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CHAPTER 9

Transcultural Hybridity and Modernist Legacies: Observations on Late Twentieth- and Early Twenty-First-Century British Poetry¹

Sara R. Greaves

Peter Burke's 2009 publication *Cultural Hybridity* opens with the following observation: "the tendency of the period we live in is to celebrate the 'cross-over, the hybrid, the pot-pourri.'" ² Similarly, Fred Dervin writes of "the widespread discursive use of 'hybridity' and/or plural identities." ³ Yet, as Burke shows, hybridity is not new, and one might think that where English poetry is concerned, it is more often the norm than the exception. Indeed, Chaucer's poetry mixed local and continental traditions, Shakespeare's theater was an adaptation of Classical forms to English ebullience, and English prosody is itself an accentual-syllabic hybrid. With the twentieth century and in particular modernism, hybridity rocketed as Eliot, Pound, and others created a new aesthetic out of collaging Western and non-European texts. This was followed by the development of local voices within a modernist aesthetic by poets such as Hugh MacDiarmid, Basil Bunting, or David Jones, who brought juxtaposition and parataxis to bear on a sense of place akin to that of Hopkins and Clare, reflecting a withdrawal from cosmopolitanism. Later, Nobel Prize-winner Seamus Heaney evolved a less explicit hybridity and captured his sense of cultural in-betweenness with the term "inner émigré,"

to refer to betrayal and self-betrayal, caught between a rural Irish childhood and a Belfast English education. Of course, these are the British Isles and class barriers compound cultural ones; in 1985 Tony Harrison's *V*, which was nearly banned from its projected television broadcast because the Conservatives were concerned about the corrupting effects of the four-letter words on Britain's youth, displayed diglossia between two conflicting social classes. And then there is the postmodern recycling of texts from diverse sources, such as the nineteenth-century archaeologists' prose fused with Elizabethan verse and original poetry in Peter Riley's *Excavations* (2004). Within this comprehensiveness, we shall try to see which aspects of modernism have helped—or hindered—the emergence in late twentieth-century/early twenty-first-century British poetry of transcultural⁴ hybridity: first, by considering what Jed Esty calls the “cultural turn” in T. S. Eliot's work, and some poets' attitudes toward the consequences of modernism for poets and poetry; second, with the help of a brief survey of transcultural poems, by a reflection on specificities of texture, theme, and audience.

Modernist Legacies

Modernism can be seen to straddle a set of polarities, to be poised between a series of opposing forces: marmoreal “masculine” and flowing “feminine” energies, erudition and impish irreverence (Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, for example), the elitist and the demotic (David Jones's *In Parenthesis*), impersonality and emotion (Basil Bunting), social and psychic fragmentation contained within the organizing frames of music or myth (Eliot, Pound, Bunting...), modernist irony (Eliot) and vitalist fervor (Pound). Furthermore, modernist writers and the modernist aesthetic—frequently theorized as a response to the surrounding chaos and collapse—evolved over time; according to Jed Esty's account, modernism and declining imperialism go hand in hand, and the “shrinking” of civilization observed by Virginia Woolf in her diary⁵ is echoed by the careers of the major modernist writers. Esty describes the shift in Eliot's development toward rootedness and community belonging as a “cultural turn,” and attributes it to an “antidiasporic” reaction to imperial contraction running across the political spectrum in 1930s England:

Indeed, I take the emergence of a wider discourse of insularity on both the left and the right to indicate not just the political stripes of one or another segment of the educated classes but rather a broader structural

shift associated with the contraction of empire and the collapse of inter-war cosmopolitanism.⁶

The celebration of insularity, or Little Englandism, is something we are used to associating with the antimodernist Movement poets and fiction writers of the 1950s, so it is important to note that the thrust of Esty's account is to show that "modernism's experimental vitality" is not riveted to its internationalism and that "literary creativity can flow from the social challenges of national engagement as much as from the existential challenges of exilic wandering."⁷ It would seem that for Esty "experimental vitality" is the common denominator of the different modernist strains: objectivism, for instance is as important to Pound in *The Cantos* as it is to Bunting in his Northumbrian poem *Briggflatts*.

Postcolonial⁸ literature takes up the torch of modernist experimentation at its inception. Trinidadian author Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) portrays, in creolised English, a certain social reality—that experienced by the "Windrush generation" of Caribbean men who arrived in London from Jamaica and Trinidad on the *SS Empire Windrush* (1948) and other ships—commemorated in Benjamin Zephaniah's (b. 1958) poem "The Men from Jamaica Are Settling Down"⁹—to find themselves condemned to a ghostlike existence in the shadows of a society unable or unwilling to notice their presence. One passage in particular, the description of a summer's day in Hyde Park, is a dreamlike sequence of stream-of-consciousness narrative in which the prose slips its syntactical ropes and drops all punctuation.¹⁰ This book is one of the earliest works of postcolonial writing in Britain and is particularly interesting as the author began writing it in standard English, only to adopt a Caribbean voice under the pressure of his subject. It is noteworthy that this precursor should draw on modernist techniques and display "experimental vitality" in order to engage with the two extremes of the modernist spectrum: community belonging and a form of exilic wandering—through the streets of London. Indeed, if Eliot and other modernists undergo a shift from cosmopolitan exilic wandering to local rootedness, it can perhaps be said that transcultural poetry does the opposite and moves from a sometimes oppressive rootedness toward a more cosmopolitan point of view.

Nevertheless, the path from modernism to postcolonial hybridity—which can be broadly defined as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the zones of contact produced by colonisation"¹¹—is not a smooth one, at least not where poetry is concerned; indeed, transcultural poetry would seem to lag behind the fiction and it is worth wondering why. Part of

the answer may lie in differing responses to the modernist aesthetic and it is noteworthy, for instance, that modernism is perceived by some as an expression of imperialism (hence the term “Euromodernism” in some postcolonial discourse) rather than as the nexus of responses to imperial decline charted by Jed Esty. Bill Ashcroft and John Salter write:

The high-cultural discourse of modernism, with its imposition of a set of largely uncontested parameters upon a non-European cultural reality, may be seen to be metonymic of the operation of imperial domination. Modernity and modernism are rooted in empire.¹²

According to this view, practitioners of high modernism are accused of having helped themselves to fragments of non-European cultures and adapted them to their own aesthetic criteria or “domesticated” them, to borrow a term from translation studies. Pound’s (beautiful!) translations of classical Chinese poetry collected in *Cathay* (1915)¹³ are a case in point. Perceived this way, modernism is likely to be for younger generations of poets more than an anxious influence, a source of antagonism. Other aspects of modernism have come under scrutiny: Dublin-born poet Eavan Boland (born 1944) discusses its inhibiting effects, focusing on the exilic cosmopolitanism that she sees as its dominant characteristic and accusing modernism of cutting British poetry readers loose for the sake of a higher ideal, of “a newer, narrower interpretation of both poem and reader”:

I am writing this to propose that twentieth century poetry took a wrong turning: that the living proof of this is that the dialect and vernacular have not only separated, but that they were in fact—with hindsight and understanding—deliberately sundered. That the consequences have been damaging, far-reaching and surprisingly unquestioned. That we have been far slower, as poets, to do what other practitioners in music, art and fiction have done—that is, look at our household gods in the cold light of day and consider their purposes and powers.¹⁴

According to Boland, modernism was admirable in its “re-making of the poem so that it could converse with the world it came from; and therefore with the past,” but catastrophic in the way “its radicalisation of poetic form and history” resulted in cutting “the reader off from the old popular expectations of the poem and the historic popular audience.”¹⁵ Yet this “popular audience” is precisely what Eliot himself laments the loss of when he writes of a long-lost English organic community, figured here in “East Coker” by the Middle English spelling:

On a summer midnight, you can hear the music
 Of the weak pipe and the little drum
 And see them dancing round the bonfire
 The association of man and woman
 In daunsinge, signifying matrimonic—
 A dignified and commodious sacrament.¹⁶

It is also what Basil Bunting sought—and found—in postwar pre-Revolutionary Iran in the fifties, where excerpts from Firdousi's tenth-century epic, *Shahnameh*, could be heard on popular morning radio. The blame, Boland contends, lies with the universities, where the nuances and paradoxes within modernism have been oversimplified:

Almost without our noticing or understanding it, a new way of configuring both the poem and the idea of the poet—we now call it high modernism—had become the mainstream culture of poetry. Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Stevens were not only held up as examples. They were also simplified, pulled out of shape, reduced from the awkward, luminous spirits they were, to suit a new hieratic code that fitted suspiciously well into the ambitions of a post-war academy. Suddenly high modernism was not simply a moment in poetry. It had become, as if by mandate, its manifest destiny.¹⁷

Modernism then, as relayed by generations of academics, is seen as being passed down overbearingly as a rather narrow, exclusive, aesthetic.

Another kind of exclusion has been pointed out by poet Simon Armitage (b. 1963), writing in his capacity as member of the jury selecting the “Next Generation” poets in an article in *The Guardian* dated 2004. He makes the point that the shortlisted poets were white with one exception, and attributes this to the narrow tastes of the publishing world:

All debate took place in camera, but one conversation I don't mind leaking concerned the lack of black and Asian poets to choose from. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, how can this be the case? That question has to be put to the editors of poetry lists, because I can't believe that such writers aren't submitting manuscripts to established poetry publishers. Editors need to recalibrate. They need to widen their aesthetic tastes.¹⁸

Similarly, another article from *The Guardian* dated 2009, titled “Britain Needs a Black Poet Laureate,” reads:

Black and minority ethnic poets don't always behave in the expected way for poets; that is, they don't always sit down and write in standard English about Greek myths. Perhaps that's why they struggle to get into print. In 2004, writer-critic Bernardine Evaristo discovered that fewer than 1% of those published by mainstream poetry presses were non-white. [...] While British fiction freewheels into multicultural heaven, British poetry remains firmly grounded in native soil. But why? It seems pointless to mention "institutionalised racism" when, in 80 years, Faber has only ever given the nod to three non-white poets [...]. The Free Verse report discovered that mainstream poetry presses—run overwhelmingly by white men—would routinely reject writers on the basis that they already had one poet to represent "the Asian voice," "the Black voice," etc.¹⁹

The journalist surmises that the reason for the lack of black and minority ethnic poets must lie in the editors' benchmarks and their anxiety about granting aesthetic passports to poetry that is not kosher, not quite pukka—to use a couple of borrowings likely to "vote with their feet" in the "mass evacuation" from the English dictionary in "Reporting from the Frontline of the Great Dictionary Disaster" by John Agard (b. 1949). In characteristic comic vein Agard's poem makes the point that the English language is itself a hybrid and pictures a series of everyday words like "banana," "pajamas," or "hammock" dropping what they are doing with cartoon farce and rushing back to their place of origin (in a rather less laborious manner than with the ongoing legal and diplomatic wrangles involved in the cultural decolonization of European museums).²⁰ Here are the poem's opening lines:

Why has the English dictionary grown so thin? Why is it weeping
between its covers?
Because today is the day
all words of foreign origin
return to their native borders.²¹

Hybridity is everywhere in the language, yet the myth of monolingualism persists. Similarly, the journalist's question is suggestive of a kind of blind spot of unconscious assumptions about what poetry should or should not be. Might it be that if British poetry has remained "firmly grounded in native soil," this has to do with what Boland decries as an aesthetic of exclusion within modernism, an internalized authority within poets and publishers alike? For poet James Fenton (b. 1949), winner of several prestigious poetry awards and former Oxford Professor of Poetry, the question is not "what?" but "when?" He writes, once again in *The Guardian*:

Modernism spoilt everything for us. It slammed the door on the past. It took the glass of art out of our hands and smashed it. But when did modernism do this thing? That, to me, is an abiding mystery.²²

If it is true that ascendancies such as that of Schoenberg's musical modernism can "[block] our access to an art," as Fenton goes on to write, it would seem urgent work to unravel the reasons why. Scottish poet Kathleen Jamie (b. 1962) sheds some light on the problem of internalized authority with her sense as a writer of having to ask permission:

Each development in our writing begins when we seek permission to approach it; to approach a new area of experience. We ask permission, that is, to blunder into a delicate place. We ask permission to assume ownership, and appropriate to ourselves whatever it is our writing is moving toward.²³

Sometimes the need for permission is within the self, as Jamie implies here, sometimes it is external: Basil Bunting's development as a poet was put on hold for two or three decades because T. S. Eliot at Faber deemed his early work too "derivative." The whole question of influence is a fraught one, as Harold Bloom's seminal book *The Anxiety of Influence*, and others, such as Michel Schneider's *Voleurs de Mots*, clearly demonstrate.²⁴ My own feeling, although I cannot explore this further here, is that there is a sort of ethical/aesthetic divide or discrepancy, and that there is sometimes an inhibiting hiatus between the human need for poetry and aesthetic aspirations. The poets we shall be looking at have taken steps to solve this difficulty and we shall devote the following pages to savoring some of our gains rather than lamenting our losses.

Transcultural Hybridity

Transcultural hybridity, then, draws self-consciously on more than one culture. It operates experimentally on language, through dialect and creolization, on themes such as exile and self-alienation, on setting, through translocalism (such as when Patience Agbabi [b. 1965] transports and transposes Chaucer's "Wyf of Bath" to Nigeria), on structure and on rhythm—further hybridizing what is already hybrid. Poetry critic Jahan Ramazani, author of *The Hybrid Muse* (2001), while acknowledging the inhibiting role of "Euromodernism" for some non-Western poets writing in English, shows how it has inspired postcolonial hybridity, which he sees as the counterpart to modernist "bricolage." He observes:

Far from being an obstruction that had to be dislodged from the postcolonial windpipe, Euromodernism—in one of the great ironies of twentieth-century literary history—crucially enabled a range of non-Western poets after World War II to explore their hybrid cultures and postcolonial experience. For these poets, the detour through Euromodernism was often, paradoxically, the surest route home.²⁵

In particular the attention to voice was found inspiring. It has continued to inspire the poets of British multiculturalism, who have indeed moved to rediscover that “ancient and communal contract between poet and audience,” such as prevailed, for instance, between Langston Hughes and his audience²⁶ (while at the same time, in New York in the 1920s, being berated by custodians of literary culture both black and white). According to Ramazani, hybridity is “the knotting together of countless already knotted together indigenous and imposed languages, images, and genres. [It] is not an aspect but the basic fabric of the postcolonial poem.”²⁷ What perhaps distinguishes transcultural hybridity from modernist collage and heteroglossia is the fact that there seems to lie, behind a modernist poem, an all-embracing monolithic consciousness, a single—albeit impersonal and fractured—self, reminiscent of those infamously overbearing Victorians.²⁸ Transcultural hybrid poetry, on the other hand, stages rather a “double consciousness,” to use the phrase coined by American historian and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois,²⁹ that is, the experience of in-betweenness, of living between two cultures, two languages, two countries, between a lived life and a fantasy one.³⁰

Indeed, a double consciousness can be a heavy burden. Born in London then moving to Guyana (then British Guiana) for the first 12 years of his life before settling in London, Fred D’Aguiar (b. 1960) “engages critically with race” and explains how the most intimate poem became “the social act of a black male.” He writes: “Born in London but not of London, writing in English but not of the English, British but under the rubric of a racial and cultural difference, my tongue forked, my skin bristled with the scales of my unlikeness.”³¹ This may produce platform poetry, such as was popular in Britain in the eighties, but with the move from politics to poetics, culture begins to be experienced as a prison. D’Aguiar continues: “Each poem staged my insider-outsider stance. My romantic impulse locked horns with my social self.”³² And again: “Each poem, so it seemed, sought to reconcile the dialectic of politics and place with the poetics of mind and space.”³³ The conflict between the will to root oneself and the will to uproot oneself is a difficult one to negotiate, and one that is staged in many transcultural poems.

For several poets, moreover, the issue of skin and belonging is exacerbated by their having been fostered by white parents. This is the case for Patience Agbabi, Lemn Sissay (b. 1967) and Jackie Kay (b. 1961), who was born of a Scottish mother and Nigerian father and adopted by two very loving Scottish communists.³⁴ The following is an extract from her long poem "The Adoption Papers":

Angela Davis is the only female person
I've seen (except for a nurse on TV)
Who looks like me. She had big hair like mine
That grows out instead of down.
My mum says it's called an *Afro*.
If I could be as brave as her when I get older
I'll be OK.³⁵

In this poem, which adopts the simple conversational voice of a young teenage girl ("Her skin is the same too you know"), the protagonist is engaged in a complex and uncomfortable process of identification and self-construction ("so sometimes when I look in the mirror / I give myself a bit of a shock"). Patience Agbabi presents the plight of teenage in-betweenness this way in "Serious Pepper":

Too Black Too White
in limbo on the edge
of the dance floor playing gooseberry³⁶

Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha uses the term "mimicry" to refer to the constitutive experience inscribed in the colonial system whereby colonized children are brought to identify with adult colonizers, and endure trauma or anxiety when they realize their skin color makes that identification impossible. This is the problem of norms that have been assimilated but which, as D'Aguiar puts it, "make [your] skin bristle with the scales of [your] unlikeness." Jamaica-born Kei Miller (b. 1978) makes a similar point when he explains during a poetry recording (British Library Sounds) how liberating it was to realize that for him litotes and irony, those wry modes of expression typical of educated British conversation, were not the only way to communicate; and the "fat black woman" presented in "Tropical Death" by Anglo-Guyanese poet Grace Nichols (b. 1950) wants not the norms of polite English discretion but a "proper" Tropical wake with droning and keening and bawling:

The fat black woman want
 A brilliant tropical death
 Not a cold sojourn
 In some North Europe far/forlorn³⁷

While Nichols's comic-nostalgic poem contrasts national character and behaviors, its sensuous sibilants and lingering spondees ("sweetbreast," "cool bless," "bloodrest"...) promote the cathartic glamor of mourning rites in the Tropics, making English stoicism appear dull and cold-blooded. The non-standard English grammar, the use of slash marks to construct alliterative pairs and the syncopated effects as well as the contrast of North and South all contribute to produce a strong hybridized voice in which the lived life and the fantasized one are equally present, and the poem is pervaded by a bittersweet nostalgia and loss, but is also a celebration of plurality.

The following is extracted from John Agard's tongue-in-cheek poem "Half Caste." It transcribes phonetic, prosodic, and grammatical traits of Caribbean English and uses farce to reflect humorously on the disparaging connotations of the term "half-caste": "Excuse me / standing on one leg / I'm half-caste [...] I close half-a-eye [...] I dream half-a-dream." Finally the speaker turns the tables on the reader, who is generously invited to return the next day to listen with not just the narrow, English-poetry-attuned part of the self, but the rest too, "de whole of yu mind":

an I will tell yu
 de other half
 of my story.³⁸

The speaker is playfully presented as the possessor of hidden riches that the reader/listener has to prove him/herself worthy of.

Similarly, in Kei Miller's prose poem "The Law Concerning Mermaids,"³⁹ the "empire writes back" by having the existentialist mermaids ("they simply were, and did not need permission to exist or to be beautiful") whom the British Empire has subjected to its legislation ("And in this law it was decreed: were any to be found in their usual spots, showing off like dolphins, sunbathing on rocks—they would no longer belong to themselves") turn the (male) colonizers' institutional weapons against them: "The law concerning mermaids only caused mermaids to pass a law concerning man," by which they disappear entirely from view. The poem laments their loss, which has left our world "dry and stifling," while at the same time returning them to it, dazzling symbols of poetry: a gift to be shared.

In "Catching Crabs"⁴⁰ by Anglo-Guyanese poet David Dabydeen (b. 1957), the "double consciousness" takes the form of exile and guilt. A childhood memory followed by an imagined return to the family home years after leaving it are presented using a hybridized grammar and with the norms of English poetry subtly foreignized.⁴¹ "We come home tired slow," "Death long catch ma..." The verse is patterned into unrhymed lines of 4 or 5 stresses with, in the first verse stanza, a large number of feminine endings: "big folk," "prospect," "piece-piece," and the texture is rich and sensuous. Tongue-in-cheek, the poem hovers between children's scare-stories and colonial clichés: "who will make the most terrible cannibal." With the word "catch" and the double meaning of "crabs," the poem insinuates a sad chain of cause and effect between crab-catching in colonial Guyana, Ruby's subsequent sexual humiliation (catching "crabs": pubic lice), and the mother's death, "crustacean-old, alone," like the crabs the children choose to cull "because they got no prospect / of family." The long 7-stress line that stands out from the body of the poem and ends on that sensitive syllable, "Ma," crystallizes guilt and pain about the lone mother left behind. The lines "the lonesome ones / Who don't mind cooking because they got no prospect / of family," "We'll test out who teeth and jaw strongest," and "We leave behind a mess of bones and shell / and come to England and America" are charged with their implicit reminders of colonial outrages. Here are the opening lines of Dabydeen's poem:

Ruby and me stalking savannah
 Crab season with cutlass and sack like big folk.
 Hiding behind stones or clumps of bush
 Crabs locked knee-deep in mud mating
 And Ruby seven years old feeling strange at the sex

Probably the most significant hybrid technique is the creolized oral texture. In Britain in the eighties, protest poetry by poets such as Linton Kwesi Johnson (b. 1952) or Benjamin Zephaniah (b. 1958), performed on stage using Jamaican or African speech and rhythms, assigned a positive role to ways of speaking perceived negatively by the dominant culture. Anglo-Jamaican poet Valerie Bloom (b. 1956) observes the restorative role of such performance poetry, particularly for people from a "community audience":

The oral tradition seems to have been neglected or lost. My poetry appears to remind people of it. Especially when I perform to a "community audience" rather than a poetry-going audience. I often find that people, older people in particular, are astonishingly gratified. This is clearly not just

a response to my work as such, but it is because something has been restored which they felt they had left behind.⁴²

But a poetic language rhythmically tempered and grammatically tampered with is also precisely where the duality of double consciousness can be left behind and the alloy impose itself as free from cultural determinisms.⁴³ In the following extract there is no syntactical or phonetic creolizing, but the rhythms are inspired by dub and rap to produce a dialectics of page and stage and a printed text that aspires to the musical score. This is taken from the "Prologue" to Patience Agbabi's collection *Transformatrix*:

Give me a word
Any word
Let it roll across your tongue
Like a dolly mixture.
Open your lips
Say it loud
Let each syllable vibrate
Like a transistor.⁴⁴

The phonetics of the dislocated words and the syncopated rhythms jump off the page as her prosody works to impose stresses on grammar words ("like," "till," "is" . . .), on the unstressed syllables of polysyllabics ("transistor") or to favor a lingering trochaic rhythm ("Till its meaning is in tatters"). The poem invites us to savor the words in the mouth like sweets ("a dolly mixture") and to focus on the sounds of them until they lose all semantic meaning ("Till its meaning equals sound"), thereby renewing the age-old myth of poetry's aspiration to the condition of music. Hybridity has been subsumed, it is part and parcel of the poetic line and the double consciousness present in Agbabi's earlier verse has been superseded by an appeal to a universal youth culture. This comes into play as a kind of third term akin to Homi Bhabha's creative "third space," which embraces neither the reified confines of multiculturalism, nor postmodern deconstructionism in which the foundation-stone of origin is constantly being pulled from under one's feet.⁴⁵ This third space is a space which is neither monolithic identity nor double consciousness but composed of fluid, fluctuating identifications that are multiple and dynamic, and which can thus appeal not only to a "community audience," but to a hybrid one as well.

So while there are poets seeking to hybridize English to find a voice within multiculturalism, there are others seeking rather to transmute voice and multicultural boundaries so as to . . . "make it new." Such poetry can

short-circuit tokenism (Ruth Padel writes: "In multiracial Britain, the flip side of having an origin different from the white English norm is that people expect you to have a particular agenda. To write 'about' being Scottish, black, or from Pakistan"),⁴⁶ but must also resist pressure from within the community, a problem that is dramatized in the following poem by Fred D'Aguiar, "Mama Dot Warns against an Easter Rising." The poem presents a boy disobeying authority and flying a kite on Easter Friday (there is an echo of Yeats's "Easter 1916," with the kite a counterpart to the falcon present in the opening lines of "The Second Coming"—lines that gave Chinua Achebe the title of postcolonialism's seminal novel *Things Fall Apart* [1958]). Watched from a safe distance with admiration and envy by a group of children, the boy is intent on skillfully handling the rising kite and inadvertently steps on a greenheart thorn, bringing himself and the kite crashing to the ground. Concerned with protecting her own, the matriarchal figure Mama Dot is the guardian of past values, whose superstition and inherited wisdom are crucial to the survival of her community. But for a young male aspiring to the beauty, freedom, and mastery represented by the kiteflying, the effect of her good intentions is stifling and emasculating. The poem could be read as an objective correlative of a failed attempt to supersede cultural determinism, represented in the poem by matriarchal lore:

Doan raise no kite is good Friday
 but is out he went out an fly it
 us thinking maybe there wont be a breeze
 strong enouf an widout any a we to hole it
 fo him he'd neva manage to get it high-up
 to de tree top ware de wind kissin
 de ripess sweetess fruit we cawn reach⁴⁷

Written in one long unpunctuated sentence that pulls and tugs like the rising—and then falling—kite on its string, or like the soaring hopes and aspirations of the kite-flyer and his spellbound admirers, the poem in its strongly creolized English translates a universal bid for existence: "trace its rise rise up up up in de sky / we all want to fly in like bird." The lovingly crafted homemade kite is an emblem of culture as defined by Mikhail Epstein: "everything humanly created which simultaneously creates a human being," or: "humankind's self-creation."⁴⁸ At the same time, it stands for the desire to escape from culture, to rise above its oppressive imprisonments, thereby reinstating high modernism as a model. Indeed, while transcultural hybridity may seem to stand in contrast with the hawk's-eye cosmopolitanism of modernism, in that it registers a rootedness in specific locations and cultures,

it may also identify with that same cosmopolitanism insofar as it provides a free-ranging existentialist model of freedom from culture. Epstein writes that while culture

frees humans from the material dependencies of nature, it also creates new, symbolic dependencies—on customs, traditions, conventions, which a person receives as a member of a certain group and ethnos. Among the many freedoms proclaimed as rights of the individual, there emerges yet another freedom—from one's own culture, in which one was born and educated.⁴⁹

Modernism, then, may reach transcultural poets both as an authoritarian superego and as authorizing facilitator; as an imperial aesthetic of cosmopolitan erudition and as a model of the search for the local rhythms of authentic speech; and as monolithic Eurocentricity and the forefather of transcultural hybridity. New paradigms for hybridity offering alternatives to the multicultural binaries are currently being explored in Britain, such as the concept of “poeclectics” (Petrucci),⁵⁰ or the multidisciplinary transcultural project “Moving Worlds.”⁵¹ It is hard to imagine them emerging without modernism in the background, inspiring and legitimizing experimentation of all kinds and providing an aesthetic authority to complement the cultural one. It would seem, then, that the specificity of transcultural hybridity is its social dimension, its capacity to speak for others, whether for a “community” or for a wider public, and that its vocation is to provide sensitive templates for constructive identifications that are plural, dynamic, and collective.

Notes

1. This chapter was first presented at a meeting of the LERMA (Research Centre of the English-Speaking World) seminar, *Politics, Culture, Society*, chaired by Valérie André at Université d'Aix-Marseille 18/03/13.
2. Perry Anderson, *Origins of Post-Modernity* (London: Verso, 1998) cited by Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 1.
3. “la mise en discours généralisée de ‘l’hybridité’ et/ou des identités plurielles,” Fred Dervin, *Le Concept de Culture: Comprendre et maîtriser ses détournements et manipulations* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013), 8 (my translation).
4. I use this term rather than “multicultural” or “postcolonial” for the following reasons: the latter is now outdated and although the consequences of decolonization continue in many places and many minds remain marked by it, historically it is over. The former, while used frequently to describe modern Britain, has the drawback of suggesting different cultures living statically side by side.

rather than dynamically together. "Transculture" conveys the idea of moving between cultures and of breaking free from culture.

5. "In 1939, Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary, 'Civilisation has shrunk'; Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), back cover.
6. Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, 110.
7. *Ibid.*, 217.
8. I use this term here although I am referring to a 1950s publication, written in fact before the independence of Trinidad in 1962.
9. Benjamin Zephaniah, *Too Black, Too Strong* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2001), 27–30.
10. Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) (London: Penguin, 2006), 92–102. I am grateful to Julien Guazzini, for placing this book in my hands, and to the Londoner who placed it in his.
11. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies, the Key Concepts* (2000) (New York: Routledge, 2007), 108.
12. Bill Ashcroft and John Salter, "Modernism's Empire: Australia and the Cultural Imperialism of Style," in *Modernism and Empire*, ed. Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), quoted in Jahan Ramazani, "Modernist Bricolage, Postcolonial Hybridity," *Modernism/Modernity* 13.3 (September 2006), 446.
13. Ezra Pound, *Cathay* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1915), reprinted in Ezra Pound, *Translations* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1984 [1970, 1953]).
14. *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. W. N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 215.
15. Eavan Boland, "The Wrong Way," in *Strong Words*, ed. W. N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 215–218, 217.
16. T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, [1936] 1963), 197.
17. Boland, "The Wrong Way," 216.
18. Simon Armitage, "Life on the Line," *The Guardian* (Saturday June 5, 2004), <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/jun/05/poetry.simonarmitage>.
19. Peter Beech, *The Guardian* (Wednesday April, 22, 2009), <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/apr/22/black-poet-laureate>.
20. See "Décolonisation culturelle au musée," in the *Culture et Idées* supplement of France's daily *Le Monde* (Saturday September 6, 2014).
21. John Agard, *We Brits* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2006), 32.
22. James Fenton, "The Artists Are Revolting," *The Guardian* (February 12, 2005).
23. Kathleen, Jamie, "Holding Fast—Truth and Change in Poetry," in *Strong Words*, ed. W. N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 277–278.
24. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1973] 1997); Michel Schneider, *Voleurs de Mots: Essai sur le plagiat, la psychanalyse et la pensée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

25. Jahan Ramazani, *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 446.
26. Ibid., 217.
27. Ramazani, "Modernist Bricolage," 449.
28. See Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians: Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr. Arnold, General Gordon* (London: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1918).
29. Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, 31.
30. As Cuban writer in exile Reinaldo Arenas put it: "In exile one is nothing but a ghost, the shadow of someone who never achieves full reality. I ceased to exist when I went into exile; I started to run away from myself" (*Before Night Falls: a Memoir* (1992) [London: Serpents Tail, 1993], 303).
31. Fred D'Aguiar, "Further Adventures in the Skin Trade," in *Strong Words*, ed. W. N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 270–273, 271.
32. Ibid., 271.
33. Ibid., 271.
34. She relates her meetings with her birth parents and their families in *Red Dust Road* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2010).
35. Michael Hulse, David Kennedy, and David Morley, eds., *The New Poetry*, (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 1993), 300.
36. Patience Agbabi, *R.A.W.* (London: Gecko Press, 1995), 14.
37. Hulse, Kennedy and Morley eds., *The New Poetry*, 155.
38. John Agard, *Half-Caste and Other Poems* (London: Hodder Children's Books, 2004), 13.
39. Kei Miller, *A Light Song of Light* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2010), 61.
40. Hulse, Kennedy and Morley eds., *The New Poetry*, 221.
41. See translation studies, as theorized by Lawrence Venuti in *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998).
42. Loretta G. Ngcobo, ed., *Let It Be Told: Essays by Black Women in Britain* (Melbourne: Pluto Press, 1987), 86–87.
43. See the recordings by the Poetry Archive or the British Library, whose website has an archive titled "Between Two Worlds: Poetry and Translation," and another titled "The Power of Caribbean Poetry: Word and Sound," both with many wonderful poetry readings. Examples are the wonderful Punjabi-inflected poems of Daljit Nagra (one of the happy few to have found favor with Faber), the Caribbean Creole of John Agard or of Grace Nichols, in her case fused with Welsh, or the Jamaican Creole of Kei Miller (British Library Sounds, "The Power of Caribbean Poetry: Word and Sound," Sounds.bl.uk.)
44. Patience Agbabi, *Transformatrix* (Edinburgh: Payback Press, 2000), 2.
45. Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207–221.
46. Ruth Padel, *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem* (London: Vintage, 2004), 36.
47. Ibid., 130.

48. Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 280. <http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/af.culturology.html>.
49. Mikhail Epstein, "Transculture, a Broad Way between Globalism and Multiculturalism," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 68.1 (January 2009): 327–351. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1536-7150.2008.00626.x/abstract>.
50. Mario Petrucci, "Making Voices: Identity, Poeclectics and the Contemporary British Poet," *International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 3.1 (2006): 66–77.
51. In a 2009 issue of *Region/Writing/Home: Relocating Diasporic Writing in Britain* (based at the University of Leeds), the editors express their aim as follows: "Celebrating the diversity and richness of local/global transcultural communities," adding that the new writing they have commissioned for the issue is creative work "for which the relationship between the global and the local provides a specific remit." They ask in their Preface, with reference to that staple of English poetry since John Denham's topographical poem Cooper's Hill, written in 1642: "What does a 'sense of place' signify when places themselves are simultaneously actual and virtual, both experienced by and projected from the coordinating centres of human consciousness? In this analysis, 'sense' quickly takes precedence over 'place,' showing human location and its cultural expression to be contingent upon individual and collective consciousness, and the reflexive cycles of individual and collective experience" (Corinne Fowler and Graham Mort, *Region/Writing/Home: Relocating Diasporic Writing in Britain*, an issue of *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings* (Leeds: University of Leeds and Nanyang Technological University) 9.2 (February 2009).