

Multilingualism and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures

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Abstract: Postcolonial literatures are literatures that have a mobile base and that travel through different geographies. Their transcultural and transnational status is often accompanied by a multilingual textuality that recalls in many ways the functioning of translation as it enables a reading experience beyond national and monocultural notions of language, literature, and community. Approaching literary studies from a postcolonial and decolonial perspective, this essay deals with the potential that heterolingual and translational texts have to multilingualise their readers. In this essay, the fields of postcolonial literary studies and of translation studies come together to craft a translational model of reading for heterolingual texts. Two different multilingual contexts are examined: North American Indigenous communities and their cultures of translation, and the Caribbean and its creolised multilingualism. The textual analysis focuses respectively on a poem by First Nations writer Garry Thomas Morse that illustrates the profound bond between translation and writing in indigenous language contexts, and two poems by Velma Pollard, a Jamaican writer belonging to the first generation of anglophone Caribbean writers who will allow us a deeper view of Caribbean forms of multilingualism.

Keywords: postcolonial literatures, multilingualism, translation, heterolingual texts, translational readings, Caribbean Creoles, Garry Thomas Morse, Velma Pollard

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The question of reading can no longer be postponed.

Rita Felski, The Limits of Critique (2015, 172)

Multilingualism is a constitutive feature of postcolonial literatures: many postcolonial countries count multiple official and unofficial languages and so-called postcolonial¹ writers are often polyglots. Since colonial contact, translation has therefore been a constant presence in the fabric of colonial and postcolonial cultural life: on the one hand it is a reminder of the epistemic violence of colonialism while, on the other, it acts as the generative principle of creative expression as well as an important weapon to respond to imposed literary and political canons. If we consider the literary field, we immediately grasp the profound and complex bond that exists between multilingual-

1 A note on terminology: in this essay, I adopt the term 'postcolonial' to refer to the body of literature and the field of literary and cultural studies that came into existence under this name, although I am perfectly aware that the term retains a Eurocentric bias. My use of the term postcolonial is functional and assimilable to the use of terms such as 'postmodern' in literary studies, but my approach, and the topic of my essay, fully align with the decolonial project of decentring Western knowledge that Quijano and Mignolo describe in their works. (See Quijano 2007 and Mignolo 2021).

ism and translation in postcolonial contexts: we still read and study postcolonial literatures mainly in European, and therefore colonial, languages; yet, postcolonial literatures have radically reconfigured the global literary landscape in the past century by exploding those very national and monolingual categories of literature and culture through the production of a vibrant body of heterolingual literature and through an equally robust corpus of re-writings, translations, and re-translations of a wide array of texts. Indeed, postcolonial literature is the main corpus of modern literature that requires a translingual approach, as its linguistic matrix is not containable within the boundaries of former colonial languages but is inclusive of indigenous languages as well as the creole languages that developed following colonial contact. Postcolonial literature also requires a translational approach as it exists in a multiplicity of languages simultaneously. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that, over the years, postcolonial literatures have actively taught us to stop reading monolingually and to put translation at the centre of our reading practice. We could call this ‘the postcolonial lesson’ and, as I aim to show in this essay, it holds great potential to change the field of literary, not only postcolonial, studies at this specific historical moment of radical questioning of received canons, methods, and epistemologies.

What model of reading could be unlocked if we stopped assuming monolingualism as a constitutive feature of the literary text and, instead, supposed that a language is not countable, that is, it cannot be clearly distinguished from another, is the topic of this essay. My argument is that translation – as the movement of texts between a source language and a target language – and the creative transformation of source and target languages overlap in postcolonial literatures and that today’s currency of translation provides a useful terminology to talk about the aesthetic value of postcolonial writing. Hence I bring together the fields of postcolonial literary studies and translation studies in order to devise a translational model of reading for heterolingual texts. I will consider two different multilingual contexts to ground my thesis: the Indigenous communities in North America and their cultures of translation, and the Caribbean with its creolised multilingualism. My textual analysis will focus, respectively, on “500 Lines”, a poem by First Nations writer Garry Thomas Morse that illustrates the profound bond between translation and writing in indigenous language contexts, and two poems by Velma Pollard, a Jamaican writer belonging to the first generation of anglophone Caribbean writers that will allow us to delve deeper into the forms of multilingualism of the Caribbean region. Given its existence in English, French, Spanish, Dutch as well as in many different Creoles, in fact, Caribbean literature marks an essential place to discuss the possibilities of a postcolonial heterolingual aesthetics, an initiative long overdue in the field of literary studies in which the postcolonial first rose to visibility.

Translation in postcolonial literatures

Postcolonial literature has been produced via multiple acts of linguistic and cultural translation but is rarely read and approached through the lens of translation, which would bring its heterolingualism fully into view. Much of the debate about translation and postcolonial literature has revolved around the translation of vernacular texts into other languages, which is a crucial aspect not only for the circulation of this body of literature, but also for a critique of the power dynamics at work in the operations of literary translation between the centres of dominant culture (old and new) and the peripheries (see Cheyfiz 1991; Niranjana 1992; Robinson 1992; Bassnett and Trivedi 1999; Bandia 2008; Spivak 2012; Bhanot and Tiang 2022).

The idea of translation that I wish to explore, however, concerns how writers make creative use of multiple languages in their works and how this linguistic multiplicity activates forms of translation in our reading practice. As Bill Ashcroft writes, postcolonial writers “face in two directions. The decision [they make] is not just how to write between languages, but how to make language perform this bearing across within itself” (Ashcroft 2014, 17), i.e., how to make the language that they use be – to borrow translation studies terminology – both source and target.

A colony, Robert Young elegantly notes, “starts as a translation, a copy of the original located elsewhere on the map” (2003, 139). This is how translation must be understood in postcolonial terms: as a complex material, historical, political phenomenon as well as a creative act presupposing not only linguistic but also cultural and geographical diversity. In recent years, this idea of translation as a condition of knowing, living, being and not just as a linguistic operation for the transfer of meaning has gained visibility in literary circles (Apter 2006; 2013; Damrosch 2003; Lennon 2010; Walkowitz 2015). In her study of global fiction, for example, Rebecca Walkowitz created the label “born translated” for works that “are written as translation[s]” (2015, 4). While Walkowitz was not primarily discussing postcolonial texts in her work, the term aptly describes literature that is born within a multilingual environment and that intentionally explores and plays with “the array of possibilities by juxtaposing or mixing languages in literature” as Rainier Grutman explains (2006, 19). By addressing themselves to audiences in several languages simultaneously, these texts change how language is seen and used in literature.

We owe to Rainier Grutman the term “heterolingualism” to talk about the simultaneous presence of distinct languages or varieties of language in a literary text as a *literary feature* (Grutman 1997), as something different from the multilingualism of societies and individuals. The import of this shift in perspective is a radical revision of how we read, because it makes us *see and hear* many voices, languages, registers, accents as *we read*. Myriam Suchet develops an insightful theory about heterolingual texts inventing not so much their own language, but a different way of thinking about

language: “La littérature hétérolingue ne reproduit pas les situations de contacts linguistiques à la manière d’un calque: elle en propose une carte”² (2010, 37). Walkowitz, on the other hand, claims that the end goal of heterolingual texts is not to ‘master’ or stretch the colonial/European language to its limit (as implied in Caliban’s famous accusation to Prospero in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*: “You taught me language, and my profit on ‘t /Is I know how to curse” (*The Tempest*, I.ii.) but the opposite: “to forego that idea of mastery altogether in favour of “gradation of fluency across and within several languages” (Walkowitz 2020, 324). I find the views of both scholars illuminating in so far as they open new ways to read heterolingual or translational texts. Some postcolonial writers in fact contest the monolingualism and ethnocentrism of national literatures by choosing to highlight, in their writing, forms of linguistic pluralism to show that “no language is neutral”, to quote the title of a powerful long poem by Dionne Brand (1990); but also by actively blocking monolingual readings and demanding “heterolingual reading pacts” from their readers (Suchet 2010, 211). In other words, postcolonial texts have the unsung potential to ‘multilingualise’ their readership.

In what follows I want to emphasise the innovative possibilities of reading that are made possible either through the use of multiple languages or of translation as a poetics. While the idea of a heterolingual text as a text that employs words from multiple languages or sociolects is quite established as made visible by the liveliness of the field of literary multilingualism studies, it might be worth clarifying what a text that uses translation as its poetics is or what it might look like on the page. In my reading, I will use the notion of translation as the inscription, or trace, of multilingualism in the postcolonial literary text (Bertacco 2014; 2016; 2021) superseding the conventional understanding of translation as the transcoding of a word, idea, or text from one language to another.

As postcolonial theory has taught us, the textual is political (Bhabha 1994). In fact, postcolonial literature, especially if written in former colonial languages, is often not a rupture with the past but a “radical rewriting of it”, as Niranjana reminds us (1992, 172). And re-writing is based – very much like translation – on a profound, or “most intimate” (Spivak 2012, 251), act of reading involving what Benjamin would call “citation” and not an “absolute forgetting” (Niranjana 1992, 171). The postcolonial desire to “write back” (Ashcroft et al. 1989) to the centre is in fact a desire to re-write and to translate that must be understood in its political and epistemological meaning as the desire to rewrite history and change the future. This political dimension is an essential component of any understanding of translation in postcolonial terms.

2 Heterolingual literature does not reproduce situations of language contact like a calque; rather, it proposes its own map (my translation).

Garry Thomas Morse's "500 Lines": A translational poetics

First Nations writing constitutes a necessary point of entry into the discussion of a translational poetics in postcolonial literatures. When looking at texts in indigenous languages, in fact, the joint question of translation and heterolingualism, takes centre stage. As Michael Cronin writes, "minority language cultures are translation cultures par excellence" (2002, 139) in that they must translate continually to stay alive. When a people lose their language, as is sadly happening for many Indigenous communities around the world, it is not that they have lost language. The speaker is in fact translated, transposed, into another language, and more likely than not uses the new language with an 'accent'. As readers, we often encounter textualities that resist a monolingual reading by putting us to the test in terms of linguistic, literary, and cultural competence. It may happen that we miss a word or a cultural allusion because we don't know all the languages or the rhetorical protocols that the text is using. This does not make us bad readers necessarily; however, failing to notice and follow that heterolingual trace amounts to a non-reading of the text, a refusal to read, as we can see in the following poem by Garry Thomas Morse.

Garry Thomas Morse is a Canadian writer, a descendant of the Kwakwaka'wakw people from the North West Coast region of Canada. The poem "500 Lines" is part of the collection *Discovery Passages* (2011), which was nominated for the Governor General's Award for poetry in English in Canada. The book documents Captain Vancouver's 'discovery' of what is now called British Columbia and the naming of the strait between the mainland of Vancouver Island and Quadra Island as Discovery Passage. The poem counts 502 lines – 500 of which repeat the sentence "I will not speak Kwak'wala" over twelve pages. Lines 501 and 502 break the pattern and give the poem its closing couplet:

Kwak'wala'mas?

K'i. K'isan Kwak'wala.

do you speak Kwak'wala?

No. I do not speak Kwak'wala.³

This poem establishes a powerful correlation between a European language as a vehicle of appropriation, violence and silencing, and translation as an act of erasure: the repeated line was a common form of punishment for children caught speaking an indigenous language in colonial boarding schools across North America and the twelve pages with one single line repeated in English an emphatic reminder of the unthinkable size of the loss endured by Indigenous communities across the world. It is also, and importantly, a tangible example of how cultural erasure, yesterday as well as today,

³ <http://kwakwala.blogspot.com>.

functions by repeating ‘tiny’ and ‘easy’ acts of violence over and over like the line “I will not speak Kwak’wala” which is written 500 times.

This poem is a heterolingual text that cannot translate itself fully as a complete translation into English would amount to the total erasure of the non-European presence in the text. This text could be called “untranslatable”, according to the taxonomy developed by Emily Apter as “a compositional heterogeneity that disrupts the fictional continuum of the text” (2013, 17) and adds a strong metalinguistic reflection to the text itself. Not only does the poem make us see a different language on the page, its heterolingual textuality also highlights the fracture between the moment of writing – and the assumed multilingual competence of the writer – and the moment of reading, with the unknown linguistic skills of readers. It is only by translating the last two lines, however, that readers realise that the competence of the poetic voice is also called into question as the last line *K’isan Kwak’wala* translates as: I do not speak Kwak’wala.

“500 Lines” is a perfect example of heterolingualism and translation working together to articulate a meaning that could not be expressed only in English or only in Kwak’wala. It is also an apt illustration of how translation and heterolingualism are often perceived to be distinct if not opposing practices: either you speak in multiple languages or you translate between them (Pratt 2022, 232). In fact, literary multilingualism studies have focused almost exclusively on writing that uses multiple languages simultaneously, and translation studies have focused more on the transfer from one language to another. One of the goals of this essay, instead, is to show the extent to which the two practices are intimately linked both in the creative process and as a mode of reading (Jones 2022, 2). In “500 Lines” translation and heterolingualism create a unique style and engender a translational experience of reading because translating from Kwak’wala into English is the only way to read the poem. I do not know Kwak’wala; yet, by translating the words in Kwak’wala, I learned to read this language in a poem that mourns its disappearance.

Reading poems like this leads to the questions I wish to answer in my essay: How do translation and heterolingualism go together in postcolonial literatures? How can translation be used to read decolonially? Isn’t translation, as in the example above, the ultimate act of colonial coercion and epistemicide? In “500 Lines” translation embodies both an act of violence and a small act of remediation: the violence of the punishment in English; the remediation of recovering Kwak’wala via translation. Translation, Naoki Sakai argues, is the textual mark of “contact with the incomprehensible, the unknowable, or the unfamiliar” (Sakai 2009, 170), and divides readers between those who are insiders of the cultural community described and those who are outsiders. In the case of this poem, translation acts as a unifying force as it allows the outside reader to feel the utter sense of loss conveyed by the poem’s last couplet in Kwak’wala

as the imperfect linguistic mastery of an outside reading poignantly aligns with the admission of imperfect linguistic mastery by the poet.

According to Myriam Suchet, only if we approach the heterolingual text as heterolingual can we actually hear its voices (2010, 211–213). While I would argue that this is true in the case of many heterolingual texts, in the case of the poem under examination, however, this description does not do justice to the multiple translation acts that it contains and needs to be re-phrased as: it is only when we approach the heterolingual text through translation, that we can truly hear its voices. A translational poetics is a poetics that has the special power to make one single language resonate with the echoes of implied (missing, partial, retrieved, forgotten) languages and where translation shines in the full complexity of its postcolonial and decolonial existence.

Heterolingualism in Caribbean literature

Another important area in which colonial contact was deadly for the Indigenous populations is the Caribbean basin via the plantation system established by rival European powers. The Caribbean, however, thanks to its geographical formation, the linguistic diversity within each island, and the physical distance from the former colonial powers and their dominant languages, has become famous for a syncretic, or creolised, culture and a multilingual vibrance in literature, music, and the performing arts. (Ashcroft 2015, 90.)

The Caribbean region constitutes perhaps the world's most extensive and most varied site of creolisation as a result of the different histories of enslavement and colonisation that unfolded on each of the Caribbean islands. Consequently, Caribbean creoles⁴ have developed along different lines, and they stand in quite different relations to the European languages present in the region. In recent years, Caribbean creoles have become important objects of study in that they are the primary tools of expression of what is generally referred to as 'creolisation', a term that in its meaning of 'cultural encounter' captures the essence of cultural life in Caribbean societies well.

As Barbara Lalla matter-of-factly points out, "While Creole has minority language status in relation to an international language, [. . .] Creole speakers have majority status within the region" (Lalla 2014a, 104). It comes as no surprise, then, that Caribbean writers, from Vic Reid to Sam Selvon, from Kamau Brathwaite to Velma Pollard, from Derek Walcott to Dionne Brand, from V. S. Naipaul to Merle Hodge, from Earl Lovelace to Louise Bennett and from Linton Kwesi Johnson to Kei Miller have explored in

4 I will hereafter gather the various types of creole together under the simple rubric Creole, capitalised, as is commonly done in literary studies and used in the sources that I cite. I will capitalise Creole when referring to a specific type of creole, therefore following the typographic convention used with standard languages, and use the term uncapitalised in all other circumstances.

their works the possibilities of a fully Antillean literary language. Such a language, Glissant wrote in 1976 in a famous article entitled “Free and Forced Poetics”, needs to be understood in its own terms: “To the Antillean the word is first and foremost a sound. Noise is a speech. Din is a discourse. We must first understand that” (1976, 96).

Glissant’s reflection on the conceptualisation of Creole as sound should not be mistaken for an understanding of the presence of Creole in written texts as the mere reproduction of orality. Rather, if one adds to it the basic, yet essential, observation that Creole permeates the very act of writing in the Caribbean even when that writing is *not* in Creole or *not only* in Creole, one has in full view what Glissant means by this statement, i.e. that language itself, in the Caribbean, is to be understood as Creole.

Readers of Caribbean literature easily recognise a text as Caribbean largely thanks to the presence of Creole. This kind of writing, which I have elsewhere called “accented writing” requires an “accented reading”, that is, an exploration of reading itself as a regulated practice but also as a learning and unlearning experience (Bertacco 2020). When we engage with postcolonial heterolingual texts, that is, texts that formally resist colonial or appropriative readings, we may find that reading has less to do with the recognition of established genres, conventions, and tropes and more with the uncomfortable experience of a limited understanding, or of feeling partially welcome in the text. These are the ‘feelings’ that prompt an ‘accented’ reading, that is to say, a reading practice that acknowledges the distance between institutionalised models of excellence (in terms of language, style, genre, orthography) and the textuality under examination and begins by admitting its own limitations. In the case of Caribbean literatures, this meta-critical level represents an important starting point as Barbara Lalla points out: “the persistent assumption that Creole discourse remains inherently oral rather than literary is simplistic and somewhat paternalistic – a view betraying a colonial mindset even within academia itself. This is a mindset that so maps orality into our understanding of Creole as to obscure the extent to which Creole participates in literary discourse” (2014b, 55).

As we shall see through the work of the Jamaican writer and linguist Velma Pollard in the following section, the terms and the categories that are crucial to understand it come from the traditionally disrespected language of the region – *creole* – and the process of its making – *creolisation*. By approaching Velma Pollard’s works through the heterolingual reading framework developed so far, a Creole poetics can be detected that blends Jamaican Standard English and Jamaican Creole and requires from the reader the operations of translation that are part and parcel of the heterolingual reading experience.

The Creole poetics of Velma Pollard

Trained as a language educator, Velma Pollard has dedicated much of her own writing and scholarship to the re-evaluation of the folk and creole traditions of Jamaica, from the systematic study of Jamaican Creole, to the use of Creole in her own works and to close readings of other writers' works.⁵ It comes as no surprise, then, that as a writer, Pollard makes pervasive use of code-switching between Jamaican Standard English and Jamaican Creole.

Jamaican folklore, the Bible, and the English poetry 'library' are detectable sources of influence on Velma Pollard's form and style, both in her fiction and in her poetry. In many of her works Velma Pollard retells stories from her island adding new characters, complicating or questioning their meanings, and, Daryl Cumber Dance points out, "resemanticizing" them (Dance 2008, 10). Apart from the thematic aspect, however, the folk tradition seems also to be entrenched in her work stylistically: the short story, the novella, the poem are the prevalent genres of Pollard's creative output, sharing a conciseness and terseness of form which, in turn, is reflected by her measured and chiselled use of language which conveys the impression that there are no words to waste in her work. Given the linguistic economy afforded by poetry, the stylistic dimension of a Creole poetics is more clearly observable in this genre, therefore I will be considering some of her poems for my analysis.

Pollard's poems present a wide gamut of social and personal exploration alternating reflections on collective history, geography, culture with more intimate recollections of landscapes, their people, the poet's own family and friends. Side by side compositions focusing on the historical and social issues that are central to all her work, we find many tender poems about lost friends and family, or loving family portraits that add an important personal and biographical element to Pollard's oeuvre. Places are notably inscribed in Pollard's poems, either in their titles or in their verses, connecting small dots on the world map in which personal history meets History with a capital 'H'. One such poem is "Portobello" from the collection *Leaving Traces* published in 2008. Portobelo, Panama is the site of death of Francis Drake (1540–1596) the legendary seaman from Elizabeth I's reign who stood against the Spanish Fleet's conquests in the West Indies. The poem's layout presents short lines seemingly truncated into ten irregular stanzas. Instead of dedicating the poem to a list of Drake's 'piracy' crimes, which would explain why Francis is "forever on [the poet's] mind", the poem lingers on

5 Her works include monographic studies such as *From Jamaican Creole to Standard English: A Handbook for Teachers* (1993); *Dread Talk, the Language of the Rastafari* (1994); lectures such as "The Way Forward" Edna Manley Lecture (2012); and critical essays such as "To Us, All Flowers Are Roses: Writing Ourselves into the Literature of the Caribbean", Barbara Lalla, Jean D'Costa, Velma Pollard, in *Caribbean Literary Discourse: Voice and Cultural Identity in the Anglophone Caribbean*.

the emotions aroused by the poet standing in the place of his death. The poet acts as a witness to history as it is embodied in a small place on the world map:

I stood
where Drake fell
Francis
forever on my mind
(Pollard 2008, 109)

The sounds of Francis Drake's initials (/f/ and /d/) echo throughout the poem, creating an alliterative pattern that captures the eye as well as the ear. The first stanza, quoted above, links *fell*, *Francis*, *forever* in a playful and explicitly alliterative way, initiating a web of echoes that proceeds from first name initial (f) to last name initial (d) and gains significance as the poem progresses in the second stanza, which is quoted below:

I don't remember
how they say he *fell*
or who (if anyone) *felled* him
I only know
forever I have **f**elt
this senior pirate
honored till my time
remembered still
in names of great hotels
and water passages
deserved to **f**all
(Pollard 2008, 109)

The poem trickles down the page in a thin stream of words held together by a tight sound pattern that can be summed up as follows:

Stanza I: **D**rake, **f**ell, **F**rancis, **f**orever

Stanza II: **f**ell, **f**elled, **f**orever, **f**elt, **f**all

Stanza III presents alliterations and consonances for both *d* (*said*, **d**ed bad) and *f* (**f**i).

Stanza IV: **f**air and **f**rom.

Stanza V: **f**ree, **f**rom, **f**ear, **f**ired, **f**rom

Stanza VI: **d**ied, **f**alleció,

Stanza VII: **f**itting, **d**ie, **d**ie,

Stanza VIII: **Drake, fulfill, dreams, dreamt, fathers, futures, dreams**

Stanza IX: **stand, Drake, feeling, deep, end**

Stanza X: **Drake, did, die**

By following the poem's sonic pattern, one is asked to connect and contrast the historical echoes of the admiral's name (Francis) with images of falling, felling and fear, on the one hand, and with freedom, feelings, and fulfilment on the other. Similarly, Francis Drake is connected, through a web of alliterations, consonances, pararhymes and rhymes, to ideas of death, dreams, and depth. On a wider scale, this parallelism summarises the paradox of Caribbean history forever entangled with the colonial past by linking aurally distant notions of death, futures and dreams, or fear, and freedom. Portobelo, Panama thus becomes the symbol of the interconnected global history inherited from Drake's explorations. In postcolonial terms, we could say that there is a sense of historical closure and of historical justice surging at the end of the poem:

feeling this deep and
satisfying end
conclusion to some things.
(Pollard 2008, 111)

Yet, this poem is highly ironic. The lines through which the irony manifests itself are found in the third and in the final stanzas and written, respectively, in Jamaican Creole and in Spanish, that is, not in English:

Stanza III
somebody must have said
cutting her eye
'dis wan fi ded bad' [this one ought to have had a bad death]
here he died
how bad I cannot tell
(Pollard 2008, 109)

Stanza X:
Drake, did, die here
and while I smile
small children stare and wonder
whispering underneath their hands
'la loca' [crazy lady]
(Pollard 2008, 111)

Despite the statues and the portraits, the honours bestowed on him during his lifetime, waterways such as the Sir Francis Drake Channel in the British Virgin Islands, and hotels still named after him, Francis Drake died *a bad death* (of dysentery supposedly ... another *d* sound!) and, the poem seems to suggest, fully deserved it.

Code-switching with Creole in this stanza is chiselled, marked by the use of inverted commas and creates an important parallelism with the hushed exclamation of the children in the final stanza who see the poet smiling and call her “la loca”. The poem signifies closure – with two final statements – through its use of different languages: Jamaican Creole and Spanish. The composition begins and ends with a smile: old and wise in Jamaican Creole in the third stanza; young and playful in Spanish in the final one. In both cases, code-switching foregrounds the line and gives it a wider significance within the poem.

In the poem above, moreover, the lineation engenders a form of syntactic and semantic ambiguity as, superficially at least, the poem looks like a first-person musing on Drake’s death, except that other points of view are inserted throughout and conveyed by these heterolingual interventions. At a superficial reading, in fact, the speaking I could easily be associated with the poet herself and all the lines read as her own words. It is only through a second reading, that it becomes clear that the speaking voice is that of the poet in dialogue with the people of Portobelo who are brought into the composition through direct quotations: “somebody must have said [. . .] /’dis wan fi ded bad’ [this one ought to have had a bad death]” and “la loca” in the final line.

This poem allows us to understand the symbolic importance of Portobelo, Panama for different generations of multilingual Caribbeans through two small but meaningful shifts in the poem’s language. The line in Jamaican Creole in the third stanza enlarges the lines of consciousness as the poem registers the “other” legend about Francis Drake, the legend that circulates in the lands that he pillaged for his fame and that of the English Crown and the legend of his far from illustrious death. The final line, instead, brings into the composition the children (a pervasive and cherished presence in Pollard’s oeuvre as she often defines herself an O. T., Old Teacher), speaking one of the many languages of the Caribbean, who just see a woman on Portobelo harbour looking weird.

By translating the heterolingual inserts, we read the complexity of the poem that a monolingual reading informed by received categories of ‘dialect’ or ‘accent’, that is via a simplistic interpretation of the Creole components as marks of orality, would not make possible.

As exemplified by this poem, lines of subjectivity and consciousness are often blurred throughout Pollard’s collections of poetry giving way to a wide array of stories, views that are explicitly associated with other people whose names are recorded in the dedications or in the body of the text. It is as if an enlarged point of perception were

inscribed into the poetic persona and documented not only because it inspired the composition, but because it is part of the composition. The eponymous poem in the book *The Best Philosophers I Know Can't Read or Write*, published in 2001, exemplifies this blurred consciousness well. Like many of Pollard's poems, it is dedicated to a specific person and anchored to a specific place – the lady of Mandahl Peak in St Thomas, US Virgin Islands:

She is large
this migrant mother
and round
(Pollard 2001, 80)

A pragmatist, the migrant mother divides the house she has built on a beautiful stretch of land between her legitimate son (the top floor) and her daughter, not legitimate (the bottom floor). The story of how she came to want that house occupies the entire poem; it is a love story between the woman and the beauty of the island but it also speaks of the complicated issue of land ownership in the Caribbean, a topic that several writers from the region have discussed, most notably perhaps Derek Walcott in his Nobel Lecture (1992).

The story of “this grand earth mother” is captured in her own words, therefore in Creole, in a long narrative sequence:

One day I stop to wipe the sweat
(for disya hill no easy) [for this hill here is not easy]
and when I look down see the place
so wonderful
and how the sea just sit down calm and clear
[. . .]
a just decide a have to buy a piece
and as a hear me say it in me head
a laugh out loud and look round was to see
if any fast-mouth somebody hearing me
poor poor me one down-island gyal [girl]
where me would look
to go and get money
(Pollard 2001, 82)

The poet recognises a philosopher in the earth mother whose house grew “like Topsy without plan” “amid white people/landscaped structures” and enlarges her experience to serve as a celebration of a pragmatic tradition in the region. Jamaican Creole and Jamaican Standard English are sometimes indistinguishable in these lines: the effect is interesting since it puts Jamaican Standard English and Jamaican Creole on the same level and conveys the idea that Creole is as poetic a language as Standard English, an interpretation that can only be supported if the Creole section in the poem is read as poetry and not as an oral ‘insert’. This use of a Creole poetics is noticeable for its difference from the rest of the poem but not in ways that would block readerly access. Unlike the previous poem, in this one there are no inverted commas signalling the speaker. And the speaker’s identity, the lady of Mandahl Peak, becomes, thanks to the structure of the poem, which foregrounds the stanzas in Creole, the main voice, offering her story of love of beauty, of property claim, and agency, as an emblem of the hybridity of Caribbean culture.

In this poem, it is the Creole element that conveys poetic status to the literary text, not Jamaican Standard English, as we might expect through a reading informed by Myers-Scotton’s Matrix Language Frame model (1993, 75–77). A Matrix Language reading would see Creole as a marked choice and Jamaican Standard English as the structuring language, what Myers-Scotton calls the ‘matrix language’. However, what this model leaves out is the poetic relevance of Creole in the composition.

Blending linguistic, social, and cultural behaviours in a text that sounds whole and organic and making it all sound simple and immediate is a distinctive trait of the art of this writer. The surface simplicity of her style in fact engages readers through a fast first reading of the text, only to send them back, at the end, for a second reading in which her Creole poetics emerges and complicates the meaning of the whole text. Are the outside readers missing something along the way? Yes, and that feeling of missing something marks the starting point for a model of literary reading that engages head-on with one of the textual features of postcolonial literature – its heterolingualism.

Whereas languages in European literary histories have seemed to be intrinsic to the literary work, in postcolonial literatures this is not the case since the literary text is open to several languages from the start and the writer makes a deliberate choice (Walkowitz 2020, 337). If linguistic dispossession figured pre-eminently in the poem by Garry Thomas Morse and was accentuated by the repetition of a single sentence, a poetic language of non-choice or ‘both-and’ seems to be at work in both Morse’s and Pollard’s poems. Together, they exemplify the “heterolingual imaginary” (Glissant in Gauvin 1992) of postcolonial literatures. As readers, critics, and translators we can learn important lessons from texts such as those that put us to the test. So below

I offer, by way of a conclusion, the main lessons that I have learned in my own process of accented reading.

Lesson 1: A Caribbean lesson for literary multilingualism studies

The Caribbean literary tradition might indeed provide a useful lesson for heterolingual reading becoming widespread and influential. In an article on the opaque translative strategies in Derek Walcott's writing, Kavita Singh highlights that "for many writers throughout the anglophone and francophone Caribbean, the language of writing is not a given but a matter of deliberate choice and complicated curations between Creoles and standardised European languages" (2014, 91). This deliberate choice deserves to be studied in its specificity. Indeed, enough has been published about Creole languages in the past fifty years that it is fair to say that the global readership is aware by now of the complexity of the region's linguistic environment, and this has started to inform recent literary studies since evolving attitudes towards language directly affect literary readings and interpretive communities (see Singh 2014; Ekberg 2019; Gonzalez 2020; Bertacco 2020). This shows an important cultural shift, away from monolingual and 'unaccented' positions of reading towards an open acknowledgment that we are all implicated in the operations of making, sharing, and revising knowledge and need to bear our responsibility in the process. Part of this responsibility concerns recognition of the specificity of the multilingual contexts taken into consideration.

In "Decolonial Multilingualism in the Caribbean", for instance, Shawn Gonzalez laments the fact that much of the literary multilingualism scholarship is still written from a Euro-American perspective and therefore implies a national framework that cannot fully address the legacies of coloniality that are present in Caribbean literary discourse. Such a perspective, Gonzalez writes, "risks assuming that multilingualism is inherently critical rather than addressing the specific linguistic hierarchies that continue to shape multilingual practices" (Gonzalez 2020, 22–12). Excellent studies have been published on the specifics of Caribbean heterolingualism, especially in recent years (see Mufwene 2001; Bartens 2013; Deuber 2014; Ekberg 2019), but a reminder that not all monolingualisms are the same is crucial if we want heterolingual reading models to avoid the blind spots of monolingual literary frameworks.

Lesson 2: The postcolonial lesson for literary studies

Postcolonial literature, because it exists in many languages, has changed once and for all how we think about literature, its cultural and political function, its forms, and idioms. It has given shape to a plurality of literary communities. These communities exist all over the world and are multilingual. In some cases, the language of the literary text is a second language for both writers and readers. This marks a new terrain for

literary studies, a terrain that is global, multicultural, and multilingual and that holds, in my view, great promise. A model of literary studies that braids together different intellectual and literary traditions is today possible. As we have seen in the analysis of the texts, it demands that we set aside preconceived notions of language and literature that are inapplicable to many literary contexts, not just postcolonial ones, and that we learn from the texts themselves how to read them. The use of Kwa'kwala or Jamaican Creole in the poems mentioned in this essay does not represent a problem of accessibility for the non-Kwa'kwala or non-Creole speaking reader, but it demands to be seen and read.

This is an important perspectival shift in the world of letters today as it enables us to start rethinking the keywords of the field – language, literature, style – from the texts outward. When we focus on linguistically liquid moments like those highlighted in this essay, we are shown a different way of thinking about literature, how it works, who is writing it and who is reading it. As outside readers we might struggle to understand untranslated words or idioms, but what we gain by working on the text is an intimate aesthetic and intellectual experience because we are asked by the presence of unknown words *to learn* how to read them. Heterolingual and translational works demand that we learn, from them, how to read them and to re-imagine the literary experience from that point forward. And while literary and translation studies as disciplinary fields might lag behind, readers do not seem to be lost, or at a loss, as this special issue shows.

Lesson 3: Heterolingual texts need translation

I want to conclude with a passionate plea in favour of breaking down the gates separating translation and literary studies. Translation as a concept is appropriate to describe the distance traversed by meaning between the event of writing and the event of reading in postcolonial literatures. In Naoki Sakai's words, "translation is a *poietic* social practice that institutes a relation at a place of incommensurability" (2009, 175, original italics). Postcolonial literatures are a perfect example of the "heterolingual address" of translation: the postcolonial writer in a European language often writes as a foreigner to a world readership of foreigners through a heterolingual – or translational – text, a text that speaks its own difference. Postcolonial texts remind us through their linguistic overloads that a language is a human behaviour and consists of what people do with it. One lesson that postcolonial writing teaches us is that the notion that our cultural identity is hardwired into our language does not hold; on the other hand, when words in different languages appear alongside one another in the same literary text, this juxtaposition offers a reading experience that is made possible by and through translation which, in turn, creates a special bond between reader and text.

Translation establishes a call-and-response relationship between its actors, in it we find ourselves – always and already – responsible for the other. This responsibility for the other and to the other is something that constitutes the pre-condition of all translative acts and defines us as agents of translation at either end of the spectrum. This is the enormous contribution that translation gives to any act of heterolingual reading.

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Mitmekeelsus ja tõlge postkoloniaalsetes kirjandustes

Simona Bertacco

Võtmesõnad: postkoloniaalsed kirjandused, mitmekeelsus, tõlge, erikeelsed tekstid, tõkelised lugemised, Kariibi kreoolkeeled, Garry Thomas Morse, Velma Pollard

Postkoloniaalsed kirjandused on kirjandused, mis reisivad läbi eri aegruumide. Nende kultuuri- ja rahvusülise staatusega kaasneb sageli mitmekeelne tekstuaalsus, mis mitmeti meenutab tõlke toimimist, sest võimaldab lugemiskogemust, mis ületab rahvuslikke ning monokultuurseid arusaamu keelest, kirjandusest ja kogukonnast. Postkoloniaalsetes kontekstides tuleks mitmekeelsust ja tõlget pidada pigem teineteist täiendavateks kui teineteisele vastanduvateks nähtusteks. Tegelikult on postkoloniaalne kirjandus peamine nüüdiskirjanduse korpus, mis nõuab keeleülest lähenemist, sest selle kirjanduse keelelist maatriksit pole võimalik kätkeada endiste koloniaalkeelte piiridesse, vaid see hõlmab nii põliskeeli kui ka koloniaalkontakti järgselt välja kujunenud kreoolkeeli. Samuti nõuab selline kirjandus tõkelist lähenemist, sest eksisteerib arvukates keeltes samaaegselt. Lähenedes kirjandusteadusele postkoloniaalsest ja dekoloniaalsest perspektiivist, käsitleb artikkel potentsiaali, mis erikeelsetel ja tõkelistel tekstidel on oma lugejaskonnas mitmekeelsuse kasvatamisel.

Artikli peamiseks väiteks on, et postkoloniaalsetes kirjandustes kattub tõlge kui tekstide liikumine lähtekeele ja sihtkeele vahel lähte- ja sihtkeelte loominguilise teisenemisega ning et tõlke staatus tänapäeval pakub kasulikku terminoloogiat, kõnelemaks postkoloniaalse kirjutuse esteetilisest väärtusest. Nii kasutatakse postkoloniaalse kirjandusuurimise ja tõlketeaduse väljasid üheskoos, et luua tõkelist mudelit erikeelsete tekstide lugemiseks.

Esimene vaadeldav erikeelne tekst on Kanada looderanniku piirkonna kwakwaka'wakw rahva seast pärineva Garry Thomas Morse'i luuletus „500 rida“ („500 lines“). Luuletus on näide erikeelsuse ja tõlke koostoimimisest tähenduste sõnastamisel, mida poleks võimalik väljendada ei inglise ega ka kwak'wala keeles. Samuti on tegu asjakohase illustratsiooniga selle kohta, kuidas tõlget ja erikeelsust sageli peetakse erinevateks või isegi vastandlikeks tegevusteks: kas kõneldakse mitmeid keeli või siis tõlgitakse nende vahel. Tegelikult ongi kirjandusliku mitmekeelsuse uuringutes keskendunud peaaegu eranditult kirjutusele, milles üheaegselt kasutatakse mitmeid keeli, ning tõlketeaduses on keskendunud rohkem ülekannetele ühest keelest teise. Üks selle artikli eesmärkidest on näidata, mil määral need kaks praktikat on omavahel tihedalt seotud nii loomeprotsessis kui ka lugemisviisina. Luuletuses „500 rida“ loovad tõlge ja erikeelsus ainulaadse stiili ning kutsuvad esile tõkelise lugemiskogemuse, sest kwak'wala keelest inglise keelde tõlkimine on ainus viis seda luuletust lugeda.

Teine oluline piirkond, kus koloniaalkontakt oli põlisrahvastikule hukutav, on Kariibi mere regioon, kus omavahel võistlevad Euroopa võimud kehtestasid istandusesüsteemi. Eri saartel aset leidnud erisuguste orjastamis- ja koloniseerimislugude tulemusena moodustab Kariibi piirkond võibolla maailma kõige ulatuslikuma ja mitmekesise kreoliseerumispaiga. Seetõttu on Kariibi kreooli keeled välja kujunenud eri arenguteid pidi ning neil on vägagi erinevad suhted piirkonnas esinevate Euroopa keeltega.

Teise artiklis käsitletud luuletaja Velma Pollardi loomingut iseloomustav joon on keelelise, sotsiaalse ja kultuurilise käitumise segamine tekstis, mis tundub tervikliku ja orgaanilisena, ning selle

kõige lihtsa ja orgaanilisena paista laskmine. Keeletoimetaja koolitusega Pollard on pühendanud suure osa oma kirjanduslikust ja teadusloomingust Jamaica rahvalike ja kreoolitraditsioonide ümberhindamisele, alates Jamaica kreooli keele süstemaatilise uurimisest kuni kreooli keele kasutamiseni tema enda loomingus ning teiste autorite teoste lähilugemiseni. Kirjanikuna kasutab Pollard läbivat koodivahetust standardse Jamaica inglise keele ja Jamaica kreooli keele vahel. Tegelikult haarab tema stiili pindmine lihtsus lugejat teksti kiirel esmalugemisel üksnes selleks, et suunata teda lõpuks tagasi teise lugemise juurde, milles tõuseb esile tema kreooli poeetika, mis komplitseerib kogu teksti tähendust.

Kui Euroopa kirjanduslugudes on keel olnud olemuslikult kirjandusteose juurde kuuluv, ei ole see nõnda postkoloniaalsete kirjanduste puhul, sest kirjanduslik tekst on algusest peale avatud mitmele keelele ning kirjanik langetab kaalutud otsuse. Kui Garry Thomas Morse'i luuletuses on tugevasti esil keeleline ilmajäetus, mida rõhutab üheainsa lause kordamine, näib nii Morse'i kui ka Pollardi luuletustes toimivat mittevaliku ning „nii-selle-kui-teise“ poeetiline keel. Koos näitlikustavad need luuletused postkoloniaalsete kirjanduste „teiskeelset kujutelma“.

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