James Reay Williams, *Multilingualism and the Twentieth-Century Novel: Polyglot Passages*. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. vii + 202 pp. (Cloth US\$84.99)

In the 1980s, two important statements about language, poetics, and the history of European imperialism came out of the Caribbean experience. Kamau Brathwaite's *History of the Voice* (1984) argues that Caribbean writers, especially poets, have a special responsibility—and a unique ability—to make use of the region's vernacular languages and rich cultural resources. *History of the Voice* regards the use of vernacular language as a democratizing act. Unexpectedly, perhaps, he cites poets such as T.S. Eliot as predecessors in making use of vernacular resources, noting that experimental modernists broke the hold of iambic pentameter on Anglophone verse. From this account of modernist prosody, Brathwaite's nation language represents a relatively short poetic leap. The language of Caribbean poetry ought to be regionally specific, its cadences responsive enough to catch the roar of the hurricane. In Brathwaite's model, poets work in and on language. Following Eliot, they are guardians of language. They are the keepers of the region's cultural patrimony.

In *Éloge de la Créolité* (1989), Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant make a similar argument about the importance of vernacular language as a means of resisting cultural imperialism. Enforced monolingualism—especially of European languages—is an attempt to impoverish the Caribbean's people, robbing them of their cultural birthright. "Creoleness is not monolingual," they declare. "Its field is language. Its appetite: all the languages of the world" (p. 108). Although they are in firm agreement with Brathwaite about the value of vernacular language, we can see from this passage that their point of emphasis is subtly different. They cast language itself, not the writer, as the agent of this process. Language has an appetite, here figured as insatiable. Language works on the region's writers. Linguistic plurality makes writing happen. M.M. Bakhtin's work on polyglossia in the novel, of course, figures as a major precursor.

In *Multilingualism and the Twentieth-century Novel: Polyglot Passages*, James Reay Williams explores the gap between *History of the Voice* and *Éloge de la Créolité*, the difference between writers as committed practitioners of multilingualism and writing as the product of multilingualism. In the twentieth-century novel, Williams suggests, monolingualism is the exception rather than the rule. Readers of English-language literature frequently misunderstand the part for the whole, mistakenly believing that one global language is capacious enough to represent divergent perspectives.

This has important consequences for how we grasp the function of literature. On one hand, Williams says that the global Anglophone novel is "unequal

to the various kinds of linguistic breadth, variety and cacophony which exist in the worlds its practitioners seek to represent" (p. 25). The Anglophone novel bulges at the seams. Writers are hardly in full command of this process, as if the porosity of languages determines the mechanisms of literary production. On the other hand, Williams says that if we read carefully enough, "we find a wealth of strategies for dealing with these problems which amount to an extension of the possibilities of the novel itself" (p. 25). Writers who are alert to the omnivorous character of language, in other words, have the ability to harness this power, using it to push the creative boundaries of fiction.

After clearing some conceptual ground with a chapter on Joseph Conrad, Williams turns to three major Caribbean writers: Jean Rhys, Wilson Harris, and Junot Díaz. The case studies reveal some surprises. In the reading of Rhys, for instance, Williams argues that "we find in the novels a treatment of language which is halting, suspicious and constantly questioning of the possibilities of the cross-linguistic encounter" (p. 75). Rhys is no straightforward cosmopolitan or playful modernist, in other words: her multilingual world is full of misunderstandings and missed opportunities. The chapter on Wilson Harris—in my estimation, the most compelling chapter in the book—highlights the novelist's incorporation of genocide, slavery, indenture, and environmental despoilment in fictional treatments of Harris's native Guyana. His fiction, Williams argues, "stands in oblique relation to traditions of linguistic pluralism and *créolité* in the Caribbean, not rejecting pluralism per se, but acknowledging that it has a problematic history stretching from the very origins of colonialism in the region to the modern-day Caribbean" (p. 116). The chapter on Díaz, likewise, understands the contemporary novelist's interlingual texts as attempts to put English and Spanish on a par, but these experiments are tinged with the knowledge of durable U.S. dominance in the Caribbean, which circumscribes all such endeavors.

Scholars who appreciate close reading and contextual approaches to literature will find much to admire in Williams's book. It blends fine-grained textual analysis with cultural and historical context. It is a welcome addition to Caribbean literary studies.

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