ANKHI MUKHERJEE

Creole Modernism

As affirmations of the modern go, few can match the high spirits of Susan Stanford Friedman's invitation to formulate a "planetary epistemology" of modernist studies. As she explains in a footnote, Friedman uses the term "planetarity" in a different sense than Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *Death of a Discipline,* where the latter proposes that "if we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us."[1] If Spivak's planet-thought is a "utopian gesture of resistance against globalization as the geohistorical and economic domination of the Global South," Friedman's own use of the term 'planetarity' is epistemological, implying "a consciousness of the earth as planet, not restricted to geopolitical formations and potentially encompassing the non-human as well as the human."[2] Friedman's planetary epistemology needs the playground of "modernism/modernity," the slash denoting a simultaneous separation and connection, "the paradox of all borders," which she considers to be richly generative (475). For modernism is not simply outside or after modernity, a belated reaction to the shock of it. It is contained *within* modernity (or particular modernities) as its aesthetic domain, and interacts with other domains, commercial, technological, societal, and governmental. It follows that "Every modernity has its distinctive modernism" (475). Pluralizing the key terms to engage with the polylogue of languages and cultures issuing from forms of modernism/modernity everywhere, Friedman's invocation of this transformational (planetary) model of cultural circulation opens up possibilities for modernist studies to venture fearlessly outside the Anglo-American field and into "elsewhere" places that constitute modernism's Other: the colonies and ex-colonies of South Asia and the Caribbean, the American South, and the Diaspora.

[1] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 73.

[2]Susan Stanford Friedman, "Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies," *Modernism/ Modernity* 17.3 (September 2010), 495.

Modernism of the last century was the aesthetic dimension of a distinctly modern experience that bore witness to such convulsive developments as urbanization, global war, post-war trauma, the technologies of photography and cinema, scientific discoveries, ease of mobility and new transportations, new class and gender formations, the birth of the unconscious, the erosion of an imperial centre, and the concomitant loss of a certainty that went into the formation of that very centre. Literature accordingly grew into a domain of active experimentation in which writers exploded notions of unity, objectivity, and self-coherence. Beyond the work of a handful of primarily Western critics, scant critical attention has been paid to the appropriation of modernism by those who were historically constituted not as its subjects but as its objects. In fact, however, as Elleke Boehmer points out, the colonial experience was itself modernist in its fragmenting and destabilizing effects, and colonial and post-colonial writers did not simply replicate the Euro-American modernist project but "appropriated its influences selectively, interpreting these to match their own experience."[3] In what follows I wish to examine the nature of this critical engagement, correlation, and selective interpretation in selected works by Jean Rhys and Derek Walcott, viewing what I term "Creole modernism" as not simply imitation but an articulation of difference and a rewriting of influence: a different way altogether of being modern in the world.

As the title of this paper suggests, modernism is increasingly read as dispersive as well as acquisitive; transcultural and polyglot, not exclusively Euroclassicist in inspiration and referential framework; and engaging in modes of literary interconnection and circulations despite a self-conscious cultivation of provincial or national character. This, obviously, stands the risk of a reductionism that treats modernism as simultaneously ethnicising northern Transatlantic writers and making cosmopolitan, *and thereby consequential*, the dubious MLA (the North American *Modern Language Association*) category of "English Literature Other Than British and American." As Natalie Melas observes:

[3] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 119. See also Jahan Ramazani's *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), and *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) for the aesthetics and politics of postcolonial modernisms.

> Exclusion is corrected with inclusion, and that inclusion, more often than not, takes the form of tracing the influence of European modernism or modernists on non-European writers and the analysis of the 'indigenization' of modernist forms into local idioms.[4]

Reading the poetic enunciation of négritude in Césaire's *Notebook* alongside Homi Bhabha's formulation of a "colonial contra-modernity," Melas argues that rather than tracking down the way modernism gives rise to derivative if eventually indigenized variants in various locales, it would be more productive to focus on the resistance of these other modernisms to the discourse of a unified or singular modernity. Following this line of argument, I would like to show how the work of Rhys and Walcott offers exemplary if inimitable instances of a modernism that is neither reactionary nor emancipatory, and that ceremoniously cites literary genealogy only to disavow it by posing de-composition as composition: "I decompose but I composing still," Walcott's Spoiler claims in his poem "The Spoiler's Return." Rhys and Walcott speak to the utopian thrust of both Spivak's and Friedman's definitions of planetarity, which involves an unbounded sense of the universe, a dimension *without* dimension in that it does not have finite taxonomies and a self-consolidating Other, and which ushers a contra-modernity predicated on colonial difference that is inclusive of other cultures as well as the nonhuman world.

"It was obvious that this was not an Anglo-Saxon: he was too gay, too dirty, too unreserved and in his little eyes was such a mellow comprehension of all the sins and the delights of life" (73). Thus begins Jean Rhys's "Tea with an Artist": the painter Verhausen, whose first name remains unknown to the reader, and who lives in relative ignominy in the "shabbier and not cosmopolitan yet" real Latin Quarter ("he had had a big reputation in Holland and Germany, once upon a time")[5] is exemplary of the émigrés and exiles who shuffle through Rhys's shadowy metropolis, deracinated, out of place, and often anachronistic. In her unfinished autobiography, *Smile, Please*, Rhys writes: "I would never be part of

[4] Natalie Melas, "Untimeliness, or Négritude and the Poetics of Contramodernity," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108.3 (Summer 2009), 566.

[5] Jean Rhys, "Tea with an Artist," *La Grosse Fifi* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), 75, 73-74.

anything. I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing."[6] A self-punishing meditation on the gulf between the isolated "I" in London and "they," at a Christmas party, "laughing and talking and happy" ends with: "I don't know what I want. And if I did I couldn't say it, for I don't speak their language and never will." In "The Insect World" (1976), a story set in London just after the Blitz, Audrey is almost 29, suffering the fragmenting impact of a gendered life on the home front, and terrified of growing old. After reading about "jiggers," a parasitic flea found in tropical climates, in a battered paperback titled *Nothing So Blue*, Audrey begins to suffer from hallucinations about the Londoners around her being insects. The story, which begins, delightfully, with "Audrey began to read," consciously poses its intertextuality, reading (and writing) itself as a revisionist narrative of the tropics as it simultaneously replicates the Orientalist misreading inherent in its fictional intertext. "Almost any book was better than life, Audrey thought. Or rather, life as she was living it. […] And books could take her away."[7]

The tropics in fiction here are first figured as a site of imaginative escape that bears little resemblance to 'real' tropics: "It was about damp, moist heat, birds that did not sing, flowers that had no scent" (127). "The natives were surly," "there were the minute crawling unseen things that got at you as you walked along harmlessly," and "there was this horrible girl whom the hero simply had to make love to, though he didn't really want to, and when the lovely cool English girl heard about it she turned him down" (128). For Audrey, reading during the war, the tropics assume a space of horror to which even the unending war might seem preferable. The fear of infection and infestation by strange insects, alien beings, can be seen as a kind of xenophobia in which the real threat of the "doodle bugs" and "fly bombs" is safely transferred to the Caribbean. Insects are also linked to anti-Semitic rhetoric. As Sander Gilman said of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, in an anti-Semitic society where Jews were labelled as the "insects of humanity," Gregor Samsa's turning into a gigantic insect could be read both as a transformation and a reverting to type.[8]

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[6] Jean Rhys, *Smile, Please* (London: Penguin, 1981), 124.

[7] Jean Rhys, "The Insect World," *Sleep It Off Lady* (London: André Deutsch, 1976), 125

[8] Sander L. Gilman, *Franz Kafka, The Jewish Patient* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 80.

Nothing So Blue, the story within the story in "The Insect World," works also to dramatise the fear of infection, not only from tropical insect but woman. When Audrey bought her second-hand books, "she always wrote her name on the fly-leaf and tried to blot out any signs of previous ownership. But this book had been very difficult. It had taken her more than an hour to rub out the pencil marks that had been found all through it" (126-127), for, throughout the book, the previous owner, Charles Edwin Roofe, has underlined, questioned, and berated the narrative in his marginal annotations, leading to his "shocking statement" that "women are an unspeakable abomination," written "with such force that the pencil had driven through the paper" (127). The annotated copy of *Nothing So Blue* figures the persistence of Orientalist discourses that blatantly misrepresent the tropics but cannot be erased or corrected; the indelibility of this discursive dominance marks the concomitant impossibility of self-narration for the woman, native, other. In fact, Audrey's novel writes woman into this landscape only to cast her as an "abominably" infectious monster and make her other.

In Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), whose title and theme—the book's Anglo Caribbean protagonist, Anna Morgan, is voyaging from the West Indies to London—consciously evoke Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the protagonist is surrounded by a deafening stillness: "It's funny how parts of London are as empty as if they were dead."[9] "We got to Holloway and it was winter and the dark streets round the theatre made me think of murders" (18). Time has warped here—"A month seemed like a week and I thought, 'It's June already' (75)—as have things—"There was that damned bust […] sneering away" (87). People are like beetles: "A man and a girl were leaning against the railings in Brunswick square, kissing. They stood without moving in the shadow, with their mouths glued together. They were like beetles clinging to the railings" (34). But what is it that unsettles and unhomes Anna, leading to her ultimate dispossession and commodification? Anna is a chorus girl, her cultural legitimacy further jeopardised by a colonial taint:

[9] Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000), 41.

> "She's always cold," Maudie said. "She can't help it. She was born in a hot place. She was born in the West Indies or somewhere, weren't you, kid? The girls call her the Hottentot. Isn't it a shame?" (12)

For Anna, the city full of "hundreds and thousands of white people"—the absence of black people in the metropolis—is frightening. She herself, she explains to her lover Walter, is a fifth generation Creole. "Well, let's go upstairs, you rum child, you rum little devil," Walter says in response (48). Rum, its adjectival sense meaning both "fine," and, according to the OED, slang for "odd, strange, queer. Also bad, spurious." Anna's racist stepmother Hester insinuates that her "unfortunate propensities"—the illegitimate association with Walter or Anna's inexplicable affinity for black people—are related to a hereditary tendency that cannot be helped, like her Uncle Bo's fondness of black mistresses, and traceable to Anna's mother's impure blood. Ethel, for whom Anna works as a manicurist, airs similar prejudices in a fit of rage: "'The thing about you', she said, 'is that you are half-potty. You're not all there, you are a half-potty bastard'" (145). The most insidious aspect of Anna's pre-history and postmemory, however, is the archaic guilt, which Hester once called "the sins of the fathers." Anna remembers an old slave list, and the name of an unknown slave, and believes that she is cursed by the sins perpetrated by the white Creole population against the black slaves in the West Indies. In the final reckoning, Anna is not just homeless Anna but a Morgan, her name evoking Henry Morgan, buccaneer and mercenary who was rewarded for his services with his appointment as Governor of Jamaica.

Reading Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* with Woolf's late essay *Three Guineas*, Jessica Berman sees in Woolf's work a dismantling of narrative unity and a broaching of the political "by way of, rather than in spite of, its incoherence, elaborating a version of engagement that works against consensus and uniformity of opinion and that begins from the impossibility of a fixed point of view."[10] According to Berman, *Three Guineas* generates "a radical democratic politics and a vision of the future" by dismantling narrative unity and calling attention to the impossibility of a consensual point of view (41). Rhys's

[10] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 41.

protagonists inhabit the world of disembodiment, dissociation, and temporal-spatial dislocation described by Woolf but, unlike Woolf, Rhys respatializes these states of being through colonial geography. Her fictional characters, whether it is Anna in *Voyage in the Dark*, Audrey in "The Insect World," or Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, "caught up in the uneven relations, mistaken bodies, tortured geographies, and convoluted trajectories of colonialism"—and I quote Berman here—"struggle not only to account for themselves to others but also to constitute a future for themselves" (41). These downwardly mobile heroines, walking the border between middle and lower classes as well as that between metropolitan centre and colonial periphery, fuse Woolf's "intimate ethics" with the "politics of the global" (43).

"The Creole in Charlotte Bronte's novel," Rhys writes in a letter, "attacks all and sundry—off stage**.** For me (and for you I hope) she must be right on stage. She must be at least plausible with a past."[11] The shadowy protagonists of Rhys novels tend to be women with a past, except the past is personal as well as a hypertrophic historical and cultural burden, whose depredations are not easily addressed, let alone corrected. Rhys positions her art and discourse in what Gikandi identifies as the "twilight consciousness" of Caribbean writers like Glissant, Brathwaite, and Walcott. Gikandi, of course, is talking about black writers in the New World, forced to forge a language that proleptically posits and operates in the space between ancestral sources and colonizing structures. The poignancy of Rhys's version of modernism, if we understand modernism to be a set of innovative strategies for liberating the self from history's alienating structures, is that the White Creole's "milieu of dispossession," to use Paul Gilroy's term, is harder to justify and altogether less plausible than the nightmare of history of her black counterparts.[12] In *Good Morning, Midnight*, the Jewish painter Serge narrates the story of a coloured woman from Martinique to the protagonist Sasha.[13]

[11] Jean Rhys, *Letters, 1931-66* ed. Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (New York: Penguin, 1985), 156.

[12] Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 297.

[13] Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000).

> Everybody in the house knew she wasn't married to him, but it was worse that she wasn't white. She said that every time they looked at her she could see how they hated her, and the people in the streets looked at her the same way. At first she didn't mind—she thought it comical. But now she had got so that she would do anything not to see people. She told me she hadn't been out, except after dark, for two years. [… I]t was difficult to speak to her reasonably, because all the time I had this feeling that I was talking to something that was no longer quite human, no longer quite alive. (80)

Serge, the Jewish painter, who "understands everybody" (67), who plays the beguine music of slave plantations and manufactures West African masks "Straight from the Congo" (91) right here in London, fails, however, to recognise the plight of the Martinican woman brutalized by systematic abuse. Nor will he entertain Sasha's affinity to a black West Indian. "Exactly like me," Sasha says. "No, no. Not like you at all," the painter retorts, explaining that the woman wasn't white, but "half-Negro—a mulatto" (79). In a novel overpopulated with global migrants and figures of uncertain provenance, Sasha differentiates the Russians from the Jews, and is keen to ascertain whether the gigolo Rene is Spanish or Spanish-American. Her own sense of identity, however, is neither black or white, neither left nor right—a rejection of both the Soviet and fascist solutions to Europe's predicament—at any rate, as in Sasha's dream of the tube station in London, "There are passages to the right and passages to the left, but no exit sign" (13).

Creolization, in the most general sense, "refers to the results of a history of contact and to the subsequent process of indigenization or nativization of European settlers," state Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih.[14] It is an empirical reality in the colonial sites in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean, though it is also increasingly used as a theoretical concept. The word "creole," derived from the Spanish "criollo" and the Portuguese "crioulo," referred to children born of European settlers in the New World and the island colonies of the Caribbean and

[14] Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, "Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally," in Lionnet and Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 22.

the Indian Ocean. As Lionnet and Shih point out, by the first half of the eighteenth century, the French word "créole" was used to not just for white children of white settlers but also blacks and mulattoes. This definitional uncertainty, I argue, is characteristic of the singular dynamics of the concept, which has generated rich metaphorics around it, making 'Creole' stand for a transcultural mode of being and a form of linguistic and cultural agency. 'Creolization' refers also to the a natural linguistic process traceable to the social history of colonization and which made its global presence felt through the explosion of Anglophone, Francophone, and Hispanophone Caribbean literature of the 1950s. Most creoles are European-language based but make for a complex typology and Michel Degraff wonders if Creole languages can ever be on a genealogical or structural par with European languages. After all, he says, "Creoles were by and large perceived as languages created by slaves"—could the lesser humans that were the slaves possibly ever speak "full-fledged human languages"?[15]

Brathwaite's theory of creolization in *Contradictory Omens* (1974) could apply to the evolving geographical, ethnic, and aesthetic implications and enlargements of the term.[16] He describes creolization as a dialectic of acculturation and interculturation: *acculturation* is the process through which subordinated cultures assimilate with dominant ones while *interculturation* refers to an "osmotic" if unplanned and unstructured relationship between the two (6). Creolization, for Brathwaite, is the liminal, modernist poetics of "creative ambivalence," a hard-won cultural unity forged from the contradictory acts of capitulation to and the subversion of European cultural norms. Being Creole, in Rhys novels, neither involves a strenuously maintained topographical and locational distinction between Paris or London and Dominica nor the defeatist stance of privileging British metropolitan geography as the final arbiter of colonial spaces. Rhys claimed in a letter that in *Voyage in the Dark* she was trying to present the character's past in the West Indies as vividly as the present

[15] See Michel Degraff, "Linguists' Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Creole Exceptionalism," *Language in Society* 34 (2005), 547. See also Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

[16] See Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou, 1974).

(in Britain) and to show them "side by side."[17] Anna Morgan imagines the West Indies in vivid sensory detail while in England: "Sometimes I would shut my eyes and pretend that the heat of the fire, or bed-clothes drawn around me, was sun-heat; or I would pretend that I was standing outside the house at home looking down Market Street to the Bay. When there was a breeze the sea was millions of spangles; and on still days it was purple."[18] Again, the road to Constance Estates, Dominica, which Anna vividly remembers, is like none of the roads she has travelled since, yet its memory is triggered by thoughts of English travel. Being Creole, then, is the doubleness not of splitting but of Brathwaite's "contradictory omens," the contrapuntal, and the "side by side." And it is in this gesture of inventing the time of the Creole modern that the overlap between Creolization, which, in the words of Simon Gikandi, "opposes the synchronic vision of colonial historiography with the diachronic narrative of a cross-cultural imagination," [19] and the economy of representation that we identify as modernism is most complete.

Good Morning, Midnight ends with Sasha's embrace of the man next door, the travelling salesman she had earlier described as "the ghost of the landing," his blue gown specked with black spots, mirroring the black spots of the cockroaches mentioned several times in the novel. While the other men in the novel—the Russians and Rene - prove to be in some way predatory, the *commis* is the only character who asks "nothing" of Sasha. "Well, what is it? What do you want?" she had exasperatedly asked him once, when he had knocked on her door, and was standing the doorway, "smiling his silly smile" (30). "Nothing," he had said, "nothing" (30). In the conclusion, too:

> He doesn't say anything. Thank God, he doesn't say anything. I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time. (159)

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[17] Jean Rhys, *Letters, 1931-66*, 24.

[18] Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000), 7.

[19] Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 17.

If, as Susan Buck-Morss says of flâneur literature, in the distracted gazing of the modernist windowshopper "we recognise our own consumerist mode of being in the world," Rhys's great flâneur novel of Creolity ends with nothing: buying nor selling, neither a hope for self-invention nor self-loathing.[20] Creolity itself becomes what Gayatri Spivak calls "planetary": not a self-consolidating other but an alterity that remains underived from us, and that gives or takes nothing. To be human, a planetary subject rather than a global agent, "is to be intended toward exteriority," Spivak adds.[21]

Neil ten Kortenaar asks if creolization is best understood, "not as the expression of an indigenous West Indian soul, but as the form that modernist ambivalence takes in the Caribbean" (19).[22] In this reading, modernism is not God's gift to Caribbean creolization but "something that the Caribbean and Europe share" (19). Walcott's Creole poetry uses definitive local situations to revisit the experimental temporal forms of modernism: the uncanny simultaneity of tradition, the subversion of the chronotope of what Bakhtin calls "national historical time," and the juxtaposition of mythopoeia and history. Following the modernists' creative rewriting of stories and archetypes, and replicating the way in which in modernism prior textuality returns on the axis of spatiality, Walcott states, "what is needed is not new names for old things, or old names for old things, but the faith of using old names anew."[23] As I have discussed elsewhere, in "The Spoiler's Return," the old names of Juvenal and Rabelais, Rochester, Quevedo, Pope, Dryden, Swift, and Byron, classics of literature Walcott had studied at St Mary's College in Castries and the University of West Indies, are written in (reconstituted) heroic couplets, enunciated in Calypso rhythm and Creole accent and peppered with homely Trini sayings.[24] The transfigured

[20] Susan Buck-Morss, "The Flâneur, the Sandwichman, and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering," *New German Critique* 13:39 (1986), 104-5.

[21] Gayatri Spivak, "World Systems and the Creole," *Narrative* 14.1 (2006), 107.

[22] Ten Kortenaar, Neil. "Where the Atlantic Meets the Caribbean: Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*." *Research in African Literature* 27:4 (1996), 19.

[23] Derek Walcott, *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1999), 9.

[24] Ankhi Mukherjee, *What Is a Classic? Postcolonial Rewriting and Invention of the Canon* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 103-7.

names, the poet says, "salted my songs, and gave me their high sign."[25] The great writers are also made to serve the less exalted function of back-up singers in a calypso performance. Spoiler is a literary parasite who calls on the "Old Brigade of Satire" to endorse his gift of mockery: Dryden, Swift, and Lord Byron, but also the "Old Brigade" of calypsonians, and Old Masters such as Attila, Executor, Lion and Tiger. The "Spoiler's chorus" brings together the European and the Caribbean, the scribal and the oral, and what Braithwaite called "the 'great' and 'little' traditions" that Creole societies try to negotiate.[26] It is as if Walcott is creating an impossible and audacious "creole continuum" between standard (acrolect) and creole (basilect) registers, and also between the European literary canon and an emergent Caribbean one. The poem is polyvocal and choric, polymorphous in its enjoyment, and draws on the richly intertextual and cross-referential tradition of libertine satire, as exemplified in John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester's "Satyr Against Reason and Mankind," with its echoes of Boileau, Hobbes, Montaigne, and Horace. As Rei Terada observes, "Walcott's impulse to allude coincides happily in Spoiler's polyglossia with satire's *need* to allude." Every satirist writes in a mockery of the language his or her community uses, so in a way the belatedness of Walcott's modernist rewriting of Augustan satire replicates the constitutive belatedness of all satiric utterances. Terada draws attention to Walcott's use of "a language of mimicry for a mode of mimicry": "The constant awareness in creole that one is in effect alluding to other languages, and ringing changes upon them, suits creole to satire."[27]

"I call creolization the meeting, the interference, shock, harmonies, and disharmonies between the cultures of the world, in the realized totality of the world," states Édouard Glissant.[28] Creole is intercultural language as well as the identity that results from processes of acculturation and interculturation. In *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, Brathwaite provides the

[25] Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems,* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 438.

[26] Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 309.

[27] Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 109.

[28] Édouard Glissant, "The Unforeseeable Diversity of the World," trans. Haun Saussy, in Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi ed. *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenges of Globalization"* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 290.

historical context for Creolization by describing the dehumanizing institution of slavery and the confrontation of "two cultures of people, having to adapt themselves to a new environment and to each other". The friction of this confrontation was "cruel, but it was also creative," Brathwaite writes (21-22). The resultant Creolization was "a way of seeing the society not in terms of white and black, master and slave, in separate nuclear units, but as contributory parts of the whole."[29] In the persona of Shabine in "*The Schooner* Flight" the contributory parts of the protagonist's Creoleness are "Dutch, nigger and English":

> I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
> I had a sound colonial education,
> I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
> and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation. (*Collected Poems* 346)

Shabine is painstakingly individuated, a stand-in for the lyric hero Walcott, a man who has severed filial and social ties to embark on a quest romance aboard a schooner unambiguously named *Flight*. He is also a type, his nickname the St. Lucian Creole name for a mulatto: "the patois for any red nigger" (346). Shabine writes from the outskirts of civilization, and outskirts, Joseph Brodsky reminds us, "are not where the world ends—they are precisely where it unravels."[30] Brodsky enjoins us to read the "Dutch, nigger, and English" sentence as referring not so much to blood but language traces—French, Hindi, Creole patois, Swahili, Japanese, Spanish—in the street lingo of Trinidad and the "real genetic Babel of the West Indies" (36). The oratorical power of "either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation," Brodsky suggests, comes from "having" multilingual and vernacular English. "When you hear such a voice, you know; the world unravels. This is what the author means when he says that he 'love the sea'" (36).

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[29] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 307.

[30] Joseph Brodsky, "The Sound of the Tide," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Derek Walcott* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003), 35.

Shabine's "nobody" is also the pseudonym used by Odysseus in Book IX of *The Odyssey*. Maria Cristina Fumagalli points out that this is the self-definition of the Homeric (Greek) Odysseus, not the self-serving fraud Ulysses described by Virgil, Ovid, and Dante: "the protean Ulysses evoked by Walcott can be regarded as a pre-deviation, pre-hubris Ulysses."[31] The pseudonym, used by Ulysses in his adventure with Polyphemus and appropriated by the Caribbean sea-wanderer, is the imaginative ruse that saves his life and will justify that of his successor. "I have no nation now but the imagination," Shabine famously declares in the poem, signifying, as Fumagalli puts it, "the necessity of imagination" out of which he has come, and which is now his only country (113). "*The Schooner* Flight" experiments with the radical possibilities of the modernist poetics of impersonality, of being "Nobody," especially with modes of self-expression that are determined negatively through self-dispossession and acts of renunciation.[32] Walcott strains at this impersonality primarily through the old modernist stratagem of excerption and decontextualization, which articulates voice beyond the limits of nation and person. "*The Schooner* Flight" is redolent with echoes and relics of the Western literary canon: the Bible; Dante's *Commedia*; Virgil's Aeneas, who, like Shabine, contains his country's future; Shakepeare's *The Tempest*, only here the poet refuses to aestheticise "them corals/brain, fire, sea-fans, dead-men's-fingers, and then the dead men" littering the ocean bed from Senegal to San Salvador; the medieval dream vision of William Langland's *Piers Plowman,* its description of a field full of half-remembered faces here displaced on the sea; Keatsian negative capability; the "common language" of the *Lyrical Ballads* manifesto and Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" ("my common language," Shabine claims, "go be the wind"); the madness and underground terrors of Tennyson's *Maud*, here replicated in the salvage diving episodes; the seascapes of Joyce's *Ulysses*; Melville's *Moby Dick*.

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[31] Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *The Flight of the Vernacular: Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and the Impress of Dante* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 113.

[32] See Maud Ellmann, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013) for a compelling reading of the centrality of the doctrine of impersonality for the anti-humanism and conservatism of Eliot and Pound. Less critical accounts of impersonality, which emphasize the "access" and affect can be found in the works of Tim Dean, Daniel Albright, and Colleen Lamos.

Walcott's Creole modernism manifests itself in a poem like "*The Schooner* Flight" in the way it aspires to the condition of planetarity - "this earth," Shabine projects, "is one island in archipelagoes of stars" (CP 361)—while noisily pledging allegiance to "simple speech" and "common language" (CP 347) and quietly acknowledging its post-imperial melancholia ("we, / if we live like the names our masters please,/by careful mimicry might become men," CP 354). The language of "The Schooner Flight," which Brathwaite lauded as Walcott's "first major nation language effort," is marinated in the salty Caribbean vernacular.[33] Paul Breslin points out that Shabine's resolve that "each line must be soaked in salt" (eventually "each phrase go be soaked in salt" in *Star-Apple Kingdom*) appears in the third version of the poem, published in the *Trinidad &Tobago Review.*[34] In the famous encounter of Shabine with "history," missing from the first printed version (*Massachusetts Review*, winter 1977), but appearing in the subsequent *Chant of Saints* one, Creole is confined in the two-line self-quotation:

> "Ay sir! Is me, Shabine, your unhistorical grandson; You remember grandma, your black cook at all?"[35]

The framing narrative is in West Indian Standard and "the code-switching for the quotation seems to register a firm distinction between Shabine as narrator of his autobiography and Shabine as character within the story."[36] In the *Trinidad & Tobago Review* text, the third version of the poem, Creole is used throughout in the "I met history once" passage. The carefully maintained differentiation between an elevated poetic voice and the inchoate voices of "one people's grief" collapses in the face of the misrecognition or non-recognition that the muse of history confers upon all things Creole.

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[33] E. K. Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1984), 10.

[34] Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 190-91.

[35] Quoted in Breslin, *Nobody's Nation*, 191.

[36] Breslin, *Nobody's Nation*, 191.

> The bitch hawk and spat.
> A spit like that worth any number of words.
> But that's all them bastards have left us: words.
> (*Collected Poems*, 350)

The movement from polarity to coincidence and continuum (between SE and creole, the alien and the indigenous) is complete in the final, *Star-Apple Kingdom*, version of the poem. As Rita Dove observes, the duality that Walcott described in his essay "What the Twilight Says," "the interior life of poetry, the outward life of action and dialect," reaches a reconciliation in "The Schooner *Flight.*"[37] When words are all that "them bastards have left us," poetry is dialect in/as grapholectal action.

The Caribbean, Benítez-Rojo states, "is not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago," marked by "change, transit, return, fluxes of sidereal matter."[38] Within the sociocultural tumult of the Caribbean archipelago Benítez-Rojo sees the features of an island that repeats itself. I would claim that world literature such as "The Schooner *Flight*," where the local unfolds and bifurcates into the global, is one of the "processes, dynamics, and rhythms" that reveal themselves within the "marginal, the regional, the incoherent, [and] the heterogeneous" of the Caribbean (3). Shabine, who had taken to the high seas to escape a political fiasco and the "dreamless face" of his lover, the carnal Maria Concepcion, is accidentally elevated into an Adam, a Jonah, the Ancient Mariner, an Ishmael and a Prufrock. He wades through the remains of New World history, witnesses miracles, is traversed by the ghost ships of the Middle Passage, meets History. "'I had no nation now but the imagination,' the third section begins, and so memorably powerful is this sentence that one may forget to ask how Shabine arrives at it," observes Breslin.[39] Through his planetary poetry Shabine loses his perishable, fungible self to the *carnaval* of the supersyncretic Caribbean, masterfully rallying the Western civilization—the legacy of his "sound colonial

[37] Rita Dove, "Either I'm Nobody, or I'm a Nation," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Derek Walcott*, 66.

[38] Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 4.

[39] Breslin, *Nobody's Nation*, 199.

education"—and its discontents to give voice to "one people's grief" (CP 346, 360): "Shabine sang to you from the depths of the sea" (CP 361).

In "Jean Rhys," a poem published in his 1981 collection, *The Fortunate Traveller*, Walcott describes Rhys's poetics of white Creole anomie as a "white hush between two sentences," crystallizing, processual, refusing to cross over to a zone of cultural equivalency, refusing full translation into either metropolitan or regional language.[40] Though he does not refer to the Walcott poem, Christopher GoGwilt seems to circumscribe the impossible "white hush between two sentences" in his comparative study of the "impasse" of Rhys's Creole consciousness and Walter Benjamin's "standstill of dialectics," the ambiguity he saw attending the social relationships and products of the bourgeois epoch.[41] "Impasse," a word Jean Rhys uses to describe the dilemmas and bafflement of her protagonists and narrators, is both a felt social experience of geographical space and the *blanc*/blank space "of its self-referential scriptural economy" (125). For Rhys, whose West Indian accent (and her lack of money) kept her out of the English middle class, Creole was not a rhizomatic mode of becoming but the irrefutable and sometimes painful fact of being for a returning white Dominican. While her explorations of Creoleness dally with metaphorical conceptions of the term, and are not always immune to the seductions of ambivalence and hybridity associated with it, the play of signifier is easily thwarted by intransigent notions of biological difference and the pain of raced bodies. Unlike some modernist writers, topography mattered in her work, and the Caribbean—not the capitals of European Modernism—was at the centre. Ford Madox Ford observes how the Antilles is represented differently from metropolitan Europe in Rhys's imaginative topography: "she hands you the Antilles with its sea and sky […] the effect of landscape on the emotions and passions of a child being so penetrative, but lets Montparnasse, or London, or

[40] Derek Walcott, "Jean Rhys," *Collected Poems*, 427.

[41] Christopher GoGwilt, *The Passage of Literature: Genealogies of Modernism in Conrad, Rhys, and Pramoedya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98. The book is organized into three main sections titled "English Modernism," "Creole Modernism," and "Indonesian Modernism." Rhys occurs in both the English and Creole sections, which addresses the non-fixity and instability of these critical categories, though the distinction between racial and cultural creolization is not always spelled out in GoGwilt's extensive exploration of the concept of creole modernism.

Vienna go."[42] If the Euro-Modernists consciously cultivated the self-alienation of exiles and émigrés, here was the interloper who showed what it was to be profoundly dispossessed, a horrid colonial, and a commoditized female body to boot. Her mentor, editor, and lover Ford saw her as an outsider in European social structures:

> And coming from the Antilles, with a terrifying insight and a terrific—an almost lurid!—passion for stating the case of the underdog, she has let her pen loose on the Left Banks of the Old World—on its gaols, its studios, its salons, its cafés, its criminals, its midinettes—with a bias of admiration for its midinettes and of sympathy for its lawbreakers. (24)

She was, of course, taking the modernist imaginary to its limit in the way her cultivation of a Creole poetics of exilic marginality and the precariat breached the gap between experimentalism and autobiography: as Hanscombe and Smyers observe of modernist women writers, "the aesthetic drives impelling the transformation of literature also power the need to live anticonventionally."[43]

As a language, Creole is a highly creative continuum from African-informed multicultural Creoles to international English, which characterises Caribbean speech. As I have indicated throughout the essay, the term Creole is often extended beyond the Caribbean or the Americas to imply a "broader, more metaphorical connection […] focusing not on the individual body or on supposed biological difference but on cultural intersections and mixtures." [44] Educated in St. Lucian Schools and the University of West Indies, Walcott grew up trilingual in a Creole culture. Critics have noted how Walcott retranslates French-lexicon Creole into an English-inflected Creole. As Rhonda Cobham-Sander points out:

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[42] Ford Madox Ford. Preface to Jean Rhys, *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), 26.

[43] Cited in Elaine Savory, *Jean Rhys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 239.

[44] Judith L. Raiskin, *Snow in the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity* (1996), cited in Savory, *Jean Rhys*, 215.

> Walcott shares a French-based, rather than English-based Creole with his St Lucian community. More so then, than for exclusively Anglophone writers, his every move in representing St Lucia involves, at the most literal level, an act of translation.[45]

If in *Omeros*, where Achille speaks French patois and English Creole in Homeric and Dantean cadences, Walcott redeploys classic prosody and Standard English to represent dialectal speech, in "Cul de Sac Valley," as in several others in the *Arkansas Testament* (1987) volume, Walcott tries out the bounded design of the quatrain poem on Creole subject matter. Three stanzas of this poem deserve special attention[46]:

> as consonants scroll
> off my shaving plane
> in the fragrant Creole
> of their native grain;
>
> from a trestle bench
> they'd curl at my foot,
> C's, R's, with a French
> or West Indian root
>
> from a dialect throng-
> ing, its leaves unread
> yet light on the tongue
> of their native road[47]

Arkansas Testament's half-joking structural parallel with the Bible suggests that we read the first section, "Here," as the Old Testament and the next,

[45] Rhonda Cobham-Sander, "Any Enemy So Was a Compliment," in Jean Antoine-Dunne, ed., *Interlocking Basins of a Globe: Essays on Derek Walcott* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2013), 107.

[46] See also Charles W. Pollard's reading of this poem in *New World Modernisms: T. S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 130-136.

[47] Derek Walcott, *The Arkansas Testament* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987), 9.

"Elsewhere," as the New, or "Here" as the poet's African ancestry and "Elsewhere" as referring to his European nomadism. "Cul de Sac Valley," which appears in the first section, is set in Trinidad and poses the poet as carpenter, refining his "fragrant Creole" to non-existence as he earnestly undertakes the linguistic and cultural translation of his oral language ("its leaves unread") into Standard English. The singular characteristics of St. Lucian Creole—its C's and R's, its French and West African roots—are shaved off like knots and imperfections in the wood. The poem begins with the desire to write simply cut and contracted quatrain poems in a common language that resemble solid, honest constructions, "this settlement/of unpainted wood," but its resolve is shaken when the poet hears the trees, his very raw materials, hissing: "*What you wish / from us will never be, / your words is English, / is a different tree*."[48] The short lines of quatrain poems, Breslin states, "enact a growing desire for definite boundaries and spatial enclosure, a sort of formal correlative of homecoming."[49] This dream of (self) determination, of containing St. Lucia in an English quatrain poem, is inevitably interrupted by a warning delivered in Creole: "*your words is English, / is a different tree*."

Hamner contends that though Derek Walcott's poems are in English, they are tonally St. Lucian.[50] Walcott is notorious for mixing English with not just St. Lucian and Trinidadian inflections but also European languages and Latin: Rei Terada calls his assemblages of countless idiolects the "Creole of Creoles" and relates this to Walcott's yearning after an international community.[51] I have suggested here and elsewhere that his use of Creole commingles language as well as expressive media, and is a vital part of his complicated identity politics. Besides claiming a transhistorical vantage point—Spoiler is rustled up from hell to comment on the state of contemporary Port of Spain and Shabine, a common seaman, ventriloquises the Great Tradition—it shapes his authorial self-situation as metaphysically marginal, and the idea of the world or world literature as

[48] Walcott, *The Arkansas Testament*, 10.

[49] Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 230.

[50] See Robert D. Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's Omeros* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 417.

[51] Rei Terada, *American Mimicry*, 84.

"one/island in archipelagoes of stars" ("*The Schooner* Flight, CP 361). His language is at once private, communal, and universal. In the alternative and discrepant modernism that is Walcott's, images, ideas, and opportunities, as Arjun Appadurai says of the transnational modernity of a deterritorialized world, "come from elsewhere."[52]

[52] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 54.