiable*, to raise the cost and movement of that assumption. Where and how is the critical departure from that patrilineage performed in the course of the recitation of his term? (Butler 1997: 36)

By the same token, *Looking for Livingstone* does not really challenge the dichotomous thinking that underlies what is denounced as phallogocentrism. On the contrary, it chooses to restate and to endorse it. Although in *Looking for Livingstone* the body emerges as marked by psychical, social and interpersonal meaning, Philip cannot avoid falling into the trap of essentialism that she had brilliantly avoided in her collection *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. In the novel, Philip also engages with the issue of constituting word/ *i-mages* equations, but these equation do not act upon language, upon the very site of subjectivation. The language that she uses in the novel, even in the poetic section, is much less complex and plurivocal than that in her 1989 poetry collection. Reading *Looking for Livingstone* does not challenge the reader to assume different perspectives with regard to the text. On the contrary, Philip often uses the word "Silence" to claim her possession of it, without questioning it in any possible way. "It is the only thing that I have that is not contaminated, My Silence – my very own Silence", the Traveller-narrator assert in the last encounter with Livingstone, which concludes the novel (Philip 1997: 65).

In both *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* and *Looking for Livingstone*, Philip engages with a homecoming whose object is the issue of the retrieval of a mother tongue which is forever lost. Yet, while in the former she is able to look for the mother tongue in the place where this mother tongue cannot be – for example in the space of the classic myth of Philomela, or of Ceres and Proserpine – and to transform the language of the other into a mother tongue by radicalizing her own exile in it, in *Looking for Livingstone* the search for a mother tongue becomes a much more undeviating affair. Silence, the feminine and the imaginary ancestors are the ground on which Philip constructs her mother tongue. With reference to *Looking for Livingstone*, Isabel Hoving has written: "She writes as if she is the first historian of silence, its very first mythographer" (2001: 271). Yet the myths of silence that she explores in her work are neither new, nor re-vivified. The tribes that the Traveller

visits in her *Odyssey* introduce her to representations and myths of Silence which are described in the form of primordial, a-historical rituals of initiation, but which in fact restate and reaffirm a rather essentialist conception of identity.

The most telling episode which illustrates how the novel fails to envisage homecoming as a transformative process, but rather locates it in an *i-mage* which has lost its disruptive power in favour of a constitutive, assertive function, is the episode in which the Traveller visits an imaginary Museum of Silence. The museum displays a series of silences belonging to the tribes that the Traveller has visited in her Odyssey:

"Return them," I demanded of the proprietors. "You must return these silences to their owners. Without their silences, these people are less than whole." They smiled and said nothing. It had been theft originally, I continued, now it was nothing but "intimidation! - plain and simple – extortion to continue to hold the entire store of our silence ransom, demand we pay for it, and give assurances we could care for it", as they had.
        It was mine – ours – I challenged, to do with as we pleased – so destroy if we so wanted. They told me the silences were best kept there where they could be labelled, annotated, dated, catalogued - "in such and such a year, this piece of silence was taken from the _____." You could fill in any name you wanted – when and how – it was all the same. It was all there in carefully regulated, climate controlled rooms.
[..] my silence – our silence – carefully guarded and cherished by them! My silence was now a structure, an edifice I could walk around, touch, feel, lick even – and I did – it was cold, cold to the tongue. I could if I wanted, even pee on it, though that would be difficult, contained as it was behind plexiglass.
        "Remove a thing – a person – from its source," I said, "from where it belongs naturally, and it will lose meaning." These were my final arguments to the curators. "At the very least," I continued, "we should own our silence." It was ours after all, I told them, and upon it their speech, their language, solid as the punning Petros upon which the early church, harbinger of silence, had been erected. Ours to do with as we pleased, I repeated, to nourish, care for, or neglect; to let rot, or wither away to dust, chewed upon by vermin. "Ours! Ours! Ours!" I screamed, to do with as we choose," I dropped my voice, "to break, banish, destroy – to negotiate with - " they laughed – how they laughed, and said nothing, which was not the same as silence. They said nothing and laughed. (Philip 1997: 57)

Indeed, this passage shows how Philip falls back on a fetishization of silence which arrives at the point of denying the creative potential of hybridization ("'Remove a thing – a person – from its source,' - I said, 'from where it belongs naturally, and it will lose meaning – our silence has lost all meaning'"). The Traveller insists on the idea of possessing silence, without questioning the very issue of claiming possession over silence or over language. Of course, the reader is aware that the silence she is talking about is a construction of, and in, her writing, and that the journey is a figuration of this process of construction of a silence which is the sign of something forever lost. Yet, if this construction is not accompanied by a movement of

deterritorialization, the result may be a reassertion of what Deleuze and Guattari call "the root-thought" (2004: 6 ff.) – the thought of the one that may become two, but is never able to think as a multiplicity.

Chapter 6

Crossing the sea and circling the island with writing. Post-Colonial re-appropriations of history in Derek Walcott's Caribbean epic of return *Omeros*

In "The Sea is History", a poem first published in the collection *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979)*,* Derek Walcott imagined an exchange between two interlocutors, each embodying two conflicting yet interdependent positions about the nature and scope of historical discourse in the Caribbean. The first interlocutor opens the poem with a series of pressing questions: "Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?/ Where is your tribal memory?"(*l*.1-2). Addressed in the plural by its opponent, this interlocutor is a collective voice whose questions, far from being innocent, resonate with a hate speech[41] already notoriously performed against the British Caribbean:

> Nothing was created in the British West Indies, no civilization as in Spanish America, no great revolution as in Haiti or the American colonies. There were only plantations, prosperity, decline, neglect: the size of the islands called for nothing else. How can the history of West Indian futility be written? What tone shall the historian adopt? The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality isn't the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies (Naipaul 1982 [1962]: 27)

The formulation of questions about the possibility of telling a history of the Caribbean – questions which have already been answered in the negative by V. S. Naipaul following in the

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[41] The term "hate speech" designates an abusive communication that is aimed at offending and belittling a person or a group, for example on the basis of their ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, etc. Butler's *Excitable Speech* (1997) deals precisely with the threatening performativity words and with the kind of agency which endows language with the power to produce political effects and injuries. Besides, Butler investigates how *hate speech*, outside a normative, sovereign view of language (a view in which the words we speak are construed as unequivocal forms of conduct) can become the site of possible redefinition of power and action.

footsteps of a long tradition of colonial denigration inaugurated by James Anthony Froude with *The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses* (1888) – puts the second interlocutor in a situation of potential linguistic vulnerability. An insult such as "nothing was created in the West Indies" (Naipaul 1982 [1962]: 27) is all the more harmful insofar as the capacity of language to injure is strictly connected to its interpellative power. Particularly injurious is the implicit statement that not being able to produce the names of "monuments", "battles", or "martyrs" (*l*.1), nor to account for a "tribal memory" (*l*.2), equals not having a history. It directly affects the way the colonial subject who is addressed comes into being through language as a subaltern subject, submitted to the cultural hegemony of those who can claim to have a history.

The impasse is overcome by the second interlocutor with an answer which, by displacing the questions, refuses to yield to their implicit violence: "Sirs,/ in that grey vault. The sea. The sea/ has locked them up. The sea is history" (*l*.2-4). The second voice disrupts the hate speech not by denying the absence that the first voice was looking for – "the ocean kept turning blank pages", the poem goes on to say (*l*.24) – but by resemanticizing this very absence. The fact that "monuments", "battles" and "martyrs" (*l*.1) cannot be named because they have not been institutionalized in historical discourses makes them the site for the emergence of a different form of existence. The Renaissance, instead of being perceived as a past epoch whose memory rests in the vestiges of ancient glory, is a submarine presence whose remnants are inhabited with sea-life. The bones of drowned people resting in the sea are united with coral ("bone soldered by coral to bone", *l*.13) and become part of living, ever growing "mosaics/ mantled by the benediction of the shark's shadows" (*l*.14-15). The wreckage of submerged "men'o'war" (*l*.36) are ornate with "colonnades of coral// past the gothic windows of sea fans/ to where the crusty grouper, onyx eyed,/ blinks, weighted by its jewels, like a bald queen" (*l*.39-42).

Finding a way of inhabiting history by disrupting the hate speech performed against the Caribbean is also the theme of *Omeros* (1990; *O*), Derek Walcott's most ambitious poem about homecoming. A rewriting of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in a contemporary post-colonial setting, *Omeros* restages the topic of Ulysses' journey, transforming the hero's voyage home into a series of journeys into language, undertaken by several different characters in search of a way to reconnect with their own pasts. The questions "Where are your monuments, your

battles, martyrs?/ Where is your tribal memory?" (Walcott 1979, *l.*1-2) are asked and answered by all of these characters in different ways. In *Omeros*, the dialogue between the two conflicting voices staged in "The Sea is History" is expanded and diffracted to encompass a variety of voices. Hate speeches aimed at denying the existence of Caribbean history, culture or identity are appropriated in order to produce and perform different discourses of hybridization.

Being hybrid subjects, but in very different relations with race, power, and language, all the homecoming characters in *Omeros* are obsessed with the irretrievability of their origins and with a confrontation with their parental figures. Achille, a fisherman of African origins, hit by sunstroke, travels back through time and space to seventeenth-century Africa to meet his ancestor Apholabe. Major Plunkett, a retired soldier who dreams of undertaking an odyssey through the Empire, decides to give the island of Saint Lucia its right place in history, and embarks on a project of research. A poet, who is also the first person narrator, comes home to his dying mother after undertaking a "voyage in" (Said 1994: 295) to Europe and America. The stories of these three characters' homecomings intertwine and complete one another, constituting three of the main sub-plots of an almost eight-thousand lines long poem.

In "The Sea is History" the act of resistance performed by the first voice is both a statement *in* language and *about* language. The poem may be read both as a performance of the appropriation of the language of the oppressor and as a meta-textual meditation on this very appropriation. Judith Butler claims that "[t]he failure of language to rid itself of its own instrumentality or, indeed, rhetoricity, is precisely the inability of language to annul itself in the telling of a tale, in the reference to what exists or in the volatile scenes of interlocution" (1997: 8). Similarly *Omeros* writes the history of the Caribbean by highlighting its concerns about writing: writing as a confrontation with previous writing, writing as the site of linguistic renegotiations, writing as a performative act.

The encounter with Homer and the negotiation of the poet's 'I'

The last of the seven books constituting *Omeros* begins with an encounter which may be read as a *mise en abyme* of the poem as a whole. This scene stages an encounter between the poet/ narrator and Homer. As Maria Cristina Fumagalli notes, this scene is reminiscent of the

encounter between Dante and Virgil in the "selva oscura" (Inferno I, *l.*2) preceding Dante's entrance into the world of the dead (Fumagalli 2001: 200). Just as Virgil guided Dante in his journey across Hell and Purgatory, Homer will guide the poet in his journey to La Soufrière, the place where the souls of those who have betrayed Saint Lucia are condemned for eternity, but also the "healing place" (*O* LVII I, *l.*52) in which the poet will be able to purify himself. In the *Comedia*, as Ernst Robert Curtius famously claimed, Virgil represented the world of the Classics, the wisdom which is necessary to ascend to the first two realms of the dead but is not enough to ascend to Paradise and to God's glory (cf. Curtius 1993 [1948]). Virgil was, in other words, the master whose teachings had to be learnt by the disciple, but whom the disciple had to exceed in order to sing God's glory and to create his Christian epic. The *Comedia* both praises and appropriates the work of the classic and transcends it to lay the foundation of an Italian, vernacular literature equally respectable as the literature in Latin. By the same token, Homer acts as a guide to the younger poet, who is still struggling to find a way of chanting his island in his vernacular, a language wilfully opposed to the standard or major usage of English.

Nonetheless, the scene is also a parody of Dante's relationship to Virgil. Even though, as Walcott declared, Homer is an important model and reference in his poetry, the poem carnivalizes[42] the figure of the Greek poet, and makes it a mixture of high and low, solemnity and ridiculousness. Homer has two faces. In the seventh book, the blind African-Caribbean fisherman Seven Seas, who has embodied him throughout the whole poem, metamorphoses into a white bust. A figure with no arms and no legs, deprived of colours because they have faded with time, the bust may also become an awkward presence. In the boat that brings him and the poet to Saint Soufrière he is described as a "marble freight" (*O* LVII, I *l.*6), who has to

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42 The Bachtinian concept of "carnivalization" traverses, in interesting ways, the whole work of Derek Walcott but it is in *Omeros* that it finds its most prominent application. Carnivalized literature reflects the vivifying and transformative force that characterizes that particular form of syncretic performance which is known as Carnival. Carnival is a complex and polymorphous phenomenon which appears in different civilization and in different ages, and which, in the Caribbean finds some of its most remarkable expressions (Cf. Arnold 1997 and Benítez-Rojo 1997). Carnival may be described as a continuous form of becoming linked to the awareness of the relativity of all order and regimes: in the carnival, social hierarchies of everyday life – their solemnities and pieties and etiquettes, as well as all ready-made truths – are profaned and overturned by normally suppressed voices and energies. Thus, fools become wise, kings become beggars; opposites are mingled (fact and fantasy, heaven and hell). The language of carnival is double and parodic, and does not need too much explanation to cause a liberatory explosion of laugher, a mixture of indignation and hilarity. In *Omeros* carnivalization is used also to avoid falling in the rigid rethoric of epics, and to construct a discourse of history that is able to display irony and self-criticism.

sit right in the middle in order for the boat to go on in a quick and light way. *Omeros* exposes ironically the risks of fetishizing the literary models to which it aspires, and by way of this ironical exposition it also exorcises this unwelcome possibility.

Right before the two poets undertake their journey to La Soufrière, Homer addresses the narrator with a highly meta-reflexive speech revealing the meaning of the latter's homecoming as well as of his poetic enterprise. Homer's complex speech, although expressed in the form of a revelation, leaves more questions open than it actually answers:

> Your wanderer is a phantom from the boy's shore.
>
> Mark you, *he* does not go; he sends his narrator;
> he plays tricks with time because there are two journeys
> in every odyssey, one on worried water,
>
> the other crouched and motionless, without noise.
> For both, the "I" is a mast; a desk is a raft
> for one, foaming with paper, and dipping the beak
>
> of a pen in its foam, while an actual craft
> carries the other to cities where people speak
> a different language, or look at him differently,
>
> while the sun rises from the other direction
> with its unsettling shadows, but the right journey
> is motionless; as the sea moves around an island
>
> that appears to be moving, love moves round the heart –
> with encircling salt, and the slowly travelling hand
> knows its return to the port from which it must start.
>
> Therefore, this is what this island has meant to you,
> why my bust spoke, why the sea-swift was sent to you:
> to circle yourself and your island with this art. (*O* LVIII, II *l*.15-33)

The passage develops an extended metaphor connecting the semantic field of sailing with the idea of writing, a topos which Walcott has employed abundantly since his earliest collections of poems. Composing as setting the sails, the poet as a sailor, the work of art as a ship are images already recurrent among the poets of ancient Rome and, as Maria Cristina Fumagalli explains, they are particularly important in Dante (2001: 41). Walcott does not limit himself to reintroducing these images, but he endows them with new meanings related to his Caribbean context.

The sea, the space that all the characters have to traverse in order to come home, is the

same space of oblivion and resemanticization which Walcott conceived of in "The Sea is History". It is a place of death but also a place where life can develop again in forms that are waiting to be semanticized. The crossing of the ocean entails the dissolution of the boundaries between things and between categories, creating favourable conditions for re-formulating and re-conceptualizing them. The sea conflates past and present in a way that allows each of them to exist simultaneously. Achille's hallucinatory journey, for example, takes him back three centuries, and within a very short time he finds himself on the opposite shore of the Atlantic. Yet while he is in Africa other hallucinations allow him to establish intermittent contact with his Caribbean present. Similarly, Major Plunkett, while being engaged in his historical account of the battle of the Saints fought off Saint Lucia between the French and the British army in the late eighteenth century, finds out that a midshipman with the same name as him had been run over and killed by a sea wave. The distance in time is annulled, and Plunkett decides to accept this unlucky young man as the son he never had. The poet narrator, like Achille, also travels to the other side of the Atlantic, but while he is in Europe he is able to see his island beyond the barrier of water.

In Seven Seas/ Homer's speech, writing and navigating are the same but they are also disconnected actions, accomplished by two different 'I's. "[T]here are two journeys in every Odyssey, one on worried water,/ the other crouched and motionless, without noise" says Seven Seas (*O* LVIII, II *l*.17). The "wanderer" (*l*.15) paradoxically stands still, while the narrator is the one endowed with movement. Both the written and the actual journey by sea have an 'I' as a mast which makes the 'I' the very protagonist of the poem. The 'I' is able to travel and to move across time and space, to traverse different cultures and tradition. The 'I' derives its shape from the experiences of the wanderer who is carried to "cities where people speak/ a different language" (*l*.22-23), but it is articulated in language through the work of the wanderer who stands still and writes.

The motionless 'I' is "foaming with paper/ and dipping the beak/ of a pen in its foam" (*l*.21), an image which suggests two mutually exclusive associations. It is not made explicit whether the paper is empty or already filled with words, but the image entails both possibilities. In "The Sea is History", Walcott had envisaged the sea as a place of oblivion and annihilation, but at the same time as a place of sedimentation and accumulation. The fact that the journey may take place on already written-on paper is a clear reference to the massive

inter-textual apparatus on which Omeros is built. "Foaming" (*l*. 21) is a verb that suggests the possibility of unsettling and disturbing the constant flux in which water and writing move.

An epic of cognitive mapping.

Walcott's recurrent metaphor of the sea pertains to the crisis of representation connected with the age of postindustrial society and multinational capitalism discussed by Fredric Jameson in his famous study of *Postmodernism* (cf. Jameson 1991). Jameson describes this crisis in terms of the subject's growing difficulties in mapping his or her position within a historical moment that has seen the disappearance of traditional systems of production and social classes. Jameson asserts that it is not possible to know the world and its totality in some objective and real way – that there is a necessary rift between existential experience and scientific knowledge. Yet the subject does need to situate himself/herself within that vaster unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structure as a whole. This positioning and cognitive mapping, which corresponds to the work of what Louis Althusser designated as "ideology" (cfr Althusser 1970), is an essential precondition of all kinds of social action. For this reason, Jameson asserts that the political form of postmodern art and literature aims at the enabling of situational representations on a social, individual, and spatial scale.

The need for what Jameson calls an aesthetics of "cognitive mapping" – that is "a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some heightened sense of its place in the global system" (Jameson 1991: 94) – is felt in a special way by post-colonial writers. For them, the feeling of spatial and social confusion connected with global capitalism is exacerbated by the fact that the forces of cultural representation, and consequently of economic and political power, are constantly taken away by a dominant center that, through the circulation of its cultural models, attempts to give a hegemonic normality to the uneven development and the differential histories of nations, races, communities, people. The recovery of a sense of place as individual and collective subjects is the first step to regaining a capacity to act and to struggle. The deploying of the literary imagination as a positive force for renegotiating alternative modes of being and being conscious in the world is a crucial aspect in the process of producing any effective "culture of

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survival" (Bhabha 1994: 247).

The passage above, which declares that the aim of the poem is precisely that of "encircling" the island of Saint Lucia and the self with "art" (*O* LVIII, II *l.*17), illustrates the poem's preoccupation with Jameson's cognitive mapping. The fact that *Omeros* is a poem, and that its mapping is achieved in a form which is extremely classical – all its eight-thousand lines are written in Dante's Terza Rima – have led many scholars to discuss the poem as an epic. O*meros* is an epic in the way it chants for the first time the burdensome history of an oppressed nation, as well as in the way in which it envisages the possibility of a return home to an island whose main experience has been dispossession. Also, the poem is an epic in the way it configures the possibility of a *homing* gesture within the hybrid condition of the inhabitants of the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia – people who feel that their roots are to be found elsewhere: in the remote landscapes of Africa, whence slaves were brutally uprooted at the time of the Diaspora, but also in Europe, the continent from which the settlers and colonisers embarked and whose culture left an indelible signature on the island's people.

In fact, to call Omeros "an epic" requires a redefinition of the limits of a genre which Michail Bakthin considered as usually rooted in stable conceptions of identity and nationhood, a genre which inevitably clashes with postcolonial narratives of identity, nation and history usually involving displacement, uprootedness, and the loss of tradition and language (cf. Pesch 1998). In the essay "Epic and the Novel", Michail Bakhtin suggested that the subject of an epic is a national epic past. Indeed, "I sang our wide country, the Caribbean Sea", says Derek Walcott in the seventh and last book of *Omeros* (LXIV, I *l.*10). Yet, this declaration implies a very fluid conception of nationhood and belonging. The Caribbean that emerges in *Omeros* is not a neatly delimited place, or an established historical and cultural entity. It is, like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, rather a consciousness of space, a spatial logic of connections and interconnections (Hitchcock 2003). It is a space that extends itself well beyond its borders – if ever it is possible to talk about borders in an Archipelago located in the midst of the Atlantic. To sing the Caribbeans, as Homer/ Seven Seas's speech above quoted suggests, is to find ways of crossing the Caribbean. The accent in *Omeros* is not on the national but on the transnational, and on the asymmetries and inequalities that the crossing of borders and cultural identities necessarily implies.

Secondly, Bakhtin asserted that a "national tradition (not the personal experience and

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the free thought that grows out of it) serves as the source of the epic" (1981: 13). In fact, Walcott, in the poem, privileges forms of agency that are both individual and not individual. Like all epic poets, he is a bard; he speaks for a collectivity. His poetry resonates with collective (hate) speeches and is built around a complex inter-textual apparatus. In that sense, it participates in what Deleuze and Guattari would define as "a collective assemblage of enunciation" (1986: 18). Besides, the journeys of homecoming that are the subject-matter of the poem are not represented as the free play of an individual will, but they are pilgrimages, journeys of redemption inspired by God (although it is significantly a very carnevalized kind of God, who makes grammar mistakes and speaks with a strong West Indian accent). Yet, at the same time, *Omeros* is a creative renegotiation of history and myth in which the individual experience plays a fundamental role, and in which the epic, collective tone is also tempered by deeply lyrical moments.

Thirdly, Bakhtin declared that "an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality, i.e. from the time in which the singer (the author and its audience) lives" (1981: 13). Indeed, in his essay "The Muse of History" (1974), Walcott talked about a Mestizo aesthetics arisen from the need to maintain a distance from the past. An aesthetics of acceptance and assimilation would be, in Walcott's view, a better way to deal with the past than the literature of recrimination produced by writers obsessed with the horrors of slavery and colonialism, which will reiterate the same master/ slave division which it is trying to attack. This Mestizo aesthetics which would empower the Caribbean subject is especially urgent and compelling since the emancipation from history has not yet come. The tensions with a past of colonialism and slavery have not been resolved, and the Caribbean is a fertile territory for the cultural and economic expansion of neo-colonial and neo-imperialist powers. At the end of the poem, the wound of history, symbolized by a scar in the body of the fisherman Philoctete and in the head of Major Plunkett, is healed. Nonetheless the poet/ narrator expresses in his encounter with major Plunkett the desire not to remove the wound left in language, because his poetry is based on the asymmetries and incongruities deriving from it.

To account for all these generic contradictions, Natascha Pesch coined the term "novelised epic" (1998: 303). It is undeniable that Walcott's text shows the marks of what Bakhtin calls novelisation, i.e. the influx of a heteroglot and polymorphous genre such as the

novel. *Omeros* displays a multiplicity of tones, texts and discourses that are incorporated in it, and reflect the hybrid status of the nation it is chanting. The hybridisation of the genre and of poetic language is therefore one of the many ways in which Walcott articulates the marks of hybrid, Caribbean identity. The way in which hybridisation creatively acts on a static genre like the epic is to be understood as an exemplification of the ability of post-colonial literatures to go beyond the established limits and to initiate a creative dialogue between different cultures, codes and modes of thought.

The way in which *Omeros* captures different ways of narrating and writing history in order to support a cognitive mapping of the Caribbean will be addressed through the way the poem mixes and intermingles the stories of three different characters: Achille, Major Plunkett, and the poet-narrator. The confrontation between these characters is envisaged as a confrontation between different systems of sense and ways of narrating/ writing history, none of which is accomplished, but rather questioned and put in a state of continuous variation. It is in the discrepancy between these modalities that the subject may find its position. Secondly, the chapter will deal with the production of space and time in *Omeros*' poetic enterprise. The poem, whose beauty refuses to be constrained in a single modality for narration or in a single vision, constructs within its multi-voicedness a poetics of immanence, in which history emerges as a presence conflating in one single moment of contemplation of the past, the present and all future possibilities, allowing, at the same time, the post-colonial subject to occupy a position at the necessary distance to deal with it.

Omeros' narration proceeds through the confrontation of different modes of perceiving and rendering the history of the island of Saint Lucia, modes incarnated by the three homecoming characters. Achille is the one mostly involved with the question "where is your tribal memory?" (Walcott 1979, *l.*2). His homecoming journey to Africa is a journey of confrontation with the oral telling of the history of Saint Lucia and of its African inheritance. On the other side of the spectrum, Major Plunkett's journey is a confrontation with history as a written practice deeply rooted in the history books and in the celebration of the Empire on which his sound, British education is built. The stories of the two characters are complementary and opposite. The poet/ narrator acts as a sort of mediating instance between the two, commenting on both characters' enterprises, and confronting them, or conforming to them, with his own. On more than one occasion he states his own dividedness, his being

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partly with Achille and partly with Plunkett. His concern with history is also a literary concern. In his own homecoming journey there is a series of encounters between himself and the literary figures who have been most significant in his education. Poetry unfolds in the dissonance of these three characters' voices, and in the juxtaposition of their utterances. In addition, each of them is already composed of a series of discrepant voices. It would be a mistake, in fact, to identify each character with a single modality of making sense of history. Each of them is a differently dialogic character, whose 'I' is constituted by a series of confrontations with the word of the other.

Achille's journey to Africa and the renegotiation of a tribal memory

The first of these modes comes through nicely in the following lines, pronounced by the poet/narrator as the poem is drawing to a close: "I sang of quiet Achille, Apholabe's son,/ who never ascended in an elevator,/ who had no passport, since the horizon needs none" (*O* LXIV, I *l.*1-3). Achille is a character whose existence is outside writing. The poet/narrator refers to him as the protagonist not of his writing, but of his singing, thus emphasizing the oral dimension in which Achille is located. The fact that Achille is without a passport testifies to his independence from the written, standardized forms to which identity is entrusted. Achille is not concerned with the History he can find in books: when he accidentally finds a precious Arawac totem, he just throws it away, to the dismay of any archaeologist who would have paid a fortune for such a precious find. The poet/ narrator comments also on the fact that the book he is writing will remain unknown to its hero.

A highly carnivalized hero, Achille is nonetheless the new Aeneas who will found "not Rome but home" (*O* LX, I *l.*48). He decides not to sell himself to the tourists who have seized the island of Saint Lucia and stays faithful to his vocation as a fisherman. Achille asks himself questions about his own identity for the first time when he finds himself in a moment of total loss. His girlfriend Helen has left him, his best friends are leaving the sea to become waiters or taxi drivers and he feels that his job as a fisherman is not enough to make a living. In an attempt to retrieve a submerged treasure which would provide him with the financial support he thinks he needs to win back Helen's heart, he almost drowns. His moment of personal loss gets to a climax when he is sailing across the sea with a fishing mate and he is hit by

sunstroke. On the surface of the water he seems to see the shadow of his father and to hear the voice of God:

> And God said to Achille: "Look, I giving you permission
> to come home. Is I send the sea swift as a pilot,
> the swift whose wings is the sign of my crucifixion.
>
> And thou shalt have no God in case you forgot
> my commandments". (*O* XXV, I *l*.31-39)

God's voice expresses a commandment coming from the Pan-Africanist intellectual traditions inaugurated in the West Indies by Marcus Garvey, and continued in different forms through several intellectuals who deeply influenced Walcott, among which the most significant are certainly Aimé Cesaire and Edward Kamau Brathwaite. This commandment highlights the ethical commitment involved in Achille's journey. Achille will respond not only to his individual loss of identity, but also to the loss of identity of his whole nation. Nonetheless, the fact that God's commandment is expressed in a highly carnivalized, vernacular voice, already indicates that this God who recognizes Africa as a real home is a product of a West Indian nostalgic fantasy.

As he is catapulted to seventeenth-century Africa, Achille finds himself chained and transported in front of his ancestor Apholabe. The chains in which he is stuck are a sign that he will have to be metaphorically enslaved in a system of thought in which he is an outsider. Apholabe asks Achille questions aimed at making Achille knowable in the African man's system of representation:

> "In the place you have come from
> what do they call you?"
>   Time translates.
>   Tapping his chest,
> the son answers:
>   "Achille". The tribe rustles "Achille".
> Then, like cedars at sunrise, the muttering settles.
>
>   APHOLABE
> Achille. What does the name mean? I have forgotten the one
> that I gave you. But it was, it seems, many years ago.
> What does it mean?
>
>   ACHILLE
> Well, I too have forgotten.

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Everything was forgotten. You also. I do not know.
The deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave
us; trees, men, we yearn for a sound that is missing.

      APHOLABE
A name means something. The quality desired in a son,
and even a girl-child; so even the shadows who called
you expected one virtue, since every name is a blessing,

since I am remembering the hope I had for you as a child.
Unless the sound means nothing. Then you would be nothing.
Did they think you were nothing in that other kingdom?

      ACHILLE

I do not know what the name means. It means something,
maybe. What's the difference? In the world I come from
we accept the sound we were given. Men, trees, water. (*O* XXV, III *l.*18-36)

Apholabe does not ask Achille who he is, but rather what other people call him, implying that his identity is dependent on the relationship he has established with the society he is living in. By linking Achille's identity to his name, Apholabe expresses a way of thinking of language as a system well-rooted in a social and historical experience. This mental outlook perplexes Achille, whose attitude towards names is more arbitrary. His name comes from a tradition which is not his own, but he accepted it and lived with it.

By saying that if Achille's name means nothing, then Achille also means nothing , Apholabe is performing an act of hate speech, by which Achille is deeply unsettled. The question asked by Apholabe produces a crisis in Achille, who starts questioning his system of beliefs and tries to recover the bond between nature, culture and language which Apholabe takes for granted. The lines: "The deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave/ us; trees, men, we yearn for a sound that is missing"(*O* XXV, III *l.*26-27) are particularly noteworthy. First because they reaffirm the importance of the sea as a space of passage and rearticulation. Second, because they highlight the sense of emptiness that the uprooting of African slaves has left in the Caribbean people. In order to fill this gap, Achille tries to adopt the code of his imaginary ancestors:

[...] But he learned to chew
in the ritual of the kola nut, drain gourds of palm-wine,
to listen to the moan of the tribe's triumphal sorrow

in a white-eyed storyteller to a balaphon's whine,
who perished in what battle, who was swift with the arrow,
who mated with a crocodile, who entered a river-horse

and lived in its belly, who was the thunder's favorite,
who the serpent-god conducted miles off his course
for some blasphemous offence and how he would pay for it

by forgetting his parents, his tribe and his own spirit
for an albino god, and how that warrior was scarred
for innumerable moons so badly that he would disinherit

himself ... (*O* XXVI, I *l*.4-16)

To adopt the codes of the African ancestors means to participate in the way Afolabe and the other members of his tribe build their own world through rituals, myths and narration. Yet, the distance between the two worlds is not bridged by this acceptance.

In Africa, Achille learns a ritual in which warriors are dressed as women, which reminds him of a ritual that his friend Philoctete performs every year on Boxing day. At the end of the poem, when Achille is back at home and reconciled with Helen, he performs the same ritual again, but the meaning he associates with it is inevitably a new one. Helen's yellow dress, which Achille wears to transforms himself into an androgynous warrior, is the bond which unites his story to the story of Major Plunkett. Helen, Achille's girlfriend and a personification of the island of Saint Lucia, got the yellow dress from Maud, Major Plunkett's wife. Whether the dress was stolen or received as a gift is not clear. Nonetheless, the dress becomes the symbol of a passage of power between the African-Caribbean locals and the white colonials who inhabit the island. "[T]hat dress/ had an empire's tag on it" (*O* XI, I *l*.24-25) comments the poet/ narrator reflecting on how the controversy about it actually mirrors a clash between social classes.

With his imaginary journey to Africa, Achille has started a process of self-translation which does not lead him to a complete identification with his ancestors. To translate, a word coming from the Latin *trans-latus* – "carried over, brought over" – entails both a spatial and a linguistic meaning. By being carried over to eighteenth-century Africa, Achille has been carried to a different semantic order. To position himself as a subject within this foreign, semantic order, he has to begin a process of confrontation and interpretation. When Achille returns to his island, he is still wondering about the meaning of names but cannot find an

answer to his questions. The effect that the journey has had on him consists in making him aware of the existence of a different system of thought, a system that is a component of his present culture but is not identical with it. Achille actually begins a dialogue with this component, and the very fact that the latter is not fully translatable into his semiotic system allows him to appreciate the surplus meaning created by the clashing of the two cultures, or by their reciprocal *untranslatability*.

Untranslatability arouses Achille's historical awareness, but it also makes him aware of the process of erasing through which his hybrid world took shape. When he asks Seven Seas about the meaning of the word Pomme-Arac, Seven Seas says: "*Aruac* means the race/ that burning there like the leaves and *pomme* is the word/ in patois for 'apple'. This used to be their place" (*O* XXXI, II *l.*24-26). While Seven Seas delivers his explanation, the iguana, the animal from which the original name of Saint Lucia "Ionulau" derives, watches as an uncanny presence. The iguana stands for the impossibility of retrieving a past cancelled through genocide and a language forever lost.

Major Plunkett's journey and the failure of historiography

The silence of the iguana, and the erased narratives of history which it symbolizes, is also a disturbing presence for Major Plunkett, the character who represents the opposite pole to Achille. Major Dennis Plunkett is a retired British soldier brought up in the awe of the empire. Differently from Achille, who at the beginning of his journey does not know who he is and has no idea of history, Plunkett firmly believes in the narratives which he has imbibed since a young age. He perceives anything that may disrupt his sense of self and history as a threat which should be removed.

His journey of homecoming starts the moment in which he realizes that the place he lives in is a place without history, a condition which freezes Saint Lucia and puts the island in an inevitably subordinate position vis-a-vis the great power who can, on the opposite, really claim to make history. For Plunkett, as matter of fact, History is and can only be what he learned from his books at school, a written account of battles, wars and treaties:

> The great events of the world would happen elsewhere
> There were those who thought his war had been the best war,
> that the issue were nobler then, the cause more clear,

their nostalgia shone like the skin on his old scar.
There were dead Germans, machine-gunned near the hotels.
In History, he'd had a crypto-Fascist master

who loved German culture above everything else,
from the Royal House of Hanover to Kaiser
Wilhelm; he had given, as one of his essay,

"A few make History. The rest are witnesses".
Beethoven's clouds enrapt him, and Hermann Hesse's
punctilious face. His essay had won the first prize. (*O* XIX, III *l*.28-39)

Plunkett is both the recipient and the performer of the hate speech which excludes and marginalizes the island of Saint Lucia from the written accounts of history. History is revealed not as a neutral, informative discourse, but a discourse supported by a chain of order-words. The imperialistic view which Plunkett represents leans on an institutionalized system which got hold of him when he was at school, and transformed him into a faithful soldier and supporter of the cause of the Empire. The passage highlights how the teaching he received in his youth from a "crypto-Fascist master" (ibid., *l*.33), a supporter of the ideals of race and nationhood which brought Germany to its ruin, are the same ideals which made him a dutiful soldier who fought against the Germans in the battle of El Alamein in WWII. "Pro Rommel, pro mori", Plunkett says (*O* V, I *l*.23), probably quoting or misquoting a slogan he heard on the battlefield. The sentence presents an awkward, grammatically incorrect construction, because in Latin, "pro" does not take the infinitive "mori". Its most probable reference would be a quote from Horace's *Odes*, "dulce et decorum est pro patria mori"[43] (3.2, *l*.13). A well known exhortation among soldiers, the ode asserts that it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. Therefore, *mori* ("to die"), the destiny that the sentence ascribes to those who fight for Rommel, is as well adumbrated as the destiny of those who fight against him.

Plunkett so firmly believes in the ideals of the homeland he has fought for that, when the war is over, his most ardent desire is to undertake a journey through the whole of the Empire. The wish of youth still kindles his fantasies as an elderly man:

Once, after the war, he'd made plans to embark on
a masochistic odyssey through the Empire,
to watch it go in the dusk, his "I" a column

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43 See also Wilfred Owen's bitter and ironic appropriation of Horace's line in "Dulce et Decorum est" , a poem written in 1917 known for its horrific imagery and its comdemnation of war (cf. Owen 1983).

with no roof but a pediment, from Singapore
to the Seychelles in his own Eight Army outfit,
calculating that the enterprise would take him

years, with most of the journey being done on foot,
before it was all gone, a secular pilgrim
to the battles of his boyhood, where they were fought,

from the first musket-shot that divided Concord,
cracking its echo to some hill-station of Sind,
after which they would settle down somewhere, but Maud

was an adamant Eve: "I'll eat up your pension".
But that was his daydream, his pious pilgrimage.
And he would have done it, if he had had a son,

but he was an armchair admiral in old age,
with cold tea and biscuits, his skin wrinkled like milk,
a gawky egret she stitched in her sea-green silk. (*O* XVI, III *l*.1-18)

As in the journey of Achille, who was sent to Africa by a God who speaks with a strong Caribbean accent, the commandment to undertake this journey would come from outside, i.e. from the orders he has introjected at school in the form of historical narratives, principles and ideals. The poem refers to "the battles of his boyhood" (ibid. *l*.9), as if these battles had not just been something that Plunkett read in books, but rather histories with which he deeply identified and in which he lived. His personality was truly shaped through his readings. His journey, which he would undertake mostly on foot as if it were a real pilgrimage, is nonetheless referred to as "a masochistic odyssey" (ibid. *l*.2), as if to highlight its uselessness. It would not be a real desire to come home that would motivate it, but rather the sterile pleasure that the Major would find in accomplishing such a demanding enterprise. In fact, the grandness of Plunkett's daydreams is soon counterbalanced by the trivial motives of its failure. It is his more down-to-earth wife Maud who warns him that his pension as a retired Major would not be enough to support him, so that, twenty years after his retirement from military life, he has grown old without being able to start the journey he had planned after the war and sits in his armchair contented with his longing and wistfulness.

The fact that, in his daydream, "his 'I' is a column/ with no roof but pediment"(*O* XVI, III *l*.3-4), an image which contrasts with the assertion that "the 'I' is a mast"(*O* LVIII, II *l*.20) pronounced by Homer/ Seven Seas in Book Seven and discussed above. Major Plunkett's conception of identity is stable to the point that even travelling to the remotest places would

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not uproot him. Even without a roof over his head he would not experience the pain of exile and of losing himself, but he will bring along his sense of belonging, of history, as well of cultural superiority. "'You ain't been nowhere, [..] you have seen/ nothing no matter how far you have travelled [...]'", says Seven Seas/ Homer to the poet-narrator, telling him that a change of sky is not necessary to learn to circle himself and his island with poetry (*O* LVIII, II *l*.7-8). This is even truer for Plunkett, for whom a change of sky, to quote Seneca's metaphor, does not imply any change of disposition.[44]

The image of the 'I' as a column also confirms the idea that History, for Plunkett, is a discourse of separation. The writing of history, as Michel de Certeau describes it, is an act that presupposes a separation between a subject who is supposed to know how to read and a field that, by being inscribed by this subject, is transformed into a *corps su*. The names that history puts on monuments, battles, martyrs (cf. "The Sea is History") are not just the evidence that time and place have changed, and that events have taken place, but also in themselves events. History proceeds or progresses, modifying what she considers to be its other: the past, the primitive, etc. Plunkett also perceives his role as that of someone who progresses by producing, through his journey, a knowledge of the other, but in a way that separates the other from himself.

Paradoxically, it will be Plunkett's war experience that will disrupt his conception of self and other. Although the first appearance of the Major is among white residents or tourists sitting in a bar, and enjoying their wealth, and being served by local staff, Major Plunkett appears different from his party because of a wound he got when he was fighting in El-Alamein. "This wound I have stitched into Plunkett's character./ He has to be wounded, affliction is one theme of this work,/ this fiction" (*O* V, II *l*.19-20), says the narrator with a tongue-in-cheek, meta-reflexive intervention, suggesting already that the "affliction" he will talk about will not be the unbearable pain or anguish that the reader might expect. Walcott's poem is not going to deal with recrimination, but rather with the working-through of affliction with all possible means, even with irony. The wound, which Maud uses to see into the husband's head, becomes the site of a possible resignification of Plunkett's identity.

Plunkett is not the only character in the poem to bear the wound of history (Cf.

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44 "Animum debet mutare, non caelum" ("you should change your attitude, not your sky"), wrote Seneca in his Epistulae morales ad Lucilium (XXIII.1).

Ramazani 1997). Philoctete,[45] the fisherman who in the first lines of the poem poses for some tourists and shows them how he built two canoes[46] with Achille, bears a similar wound in his shin, a wound which he shows to the tourists for some extra money, but whose cure he refuses to explain ("'it have some things' - he smiles – 'worth more than a dollar'", *O* I, I *l*.21). Later in the text, Philoctete explains that he believed that his wound did not come from a rusted anchor, but rather from the chain of the ancestors who where brought as slaves to Saint Lucia, and that the cross he had to carry was not just his own, but the whole pain of a race. Both Plunkett's and Philoctete's wound are cured in the end of the poem with the arts of the obeah woman Ma Kilman. As noted by Jahan Ramazani – author of an essay on the post-colonial politics of affliction in Derek Walcott's *Omeros* – Walcott's stitching the wound of history into two characters with such a different extraction "frustrates the assumption it elicits" (Ramazani 1997: 405). The motif of the wound becomes strange and unpredictable in Walcott's hands. Refusing the separatist aesthetics that characterizes what he calls the literature of recrimination, Walcott's poem becomes the site for the articulation of a hybrid, polivalent and unpredictable articulation of this very story of affliction.

The wound makes Major Plunkett a very complex and central figure, metaphorically opening his body to the other, as well to a series of changes that he does not seem able to formulate with his own words. Although appearing as a rigid character stuck with his privileges as a white man, Plunkett is no less hybrid than other characters in the poem. Spending twenty years of his life on a Caribbean island has inevitably transformed him into a Saint Lucian who takes offence when Hector mistakes him for a tourist and calls him a "honky" (*O* LI, *I l*.13). For this reason the homecoming journey through language, history and

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45 Philoctete is named after a Greek hero whose story is told in the second book of the *Iliad*. Plagued by wound – the punishment for having broken an oath he has sworn to Heracles – Philoctete was exiled on a desert island by Ulysses who could not stand the terrible reek emanating from his wound. The story of the Greek Philoctete, abandoned by his very allies, diverges from the story of the Caribben Philoctete insofar as Philoctete never becomes an exile. On the contrary, he finds in his very community the cure to his pain.

46 Drawing on the metaphor of writing as navigation discussed above, Maria Cristina Fumagalli discusses the first scene in Derek Walcott's poem as an introduction to the whole theme of the novel. Achille and Philoctete's building of the canoes (one for Achille and one for Hector) suggests that they are preparing the means of their navigation, just like the poet is preparing the instrument of his writing. The fact that the sacrifice of the trees named laurier-cannelles will make them impatient to become canoe "feeling not death inside them but use" (*O*: 18) anticipates the fact that the poetry of *Omeros* will not be a sterile, celebratory exercise, but that it will engage with language as a living phenomenon. Achille's canoe, the only one among the two which will manage to accomplish a journey home, will be called "In God we Troust" and that Achille replies "'Leave it! It is God' spelling and mine'" (*O*: 19), suggests that the journey by sea that Achille and the poet are about to undertake will be a journey of linguistic transformation and metamorphoses. For an analysis of Achille's misspelling, see also D'Aguiar 2005.

representation that he undertakes not as a real journey, but as a journey in writing, with a presumably, univocal, monolithic intention, leads him to explore unexpected paths. Like in Achille's journey, Plunkett will have to confront the issue of *untranslatability.*

His beginning to become aware of the discrepancies between himself and the discourses he has been brought up in is outlined in the episode of his tour around the island on board of a Land Rover together with his wife Maud. Contemplating from a height the island he realizes that history would see nothing in the shacks roofed with tins that the descendants of African had built in an almost casual way, uniting themselves to become villages and later perhaps cities, or in the "broken roads"(O X, II *l.*9), or in the "pretty, dangerous streams"(ibid. *l.*12). Plunkett thinks that "Their past was flat as a postcard, and their future,/ a brighter and flatter postcard, printed the schemes/ of charters with their poverty guaranteed tours." (ibid. *l.*13-15). Not only the past of the island seems to have nothing to offer to the eye of the historian. Also its futures seems to promise that Saint Lucia will remain outside of history, a sort of artificial paradise for tourists, where the poverty of the inhabitants is transformed into a flat, idealized attraction. Yet, this island without history, where progress has not taken hold yet, and which in may regards had remained wild and uncultured, appears to Plunkett preferable to the more rational landscape of his own homeland:

> England seemed to him merely the place of his birth.
> How odd to prefer, over its pastoral sites –
> reasonable leaves shading reasonable earth –
>
> these loud-mouthed forests on their illiterate heights,
> these springs speaking a dialect that cooled his mind
> more than pastures with castles! To prefer the hush
>
> of a hazed Atlantic worried by the salt wind!
> Other could read it as «going back to the bush»
> but harbour after crescent harbour closed his wound (O X, III *l.*13-21)

This passage is particularly interesting because not only Plunkett declares his inexplicable love to Saint Lucia, but also because the landscapes of England and that of the island are identified with the language spoken in both places. If England, idealized from afar, appears to him as the place where the leaves and the earth speak in a reasonable and soothing way, Saint Lucia appears as a place spoken by a "loud-mouthed dialect" (ibid. *l.*16).

Plunkett's decision to write the history of Saint Lucia – or rather to give back to it what

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he considers to be its own rightful, forgotten place in History, as Saint Lucia was theatre to one of the most significant battles arisen between England and France in the context of the American revolution – arises from his ambiguous relationship to language and dialect. Without being aware of it, Plunkett has in fact been caught by the vernacular spoken in Saint Lucia, and his attempt to transform the "loud-mouthed forests" (O X, III *l*.16) into a more rational landscape/ language is doomed to make him face his internal contradictions.

Plunkett compares History to Circe, the goddess who, in the *Odyssey*, transforms her enemies into swine, a multi-layered image whose significance escapes from his hands: "If history saw them as pigs, History was Circe/ with her schoolteacher's wand, with high poles at the fêtes/ of saint-day processions past al fresco latrines" (O XI, I *l*.28-30). History, like the Medusa of modernity described by Maria Cristina Fumagalli, is a discourse that transforms its others into fetish to make them part of a system of production of knowledge. Yet, although Plunkett's Circe uses her "schoolteacher's wand" (ibid. *l*.29) to transform Empires into pigs ("Empire were swinish", ibid. *l*.9), she does not offer the petrifying gaze that Medusa casts onto whoever dares to look at her. Circe is a much more erotically connoted character. The sailors who accompanied Ulysses were invited to enjoy the pleasure of her banquet before being transformed into piglets. Ulysses, who resisted her spell, decides on his own free will to remain on her island for a year, until it is the insistence of his mate who forces him to leave. Plunkett's writing of history is not the result of his identification with Circe, but rather of his being seduced by her.

Plunkett's comparison of history to Circe introduces Plunkett's decision to dedicate his writing enterprise to a woman. It is for Helen, who works at Plunkett's pig farm as a maid, that the old Major decides to retire himself from the world for a while and live the life of a don among books and among papers. Helen inspires the writing of Plunkett – as well, as the poet-narrator's own writing – as the Helen of the Greek myth inspired the Trojan war. With his writing, Plunkett hopes to give back to her the yellow dress that Maud had accused her of stealing, as well as to repossess an island dispossessed of its dignity by her being forgotten by history:

> So Plunkett decided that what the place needed
> was its true place in history, that he'd spend hours
> for Helen's sake on research, so he proceeded

to the whirr of enormous moths in the still house.
Memory's engines. The butterfly dress was hers,
at least her namesake's, in the Battle of the Saints. (O XI, I *l*.31-36)

Helen, whom Plunkett contemplates while she is wearing the dress "with an empire's tag on it" (*O* XI, I *l*.24-25) that Maud accused her of stealing, is the personification of the island of Saint Lucia. An island known for its beauty as the "Helen of the Caribbean" (Hamner 1997: 48), Saint Lucia passed over thirteen's time from English to French hands and vice-versa. The contemporary war on Saint Lucia between those who have decided to sell themselves to the homogenizing, neo-colonialist business of tourism and those who have decided to live their life without transforming themselves into waiters and servants to a new elite of first world tourists is depicted in the poem as the conflict between Helen's two lover Hector and Achille respectively. While the first decides to abandon his canoe to embrace the more profitable occupation of driving taxis, the second decides to live as a fisherman in spite of his pressing financial straits. The war between France and England of which the Battle of the Saints is one of the most significant episodes, the war between the fishermen Achille and Hector, as well as the "schoolteacher's wand merge in the work of Plunkett to produce an account which reverberates with myth and the accounts of the Trojan war.

"Black maid or blackmail" (*O* XVII, II *l*.19), as Plunkett defines her, the physical, concrete presence of Helen insinuate herself in Plunkett's writing, taking him adrift from his purposes. Not only Plunkett does not have control on the language of facts and figures and that of myth, which he mixes, profoundly disturbed by their inevitable clash. Helen disturbs the imagination of the major, provoking him with her beauty while he tries to concentrate on his pure thoughts, thoughts which he claims are "meant to help her people, ignorant and poor" (*O* XVII, II *l*.17). Her highly sexualized body is diametrically opposed to the book without passions on which Plunkett spends his days and his nights. However hard he tries to fix Helen on the white page, she escapes from him, from his writing and from the Empire's history.

The sterility of Plunkett's enterprise, although he fails to recognize it, brings him closer to the acknowledgement of his hybrid identity, and enacts in him a process of questioning which will later bring him to the healing of his wound. If he is not able to frame the history of Helen on the white page, he manages not to make his writing enterprise completely useless by finding the son whom he has never had in the figure of a midshipman

named like him, a nineteen-year-old Dennis Plunkett, who died in the battle of the Saints while serving with Admiral Rodney.

It is the imagined mourning for discovering a son buried in history and the real death of her wife Maud which makes him realize the sterility of his search and leads him to dismantle the fixity of his pediment. It is to overcome the unbearable pain of the loss that he starts speaking in earnest with the people with whom he has lived with for over twenty years "not as boys/ who worked with him, till every name somehow sounded different" (*O L*XI, III *l*.18-19). He starts, differently put, to overcome the discourses of history that had separated him from what he considered as his others, substituting the desire of knowledge as appropriation and functionalization that had moved him with a desire of knowledge as a way of establishing a relation (cf. Glissant) with the others. He starts to forget "the war's history/ that had cost him a son and a wife" (*O L*XI, III *l*.15-16), and to considers Helen as a presence, a "local wonder" (ibid. *l*.21), not as a cause for a war. He abandons the discourse of history he has learnt in school to appreciate the quilt that his wife Maud had been sawing in the last moths of her life, a narration of history performed in a poetic way and comparable to the work that the poet-narrator undertakes with the writing of *Omeros*.

As Ramazani claims, the greateness of Walcott's poem consists in the very denial and constant problematization emerging from his lines. Plunkett, before being graced by a sort of wistful, melancholic happiness in the end of the poem, has to meet with a poet-narrator who shows some tangible signs of irritation upon finding him a tired and mourning man, waiting in a queue at the local bank deprived of the foundation on which his 'I' was solidly based:

> "Our wander's home, is he?"
>   I said "For a while, sir"
> too crisply, mentally snapping to attention,
> thumbs along trouser's seam, picking up his accent
> from a khaki order.
>   "Been travellin' a bit, what?".
> I forgot the melody of my own accent,
> but I knew I'd caught him, and he knew he'd been caught,
>
> caught out in the class-war. It stirred my contempt.
> He knew the "what?" was a farce, I knew it was not
> officer-quality, a stunning R.S.M.,
>
> Regimental Sarn't Major Plunkett, Retired.
> Not real colonial gentry, but spoke like
> them from the height of his pig-farm, but I felt as tired

as he looked. Still, he'd led us in Kipling's requiem
"Been doin' a spot of writing meself. Research".
The «meself» his accommodation. "P'raps you've 'eard...

the old queen" shrugging. I said I'd been at the church.
"Ah! Were you? These things. Eyes tend to get very blurred.
Sorry I missed you. Bit of an artist, too

was old Maud. You must come up. I'll show you a quilt
she embroidered for years. Birds and things. Mustn't keep you".
O Christ! I swore, I'm tired of their fucking guilt,

and our fucking envy! War invented the queue,
and he taught that Discipline formed its own beauty
in the rhyming steps of the college cadet Force,

that through crowds mimicked his strut, it was his duty
to make us all gentleman, if not officers.
«Nice to see you, sir» said my old Sergeant Major,

and my eyes blurred. Then he paused at the white glare of
the street outside, and left, as the guard closed the door,
the wound of a language I'd no wish to remove. (*O* LIV, I *l*.25-54)

The fact that the major acquiesces to speak with a West-African accent threatens an unwelcome assimilation. His dialectal use of "meself" (ibid. *l*.41) appears like a concession, an accommodation that Plunkett makes to an "authentic" native speaker. The writing of history that Maud had performed with her quilt appears from the enraged perspective of the poet-narrator as a sterile way of dealing with the sense of guilt that History has bestowed on white colonials.

The scene, contradictory as it is, enacts the *agon* on language that animates the poem as a whole. The way in which Plunkett has undertaken his writing of history plays an essential role in *Omeros* because to a degree it is by working-through the self-division of language that a new, uncompromising, unassimilating view of the island through poetry may be produced. Walcott uses language "partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency, as an act with consequences" (Butler 1997: 6). The possibility of reconfiguring history derives from the capacity of the poet of working-through the self-division of language, and of reproducing the multiplicity of utterances, dialects, accents that makes English the instrument of Walcott's poetic enterprise. The wound that history has impressed on language cannot be easily removed without running the risk of simplification.

It is with this awareness that the poet-narrator defines his own poetic work as a work of sewing together the different parts that compose the complexity of his language and of his Caribbean culture. Toward the end of the poem, the poet gathers up the threads represented by the different stories and the different ways of relating oneself to history, thus defining his own poetic mode as a stitching together of Achille's and Plunkett's homecoming:

> I followed a sea swift to both sides of this text;
> her hyphen stitched its seam, like the interlocking
> basins of a globe in which one half fits the next
>
> into an equator, both shores neatly clicking
> into a globe; except that its meridian
> was not North and South but East and West. One, the New
>
> World, made exactly like the Old, halves of one brain
> or the beat of both hands rowing that bear the two
> vessels of the heart with balance, weight and design.
>
> Her wing-beat carries these islands to Africa,
> she sewed the Atlantic rift with a needle's line,
> the rift in the soul. Now as vision grows weaker,
>
> it glimpses the straightened X of the soaring swift,
> like a cedar's branches widening in sunrise,
> in oars that are crossed and settled in calm water,
>
> since the place held all I needed of paradise,
> with no other sign but a lizard's signature,
> and no other laurel but the *laurier-cannelle*'s. (*O L*XIII, III *l.*9-18)

The passage significantly begins with a "I followed" (*l.*1): not an assertion of the poet's individual accomplishment, but a recognition that poetry is born from language as a shared and collective activity. The sea-swift figures though *Omeros* as a God-sent messenger carrying an order to come home to different characters: it carries Achille on his journey through time and space; it accompanies the poet-narrators during a series of peregrination on both sides of the Atlantic ocean; it brings from Africa the seed which Ma Kilman will use to cure Philoctete's wound; and even if it seems to ignore Plunkett's own writing enterprise, it inspires Maud's embroidering of the quilt that Major Plunkett will learn to appreciate and treasure after his wife's demise. By saying that the impulse of coming home comes from a

sea-swift, Walcott highlights that the need to come home is not an individual choice, but a collective necessity over which not even the poet has complete control.

The flight of the sea-swift stitches the seams of the text with the same gesture with which it unites the two halves into which the world has been divided, the New and the Old. To stitch together the modes in which Achille and Plunkett relate to their history by letting their incongruities, their clashes and their untranslatability emerge, is a way of joining together the New World with the Old. The act of sewing does not imply assimilation of any sort. The wound of history must be made visible by poetry working through the scars it has left in language. Such, at least, is Derek Walcott's interpretation of his work as a poet as he discussed it in the famous lecture he delivered when he was awarded the Nobel prize in 1992:

> Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent. (Walcott 1998: 69)

The task of the poet is to reassemble a broken vase whose form does not just repeat the ideal of the vase when it was a whole, but rather enriches it with the efforts and the love necessary to put the fragments together and provide them with a new, coherent form. The art of the dispossessed does not have to imitate the art of a previous master or its narrative forms, but rather take from it and re-elaborate its models to put them in a state of instability.

The straitened X that the sea-swift describes as she is soaring is the sign of her stitching together, but also a complex signifier charged with a number of different connotations. The X is a chiasmus, a symbol of the exchange that combines, displaces and mixes the different roots of Caribbean culture to produce something completely new. It is an hourglass whose shape may stretch itself to infinity, marking the possibility of understanding the measurement of the passing of time in a different way. The X may as well refer to Malcom X's choice of replacing its surname with the sign of an absence to mark his desire of breaking the bond with a past of slavery. The X is also a sign of the cross – the sign of the crucifixion that the swift projected onto the Sea when God sent her to fetch Achille and bring

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him before his ancestor, Apholabe (*O*: 228). The cross reverberates with the connotations of the pain and suffering that the African slaves endured when they were uprooted from their homeland. Yet, at the same time, it figures prominently as the instrument through which, according to Christian theology, mankind was saved and redeemed through Christ's sacrifice.

The idea that the swift, and therefore poetry in general, should be able to encircle the world and provide it with a new vision makes *Omeros* a poem with an encyclopaedic scope in ways that both resemble and diverge from Dante's *Comedia*. The word "encyclopaedia" comes from the ancient Greek *egkylopaideia*, literally meaning "circle of knowledge". With his work, Dante re-organizes all the knowledge of his time to create a vision of universality perfectly structured in a rigid architecture of the universe which finds its roots in the Ptolemaic geocentric system re-interpreted through Thomistic philosophy. Hell, Purgatory and Paradise are separated spaces whose configuration responds to a hierarchical model of eternal perfection created by God, in his unfathomable wisdom, where all sins, all humans, occupy a precise place within this scheme. The architecture of Walcott's encyclopaedia, by contrast, is a provisional one, kept together by the arbitrariness of the flight of a sea-swift whose trajectory is transient, volatile, arbitrary.

Omeros is an encyclopedia in the sense that the poet has to learn to "circle [himself] and [his] island" with poetry, as Homer/ Seven Seas explains to his disciple when they finally meet in Saint Lucia (*O* LVIII, II *l*.33). In order to circle himself with poetry, and to make it possible for him finally to rejoin with Saint Lucia, the poet-narrator has to undertake a journey which will bring him into confrontation with the cultural inheritance of his past. While Achille travels to Africa to reconnect with his ancestors, with their ritual and with their art of story-telling, Plunkett has to travel across books and historical accounts, the poet-narrator travels to Europe, to Canada and to the USA to reconnect to the artistic and literary models which have inspired his vocation to become a writer. It is through a journey which will keep him away from home for many years that the writer will be able to mediate his own relationship to literature and to the word.

It is the shadow of the poet-narrator's dead father who commands him to leave the island and enter the cities "that open like *The World's Classics*" (*O* XXVI, III *l*.41). It is, in fact, the awe that his father had for the literature produced elsewhere that produces the derogatory hate speech which the author himself has to overcome. The juxtaposition of cities

like Lisbon, London, Dublin, Istanbul, Venice, Rome and Boston with the *World Classics* that his father jealously kept in his own little library suggests that these cities are also a sort of inescapable canon which any writer worthy of the name should confront.

Yet, as the poet leaves his island and visits those cities, what he finds is a world that has become rigid in the contemplation of its past. This past, in fact, also involves domination, exploitation and violence towards the colonised land:

> A bronze horseman halts at a wharf, his green-bronze
> cloak flecked with white droppings, his wedged visor
> shading the sockets' hyphenating horizons,
>
> his stare fixed like a helm. We had no such erections
> above our colonial wharves, our erogenous zones
> were not drawn to power, our squares shrank the directions
>
> of the Empire's plaza. Above us, no stallion paw
> the sky's pavement to strike stars from the stones,
> no sword is pointed to recapture the port of Genoa.
>
> There the past is an infinite Sunday. It's hot, or it rains;
> the sun lifts the sheets of the rain, and the gutters
> run out. For those to whom history is the presence
>
> of ruins, there is a green nothing. No bell tower utters
> its flotilla of swallows memorizing an alphabet,
> no cobbles crawl toward the sea. We think of the past
>
> as better forgotten than fixed with stony regrets. (*O* XXVI, III *l*.1-16)

The passage is built around a contrast between, on the one hand, the image of death contained in the monuments built in European cities and the image of life contained in the green nothingness of the Caribbean. Walcott ironically uses the word "erection" (ibid. *l*.4) to refer to the statue to hint to the almost erotic pleasure involved in the assertion and celebration of one's power over other countries, as well as to highlight that this power is a sterile one, fixed in the immobility and impotency of a statue of stone. Extremely significant is the use of the enjambment in the lines: "for those to whom history is the presence/ of ruins"(ibid. *l*.10-11). Ruins are in fact not the sign of a presence, but of an absence. The island deprived of its ruins emerges from this passage not as "green nothing" (ibid. *l*.11), but rather as a space on the move, where the past is not fixed with stony regrets, but is subsumed in a sort of eternal Sunday, where sun and rain alternate endlessly, prospecting for the emergence of some form

of life.

Although the poet-narrator, through his journey comes to see the monuments, the work of art as well as the pieces of literature as something haunted by the fear of death, his journey brings him to a new consciousness, a consciousness which will soon bring him to elaborate his own vision of poetic history. By acknowledging his own estrangement from the place where he has undertaken the journey that his father had commanded him to do, he also gives form to a new possibility for interaction:

> In them was the terror of Time, that I would march
> with columns at twilight, only to disappear
> into a past whose history echoed the arch
>
> of bridges sighing over their ancient canals
> for a place that was not mine, since what I preferred
> was not statues but the bird in the statue's hair. (*O* XL, III *l.*7-12)

By claiming that what interests him is not the statue, but rather the bird playing in the statue's hair, the poet-narrator proposes a meta-reflection on the scope of what he would want his art to be. His object of interest is not the bird per se, but the way the bird plays with the monument that someone else has erected to celebrate a past which, if allowed to speak in a different way, may still be become part of today's present not as an impediment, not as recrimination, but rather as a space to be inhabited.

In this sense, Derek Walcott's poem engages with Michel de Certeau's definition of history as "[a] labor of death and a labor against death" (1992: 5) and tries to re-articulate the borders between the "of" and the "against". *Omeros*, to put it differently, engages with the impossible task of making the writing of history not just an exercise of creating dead linguistic artefact or any sort of monuments to work through the grief for having lost the past forever, but rather to imagine possible horizon for the impossible translation of death into life.

The impossibility of the task of this translation is thematized in more than one passage in *Omeros*. The scene of the encounter between the narrator and Major Plunkett at the bank is followed by another encounter in which the two characters discuss their respective works as well as their respective failures. "Plunkett/ in his innocence, had tried to change history to a metaphor/ in the name of a housemaid" (*O* LIV, II *l.*12-13), says the poet-narrator, implying that the work of the old Major had been one of idealization. He had tried to celebrate history

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and to give it a meaning by translating Saint Lucia/ Helen into my. "I, in self-defence, altered her opposite" (ibid. *l*.14-15), claims the narrator, suggesting that what he had tried to do has been a translation of poetry into history. Yet, the real Helen, as well as the real Saint Lucia remains outside of the writing of both:

> There, in her head of ebony,
> there was no real need for the historian's
> remorse, nor for Literature's. Why not see Helen
>
> as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow,
> swinging her plastic sandals on that beach alone,
> as fresh as the wind, why make the smoke a door? (*O* XL, III *l*.22-27)

The two writers ask themselves the reason for what they call "her [Helen/Saint Lucia's] arrogance" (ibid. *l*.3). Yet, what emerges from the text it is not only Helen's arrogance in refusing to be fixed in their writing. The accusation is addressed in a specular way to the two writers who want to capture something whose beauty can only be appreciate outside writing.

In the passage above Walcott performs an example what has been defined as "the poetry of the ineffable" of Dante. In *Paradiso XXXIII*, Dante declares himself unable to express with words something that, because of its greatness or beauty, cannot be said or is better not said, such as the vision of God which the poet attains at the end of his pilgrimage among the three realms of the afterlife. By erecting a wall of silence between what he says and what he saw, Dante directly interpellates his readers and asks them to use their own imagination to complete and make sense of a vision for which words are not enough. Walcott not only uses the same poetic strategy as Dante, but connotes it with a further meaning of resistance. Poetry, like the writing of history, is a genre that he has inherited from a colonial past. It is for this very reason that poetry may be used to translate or to articulate a multiple vision of the island of Saint Lucia, but must be kept at a certain distance in order not to run the risk of transforming the island into a new fetish.

Walcott deals with the issue of the arrogance of poetry in the seventh and last book of *Omeros*. Dante, again, serves as a central reference to the Caribbean poet, who re-stages the cosmology described by the Italian poet within his own little Caribbean island. The hierarchical architecture in which the *Comedia* unfolds[47] is destined to collapse and converge

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47 The importance of a semiotic analysis of the spatial architecture in Dante Alighieri's *Comedia* has been

into Walcott's Saint Lucia. In *Omeros*, evil and good cannot be separated and they do not occupy different places. The poet-narrator, walking on the already swept beach in front of the hotel where he is staying as he is visiting his native island – an image of emptiness and uprootedness which recalls Dante's errancy in the "selva oscura" (Inferno I, *l.*2) – meets the bust of Seven Seas/ Homer who will lead him, like Virgil led Dante, on a journey into Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. This journey will take place on a volcano in the island of Saint Lucia, a volcano known as *Malebolge* (literally, "evil ditches"), like the ten subdivisions of the eighth Circle of Hell in Dante's *Comedia*. Malebolge is defined as "hell in paradise", but also as "*a volcano, stinking with sulphur*" which has made Saint Lucia "*a healing place*" (*O* LVII, I *l.*52, italics in the original). Unlike Dante's Inferno, Malebolge will be reached by climbing up, not by descending into a pit. Therefore the ascent into hell is also an ascent to mount Purgatory, where the poet-narrator expects to gain the purification necessary to reach Paradise.

The journey in the realm of the dead results in a way of renegotiating the role of poetry, highlighting both its limits and its possibilities. Following his guide, the poet-narrator has a vision of all the torments which plague all those who have served their own interests at the expense of the island, among whom are also the poets:

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stressed by Jurij Lotman in an essay entitled "Ulysses' Journey in Dante's Divine Comedy" (in Lotman 1990). Lotman insisted on the fact that Dante firmly believed in the correspondence between signifier and signified. The world, to Dante, was the product of a creation, and for this reason it was natural that it had a purpose and a meaning. The world, to put it differently, was a message of its creator and this message was codified in a spatial structure. Dante saw himself as somebody in charge to transmit this message. For this reason, the spatial organization of the *Divina Comedia* had to be analysed a symbolic system, in which every single place was endowed with a specific meaning in the light of the final revelation of the poem - that is, the vision of God. Also, the kind of movements that are allowed within this structure respond to symbolic logics. To Dante, the whole physical world is to be seen in God's mind: it is a perfect sphere within which the stars, the planets and the earth are included. This structure is highly hierarchical and the heavenly spheres are strictly subordinate one another. The first, most external level is the Empyrean. The Empyrean is the permanent residence of God and the blessed. It is the level of the eternal peace and of eternal presence, where the divine mind, that gives virtue, light and energy to all the subordinate spheres, from above to below, articulating it, through many differentiations (accidents) from the One, to the multiple. The closer the heavenly spheres are to the Empyrean, the quicker they rotate. The movement is circular according to the Platonic principle by which the circle represents perfection. The Primum Mobile is the quickest sphere. Then there is the heaven of the fixed stars, in which the circular movement of the planets is embedded. Each planet represents a virtue, according to the principle that the closer it is to God, the greater the virtue. The earth is at the centre of the universe, and therefore it is the furthest from God. The virtue of God has to go through different specifications and celestial influences before reaching it, that's why the earth is so subjected to accidents. The world of the living, which for Dante comprised the space between the sources of Gange and the pillar of Hercules is in the southern hemisphere. Hell is a huge pit formed by Lucifer's fall, and it stretches to the centre of the earth as far as possible from God's glory. Lucifer's fall also created Mount Purgatory, which is to be found on the northern hemisphere of the earth, and is the place where the souls of the sinners have to ascend to be purified and to become worthy of being admitted to Paradise.

> In one pit were the poets. Selfish phantoms with eyes
> who wrote with them only, saw only surfaces
> in nature and men, and smiled at their similes,
>
> condemned them in their pit to weep at their own pages.
> And that was where I had come from. Pride in my craft.
> Elevating myself. I slid, and kept falling
>
> towards the shit they stewed in; all the poets laughed,
> jeering with dripping fingers; then Omeros gripped
> my hand in enclosing marble and his strength moved
>
> me away from that crowd, or else I might have slipped
> to that backbiting circle, mockers and self-lovers (*O* LVIII, III *l*.10-20)

The pit of hell is the place where the poet claims that he comes from. He is aware that poetry may be used to produce monuments like the statue in the European wharf he visited during his journey to Europe. He knows that the risk of poetry is to be transformed into an individualist, sterile act of self-celebration. The danger that poetry may serve the pride of a poet who dares to compare himself to God had also been a theme in Dante's *Comedia*. Dante, in fact, foresaw his future among the repenting souls of the Proud in the first terrace of Purgatory (*Purgatorio* XI). An attitude on which the poem exposes in the form of a sense of guilt: "Hadn't I made their poverty my paradise?" asks himself the narrator as he is travelling home in a taxi like any wealthy tourist (*O* XLV, II *l*.55).

"Omeros grip my hand in enclosing marble", says the poet-narrator (*O* LVI, III *l*.18), suggesting that his guide may be able to preserve him from the risks of falling again into the pit where poets are condemned to weep on their writing, submerged in filth. Choosing Homeric poetry as a model, Walcott in fact chose a poetry which is not a single individual's enterprise. The dimension of Homeric poems is not just their written form, but first and foremost that of the oral tradition. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* go well beyond their written form because they were destined not to solitary reading but to collective performances. By being recited by different people, Homer's written word acquire a different meaning and different contextualization in each performance – performance which include not only the role of a reader, but also of a collective audience. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were often recited by heart, acquiring a new life in the memory and in the utterance of their performers. Their lines and their account of history were not fixed in the separation between life and death that

characterizes written poetry, but mobilized through each single interpretation.

Secondly, by inscribing his own journey in the will of someone else and by choosing Homer as his guide, the poet-narrator configures his journey as a pilgrimage. The Russian semiotician Jurij Lotman discussed the difference between journey and pilgrimage with reference to the episode of Dante's encounter with Ulysses in *Inferno XXXVI*. In the *Comedia*, the character of Ulysses plays a very ambivalent role, Lotman remarks. Ulysses is not just Dante's opposite, but also his twin: "Dante and Ulysses are voluntary or forced exiles, driven by passion, crossing the boundaries which separate one area of the cosmos from the other" (Lotman 2001: 183). Ulysses is the man of the Renaissance, who travels to satisfy his thirst for knowledge, as the famous words uttered by Ulysses to convince his mates to follow him imply: "Call to mind from whence we sprang:/ Ye were not form'd to live the life of brutes/ But virtue to pursue and knowledge high"(*Inferno* XXVI, *l.*115-117). In the *Comedia*, Dante imagines that Ulysses, after his return to Ithaca could not resign himself to a life of comfort as a king of his island. That is why he decided, together with some of his most trusted men, to venture beyond the limits of human knowledge that God had imposed on man, and to cross the Column of Hercules. Dante imagined that, after having been many days at sea, Ulysses managed to reach the mountain of Purgatory. Ulysses' journey is doomed because, unlike Dante's pilgrimage, it had not been decreed by God. As soon as he got closer to the coast, his ship was swept away by a whirlpool, and Ulysses precipitates first into the abyss and then into Hell. The pilgrim Dante, whose journey is dictated by Grace and guided by the wisdom of the classics which Virgil incarnates, is destined to bring the poet to reach the summit of the mount, to purify himself from his sins and to attain the vision of God which illuminates his all work.

The poet-narrator inscribes his journey between's Ulysses' *folle volo* ("witless flight", *Inferno* XXVI *l.*124). and Dante's *alto volo* ("the flight of holy transport", *Paradiso* XV, *l.*54). He knows that what he would like to attain is a journey with the status of a pilgrimage, but he is constantly aware that his journey may turn out a journey that somehow follow in the path of Ulysses' journey of discovery, the word "discovery" being tainted with the connotations left by a colonial history:

"you tried to render

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their life as you could, but that is never enough;
now in the sulphur stench ask yourself this question,

whether a love of poverty helped you
to use the other eyes, like those of this stone?"
My own head sank in the black mud of Soufrère,
while it looked back with all the faith it could summon. (*O* LVIII, III *l*.28-34)

The final question that Homer/ Seven Seas asks questions the whole poetic mode of narrating history that Walcott produces within his work. The point made in this question – which remains unanswered because the poet-narrator wakes up from what in the end turns out to be a dream – is that even though the poet's intention is to be able to see with the eyes of the other, and even when this other is, like the stone to which the passage refers, the "subaltern" discussed by Spivak (cf. Spivak 1988), that is, the masses of people who have no access whatsoever to cultural imperialism.[48] The "love for poverty" to which Seven Seas/ Homer refers is not just to Walcott's celebration of the life of fishermen and sailors which he expresses in his poems, but also to poverty as a precise poetics.[49] Yet, the fact that poverty may be celebrated in lines risks to widen the gap between Walcott as a poet and the fishermen and sailors about whom he writes.

Charting the sea as a way of charting history

In the last lines of the poem, Walcott quotes and restages his poem "The Sea is History" with reference to the story of Achille, and all of those who, by remaining outside the official records of historiography, perceive history not as a celebration of a dead past but as a form of life. In these lines the poet discusses the necessity of writing about Achille, because it is this with a writing that is also a form chanting that poetry may create a different way of looking at history:

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48 According to Spivak, *"subaltern* is not just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie....In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern––a space of difference. Now who would say that's just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not subaltern.[..]Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus, they don't need the word 'subaltern' [..]They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They're within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern" (de Koch 1992).

49 a poetics which emerges, from his essay "What the Twilight Says", as deeply inspired by Grotowski's "poor theatre".

> Why waste lines on Achille, a shade on the sea-floor?
> Because strong as self-healing coral, a quiet culture
> is branching from the white ribs of each ancestors,
>
> deeper than it seems on the surface; slowly but sure,
> it will change us with the fluent sculpture of Time,
> it will grip like the polyp, soldered by the slime
>
> of the sea-slug. Below him, a parodic architecture
> re-erected the earth's crusted columns, its porous
> temples, stoas through which whipping eels slide,
>
> over him the tasselled palanquins of Portuguese man-o'-wars
> bobbed like Asian potentates, when ribbed dunes hide
> the spiked minarets, and the waving banners of moss
>
> are the ghosts of motionless hordes. The crabs' anabasis
> scuttles under his wake, because this is the true element,
> water, which commemorates nothing in its stasis. (*O* LIV, II *l*.1-15)

The lines above are some of the most epic passages in the whole work, referring directly to the foundational role that poetry may have for the creation of a collective, historical, (trans)national consciousness. This epic role of poetry is introduced with a question which summarizes some doubts about *Omeros* as a poetic enterprise, as the narrator had already formulated in the previous chapters: "Why waste line on Achille, a shade on the sea-floor?" (ibid. *l*.1) The use of the verb "waste" is particularly interesting, insofar as it already undermines the potential solemnity of the answer that follows. Indeed, the role of this question is not to introduce a positive answer, but rather to show how the (novelized)[50] epic quality of *Omeros* derives from the dissonance of the relation to the other, a dissonance expressed also by the word "parodic" with reference to the submarine, imaginary architecture through which the poem conveys its idea of history.

The sea is, once again, revealed as the site in which history is both celebrated and unmade, because "water celebrates nothing in its stasis" (*l*. 15). The passage reveals that the poetics to which the *Omeros* aspires, and which unites all the modes of narrating history that have been performed through the many homecoming journeys it depicted, is a poetics able to dissolve and go beyond all the journeys which the three travelling characters have engaged

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50 Cf. Pesch 1998

with, including the poet's journey. The "crabs' anabasis" (*l*.13), which "scuttle under his [Achille's] wake" (*l*.14) is transformed from a movement from a coastline up to the interior of a country into its opposite, a movement towards the sea. This circular path refers to the multiple paths of return through the history of Saint Lucia described in the poem, paths which all lead back to the sea.

The task of poetry is to give life to the dead monuments which de Certeau claims constitute the writing of history and to transform them into a possibility for charting the present through the light of the past. The passage quoted above suggests that history may be created not as a succession of events, not as a series of monuments celebrating the past, but rather as the possibility of making this very past immanent. Walcott's idea that poetry may be a filter through which it is possible to construct a vision of the past certainly recalls what Eliot wrote in "Tradition and the Individual Talent". For Walcott, as for Eliot, the meaning of poetry is to give a sense of the past through the present, to enable us to see, simultaneously, the past, the present, and the future possibilities that may emerge from them. Walcott enlarges the scope of Eliot's claim and his vision of "Tradition" goes far beyond the literary, and certainly encompasses much more than the Western tradition. Time emerges as a "fluent sculpture" (*l*. 5), a mostly heterogeneous construction made up of a multiplicity of utterances, idioms, traditions, usages, a rhizome in which each point is connected to the other. Like Deleuze and Guattari claimed, this rhizome may be broken, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines.

The last line of the poem reads as follows: "when he [Achille] left the beach the sea was still going on" (*O* LXIV, III *l*.33). The paths of becoming that the sea assembles and diffracts go on beyond the literary text. All returns that take the sea as their point of arrival have meaning insofar as they are able to deterriorialize themselves with the sea, to let themselves be carried away by the fluid element in which they converge, and to allow for the emergence of new ways of (be)coming home.

Chapter 7

To arrive where we started. Some concluding remarks

T. S. Eliot's invitation to a never-ceasing exploration, and his warning that "the end of our exploring will be/ to arrive where we started/ and know the place for the first time" ("Little Gidding" V, *l*.27-29) not only opened this study on Anglo-Caribbean literature, but also implicitly accompanied all its readings. The idea that never-ending literary journeys of homecoming construct multiple, discrepant visions of home has been paralleled by the idea that the process of reading a text is also a never-ending process – a process through which a text is called into play. This study has drawn on Deleuze and Guattari to deal with the text as something with multiple, ever-changing connections to a variety of machines of representation and sense. A text, as Deleuze and Guattari wrote in *A Thousand Plateaus*, creates a rhizomatic connection with the world (cf. Deleuze 2004). It deterritorializes and reterritorializes the word of the other, metamorphoses a conglomeration of multiplicities, and produces assemblages, machines, and also subjects.

Beginning a study on Anglo-Caribbean literature with the words of a poet like T. S. Eliot has, in fact, been instrumental as a means of introducing the kind of displacement which the readings here have performed. Dealing with issues of exile and return, this study has suggested, involves crossing the space of the other, the space in which the self comes into being in relation to the other, and also the space in which the self is conversely perceived as an other. Figurations of exile and homecoming in Anglo-Caribbean literature traverse, appropriate and displace different literary and cultural spaces. This traversing has proved not to be a way of occupying or to laying claim to possession, but rather a way of establishing connections and of inhabiting these spaces provisionally, as well as a means of opening them

up to continuous processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

The juxtaposition of some lines from "Little Gidding" with a passage on return by the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris highlighted some of the continuities and differences between Eliot's European, modernist conception of return and its Caribbean transpositions. In addition, it made it possible to formulate the three theses that have served as guidelines for interrogating the figurations of exile and return that have been discussed. To recapitulate them briefly, the first of these theses argued that the word "return" never refers to a direct act but rather to a process mediated by the presence of the other. (Be)coming home, this text has argued, does not just mean to come back to a place, but also to construct this place by taking a detour through the space of the other. Secondly, the second thesis suggested that the topic of return is embedded in a meta-discourse on literature. The literature of return is a literature that speaks about itself, about the role that it plays for the definition of history and tradition, as well as about the way each text both leans on texts from the past and paves the way for the writing that is to come. Harris' figuration of the return as windows opening onto other windows allowed us to restage and recontextualize Eliot's rather universalizing ideal of tradition from the point of view of a hybrid, post-colonial and post-modern perspective. The image of tradition emerging from Harris' words is a kaleidoscopic, unstable, fragmentary one, within which Eliot's idea that "every word" may be "at home" ("Little Gidding" V, *l*.4) is all the more significant precisely because of its paradoxicality. Finally, the third thesis suggested that the subject of the homecoming does not pre-exist the journey but rather takes shape precisely in the journey. Homecoming journeys figure in Caribbean literature as journeys of subjectivation, journeys in which hybrid subjectivities are articulated through the literary text.

The readings that have been presented in this study have proceeded from these three, necessarily interconnected theses in different ways. Each singular literary work, in fact, engages with the issues of exile and homecoming from different perspectives, raising different problems and proposing different constructions of home and subjectivity. Yet, all the texts have put the question of language at the very centre of their engagement with the topics of exile and return. These analyses, inspired by Jean-Jacques Lecercle's philosophy of language and in particular by his idea that "language is the site of subjectification through interpellation" (Lecercle 2006: 139), have tried to show how all the journeys considered here take language as both their starting point and their point of arrival. All texts not only

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thematize language as a site of exile and as a site of homecoming but also striven to work through English – a language indissolubly linked with a history of colonial domination – in order to make English a language able to express the conflicts and the contradictions of the experience of hybridity.

The emphasis that has been placed to language made it possible to highlight two main points in the readings proposed here. The first of them concerns the issue of untranslatability; that is, of the friction and impossibility of conciliation between self and other. Traversing the space of the other in order to come home, in the texts discussed here, results not in an irenic process, but rather in conflict. It is precisely this untranslatability which constitutes the very medium of (be)coming home. The second consideration refers, meanwhile, to the idea suggested in the second chapter of this study; that is, that Caribbean literature carries on and extends the project of the search for the other in writing and language that Michel de Certeau called "heterology". Claiming that the highly meta-reflexive Caribbean literature of return may be associated with a "science of the other", in fact, requires some important specifications, and considerations about the kind of knowledge that literature may produce.

The word "untranslatability" implicitly subsumes and merges the spheres of language and culture. A language, as this study has claimed on more than one occasion, is not an immanent system, but is always embedded in a cultural-historical context; it expresses the values and the norms of a society, and is directly linked to the way power exerts itself on its speakers. To claim that it is not possible to translate a word or a sentence into a different language implies that they are inextricably associated with a cultural context, and that it is only in that cultural context that they assume their specific meaning. Although untranslatability is, to a certain extent, inherent in all translation – to translate from a source to a target language always implies a partial loss of meaning (cf. Bassnett 1991) – untranslatability in its most explicit form has often been used as an oppositional strategy in post-colonial novels. It figures most prominently in foundational works like, for example, Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) or *No Longer at Ease* (1960), in which Achebe intermingled English with Ibo words, with explanations provided in a glossary at the end of the novel. Achebe's choice of using Ibo terms functions to express the complexity of a cultural experience which could not be absorbed and explained by the language of the colonizer, as well as to produce a critique of the claim to the universality of the values of

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which this language is implicitly a bearer. Linguistic untranslatability also appears in some of the texts that have been discussed here. David Dabydeen's novel, for example, introduces a number of sentences in an unspecified African language, in the passages in which the black slave Mungo reminisces with the ghosts of his dead tribe, in an African language, about the smells and tastes of his lost homeland, leaving the reader with the awareness of not being able to access to the experiential knowledge to which Mungo is referring (*HP*: 99). Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, on the other hand, sometimes juxtaposes lines in French patois with a translation in English in a way which highlights the very imperfection of the translation. This seemingly faithful rendition in English serves as a partial filter through which the reader can access, if only approximately, the meaning expressed by the vernacular, but it also contributes to highlighting the difference in tone between the English written rendition and the spoken patois.

Observing language in terms of connotations allows us to see how untranslatability not only concerns the impossibility of communication between two different idioms, but also and above all the frictions within a single one. If language is a system of continuous variation composed of different dialects, registers, usages, and cultural practices, then untranslatability may also figure as an intralinguistic phenomenon. One of the central themes highlighted in Naipaul's autobiographical novel *The Enigma of Arrival* was precisely the difficulty the narrator had in translating his own knowledge of the Wiltshire countryside – a knowledge which he had acquired mostly through literature and representations – into the idiom spoken by his neighbours. Although already in the second paragraph of the novel Naipaul claims that he has learnt to use the contextually correct, local word to describe the landscape he has elected as his home, the novel highlights the impossibility of direct access to this vernacular. The novel, in fact, describes the process of learning to speak like a local as a highly mediated, imperfect one. Naipaul thematizes the way that the cultural filter of literature and art that allows him to access his new linguistic experience also separates him from a complete identification with the vernacular of Wiltshire.

As the theoretical premise of this study has been the idea that language is a site of subjectivation through interpellation, the concept of translation has gone much beyond the linguistic and cultural sphere, also embracing the sphere of personal identity. Learning to translate words into a different (sub)language, or becoming aware of the frictions between

two cultural and linguistic (sub)systems, also means to access new areas of the self or, to put it another way, to be spoken by a language in a different ways. In all the works that have been taken into consideration here the concept of self-translation has been used to describe the processes of subjectivation experienced and enacted by the main characters. It has been argued that Naipaul's novel deals with the coming into being of an autobiographic subject through a process of successful self-translation into the context of a foreign, elusive landscape. Yet, this self-translation, in fact, passes through a series of imperfect meditations – it is marked, so to say, by the stain of untranslatability. Indeed, Naipaul utilizes his own condition of exile to maintain a sort of detachment that does not allow him to be assimilated – or completely and exclusively spoken by – the language of his new home. In the analysis of David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress*, it has been argued that the narration arises precisely in the impossibility of conciliation between the language spoken by the well-meaning, devout Christian Mr Pringle and that of the hybrid subject Mungo. What is more, Mungo gains access to the possibility of speaking and articulating his hybrid condition precisely by giving shape to the untranslatability that separates him and Mr Pringle. Marlene NourbeSe Philip's *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* depicts a woman traveller's search for her true self as a search for the untranslatability of the silence of the ancestors. Finally, untranslatability figures in all the many homecoming journeys which make up the composite world of Derek Walcott's *Omeros*. All the homecoming characters try to translate themselves into the language and the modes of narrating history which they consider to be those of their ancestors. It is when they become aware of the paradoxical quality of their enterprise of self-translation that they start questioning and reformulating their own conception of home and identity.

The texts analysed in this study deal with translation and untranslatability mostly as meaning-generating mechanisms. In the already quoted essay on Luigi Menegello's novel *Il dispatrio*, Jean-Jacques Lecercle (2006b) argues that one of the main tasks which literature performs is that of engaging in the impossible task of translating the untranslatable. Literature is described by the French philosopher as the site in which the clash between languages, registers, and dialects, as well as the cultures and conceptions of the world in which these are embedded, are reflected. Literature, in Lecercle's view, is a form of *dispatrio*, a way of metaphorically expatriating oneself from one language and repatriating oneself by taking a detour into another language. This passage enriches the experience of one language with

difference, or better, with the irreducible difference of the other. Untranslatibility is, in fact, a way of introducing new concepts and new words into a language (cf. Lotman 2001). This introduction of the untranslatable, which is always marked by the sign of difference, actually transforms the language and the culture itself.

Claiming that literature is a site of *dispatrio* – of acquisition of knowledge of the self through the other – puts literature within the ambit of the heterological search that inspired the work of Michel de Certeau. De Certeau coined the word "heterology" as a compound of *heteros*, "other, different" and *logos*, "discourse, science" (cf. de Certeau 1986). The word "science", as already remarked, is a word at odds with de Certeau's enterprise of mapping the way the other is dealt with and troubles the form that writing, as a scientific enterprise, has taken in Western thought. The issue of the other cannot be handled with the apparatuses of a science; it cannot be addressed with general or universal propositions. If the other is the site of difference, difference presents itself in numberless, untranslatable forms. Yet, if the word "science" is at odds with de Certeau's pluralized, fragmentary and heterogeneous counter-discourse, the association of literature with the word heterology may appear even more extravagant. Certainly, asserting that literature is a form of heterology does not imply the idea that literature is a science, or that literature is subservient to a form of science.

As Jean-Jacques Lecercle claims, literature is the best site for gaining knowledge of the other precisely because of its capacity to go beyond the universal and to focus on the particular, on *singularities* – i.e. on that about which positivist science claims that no knowledge, but rather "only picturesque case histories" (Lecercle 2003: 13), is to be gained. Literature may be studied with the aid of sets of theories, but none of these theories is all-embracing enough and capable of saying a definitive word on what the text, in its complexity, plurivocality, and singularity, means. Theories are necessary to the work of illuminating and interpreting the text, and it may even be that the text is the locus for producing and testing theories. "There is hardly a contemporary philosopher that has not seriously engaged with literature", writes Lecercle: "Not with the abstract concepts of fiction or literature, [..] but with concrete literary texts. The list is endless, and the couples thus joined are notorious: Heidegger and Hörderlin; Rilke and Trakl; Gadamer and Celan; Foucault and a host of writers, from Artaud to Jabes; Deleuze and Lewis Carrol or Proust" (2003: 15). Yet the literary text is always beyond the theoretical and philosophical word. For this reason, Lecercle

suggests that what theory does to literature is not a form of scientific *explanation*, but rather – using the distinction made by Dilthey (cf. Dilthey 2002) – of *comprehension*. In this sense, literature is "no longer an object for the philosophical gaze, a reservoir of pleasant exemplification" (Lecercle 2003: 15), but rather the site of an engagement, a site where what Lecercle calls "a specific knowledge" (Lecercle 2003: 17) is produced, a knowledge which is "close to the living phenomena as opposed to the always-already dead abstraction" (Lecercle 2003: 17).

Lecercle's claim that literature deals with singularities parallels in significant ways Édouard Glissant's concept of the literature of *tout monde*. Glissant claims that literature at the time of globalization – and the Caribbean has proved throughout all its history to be a hotbed of accelerated globalization – should be able to express the singularity of singular, local experiences in the light of their entanglement with the whole world. Embracing the thought of the totality means, for Glissant, embracing the thought of exile and errantry, a thought that is by definition always relational and dialectic:

> The thought of errantry is not apolitical nor is it inconsistent with the will to identity, which is, after all, a search for a freedom within particular surroundings. If it is at variance with territorial intolerance, or the predatory effects of the unique root (which makes process of identification so difficult today) this is because, in the poetics of Relation, one who is errant (who is no longer traveler, discoverer or conqueror), strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this – and knows that it is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides. (Glissant 1997: 20)

It is precisely this desire to see the totality of the world through the singularity of an individual, localized experience which characterizes the homecoming journeys described in this study. To (be)come home has been a way of walking along the multiple paths of what Glissant calls the "Relation" in ways that are never fixed nor stable, but always conscious of their provisional quality.

In *The Predicament of Culture* the American ethnologist James Clifford suggested that the Caribbean experience may be regarded as a lens through which it is possible to reach an understanding of our experience of post-modernity, as well as of the way hybridization affects, to different degrees, all cultures. Clifford famously claimed that "[w]e are all Caribbean now in our urban archipelagos. 'Guinea' (old Africa, writes Césaire) 'from your cry from your hand from your patience/ we still have some arbitrary land' (1983: 207). Perhaps

there is no return for anyone to a native land – only field notes for its reinvention" (1988: 173). What this study hopes to have shown is that the paradigmatic quality of Caribbean experience resides paradoxically in its non-paradigmaticity, i.e. in the very singularity of the way in which Caribbean writers deal with (be)coming home as a way of endlessly posing and recomposing identity.

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