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**Foreign Music: Linguistic Estrangement
and its Textual Effects in Joyce, Beckett,
Nabokov and Rushdie**

by

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DECLARATION

This thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between multilingualism and defamiliarisation in Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov and Rushdie. Focusing on Joyce's *Ulysses*, Beckett's Trilogy, Nabokov's *Bend Sinister*, *Pale Fire* and *Ada*, and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the study considers the reasons for these authors' uses of foreign languages and examines their specialised compositional processes. It evaluates the textual effects produced by these processes, and compares overtly multilingual effects (such as multilingual puns and the hybridisation of language) to more general characteristics of the authors' prose-styles, including monolingual forms of defamiliarisation.

The prose of all four authors is characterised by extreme forms of defamiliarisation, and the thesis develops the concept of 'linguistic estrangement' to elucidate a perceived relationship between each author's perspective of ideological or literal estrangement *from* language and his subsequent estrangement *of* that language. In particular, these writers tend to turn the distinctive features of the foreigner's perspective on language – semantic ambiguity and linguistic materiality – to positive effect: semantic ambiguity is used to produce puns, plays on words and linguistic overdetermination, while a focus on the material characteristics of language is fundamental to the construction of phonetic and rhythmic linguistic patterns. As a result, the work under scrutiny is often characterised by high levels of musicality, iconicity and textual performativity. Apparently 'negative' aspects of language – interlingual confusion, distortion, mistranslation, misunderstanding and misuse – thus form the basis of some of the most productive stylistic aspects, and indeed the radically innovative nature, of each author's work.

The thesis explores a wide array of evident intentions associated with such processes including, among others, mimetic, aesthetic, literary historical and socio-political concerns. Translational processes, interlingual contact and linguistic estrangement are thus demonstrated to be fundamental to the particular thematic and stylistic features of the work of each individual author. This study can also, more generally, be seen to address a central dynamic within modernist (and subsequent late-modernist and postmodernist) literary production.

ABBREVIATIONS

James Joyce:

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man P
Ulysses (The Corrected Text) U

Samuel Beckett:

L'Innommable I
Malone meurt MM
Molloy M
Watt W
Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable T

Vladimir Nabokov:

Ada A
The Annotated Lolita AL
Bend Sinister BS
Pale Fire PF
The Real Life of Sebastian Knight SK
Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited SM
Strong Opinions SO

Salman Rushdie:

Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991 IH
Midnight's Children MC
The Satanic Verses SV
Shame S
Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002 SAL

Pradyumna S. Chauhan, ed. *Salman Rushdie Interviews: A Sourcebook of His Ideas*

SRI

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

For all languages except Russian, the original language appears in the body of the text, and a translation in the footnote (citations from Russian appear only in English translation). Where possible, I have made use of published English translations; elsewhere, translations are my own.

INTRODUCTION

Nur der verfügt über die Sprache wie
über ein Instrument, der in Wahrheit
nicht in ihr ist.¹

– Theodor Adorno

W.B. Yeats, speaking to a conference of Indian writers, defended his decision not to write in Gaelic by proclaiming that ‘no man can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue.’² Yet a great many writers, especially in the twentieth century, have been subject to conditions of cultural and linguistic displacement that have led them to make use of foreign languages in their work, or even to write entire works in a foreign language. William Mackey reminds us that ‘[m]any of the pioneers of the great vernacular literatures, the very makers of the written languages of Europe, chose to write some of their works in an acquired tongue’,³ and George Steiner, pointing to a common condition of ‘extraterritoriality’ that characterises the work of multilingual authors such as Beckett, Nabokov, Borges and Pound, asserts that these ‘multilinguists’ are ‘among the foremost writers’ of the twentieth century.⁴ The condition of exile is now acknowledged to have played a significant role in modernist literature, and the more recent rise of authors from postcolonial countries, for whom cultural hybridity, exile and multilingualism are often the norm, has led to a critical climate that is beginning to move away from

¹ ‘Only someone who is not actually inside language can manipulate it like an instrument.’ Theodor Adorno, ‘Die Wunde Heine,’ *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974) 98; ‘Heine the Wound’, *Notes to Literature, Volume One*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 82-3.

² W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume 5: Later Essays*, ed. William H. O’Donnell (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994) 211.

³ William Mackey, ‘Literary Diglossia, Biculturalism and Cosmopolitanism in Literature,’ *Visible Language* 27.1/2 (Winter/Spring 1993): 43.

⁴ George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972) 6.

Romantic ideals of linguistic ‘at-homeness’,⁵ towards an appreciation of the importance of multilingualism in literature.⁶

The four authors of this study – Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov and Rushdie – exemplify Steiner’s claim for the centrality of ‘multilinguists’ to twentieth-century literature. All highly influential, if not genre-defining, they are also known as some of the most important prose-stylists since the beginning of the last century. The particularly extreme forms of defamiliarisation that are apparent in the work of all four writers are, moreover, directly related to their multilingualism and/or their decision to write in a foreign language. Joyce’s work is increasingly multilingual, culminating in his use of between seventy and eighty different languages in *Finnegans Wake*.⁷ Beckett and Nabokov are both notable for their bilingual oeuvre: Beckett in English and French, and Nabokov in Russian and English. Both decided to write in a foreign language at the mid-point of their career, and both were actively involved in translating their own work. Rushdie also decided to abandon his mother tongue, Urdu, in favour of a highly stylised form of Indian English that makes direct

⁵ Steiner describes how, in the Romantic period, a national language was seen to embody ‘the inner history, the specific world-view of the *Volk* or nation’, and the writer was the incarnation of the ‘genius, *Geist*, quiddity of his native speech.’ Steiner, *Extraterritorial* 3. Mackey also reminds us that ‘[u]ntil some time in the seventeenth century, most writers were, by definition, biliterate’ and that ‘the idea of national and linguistic allegiance’ only took hold of Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. Mackey 43.

⁶ Raymond Williams, for example, examines the importance of immigration and exile to the language of modernist literature in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989) 34-5, 45, 77-8. Elleke Boehmer refutes the common assumption that the modernist movement is predominantly metropolitan and Euro-American, arguing that colonial writers (such as the Negritude poets) and modernists exerted considerable influence over each other. She considers the possibility that ‘the colonials’ culturally translated art provided models for the multilingual, generically mixed utterance that modernism favoured.’ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 123-4. Actual translation is also now seen to have played an extremely significant role in modernist literature: in a recent edition of *Translation and Literature* devoted entirely to the topic of ‘Modernism and Translation’, Adam Piette indicates the influence of translated works upon modernist movements as well as the frequency of translations by modernist authors, and provides extensive evidence for the claim that ‘anglophone modernism might be thought of not only as the product of acts of translation, but as being constituted by such acts.’ Adam Piette, ‘Introduction,’ *Translation and Literature* 12.1 (Spring 2003): 1-17.

⁷ See Laurent Milesi, ‘L’idiome Babelien de *Finnegans Wake*: recherches thématiques dans une perspective génétique.’ *Genèse de Babel: Joyce et la création*, ed. Claude Jacquet (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1985) 173.

use of hybrid linguistic forms. Though these writers all share a dedication to formal experimentation, the textual effects manifest in their prose are extremely varied. Nevertheless, the way they work with foreign languages indicates an extremely close link between their multilingualism and the stylistic effects and forms of defamiliarisation apparent in their work. Yeats denied the creative possibilities of writing in a foreign language; this study, however, is based on the premise that much of the 'music and vigour' of the prose of Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov and Rushdie is the product of what I call 'linguistic estrangement' – a form of defamiliarisation that is in part produced by a general sense of estrangement *from* language and that is characteristic of explicitly multilingual texts.

In an early study of multilingualism in literature, W.T. Elwert describes a general critical attitude which considers the use of foreign languages in literature as merely a marginal phenomenon, a practice inherently inferior to monolingual writing:

Nous savons d'expérience que, dans toute production littéraire, il est naturel que l'oeuvre soit écrite en une seule langue, d'un bout à l'autre. Cela correspond à la situation normale de tout interlocuteur dans la conversation quotidienne. Quand on parle avec quelqu'un, on lui adresse la parole dans une langue dont on suppose qu'elle lui est connue, et si cette supposition se révèle juste, on continue à se servir du même moyen d'expression. C'est dans cette situation que pense se trouver quiconque compose une oeuvre littéraire: il s'adresse à un lecteur qu'il suppose capable de comprendre ce que lui, l'écrivain, va lui dire dans la langue qu'il a choisi. Ce serait apparemment insensé, de la part d'un écrivain qui possède plusieurs langues, de s'en servir dans la même oeuvre, au gré de son imagination, ou même arbitrairement.⁸

⁸ 'We know from experience that, in all forms of literature, it is natural for the entire work to be written in a single language. This corresponds to the normal situation of any interlocutor engaged in everyday conversation. When we talk to someone, we address them in a language which we assume they will understand, and if this assumption proves to be correct, we continue to use that same mode of communication. Any author of a literary work thinks to find himself in such a situation: he addresses a reader who, he assumes, can understand what he, the writer, will tell him in his chosen language. It would seem senseless for any author in possession of several languages to make use of those languages in the same work, according to the dictates of his imagination, or even arbitrarily.' W.T. Elwert, 'L'emploi de langues étrangères comme procédé stylistique,' *Revue de littérature comparée* 34 (1960): 409.

Elwert, however, reminds us that ‘il y eut des époques entières où il n’était pas naturel de s’exprimer par écrit dans la langue maternelle,’⁹ and, surveying an extremely broad range of European literary multilingualism from Rabelais to contemporary Basque literature, demonstrates that multilingualism is by no means marginal. Today, however, it is the description of a normative monolingualism – the attitude which Elwert expected his readers to share – which seems unusual, especially in the context of late twentieth-century literature and theory. As Mackey writes, ‘[p]lurilingual societies are typical of our century – especially the second half’ and, as a result, ‘[m]uch of the writing produced in the world today is done of necessity within the context of bilingualism.’¹⁰ The value of such polylingualism in a linguistic context is contested: as Mackey points out, the bilingual’s ability to use more than one language has often been seen to diminish their competence in any single language.¹¹ The counter-argument to this Yeatsian conclusion is compelling, however, especially in the context of such prominent multilinguals as Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov and Rushdie. In 1977, Kristeva wrote that ‘[l]’époque actuelle est une époque d’exil’, and even that ‘[r]ien ne s’écrit sans quelque exil’¹² and, more recently, the Martiniquan theorist Édouard Glissant claimed that ‘[o]n ne peut plus écrire une langue de manière monolingue.’¹³ Both Kristeva and Glissant – neither of whom writes in their mother tongue – imply that in order to write creatively it is necessary to step outside of language, to lose the wholeness and security of a monolingual and monocultural perspective on language. Indeed, their perspective

⁹ ‘there have been lengthy periods in history in which it was not natural to express oneself in writing in one’s mother tongue.’ Elwert 410.

¹⁰ Mackey 48.

¹¹ Mackey 62.

¹² ‘[o]ur present age is one of exile’; ‘[w]riting is impossible without some form of exile’. Julia Kristeva. ‘Un nouveau type d’intellectuel: le dissident.’ *Tel Quel* 74 (Winter 1977): 7; ‘A New Type of Intellectual: the Dissident.’ trans. Seán Hand. *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 298.

¹³ ‘It is no longer possible to write any language monolingually.’ Édouard Glissant. *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996) 112.

would associate Yeats' own use of language with his estrangement from English as an Irish writer and with his bilingualism. Glissant's statement even implies that the stability of a truly monolingual perspective is actually impossible in today's world of migration, diaspora and cultural and linguistic hybridisation.

Earlier studies of multilingual literature nevertheless tend to be marked by a need to defend literary multilingualism; Elwert's essay is representative in this regard. Leonard Forster's seminal study, *The Poet's Tongues*, is restricted by this need to adopt a careful defence of the literature under scrutiny. Asserting the normative, unexceptional nature of multilingual writing, he argues simply that 'there are very many people and very many situations for which different languages are simply tools appropriate to certain definite purposes, analogous to the different stylistic levels within any one language.'¹⁴ Such a defence fails to account for the fact that many of the authors included in his study use multilingual techniques to produce radical forms of stylistic innovation. Polylingualism may be common in both a socio-linguistic and a literary context; its literary effects, however, are far from ordinary. The twentieth-century writing examined by Forster, for example, includes work by some of the most radical avant-gardists of the period – not only T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, but also Dadaists, Futurists and Concrete poets. Forster describes how Joyce overcomes the modernist crisis of language 'by constructing an immensely flexible web of interwoven multiple associations, in which the very imprecision of words becomes an advantage. It does not matter if the words "strain, crack and sometimes break ... under the tension," because out of the fragments other words can be made or invented, and this becomes much easier if the writer is not

¹⁴ Leonard Forster, *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 7.

limited to the resources of one language only.’¹⁵ As I will argue in Chapter 1, however, the chimerical quality of Joyce’s prose is not merely made easier by multilingualism, but is dependent upon and *created by* a multilingual perspective. Indeed, in the work of all the authors examined in this study, different languages are not merely combined for expressive effect. Instead, their work makes use of processes of interlingual contact, transfer and creation to produce radically defamiliarising linguistic effects that rupture the signifier/signified relationship and push language to its limits. As George Steiner argues, some of the most important writers of the last century are ‘extraterritorial’ – linguistically ‘unhoused’,¹⁶ perhaps, but also ‘actively at home in several languages’.¹⁷ For such authors, multilingualism is not merely an aspect of their writing, but is the very essence of their linguistic perspective.

Steiner hints at some of the more radical and far-reaching implications of literary multilingualism. But since Forster and Steiner’s studies, published in the early 1970s, and despite the importance of multilingualism signalled by Steiner, comparative studies of literary multilingualism have been extremely scarce. Critical attention has thus far tended to focus on the polylingual practices of individual authors or on the literature of individual countries (such as Canada or India), and has drawn attention to the socio-political implications of exile and/or writing in a foreign language.¹⁸ There have as yet been no fully comparative analyses of the effects of

¹⁵ Forster 77. The quotation is from T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (Burnt Norton V).

¹⁶ Steiner, *Extraterritorial* 3.

¹⁷ Steiner, *Extraterritorial* 16.

¹⁸ Some more recent book-length comparative studies and collections of essays on bilingualism, multilingualism and/or self-translation are as follows: Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the “First” Emigration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), Marius Buning and Ton Hoenselaars, eds., *English Literature and the Other Languages* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 1999), Lise Gauvin, ed., *Les langues du roman: du plurilinguisme comme stratégie textuelle* (Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1999), Steven G. Kellman, *The Translingual Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), Christian Lagarde, *Des écritures bilingues: sociolinguistique et littérature* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), Michaël Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme*

multilingualism on literary style. This study therefore sets out to examine the relationship between multilingualism and defamiliarisation in further detail. The authors of this study all make deliberate and often explicit use of different languages; my analysis of each will explore not only how they make use of interlingual contact for creative effect, but how this multilingualism relates to monolingual forms of defamiliarisation, as well as to their more general aesthetic and narrative aims.

‘When we straddle two languages,’ writes Walter Redfern, ‘we develop an alien eye, a binary perspective (or strabismus), a foreign ear.’ This position of externality to both languages makes the bilingual view his/her languages with a certain clarity – ‘[t]he exile can see the more mechanical aspects of his or her native, or adoptive, tongue.’¹⁹ As Derrida explains, metalanguage is impossible in a monolingual context, ‘car des *effets* de métalangage, des effets ou des phénomènes relatifs, à savoir des relais de métalangage “dans” une langue y introduisent déjà de la traduction, de l’objectivation en cours. Ils laissent trembler à l’horizon, visible et miraculeux, spectral mais infiniment désirable, le mirage d’une autre langue.’²⁰ The effect of metalanguage is to open up a space of translation, a position of externality from language, thus annulling the very notion of monolingualism. The act of translation, or indeed any form of interlingual contact, is therefore inevitably accompanied by a metalinguistic perspective. The clear view of the mechanisms of language that such a perspective brings, however, does not in turn guarantee

d’écriture et auto-traduction: Julien Green, Beckett, Nabokov (Paris: Harmattan, 2001). Sherry Simon, ed. *Le trafic des langues: traduction et culture dans la littérature québécoise* (Montréal: Boréal, 1994), Jean Weisgerber, ed. *Les avant-gardes et la tour de Babel* (Lausanne: L’Age d’homme, 2000).

¹⁹ Walter Redfern. ‘Traduction, Puns, Clichés, Plagiat,’ *Traductio: Essays on Punning and Translation*, ed. Dirk Delabastita (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997) 262.

²⁰ ‘for some *effects* of metalanguage, effects or relative phenomena, namely, relays of metalanguage “within” a language, already introduce into it some translation and some objectification in progress. At the horizon, visible and miraculous, spectral but infinitely desirable, they allow the mirage of another language to tremble.’ Jacques Derrida. *Le monolinguisme de l’autre: ou la prothèse d’origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996) 43-44; *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 22.

linguistic clarity. On the contrary, as Redfern writes, linguistic exiles such as Ionesco, Nabokov and Joyce, 'in the process of familiarizing themselves with a new culture and new tongue, defamiliarise both these and their own.'²¹ The link between multilingualism and defamiliarisation is borne out by the fact that exile – or a sense of foreignness and alienation – is a common condition of modernist writers, and that these authors' multilingualism often produces radical forms of defamiliarisation. Steiner writes that exile 'is, perhaps, the main impulse of current literature',²² and that 'the modernist movement can be seen as a strategy of permanent exile.'²³ Jean Weisgerber notes the multilingualism of many avant-garde writers, and indicates the importance of that multilingualism to an avant-garde aesthetic:

par son étrangeté, le multilinguisme dont c'est l'à, semble-t-il, la fonction majeure, heurte, suscite l'étonnement; il découle de l'esthétique du choc qui constitue le pivot du programme avant-gardiste.²⁴

And in more recent literature by writers from formerly colonised countries, exile and multilingualism are often the background to formal and linguistic innovation. This is certainly the case for Salman Rushdie, who even proclaims that 'those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us.'²⁵ Though Rushdie is not explicitly invoking linguistic displacement here, his words are relevant to the multilingual migrant's realisation of the provisional nature of all linguistic as well as cultural truths, and his/her estrangement, not only from foreign language(s), but also from the mother tongue.

²¹ Redfern, 'Traduction' 262.

²² Steiner, *Extraterritorial* viii.

²³ Steiner, *Extraterritorial* 17.

²⁴ 'Multilingualism incites and provokes surprise by way of its very strangeness, which, it would seem, is its key function: this derives from the aesthetic of shock that is the mainspring of the avant-garde agenda.' Jean Weisgerber, 'Avant-Propos,' *Les avant-gardes et la tour de Babel* 9.

²⁵ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (Harmondsworth: Granta/Penguin, 1991) 12. (All subsequent references to *Imaginary Homelands* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'IH').

In a famous passage from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus, prompted by a conversation with the English Dean of his college, articulates the complexity of his relationship to the English language:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. [...] I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.²⁶

Stephen's awareness of the cultural and ideological otherness of English means that, even though it is his mother tongue, it will always remain 'foreign' to him. He is thus alienated from any natural or automatic relationship to language. His reaction to this is curious, however: he states that he has not 'made or accepted its words.' Of course no individual can claim to have *made* the words of their mother tongue – the language pre-exists their use of it, however innovative that use may be: language is always acquired. Joyce in *Portrait* does indeed place a strong emphasis on the child's acquisition of language: the child-Stephen learns English as if it were a foreign language. The child's literal estrangement from language – not knowing what words mean, for example – is later replaced by the more complex socio-political awareness indicated in the above quotation. Constant throughout *Portrait*, however, is a correlation between the young artist's general linguistic alienation and malaise, and his aesthetic experiments with words. His estrangement from language necessitates his estrangement *of* that language; it also, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 1, forms the basis of some of his earliest multilingual experiments.

The artist's tendency to defamiliarise language is not merely a product of biographical conditions. Joyce's radical defamiliarisation of language can be read in the context of his sense of cultural and political distance from his mother tongue, but

²⁶ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 159. (All subsequent references to *Portrait* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'P').

his recourse to other languages as a means of producing even more extreme forms of defamiliarisation is even more significant. Similarly, Beckett's choice of French, and Nabokov and Rushdie's choice of English indicates these authors' readiness to make express use of the foreigner's estrangement from language: even where the choice of the foreign language is partly motivated by practical concerns (to gain a wider readership, for example), the prose-styles of all four authors make explicit and productive use of interlingual interference, the hybridisation of language, and even linguistic misuse.

Kristeva, in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, describes the nature of the foreigner's speech, and, invoking Joyce, hints at the particular textual effects of estrangement from language:

La parole de l'étranger ne peut compter que sur sa force rhétorique nue, sur l'immanence des désirs qu'il y a investis. Mais elle est dépourvue de tout appui de la réalité extérieure, puisque l'étranger en est précisément tenu à l'écart. Dans ces conditions, si elle ne sombre pas dans le silence, elle devient d'un absolu formalisme, d'une sophistication exagérée – la rhétorique est reine et l'étranger un homme baroque. Gracián et Joyce devaient être étrangers.²⁷

The foreigner, distanced from the automatically referential function of language, proliferates his/her words, and 'rhetoric' becomes the central signifying factor. Despite her mention of Joyce, Kristeva is primarily referring to the foreigner's general misuse of the acquired language. And yet this inability to make the foreign language signify properly is expressed in terms of *rhetoric*, *formalism* and linguistic *sophistication* – terms which lead Kristeva to link the strangeness of the foreigner's speech with the extreme complexity and control of Joyce's language. That linguistic

²⁷ 'The foreigner's speech can bank only on its bare rhetorical strength, and the inherent desires he or she has invested in it. But it is deprived of any support in outside reality, since the foreigner is precisely kept out of it. Under such conditions, if it does not founder into silence, it becomes absolute in its formalism, excessive in its sophistication—rhetoric is dominant, the foreigner is a baroque person. Baltasar Gracián and James Joyce had to be foreigners.' Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) 34; *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 21.

inadequacy could form the basis of the most sophisticated literary language seems to be a contradiction in terms. For Jakobson, however, the ‘poetic’ function of language is distinguished by its ‘focus on the message for its own sake’. Indeed, this function, ‘by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects.’²⁸ The two central characteristics of ‘poetic language’ provided by Jakobson – linguistic materiality and destabilised referentiality – are thus in accordance with Kristeva’s definition of the foreigner’s speech. To assert that the language of the artist and the language of the ordinary foreigner are inherently similar would of course be highly problematic. As Steiner indicates, however, multilingual authors have produced some of the most significant and innovative writing of the twentieth century; this writing is, moreover, characterised by particularly extreme forms of defamiliarisation. Certainly, in the context of the authors examined in this study, the condition of exile and/or a sense of alienation from the coloniser’s language can be related to their systematic deformation of language. Even more significant, however, is their deliberate augmentation of the foreigner’s perspective on language (for example, through their decision to write in a foreign language or languages) and their explicit manipulation of interlingual interference for stylistic purposes.

Viktor Shklovsky’s seminal theory of *ostranenie* or ‘enstrangement’²⁹ is based on an implied relationship between ‘foreignness’ and defamiliarisation. For Shklovsky, the originally figurative nature of language, eroded by everyday use, has degenerated into an ‘algebraic’ symbolism that is ‘devoid of imagery’. Our

²⁸ Roman Jakobson, ‘Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,’ *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Robert E. Innis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 153.

²⁹ *Ostranenie* has been translated as ‘defamiliarisation’, ‘making strange’, ‘estrangement’ and ‘enstrangement’. I have chosen here Benjamin Sher’s translation – ‘enstrangement’ – which takes into account the neologistic nature of the Russian term. Unlike ‘defamiliarisation’, ‘enstrangement’ has not been assimilated into the English language. I therefore use ‘enstrangement’ when making specific reference to Shklovsky’s theory, and ‘defamiliarisation’ when referring to more general processes.

familiarity with words means that both their ‘internal (image) and external (sound) forms have ceased to be sensed. We do not sense the familiar, we do not see it, but recognise it.’³⁰ ‘Artistic’ perception, on the other hand, ‘is perception in which form is sensed’,³¹ and so ‘the language of poetry may be said to be a difficult, “laborious,” impeding language’³² which has been ‘intentionally removed from the domain of automatized perception.’³³ ‘Poetic’ language is, therefore, ‘enstranged’ language – it is foreign to the reader, even to the point of semi-comprehensibility.³⁴ The function of *ostranenie* is to make it more difficult for the reader of the work of art to perceive the object of representation:

The purpose of art [...] is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By “enstranging” objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and “laborious.” The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest.³⁵

As the work is excessively strange and formal, so also the reader’s distance from the language of that work contributes to the materialisation of the language: as long as the reader is distanced from the referential function of language, s/he will also perceive that language in terms of its surface form, and, as a ‘foreign reader’,³⁶ will experience its material *effects* more fully. By prolonging the perceptual process, ‘enstrangement’ paradoxically works to bring the object ‘into view’³⁷ and even to make it seem more vivid, thus fulfilling his famous description of the purpose of art

³⁰ Viktor Shklovsky, ‘The Resurrection of the Word,’ trans. Richard Sherwood, *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, ed. Stephen Bann and John E. Boulton (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973) 41-2.

³¹ Shklovsky, ‘Resurrection’ 42.

³² Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Illinois: Dalkey, 1990) 13.

³³ Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* 12.

³⁴ As Shklovsky writes: ‘the language of poetry is not a comprehensible language, but a semi-comprehensible one.’ Shklovsky, ‘Resurrection’ 46.

³⁵ Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* 6.

³⁶ Fritz Senn uses this phrase to describe the reader’s estrangement from language in the Joycean context. See Fritz Senn, *Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation*, ed. John Paul Riquelme (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) 54.

³⁷ Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* 12.

– ‘to return sensation to our limbs, [...] to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony’.³⁸ For Shklovsky, it is precisely by destabilising the referential function that ‘enstrangement’ works to make us perceive the object of representation more vividly.

‘Enstranged’ language is not merely foreign in a figurative sense, however – Shklovsky refers to Aristotle’s claim that ‘poetic language ought to have the character of something foreign, something outlandish about it’ and asserts that ‘[i]n practice, such language is often quite literally foreign.’³⁹ The reason for using such language, Shklovsky explains, is that ‘this sort of semi-comprehensible language seems to the reader, by reason of its unfamiliarity, more figurative.’⁴⁰ Shklovsky, however, fails to provide any further explanation of how foreign languages relate to defamiliarisation, or indeed of how exactly a foreign language could seem ‘more figurative’. The multilingual, and often radically ‘enstranged,’ work of Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov and Rushdie, as this study will demonstrate, often makes direct use of foreign languages to produce figurative effects. I also argue, however, that the ostensibly monolingual figurative effects apparent in these authors’ works can be traced to similar processes of linguistic estrangement, and are thus closely related to each author’s multilingualism.⁴¹

³⁸ Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* 6.

³⁹ Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* 12.

⁴⁰ Shklovsky, ‘Resurrection’ 47.

⁴¹ It is important to stress that this thesis is not fundamentally concerned with the specific, substantive properties of the non-English languages to which these authors allude in their fictions. No one, including Joyce, ‘knows’ the seventy-odd languages on which Joyce draws, and while he may appear to treat these as stable, fixed, bodies of vocabulary and usage of which he has perfect knowledge, this is an appearance that we always understand to be illusory. The multilingual styles of these authors are not primarily based on the *correct* usage of foreign languages (or indeed of any language); rather, foreign languages are used to produce general defamiliarising effects that tend to depend more on the phonetic qualities or estranging power of foreign words than on their specific semantic content. It is thus the apparent – even if ‘incorrect’ – *allusive* potential, rather than ‘correctness’, of foreign utterances that is of interest to the authors at hand and to this study.

Steiner writes that what is remarkable about twentieth-century multilingual writers is that they ‘stand in a relation of dialectical hesitance not only toward one native tongue – as Hölderlin or Rimbaud did before them – but toward several languages.’⁴² I would argue, however, that it is Joyce and Beckett’s ‘dialectical hesitance’ towards *one* language – English – that leads to their experimentation with multilingual effects; and, conversely, that the multilingual experiences and upbringing of Nabokov and Rushdie produce their ‘dialectical hesitance’ towards any single language. Steiner concentrates only on explicitly multilingual effects; it is also the case, as I have intimated, that the polylingual writer’s ‘dialectical hesitance’ towards languages can also affect monolingual aspects of their style. As Kellman writes, ‘[i]t is hard to take words for granted when writing in a foreign language.’ ‘Translingual’ authors (authors who write in more than one language) thus for Kellman ‘represent an exaggerated instance of what the Russian formalists maintained is the distinctive quality of *all* imaginative literature: *ostranenie*, “making it strange.”⁴³ Kellman does not elucidate this link between multilingualism and *ostranenie*. In the context of the authors examined in this study, however, it becomes apparent that multilingualism is not only used to make language seem ‘more figurative’, but produces particularly enstranging forms of figuration.

Shklovsky’s theory of *ostranenie*, though implicitly based on an idea of literary ‘foreignness’, fails to take into account the direct effects of multilingualism in literature. I have therefore developed the term *linguistic estrangement* to elucidate the multilingual writer’s tendency to make use of extreme forms of defamiliarisation. Derived from Shklovsky’s notion of *ostranenie*, linguistic estrangement defines the textual effects of estrangement from language, especially in a multilingual context.

⁴² Steiner, *Extraterritorial* viii.

⁴³ Kellman 29.

The experience of multilingualism produces a sense of the arbitrariness of the sign, hindering the illusion of automatic and unproblematic signification. There are two main characteristics of this estrangement from language, which correspond to Jakobson's definition of the 'poetic' function of language. The most immediately apparent characteristic is semantic ambiguity. In the perception of language that is literally foreign, this distance is manifest in that language's incomprehensibility or semi-comprehensibility; where the language is understood, its semantic function is nevertheless problematised (this is particularly evident where there is a sense of ideological or cultural alienation from the language – and, as Stephen Dedalus's experience tells us, this can also occur with regard to the mother tongue). This arbitrariness of the semantic function turns the reader or listener's attention to the surface of that language – its phonetic and/or textual qualities are perceived over and above what the language purports to signify. This surface awareness in turn impedes the referential function, and partial or complete incomprehension is of course, in practical terms, unproductive. But such a linguistic perspective also underlies Shklovskian *ostranenie* and Kristeva's description of the foreigner's linguistic sophistication. Certain textual effects are also produced by linguistic estrangement: semantic ambiguity can be used to produce puns, plays on words and linguistic overdetermination (where one word or phrase means more than one thing), while a sense of linguistic materiality – a focus on the sounds and rhythms of language – is fundamental to the construction of phonetic and rhythmic patterns in language. A sense of the foreignness of language can thus also produce the impetus to estrange language: in the absence of any sense of a stable, authoritative signifying system, the polylingual writer finds different ways of making language signify. The sense of 'foreignness' noted by Shklovsky as a feature of 'enstrangement' is not merely the

effect of making language strange, then: it also points to that estrangement *from* language (often produced by a multilingual perspective) which is at the very heart of the impetus to make language work in different ways.

This study examines the textual effects produced by linguistic estrangement in selected novels of Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov and Rushdie. I compare multilingual and monolingual forms of defamiliarisation, and evaluate the importance of multilingualism to the broader formal, linguistic and thematic aspects of the texts.⁴⁴ Contrary to Yeats' assumption that 'no man can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue', I aim to demonstrate that the prose-styles of Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov and Rushdie are produced from a sense of the foreignness of language, a multilingual consciousness, and a subsequent defamiliarisation of language that often makes use of interlingual effects.

My first chapter focuses on Joyce's *Portrait* and *Ulysses*. Analyses of multilingualism in Joyce have tended to focus on the Babelising effects of *Finnegans Wake*. For Rosa Maria Bosinelli, it is in this last novel that multilingualism produces not only 'foreignizing' effects, but actually forms 'the very substance of the utterance.'⁴⁵ In Chapter 1 I will, however, examine the language(s) of *Portrait* and *Ulysses* in order to explore the relationship between multilingualism and Joyce's linguistic aesthetic in more general terms. I examine Stephen Dedalus's early language acquisition and construction of 'poetic' forms, his perception and use of foreign languages and his subsequent linguistic epiphanies. In *Ulysses*, I focus upon the explicit multilingualism of the 'Proteus' chapter, and elucidate various

⁴⁴ The thematic and narrative dimension of multilingualism in the work of these authors is extremely significant: multilingualism, translation, foreignness and exile are all fundamental to many aspects of plot, characterisation and narrative development in the works under scrutiny. This thesis is primarily a study of discourse, but a more developed analysis of the relationship between multilingualism and broader thematic and developmental narrative elements is important, and will bear further exploration in my future research.

⁴⁵ Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli, 'Joyce Slipping Across the Borders of English: The Stranger in Language,' *James Joyce Quarterly* 38.3/4 (Spring/Summer 2001) 407.

translational aspects of Joyce's style (not only multilingual complementarity, but also interlingual interference, translational distortion and linguistic misuse), and demonstrate how they produce various productive effects such as overdetermination, sound-patterning, punning and iconicity.

Whereas Joyce's multilingualism is expansive and expressive, Beckett deliberately chooses to write in a foreign language, French, in order to further his estrangement from language. Chapter 2, focusing on the Trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, *L'Innommable*), examines Beckett's use of French in relation to his project to make language paradoxically express its own failure and enact its own *décomposition*. I look at Beckett's practice of self-translation and the relationship between English and French versions of the Trilogy, and I examine and compare Anglicisms in the French text and Gallicisms in the English text. In Beckett it is through interlingual struggle that language is most effectively problematised; I thus demonstrate how he makes use of bilingual strategies and sophisticated forms of deliberate linguistic misuse in order to estrange language for the reader and to estrange signifier from signified.

The following chapter examines Nabokov's fiction in English, with particular emphasis on *Bend Sinister*, *Pale Fire* and *Ada*. I compare Nabokov's theory and practice of translation to his fictional multilingualism: whereas he develops a theory of translation that is scrupulously literal, his fiction makes full use of the creativity inherent in interlingual distortions and semantic confusion – the strange allure of hybrid tongues, the complexities of multilingual puns, and bizarre accidents of mistranslation. I also examine the themes of translation and interlingual contact in these novels in relation to Nabokov's multilingual prose-style. Nabokov's fiction

emphasises the incommensurable differences between languages; it is from those differences, however, that he produces expressive forms of 'plexed artistry'.

Chapter 4 focuses on multilingualism in Rushdie's fiction. In the context of recent debates in postcolonial criticism and theory, and in relation to linguistic estrangement in Joyce and Beckett, I examine the socio-political implications of Rushdie's use of English. My analysis then moves on to look at what much postcolonial criticism has tended to ignore: the formal and aesthetic effects of Rushdie's linguistic displacement. Concentrating on *Midnight's Children*, I show how Rushdie's linguistic effects embody the themes of 'mongrelisation,' translation and linguistic multiplicity (especially Babel) which dominate his work. I then examine his hybridisation of the English language, demonstrating how he develops Indian English into a form of highly stylised literary language which, though produced by a specific socio-political context, is also closely related to the non-naturalistic forms of multilingual defamiliarisation apparent in Joyce, Beckett and Nabokov.

Rushdie, a self-professed 'translated man', insists in his novel *Shame* that, though '[i]t is generally believed that something is always lost in translation', 'something can also be gained.'⁴⁶ Rushdie's words are extremely relevant to the multilingual effects with which this study is concerned. All four authors make explicit or implicit use, not only of different languages for complementary effect, but also of the transformations, distortions and stylistic oddities produced in interlinguistic transfer or communication. Stephen Dedalus, in the 'Aeolus' chapter of *Ulysses*, in response to Bloom's misunderstanding of Italian, complains that

⁴⁶ Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Picador, 1984) 29. (All subsequent references to *Shame* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'S').

'[s]ounds are impostures'⁴⁷; it is precisely this aspect of language, however, that Joyce uses to produce the complex verbal music of 'Sirens'. Beckett makes direct use of the foreigner's misuse of language, deliberately enhancing what is *lost* in translation in order to make language perform its own inadequacy. Nabokov's work is even more explicitly marked by translational processes: his fiction, while brutally parodying mistranslation, and emphasising what can be lost in the process, nevertheless makes consistently productive use of the stylistic and semantic by-products of interlingual contact. And Rushdie, in "'translat[ing]" the great subject of India into English',⁴⁸ allows his subject matter to distort and transform the English language. In the second part of this Introduction, I will therefore turn to some relevant theories of translation in order to elucidate the relationship between translation proper – the transfer of a text from one language to another – and the translational text.

* * * * *

Many of the issues and arguments regarding translation are in fact highly relevant to the multilingual, translational text. The link between translation and multilingual writing is literalised in the case of the self-translating author such as Beckett, Nabokov and, on a smaller scale, Joyce (who actively participated in the translation of 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' into French and co-translated parts of *Finnegans Wake* into Italian⁴⁹). Even where a writer is not explicitly involved in translation or self-translation, as is the case with Rushdie, translation is frequently used as a metaphor to describe the process of multilingual writing or writing in a

⁴⁷ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, The Corrected Text, ed. Hans Walter Gabler *et al* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) 16.362. (All subsequent references to *Ulysses* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'U'. References indicate episode and line numbers).

⁴⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction, 1992-2002* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002) 435. (All subsequent references to *Step Across This Line* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'SAL').

⁴⁹ See Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, new and revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 632-3; 700.

foreign language. The links are inevitable: most literary interlingual contact occurs in the context of translation, and the multilingual writer faces some of the same issues as the translator. Writing in a foreign language, for example, necessitates the transference of concepts from one language to another; as Mackey explains, '[m]ost of the difficulties of bicultural writers stem from the need to express in one language concepts that come to them from another – difficulties not only in expressing them, but even in thinking about them.'⁵⁰ The fundamental incommensurability of different languages means that, in multilingual writing as in translation, the writer is faced with issues of untranslatability, interlingual distortion, differences in the rhythmic, phonetic and other material qualities of different languages, and so on. And, in the postcolonial context, there is the question of how to deal with the political implications of writing in a foreign language that is often the coloniser's tongue.

However, if translation requires a certain amount of fidelity to an original text, the polylingual text is free from such restriction. And, rather than having to transfer the expressive or semantic qualities of one language into another, the multilingual writer can, to a much greater extent, use *both* languages in complementarity with each other. In the field of translation studies, translators have explored the possibilities of allowing languages to affect one another and to hybridise each other, but the multilingual author is able to explore the expressive and aesthetic potential of interlingual contact far more freely. S/he can thus use interlingual contact to produce a wide variety of formal, semantic and stylistic effects.

⁵⁰ Mackey 52.

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism in the novel provides a general framework for conceptualising how languages can be combined for creative effect. For Bakhtin, language is never unitary, and his writings constantly work to reveal the alterity inherent in language, the 'active participation of every utterance in living heteroglossia'.⁵¹ Any single national language is made up of a range of different social, generic and professional 'languages' so that, even in an apparently monolingual context, a word signifies not merely in relation to its object, but also 'in the process of living interaction' with 'an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme'.⁵² Any word signifies through *dialogue* with these other words and 'languages', and thus 'forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way.'⁵³ Dialogism is not only an 'internal' process, however. Any word is also engaged in an external dialogue: 'directed toward an *answer*', it 'cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates.'⁵⁴ Even in a monolingual context, then, any utterance engages in an internal dialogue with a range of different 'languages'. And, in the overt and external dialogism of the word, the anticipated 'answer' also belongs to a different 'language': the receiver's 'conceptual system' is different to that of the speaker. As Bakhtin explains, '[t]he speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background.'⁵⁵ Communication is thus inherently translational.

For Bakhtin, the novel form contains and represents heteroglossia in language: '[t]he novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types

⁵¹ M.M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 272.

⁵² Bakhtin 276.

⁵³ Bakhtin 279.

⁵⁴ Bakhtin 280.

⁵⁵ Bakhtin 282.

(sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized.’⁵⁶ It is thus ‘a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice.’⁵⁷ The early stages of the novel’s development were marked by conditions of cultural and linguistic interaction: novelistic discourse ‘always developed on the boundary line between cultures and languages’ and thus reflects ‘a primordial struggle between tribes, peoples, cultures and languages.’⁵⁸ Novelistic style is to be found in the way all these different ‘languages’ intersect – in ‘the combination of its styles’. The effect is fundamentally metalinguistic: the various different languages – of characters, narrators, the author, and so on – illuminate each other. As Bakhtin explains, ‘[l]anguages throw light on each other: one language can [...] see itself only in the light of another language’.⁵⁹ The experience of heteroglossia makes us step outside any single ‘language’ and view it from a different perspective; the inherently multilingual novel is thus also characterised by a position of externality to the various different ‘languages’ that it represents. This externality also, however, affects the referential function of language: a multilingual awareness is also of course accompanied by an awareness of the differences between languages – a perspective which emphasises the arbitrariness of the sign. As a result, in an actively polyglot world, ‘completely new relationships are established between language and its object (that is, the real world).’⁶⁰ Bakhtin thus implies that new forms of signification are developed. In a literary context such a conclusion is extremely significant, and leads to his claim that the ‘profound stylistic originality of the novel’ is ‘determined by its connection with polyglossia’.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Bakhtin 262-3

⁵⁷ Bakhtin 261.

⁵⁸ Bakhtin 50.

⁵⁹ Bakhtin 12.

⁶⁰ Bakhtin 12.

⁶¹ Bakhtin 13.

Rainier Grutman notes that the translation of Bakhtin's Russian term *raznorečie* as 'heteroglossia' or 'plurilinguisme' is misleading, since such translations 'are constructed on the etymons *glossa* and *lingua*, which both mean "language" in its plainest sense, as in *polyglot* or *bilingual*', whereas the meaning of Bakhtin's term 'can more readily be subsumed under the heading of "internal (regional, social etc.) variation" than under that of "external variation" (bi- or multilingualism).'⁶² Grutman is also careful to point out that Bakhtin's theory of the novel is not universally applicable to polylingual literature. Nevertheless, it is easy to see how the effects of global creolisation have given rise to a critical climate that is extremely sympathetic to Bakhtin's theories: particularly in explicitly multilingual and hybrid cultural contexts such as Canada, India and the Caribbean (to name but a few), heteroglossia is felt as a tangible reality, and Bakhtin's more abstract definition of different 'languages' as different discourses becomes relevant to overtly polyglot literature. Sherry Simon, for example, assigns a specifically socio-cultural context to heteroglossia in her analysis of a 'poetics of translation' in Quebec literature. In the Canadian context, translation, writes Simon, can no longer be 'a single and definitive enterprise of cultural transfer.' Instead, translation 'not only negotiates between languages, but comes to inhabit the space of language itself. The many languages of the literary text speak of the fragmentation of language communities and the increasing complexity and heterogeneity of cultural space.'⁶³ Édouard Glissant argues that the explicit heterogeneity of Caribbean creole languages is in fact common to all languages, and reminds us that 'presque toute langue à ses origines

⁶² Rainier Grutman. 'Mono versus Stereo: Bilingualism's Double Face.' *Visible Language* 27.1/2 (1993): 212-3.

⁶³ Sherry Simon. 'The language of cultural difference: figures of alterity in Canadian Translation.' *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*. ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 1992) 174.

est une langue créole.’⁶⁴ He claims that cultural and linguistic creolisation in the Caribbean is representative of wider global movements of ‘interpénétration culturelle et linguistique’,⁶⁵ and that for this reason, the contemporary writer cannot be truly monolingual, even if he only knows one language ‘parce qu’il écrit en présence de toutes les langues du monde.’⁶⁶

Bakhtin’s theory has been particularly useful in countering notions of stylistic unity or coherence, in demonstrating the alterity inherent in language, and how this alterity can be stylistically effective. The multiple-voicedness celebrated by Bakhtin is of direct use in analysing the multivocal nature of Joyce and Rushdie’s fiction, for example. Indeed, Rushdie’s explicitly heteroglotic style conforms almost perfectly to Bakhtin’s novelistic ideal. The political implications of Bakhtin’s analysis are also extremely significant. As Deleuze and Guattari write, ‘[m]ême unique, une langue reste une bouillie, un mélange schizophrénique, un habit d’Arlequin à travers lequel s’exercent des fonctions de langage très différentes et des centres de pouvoir distincts’.⁶⁷ For Deleuze and Guattari, ‘minor’ literature is formed by authors writing, not in a minor language, but in a form of major language that is used by a minority (Kafka, for example – a Czech Jew living in Prague but writing in German). They describe the subversive, deterritorialising function of minor writing:

Conquérir la langue majeure pour y tracer des langues mineures encore inconnues. Se servir de la langue mineure pour *faire filer* la langue majeure.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ ‘virtually every language was originally a creole language.’ Glissant 21.

⁶⁵ ‘cultural and linguistic interpenetration’. Glissant 19.

⁶⁶ ‘because he writes in the presence of all the world’s languages.’ Glissant 27.

⁶⁷ ‘Even when it is unique, a language remains a mixture, a schizophrenic mélange, a Harlequin costume in which very different functions of language and distinct centers of power are played out’. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Minuit, 1975) 48; *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 26.

⁶⁸ ‘Conquer the major language in order to delineate in it as yet unknown minor languages. Use the minor language to *send the major language racing*.’ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille*

The 'minor' author is a foreigner in his own language, and 'minor' literature subverts the centres of power inherent in that language. Such an awareness of the very political aspect of language-stratification is especially pertinent in the 'post-colonial' context, where the ex-coloniser's language is often the dominant language in political, educational and administrative contexts, and is hence also the language of the political, social and cultural élites. In a more general context, as Jean Weisgerber writes, multilingualism is important to avant-garde literature because '[l]a coexistence des parlers est une réalité, mais un scandale pour les nostalgiques de l'unité.'⁶⁹ An important facet of the political radicality of multilingual avant-garde writing is thus its ability to counter what Bakhtin calls 'authoritative discourse', to deny the monologic forces of authority that attempt to impose ideological and/or linguistic unity. I will return to such political issues in the context of Joyce and Rushdie in Chapters 1 and 4: both authors distort and misuse the coloniser's tongue, a process which can be read as an assertion of power over that language.

This study is primarily concerned, however, with the textual effects of linguistic estrangement, and how polyglossia is used stylistically. In order to evaluate some of the specific effects produced by interlingual contact (as opposed to the combination and/or representation of different discourses in the heteroglotic novel), it is necessary to turn to theories of translation proper. As multilingual writers make explicit use of the creative, hybridising, even Babelising effects of multilingualism, only certain translation theories are useful – those that, rather than treating translation as an activity that is secondary, inferior, and subservient to the original text, acknowledge the creativity inherent in the practice, the necessarily

plateaux: capitalisme et schizophrénie (Paris: Minuit, 1980) 133; *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1988) 105.

⁶⁹ 'the coexistence of different languages is a reality, but is scandalous for those who hanker after lost unity.' Weisgerber 7.

interpretative dimension of translation, and the importance of interlingual effects. Antoine Berman writes that ‘les traductions dites “littéraires” (au sens large) [...] s’occupent d’*oeuvres*, soit de textes tellement liés à la langue que l’acte de traduire devient ici fatalement un travail sur les signifiants, un travail où, selon des modes variables, deux langues entrent en commotion, et d’une certaine manière *s’accouplent*.’⁷⁰ Such interlingual contact is most effectively and explicitly unleashed in the multilingual text.

Steiner, in his study of translation, *After Babel*, provides a view of a post-Babelian linguistic state that indicates the productivity of interlingual contact:

The teeming plurality of languages [...] embodies a move away from unison and acceptance – the Gregorian homophonic – to the polyphonic, ultimately divergent fascination of manifold specificity. Each different tongue offers its own denial of determinism. ‘The world’, it says, ‘can be other.’ Ambiguity, polysemy, opaqueness, the violation of grammatical and logical sequences, reciprocal incomprehensions, the capacity to lie – these are not pathologies of language but the roots of its genius.⁷¹

Steiner is describing multilingualism in the world, but the multilingual text provides a microcosmic equivalent of this world heteroglossia and thus embodies the ‘denial of determinism’ of which Steiner speaks. It is also notable that those linguistic qualities which, for Steiner, are the roots of language’s ‘genius’ are present to an unusual degree in the multilingual text. Ambiguity, polysemy and opaqueness are all manifest in punning, wordplay and overdetermination, while ‘the violation of grammatical and logical sequences’ is a central feature of defamiliarisation. Often, the multilingual writer makes direct use of interlingual contact (translation between languages or hybridisation, for example) in order to produce these defamiliarising or

⁷⁰ ‘so-called “literary” translations (in the broad sense) [...] are concerned with *works*, that is to say texts so bound to their language that the translating act inevitably becomes a manipulation of signifiers, where two languages enter into various forms of collision and somehow *couple*.’ Antoine Berman, ‘La Traduction comme épreuve de l’étranger,’ *Texte* (1985): 68; ‘Translation and the Trials of the Foreign,’ *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2000) 285.

⁷¹ George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) 234-5.

punning effects. A marked feature of Nabokov's writing, for example, is the production of puns through false friends and mistranslations. However, where the effects are apparently monolingual, they demonstrate how a multilingual perspective can be accompanied by an awareness of alterity within a single language. Sartre writes that '[l]a langue étrangère, en fait, c'est – comme dans le calembour – le langage saisi comme étranger',⁷² and Walter Redfern asserts that '[a] pun is a translation within a language, shuttling between two or more meanings of a word or phrase.'⁷³ Interlingual ambiguity highlights the ambiguities of any single language, and wordplay is inherently translational.

Derrida, in *Positions*, writes that:

Dans les limites où elle est possible, où du moins elle *paraît* possible, la traduction pratique la différence entre signifié et signifiant. Mais, si cette différence n'est jamais pure, la traduction ne l'est pas davantage et, à la notion de traduction, il faudra substituer une notion de *transformation*: transformation réglée d'une langue par une autre, d'un texte par un autre.⁷⁴

The 'transformation [...] d'une langue par une autre' is of particular importance in the context of literary multilingualism. One of the most significant essays in this context is Walter Benjamin's 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers'. Here, Benjamin moves away from the *impasse* of traditional concepts of fidelity and licence in translation. His theory is less concerned with the ability of a translation to reproduce meaning than with the possibility of creative, even redemptive, linguistic development which can result from interlingual contact. Translation can never accurately transfer a work of art from one language to another; 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers' therefore

⁷² 'A foreign tongue in fact, as in the pun, is language itself experienced as foreign'. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971, vol. 2) 1978. Cited and translated by Walter Redfern in *Puns* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) 1.

⁷³ Redfern, 'Traduction' 265.

⁷⁴ 'In the limits to which it is possible or at least appears possible, translation practices the difference between signified and signifier. But if this difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of *transformation*: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another.' Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Paris: Minuit, 1972) 31; *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Athlone Press, 1981) 20.

attempts to locate the value of translation in more oblique aspects of interlingual productivity – in the *by-products* of semantic transfer rather than in the transfer itself.

For Benjamin, translation is potentially redemptive. By making different languages supplement each other, it can gesture towards a pre-Babelian ‘reine Sprache’ or ‘pure language’.⁷⁵ Such an Adamic notion of a ‘pure language’ that could emerge from the conjunction of all the different languages of Babel is esoteric and abstract, but nevertheless leads Benjamin to make far-reaching and extremely significant claims for the importance of translation, not only as a literary practice, but in relation to the development of languages in general. Translation, by transforming and renewing its source text, contributes to the ‘afterlife’ (‘Fortleben’) of the original⁷⁶; it also, however, transforms the mother tongue of the translator.

Benjamin quotes from Pannwitz:

[U]nsere Übertragungen, auch die besten, gehn von einem falschen Grundsatz aus, sie wollen das indische, griechische, englische verdeutschen, anstatt das Deutsche zu verindischen, vergriechischen, verenglischen. Sie haben eine viel bedeutendere Ehrfurcht vor den eigenen Sprachgebräuchen als vor dem Geiste des fremden Werks ... der grundsätzliche Irrtum des Übertragenden ist, daß er den zufälligen Stand der eigenen Sprache festhält, anstatt sie durch die fremde gewaltig bewegen zu lassen.⁷⁷

Translation holds the potential for a productive hybridisation of language; its creative potential lies not only in the translator’s ability to adapt and mutate the source text, but in the hybridisation of the language of translation – and hence in the gradual transformation of that language. Indeed, reversing the common aim of

⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961) 67; *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999) 80.

⁷⁶ Benjamin, *Illuminationen* 60; *Illuminations* 73.

⁷⁷ ‘Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works.... The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue.’ Benjamin, *Illuminationen* 68; *Illuminations* 81.

translators to convey the meaning and form of the original as accurately as possible. Benjamin implies that the more a translation needs to transform source text and target language, the better. He therefore also reverses the usual hierarchy of 'translatability':

Je weniger Wert und Würde seine Sprache hat, je mehr es Mitteilung ist, desto weniger ist für die Übersetzung dabei zu gewinnen, bis das völlige Übergewicht jenes Sinnes, weit entfernt der Hebel einer formvollen Übersetzung zu sein, diese vereitelt. Je höher ein Werk geartet ist, desto mehr bleibt es selbst in flüchtigster Berührung seines Sinnes noch übersetzbar.⁷⁸

It is the very failure of translation to transfer both style and content of a work of art from one language to another that forces the translator to develop his own language to accommodate the linguistic and semantic forms of the original text. The more difficult the work, therefore, the more the process of translation causes language to be hybridised – so that, ultimately, the translation expresses itself through two supplementary languages. As Maurice Blanchot, writing from a Benjaminian perspective, affirms: the translator can be revalorised as 'un écrivain d'une singulière originalité, précisément là où il paraît n'en revendiquer aucune.' As Blanchot explains: '[i]l est le maître secret de la différence des langues, non pas pour l'abolir, mais pour l'utiliser, afin d'éveiller, dans la sienne, par les changements violents ou subtils qu'il lui apporte, une présence de ce qu'il y a de différent, originellement, dans l'original.'⁷⁹ The translator thus not only creates a text in a different language, but reveals the alterity inherent in the original text. This view of the creativity

⁷⁸ 'The lower the quality and distinction of its language, the larger the extent to which it is information, the less fertile field it is for translation, until the utter preponderance of content, far from being the lever for a translation of distinctive mode, renders it impossible. The higher the level of a work, the more does it remain translatable even if its meaning is touched upon only fleetingly.' Benjamin, *Illuminationen* 68; *Illuminations* 81.

⁷⁹ 'The translator is a writer of singular originality, precisely where he seems to claim none.' 'He is the secret master of the difference of languages, not in order to abolish the difference but in order to use it to awaken in his own language, through the violent or subtle changes he brings to it, a presence of what is different, originally, in the original.' Maurice Blanchot, 'Traduire,' *L'Amitié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) 71; 'Translating,' *Friendship*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press) 59.

inherent in translation allows us to perceive closer links between the acts of literary creation and translation. Indeed, processes akin to translation are fundamental to the very fabric of the multilingual text, and can even be seen to generate particular forms of defamiliarisation. Rosa Maria Bosinelli defines Joycean defamiliarisation in translational terms. She describes '[t]he interplay between English and foreign words' in Joyce which 'results in an estrangement or "foreignizing" of the word'.⁸⁰ This process makes use of alterity in language and 'work[s] to expose the presence of "the stranger in language"'.⁸¹ Bosinelli makes use of Lawrence Venuti's term for source-oriented translation – 'foreignization' – to denote 'a move away from the familiar and into a strange territory'.⁸²

In *The Translator's Invisibility*, Venuti describes the translator's choice between 'a domesticating method, an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the author back home, and a foreignizing method, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad.'⁸³ Venuti critiques the 'illusion of transparency' inherent in 'domesticating' translation – readability and fluency are the qualities desired by publishers, readers and reviewers, and yet in order to produce such qualities, the source text is subjected to 'ethnocentric violence':

By producing the illusion of transparency, a fluent translation masquerades as true semantic equivalence when it in fact inscribes the foreign text with a partial interpretation, partial to English-language values, reducing if not simply excluding the very difference that translation is called on to convey.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Bosinelli 395.

⁸¹ Bosinelli 396.

⁸² Bosinelli 397.

⁸³ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995) 20.

⁸⁴ Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 21.

A 'foreignizing' translation, on the other hand, makes explicit the differences between languages and the impossibility of semantic equivalence: it allows the target language to be affected, or even transformed, by the language of the source text. Venuti exposes the political importance of different modes of translation: he describes the role played by domesticating translation in appropriating foreign cultures for domestic agendas and in perpetuating 'aggressively monolingual' cultures in the UK and US that are accustomed to the 'narcissistic experience of recognizing their own culture in a cultural other.'⁸⁵ Foreignizing translation combats this by enabling the portrayal of linguistic and cultural difference. The effects are not only political, however: in acknowledging the differences between languages, a foreignizing translation works against the illusion of monolingualism, allowing instead for productive and creative interaction between source and target languages.

For Venuti, foreignizing translation serves a socio-political purpose: it is able to represent and reflect cultural difference, thus improving inter-cultural understanding and combating forces of 'aggressive monolingualism' such as Anglo-American cultural imperialism. Bosinelli notes that, despite her choice of terminology inspired by translation studies, she might as well have referred to Shklovsky's notion of enstrangement. But whereas Shklovskian *ostranenie* is primarily aesthetic, her use of Venuti leads her to highlight a more socio-political dimension of Joyce's multilingualism:

Joyce's multilingual texts address both the monolingual English reader and the foreign reader with the result of displacing them both. But such a displacement, or dislocation [...] not only requires us to rethink our notions of writing and reading but also, paradoxically, challenges and even breaks down the usual discrimination between foreigners and fellow citizens.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 15.

⁸⁶ Bosinelli 395.

Bosinelli's direct reference to translation allows her to emphasise the importance of Joyce's multilingualism to his processes of 'foreignization'. More than making language strange, Joyce 'proves that the vitality of the word lies in its capacity to cross the borders of a single, historically determined linguistic code.'⁸⁷

Sherry Simon, writing about bilingual Quebec literature, describes certain authors' explicit use of such interlingual 'vitality'. These authors do not simply work with English and French: they make use of interlingual processes such that translation is not merely a theme of their work, but forms the very basis of their language. Simon thus formulates the concept of a 'poétique de la traduction,' a linguistic aesthetic which is characterised by translation 'effects' within the text caused by the interference of different languages:

Par son vocabulaire disparate, sa syntaxe inhabituelle, par un dénuement "déterritorialisant", mais plus souvent par une circulation intense de références culturelles hétéroclites, le texte se distancie du langage *heimlich* et chaudement sécurisant du terreau communautaire.

La poétique de la traduction utilise donc le rapport à la langue étrangère pour nourrir la création, se déployant dans cette zone frontière où création et transfert, originalité et imitation, autorité et soumission se confondent.⁸⁸

Simon's description of such a 'poétique' carries specific reference to Quebec literature and to the socio-political as well as linguistic context of that literature. The specificity of the term 'poétique de la traduction' is also facilitated by the explicit presence of translation in the literature examined by Simon. Nevertheless, the above description seems to refer to that quality of alterity inherent in Joyce's language that Bosinelli indicates. In addition, the diversity of cultural and intertextual references

⁸⁷ Bosinelli 407.

⁸⁸ 'By the disparate range of its vocabulary, by its unusual syntax, by a "deterritorialising" impoverishment, but more often by an intense circulation of heterogenous cultural references, the text distances itself from the warm, secure and *heimlich* language of the native earth. / A poetics of translation thus uses the connection with the foreign tongue to nourish creativity, unfurling itself in that frontier zone where creation and transfer, originality and imitation, authority and submission are merged together.' Simon, *Le trafic des langues* 20.

of the translational text defined by Simon bears relevance to the extremely complex patterns of intertextuality that are apparent in Joyce, Nabokov, Rushdie and, to a lesser extent, in Beckett.

In the case of Nabokov and Beckett, translation even enters directly and explicitly into the process of composition: as translators of their own work, they have produced bilingual oeuvres in which the status of 'original' and 'translated' text has been rendered ambiguous if not nonsensical, especially where the process of translation has direct impact on the text in both languages. The hybridisation of language is a feature of both Nabokov and Beckett's work, and it is often through translation that hybridised effects are brought about. Corinne Scheiner notes a certain 'commonality' to the approach of self-translating authors such as Joyce, Beckett and Nabokov, which can be defined as 'a reliance on Walter Benjamin's utopic vision outlined in "The Task of the Translator," wherein the source and target texts exist in dialectical relation to one another.'⁸⁹ Of particular interest is the fact that Joyce, Beckett and Nabokov, when translating or co-translating their own work, are all more concerned with transferring stylistic, phonetic and rhythmic effects than semantic content.⁹⁰ This is indicative of the nature of their language (which, as I have suggested, is characterised by a destabilisation of the referential function of language in favour of more material textual effects) and demonstrates the relative freedom of the self-translator. It also indicates that these authors perceive translation

⁸⁹ Corinne Scheiner. 'Writing at the Crossroads: Samuel Beckett and the Case of the Bilingual, Self-Translating Author,' *English Literature and the Other Languages* 175.

⁹⁰ Ellmann notes that, when translating *Anna Livia Plurabelle* into French, 'Joyce's great emphasis was upon the flow of the line, and he sometimes astonished them [his co-translators] (as later, when he was helping Nino Frank with the Italian translation), by caring more for sound and rhythm than sense.' Ellmann 632-3. Ludovic Janvier, co-translating *Watt* into French with the author, observes a similar tendency in Beckett. Ludovic Janvier, 'Au travail avec Beckett,' *Cahier de L'Herne: Samuel Beckett*, ed. Tom Bishop and Raymond Federman (Paris: L'Herne, 1976) 105, and Jane Grayson notes that '[w]hen dealing with translations of his own work [Nabokov] is often prepared to sacrifice literal interpretation for patterns of sound and form.' Jane Grayson, *Nabokov Translated: A Comparison of Nabokov's Russian and English Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 181.

not merely as the transference of meaning from one language to another, but as a process of interlingual and intertextual reciprocity. As Benjamin affirms, the work of art is not primarily communicative: ‘Was “sagt” denn eine Dichtung? Was teilt sie mit? Sehr wenig dem, der sie versteht. Ihr Wesentliches ist nicht Mitteilung, nicht Aussage.’⁹¹ The ‘meaning’ of the work of art resides as much in sound and form as in sense. The fundamental differences between languages – not only grammatical, structural and lexical, but also cultural – make it impossible to translate such elements of language perfectly; any translation that attempts to do so, then, necessarily *transforms* both text and target language.⁹²

In certain bilingual works of Beckett and Nabokov, the processes of composition and translation were almost simultaneous; in these works, the transformational possibilities of translation are especially apparent. Changes made in translation had a direct effect on subsequent revisions of both texts, thus allowing each individual text to *internalise* the Benjaminian ‘dialectical relationship’ between source and target texts, and indeed between source and target languages. In Beckett’s *Trilogy*, for example, the interplay between English and French becomes fundamental to the ways in which language is defamiliarised: the original text in French makes use of English and Irish words and names, Irish protagonists, and anglicised French in order to estrange language – and indeed, the subsequent translation of the French text into English is for Beckett a means of distancing himself from his mother tongue. Both the English and French texts thus manifest translational qualities, regardless of whether they are source or target text. Nabokov

⁹¹ ‘For what does a literary work “say”? What does it communicate? It “tells” very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not statement or the imparting of information.’ Benjamin, *Illuminationen* 56; *Illuminations* 70.

⁹² It should be noted, however, that Nabokov only espouses this mode of translation when engaged in translating his own work. As I will explain further in Chapter 3, when translating the works of others, he develops a theory of absolute literality which attempts to minimise the semantic mutations produced in translation.

also makes extensive use of processes of translation, mistranslation, and interlingual contact in his fiction. His work as a translator and self-translator is reflected both thematically and linguistically in novels such as *Bend Sinister* and *Pale Fire*, and translation is one of the central motifs of *Ada*. Throughout his fiction, Nabokov, like Joyce, multiplies the possibilities of wordplay, punning and *double-entendre* by using several different languages, thus also bringing out the inherently translational nature of the pun.

Simon hints at an important connection between translation and defamiliarisation when she writes that a poetics of translation takes us away from the secure territory of a monolingual 'home' towards a linguistic uncanny. Though she does not explicitly refer to 'enstrangement' as such, it is possible to deduce from Simon's words that defamiliarisation in general, by preventing us from feeling 'at home' in language, is inherently translational. Jacqueline Risset concludes that Joyce's own translation of two fragments of *Finnegans Wake* into Italian allows him to explore the extreme possibilities of the Italian language, and to create 'une langue pour ainsi dire entièrement neuve, inconnue.'⁹³ It could be argued that much of the 'newness' of Joyce's untranslated texts are also produced by various forms of interlingual contact. Indeed, in the work of all four authors examined here, defamiliarisation can be produced or enhanced by translational processes, such as writing in a foreign language or self-translation. In the chapters that follow, I will be exploring how these authors make explicit or implicit use of interlingual contact for creative effect, and how these multilingual processes of composition relate to monolingual forms of defamiliarisation.

⁹³ 'a language which is, as it were, entirely new and unknown.' Jacqueline Risset, 'Joyce traduit par Joyce,' *Tel Quel* 55 (Autumn 1973): 48.

CHAPTER 1: JAMES JOYCE

Are we speachin d'anglas landadge or
are you sprakin sea Djoytsch?
– *Finnegans Wake* 485.12-13

In 1933, F.R. Leavis complained that the overall effect of Joyce's *Work in Progress* was 'not orchestrated richness but, for the most part, monotonous non-significance.'¹ Whereas the 'great' Shakespeare's words 'are servants of an inner impulse or principle of order',² 'in the *Work in Progress*, it is plain, the interest in words and their possibilities comes first.'³ In short: for Leavis, Shakespeare's words *mean* something; Joyce's words, on the other hand, call far too much attention to themselves to signify anything very securely. The stability of signification – so fundamental to Leavis' conception of 'linguistic genius' – is for him the product of '[a] national culture rooted in the soil', an 'essential character' and 'spirit' of rural Englishness.⁴ Such linguistic idealism is based on a faith in the signifying stability of monolingualism; his belligerent despair in the face of the 'cultural disintegration, mechanical organization and constant rapid change' of the modern world is thus left unappeased by the multilingual inventiveness of 'transition-cosmopolitans' such as Joyce.⁵ Leavis' failure to grasp Joyce's linguistic aesthetic is closely related to the fact that he seems to have forgotten that Joyce is not English at all, but Irish. Had he read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* properly he would remember Stephen Dedalus's complaint that English, a language 'so familiar and so foreign', would always be for him 'an acquired speech' (P 159). Such cultural and ideological

¹ F.R. Leavis. 'Joyce and 'The Revolution of the Word''. *Scrutiny* 2.2 (1933): 197.

² Leavis 195.

³ Leavis 194.

⁴ Leavis 199-200.

⁵ Leavis 200.

estrangement from language is, as we now fully acknowledge, fundamental to Joyce's use, misuse and abuse of the English language. When Stephen states of English that 'I have not made or accepted its words' (P 159), he is also implying that he wants to make his own words: his relationship to language is thus closely linked to his literary endeavours.

Stephen's alienation from English leads him to experiment with language, and Joyce's own language, culminating in the Babelian virtuosities of *Finnegans Wake*, is increasingly defamiliarised. The style of 'scrupulous meanness' of *Dubliners* is characterised by a certain mimetic clarity: in this 'nicely polished looking-glass'⁶ Joyce is careful to retain the precise linguistic mannerisms of *Dubliners*. Language in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, however, is much stranger, mirroring with every episode the relevant stage of Stephen's linguistic, and hence also artistic, development. Following *Portrait*, *Ulysses* is made up of an astounding range of different forms of defamiliarisation – if language is the writer's tool for mimesis, *Ulysses* is more of a 'cracked looking glass' (U 1.146) than a polished one. *Finnegans Wake* is the extreme culmination of Joycean defamiliarisation: language here is notoriously difficult. The trajectory of Joyce's linguistic development is marked not only by increasing levels of defamiliarisation, however, but by increasing multilingualism: by *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's style, as has been noted, contains between seventy and eighty different languages. It is therefore unsurprising that studies of multilingualism in Joyce have tended to focus on this last novel, whose Babelian complexities so threatened Leavis' sense of linguistic security. Fritz Senn tells us, however, that 'everything Joyce wrote has to

⁶ Richard Ellman, ed. *Selected Letters of James Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) 90.

do with translation',⁷ and indeed the effects of multilingualism are felt throughout Joyce's oeuvre, even where other languages are not immediately apparent. This chapter therefore examines the relationship between multilingualism and defamiliarisation in *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, and looks in particular at how multilingualism relates to monolingual forms of defamiliarisation.

Joyce's ideological estrangement from English is accompanied by a desire to distance himself further from this problematic mother tongue. As Richard Ellmann notes, Joyce had once even threatened his brother Stanislaus that he would 'unlearn' English and write in French or Italian.⁸ Such deliberate estrangement from language was later to become an important part of Samuel Beckett's project. But even though Joyce decided not to write in a language that was *literally* foreign, as Eric Bulson affirms, his 'drive to find another language in which to express himself is made manifest from his early journalism to *Finnegans Wake*.'⁹

Indeed, Joyce's radical defamiliarisation of the English language is politically as well as aesthetically subversive, and Beckett's use of French, though also in part stemming from the problematic status of English for the Irish writer, is less explicitly political than Joyce's multilingualism. Colin MacCabe writes that '*Finnegans Wake*, with its sustained dismemberment of the English linguistic and cultural heritage, is perhaps best understood in relation to the struggle against imperialism.'¹⁰ Robert Tracy similarly argues for the political importance of Joyce's language: *Ulysses* is, for Tracy, 'an extended meditation on, quarrel with, and

⁷ Fritz Senn, *Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation*, ed. John Paul Riquelme (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) 39.

⁸ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, new and revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 397.

⁹ Eric Bulson, 'An Italian Tongue in an Irish Mouth: Joyce, Politics, and the Franca Langua,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 24.1, Fall 2000: 68.

¹⁰ Colin MacCabe, cited in Srivinas Aravamudan, 'Postcolonial affiliations: *Ulysses* and *All About H. Hatterr*,' *Transcultural Joyce*, ed. Karen Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 113.

revision of the efforts of Douglas Hyde and the Gaelic League to develop an Irish culture based on the revival of the Irish language and tradition.¹¹ By mastering English ‘only to destroy it’,¹² Joyce’s multilingual efforts constitute a more complex, and ultimately more effective, act of cultural affirmation. Salman Rushdie, who explicitly aims to subvert the coloniser’s tongue through systematic misuse and hybridisation of that language, also views Joyce’s project as ‘anti-imperialist’.¹³ Though it is problematic to assert that Joyce’s work is *primarily* politically motivated, the colonial context of Joycean language is indeed extremely significant. It is the source of Joyce’s complex relationship to English, and hence provides the backdrop to his desire to estrange language. For Derrida, the multilingualism of *Finnegans Wake* acts out the conflict inherent in linguistic imperialism – ‘une guerre (*war*) par laquelle l’anglais tente d’effacer l’autre, les autres idiomes domestiqués, néocolonisés, donnés à lire depuis un seul angle.’ Resistance to that hegemony is also present, however, in ‘la contamination de la langue du maître par celle qu’il prétend s’assujettir et à laquelle il a déclaré la guerre.’¹⁴ The specific ‘contamination’ of which Derrida speaks here is the presence of German in two words from *Finnegans Wake*: ‘he war’. Though not always in the context of any specific ‘war’, Joyce’s linguistic deformations and multilingual play create language that resists the hegemony of any single language, discourse or ideology, even in an apparently apolitical context; indeed such language, as my analysis will make clear,

¹¹ Robert Tracy, ‘Mr Joker and Dr Hyde: Joyce’s Politic Polyglot Polygraphs,’ *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 1.3, 1990: 154.

¹² Tracy 151.

¹³ Pradyumna S. Chauhan, ed., *Salman Rushdie Interviews: A Sourcebook of His Ideas* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001) 233. (All subsequent references to *Salman Rushdie Interviews* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation ‘SRI’).

¹⁴ ‘a war through which English tries to erase the other language or languages, to colonize them, to domesticate them, to present them for reading from only one angle’: ‘the contamination of the language of the master by the language he claims to subjugate, on which he has declared war.’ Jacques Derrida, *Ulysse gramophone: deux mots pour Joyce* (Paris: Galilée, 1987) 47-8; ‘Two Words for Joyce,’ *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*, ed. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 156.

requires the avoidance of a direct authorial political stance. The *textual* effects of such language are also remarkable, however, and thus form the primary focus of my analysis.

Senn, in *Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation*, argues that ‘Joyce’s works consist of translation and glorify all cognate processes. By their energies they acknowledge that translations suffuse and enable literature and cultures.’¹⁵ From this, he develops a concept of ‘dislocation’, ‘an illustrative synonym for translation’¹⁶ that ‘suggests a spatial metaphor for all manner of metamorphoses, switches, transfers, displacements’ while ‘acknowledg[ing] the overall significance of speech and writing, and insinuat[ing] that the use of language can be less than orthodox.’¹⁷ Senn’s term is deliberately broad and allusive, referring not only to interlingual shifts apparent in Joyce’s work, but all other forms of transformation. Rosa Maria Bosinelli’s more recent analysis of processes of ‘foreignization’ in Joyce’s work attempts to bring the dislocutory nature of Joyce’s multilingualism into focus and draws important parallels between Joyce’s use of different languages and his ‘estrangement or “foreignizing” of the word’.¹⁸ As I explained in my Introduction, Bosinelli’s analysis, like Senn’s, demonstrates the alterity in Joyce’s language and illustrates the effects of that alterity, particularly upon the reader. Joyce’s language challenges the monolingual perspective by demonstrating, to native and foreign readers alike, the presence of “the stranger in language”¹⁹ and that ‘we are all foreigners lost in a labyrinth.’²⁰ Senn demonstrates and illustrates a wide range of textual effects produced by Joyce’s dislocutions.

¹⁵ Senn 38.

¹⁶ Senn 210.

¹⁷ Senn 202.

¹⁸ Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli. ‘Joyce Slipping Across the Borders of English: The Stranger in Language.’ *James Joyce Quarterly* 38.3/4 (Spring/Summer 2001): 395.

¹⁹ Bosinelli 396.

²⁰ Senn 49.

Bosinelli, moreover, suggests links between Joyce's multilingualism and Shklovskian *ostranenie*.²¹

Drawing on the perspectives of these translator-critics, this chapter is concerned with examining further what I define as an aesthetic of estrangement apparent in Joyce's use of language. This aesthetic is directly related to multilingualism; it begins, however, with a fascination, not with foreign languages as such, but with the foreignness of language itself. Stephen's alienation from language in *Portrait* is central to understanding not only the effects, but also the reasons for the more extreme forms of defamiliarisation in Joyce's later works. Shklovsky, as I demonstrated in my Introduction, bases his theory of *ostranenie* or 'enstrangement' upon Aristotle's claim that 'poetic language ought to have the character of something foreign, something outlandish about it' and that '[i]n practice, such language is often quite literally foreign.'²² It is thus that, Shklovsky tells us, 'the language of poetry may be said to be a difficult, "laborious," impeding language.'²³ Shklovsky's references to actual foreignness and multilingualism remain vague. An examination of *Portrait*, however, demonstrates the importance of the relationship between *ostranenie* and an actual estrangement from language.

Senn notes that the child-narrator of 'The Sisters', whose fascination with unknown words is akin to Stephen's early linguistic experiences, 'becomes something of a foreign reader' in his attitude to language.²⁴ The assertion of the 'foreignness' of language in Joyce is in part a metaphor: in Stephen's words, the English language is both 'familiar' and 'foreign' for the Irish writer – clearly, any language which is the speaker's mother tongue cannot be entirely foreign.

²¹ Bosinelli 408n.

²² Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Illinois: Dalkey, 1990) 12.

²³ Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* 13.

²⁴ Senn 40.

Nevertheless, Stephen, 'a wary reader of all sorts of signs and signatures',²⁵ learns English as if it were a foreign language: the unfamiliarity of words and the arbitrariness of their meanings are foregrounded in the child's narrative from the start, lending literal significance to his later claim that his mother tongue is 'an acquired speech'. It is the very process of acquisition, however, that underlies the early stages of the artist's linguistic development. For the child Stephen in *Portrait*, the signifiers and structures of language are not automatically assimilated, but must be consciously and actively learnt. Like a foreigner, he is excluded from any sense of automatic correlation between signifier and signified. Words are strange and sometimes incomprehensible, and so he perceives the surface sound and structure of language over and above its referential function. As a result, he tries to comprehend words by focusing on their sounds and by attempting to connect the sounds of words to the material experience that they purport to represent. It is only thus that he begins to grasp verbal meaning:

Suck was a queer word. [...] But the sound was ugly. Once he had washed his hands in the lavatory of the Wicklow Hotel and his father pulled the stopper up by the chain after and the dirty water went down through the hole in the basin. And when it had all gone down slowly the hole in the basin had made a sound like that: suck. Only louder. (P 8-9)

What did that mean, to kiss? You put your face up like that to say good night and then his mother put her face down. That was to kiss. His mother put her lips on his cheek; her lips were soft and they wetted his cheek; and they made a tiny little noise: kiss. (P 11)

Neither 'suck' nor 'kiss' are onomatopoeic words, yet Stephen constructs an onomatopoeic function for each: 'suck' signifies the sound made by water being sucked down the plughole; 'kiss' signifies the 'tiny little noise' made when his mother kisses him. He thus brings the sound of each word much closer to its meaning than would be perceived in their ordinary use. This anxiety to lend

²⁵ Senn 44.

language an iconic function can be viewed as an early sign of the artist's development – much literature develops the semantic possibilities inherent in the formal and material properties of language, producing increased levels of iconicity.²⁶

Stephen's relationship to language indicates the development of a more complex aesthetic, however: the child revels not merely in the onomatopoeic functions of language, but also in the *distance* between the material properties of the signifier and its signified. Where the strangeness of language yields sounds that aid comprehension, the emphasis still remains on the sounds of those words; at other times the phonetic elements of language are totally abstracted from referentiality, and this is perhaps even more fascinating. At one point, Stephen listens in on discussions between his father and granduncle:

Words which he did not understand he said over and over to himself till he had learned them by heart: and through them he had glimpses of the real world about him. (P 52)

It is through the incomprehensible words that the 'real world' can be glimpsed; moreover, the litanical repetition of words further emphasises their phonetic qualities over and above their referents (the referent is distanced rather than attained through repetition, even where a word is initially understood). So it is in deliberately taking words even further from their semantic function that Stephen learns to appreciate language. Later, in *Ulysses*, Stephen tells Bloom that 'sounds are impostures' (U 16.362), but it is precisely this quality of language that he seems to relish. It is very early in *Portrait* that Stephen first discovers that, just as

²⁶ In post-Saussurian linguistics, non-literary language is generally perceived as non-iconic and arbitrary. Nevertheless, as Leech and Short point out, iconicity is often present in such common features as chronologically apt word order and onomatopoeia. In literature, however, there is 'an exceptional development of the iconic, imitative resources of language.' Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (London: Longman, 1981) 234, 254.

onomatopoeia can make words seem more meaningful, a single sound can have contradictory meanings:

That was a belt round his pocket. And belt was also to give a fellow a belt.
(P 7)

A syntagmatic consciousness of language foregrounds the homonym; such potential for deception or confusion contained within language can be harnessed in the kind of punning and semantic overdetermination so characteristic of Stephen's language in *Ulysses*, and indeed of Joyce's language in general. An estrangement from language thus becomes important to the artist's further defamiliarisation of language.

Stephen's production of figurative language is also directly related to his sense of the foreignness of language. Shklovsky explains that a significant reason for using foreign languages in literature 'is that this sort of semi-comprehensible language seems to the reader, by reason of its unfamiliarity, more figurative.'²⁷ In *Portrait*, Stephen's distance from language, his awareness of the foreignness of language, and his inability to comprehend words automatically, are fundamental to his construction of figures of speech. His position of initial incomprehension or semi-comprehension gives him an acutely material perception of language. He thus develops an awareness of the potential for sound-patterning that is manifest in his early attempts at figurative language:

In the soft grey silence he could hear the *bump* of the *balls*: and from here and from *there* through the quiet *air* the sound of the cricketbats: *pick, pack, pock, puck*: like drops of water in a *fountain falling* softly in the *brimming bowl*. (P 49, my emphasis)

A focus on the syntagmatic function of language means that his earliest figures of speech are phonetically constructed: in the above example, his onomatopoeic awareness produces a high degree of alliteration and assonance. It is this primarily

²⁷ Viktor Shklovsky, 'The Resurrection of the Word,' trans. Richard Sherwood, *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, ed. Stephen Bann and John E. Boulton (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973) 47.

phonetic linguistic awareness that in turn produces the simile in the above passage: the sound-associations and alliterative play of his linguistic perception create an association between the noises of water and of cricket bats.

At other times, Stephen attempts to understand words, not only by their sounds, but also through semantic associations:

The word was beautiful: wine. It made you think of dark purple because the grapes were dark purple that grew in Greece outside houses like white temples. (P 39)

By setting up associations between 'wine' and images not ordinarily signified by the word – 'dark purple', 'Greece' and 'white temples' – Stephen produces a series of potential metaphors. In this instance Stephen is simply trying to enrich his understanding of a word that is new and strange to him. But just as sound-associations help not only to understand words but to embellish descriptions, the process of semantic association is also fundamental to more aesthetically motivated passages such as the following:

The fire rose and fell on the wall. It was like waves. Someone had put coal on and he heard voices. They were talking. It was the noise of the waves. Or the waves were talking among themselves as they rose and fell. (P 21)

Fire, waves and voices are all gradually associated with each other, culminating in the final metaphor which combines the qualities of all three. This passage illustrates the associations which underlie the final metaphor in a process which is very similar to Stephen's attempt to grasp the full meaning of the word 'wine'. The nature of Stephen's language acquisition is therefore closely related to his early artistry: it is the very foreignness of language that leads Stephen to construct primitive figures of speech; his figurative associations and sound-patterns are initially a means of learning and understanding language. As a result, the same processes of semantic

association and syntagmatic apprehension are used both to understand language and to produce tropes and schemes.

The young artist's relationship to language, though manifesting increasing mastery and sophistication, is not one of increasing familiarity, however – Stephen never assumes the automatic signification of a fully native and familiar tongue. 'Words', he asks himself, '[was] it their colours?' But he must conclude that his appreciation of words is not visual – it resides within the sounds and forms of the words themselves rather than their signifieds:

Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour? Or was it that, being as weak of sight as he was shy of mind, he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of language many coloured and richly storied than from the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose? (P 140)

Whether it is the 'rhythmic rise and fall' of the words themselves, or 'an inner world of individual emotions' represented in words that is more important to Stephen, it is clear that the emphasis lies on the subjective experience and manipulation of language rather than any objective referent external to language.

The foreignness of language thus recurs throughout *Portrait*. Stephen's most intense reactions to words after the first chapter are either in response to poetry (especially his own poetry) or to foreign words – the relationship between estranged and poeticised language is thus reinforced. Derek Attridge notes two instances where Stephen's reaction to foreign words recalls those of his childhood: the director's use of the phrase '*Les jupes*' causes Stephen to blush (P 130), and Cranly's '*Mulier cantat*' makes him reflect upon '[t]he soft beauty of the Latin word' and its gentle physical touch 'fainter and more persuading than the touch of

music or of a woman's hand' (P 205-6).²⁸ Attridge's analysis focuses on the relationship between sexuality and the materiality of language in *Portrait*, and in particular Stephen's early 'sensitivity to the physical and erotic suggestiveness of individual words'.²⁹ There is another occurrence of this when Stephen describes a conversation with an Italian boy:

[Ghezzi] gave me recipe for what he calls *risotto alla bergamasca*. When he pronounces a soft *o* he protrudes his full carnal lips as if he kissed the vowel. (P 210)

Foreign words appear as material substances; the experience is often described in sexual, or at least sensual, terms. Joyce is 'always alert to the possibility that a word can resonate physically and often erotically even as it points to a referent or expresses an idea.'³⁰ Such resonance is part of what Jean-Jacques Lecercle terms 'the remainder' in language – in Attridge's words, 'that aspect of language's functioning which, in spite of its necessity, is normally suppressed from our conceptions of it.' As he continues:

The remainder imparts to utterances powerful effects of various kinds, though they cannot be described in purely conceptual terms. This is not to say that the remainder is prelinguistic (or presymbolic); it may just as easily be manifested in an excess of meaning as in a lack of it. The fact that language necessarily employs physical signifiers which have their own complex interconnections (at a purely material level), as well as connections with the worlds of meaning, feeling, and action, together with the fact that the meanings conveyed by any item of language always depend on its context, and that contexts are variable and inexhaustible – these facts result in an ever-present possibility that an utterance, written or spoken, will convey more than could be understood in terms of a model of 'intention' or 'communication'.³¹

Attridge's assertion of the link between language and sex in *Portrait* and of Joyce's exploitation of 'the remainder' in *Ulysses* is pertinent: Lecercle's term helps to

²⁸ Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 76.

²⁹ Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 76.

³⁰ Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 77.

³¹ Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 66.

elucidate the extraordinary range of effects and *affects* produced by Joyce's language, and also indicates the importance of the material functions of that language. Lawrence Venuti relates 'the remainder' to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor' literature:

Certain literary texts increase [the] radical heterogeneity [of language] by submitting the major language to constant variation, forcing it to become minor, delegitimizing, deterritorializing, alienating it. [...] In releasing the remainder, a minor literature indicates where the major language is foreign to itself.³²

Deleuze and Guattari specify that 'minor' literature, while often occurring in bilingual or multilingual contexts, is not 'minor' by virtue of its multilingualism; instead, it brings out the alterity inherent within any single language: 'C'est dans sa propre langue qu'on est bilingue ou multilingue.'³³ Nevertheless, the actual use of foreign languages can have similar deterritorialising effects. As Venuti argues, '[g]ood translation is minoritizing: it releases the remainder by cultivating a heterogeneous discourse, opening up the standard dialect and literary canons to what is foreign to themselves, to the substandard and the marginal.'³⁴ Joyce's own use of foreign languages is interesting in this regard: Stephen Dedalus' apprehension of foreign words leads him to a perception of the remainder in language and, though Joyce's work is indeed 'minor' in its estrangement of the *English* language, its effects are often explicitly multilingual. Translational processes within the literary text can thus also '[release] the remainder'.

The materiality of language in Joyce is also fundamental to a more abstract aesthetic: Stephen's reaction to the foreignness of language is artistic as well as

³² Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998) 10.

³³ 'It is in one's own language that one is bilingual or multilingual.' Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux: capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Minuit, 1980) 133; *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1988) 105.

³⁴ Venuti, *Scandals* 11.

bodily, and he manipulates the sensuality of words – and ‘the remainder’ in language – for aesthetic effect.³⁵ In Chapter Five he has a curious experience, where words lose all meaning:

he found himself glancing from one casual word to another on his right or left in stolid wonder that they had been so silently emptied of instantaneous sense until every mean shop legend bound his mind like the words of a spell and his soul shrivelled up, sighing with age as he walked on in a lane among heaps of dead language. His own consciousness of language was ebbing away from his brain and trickling into the very words themselves which set to band and disband themselves in wayward rhythms:

*The ivy whines upon the wall
And whines and twines upon the wall
The ivy whines upon the wall
The yellow ivy on the wall
Ivy, ivy up the wall*

Did any one ever hear such drivel? Lord Almighty! Who ever heard of ivy whining on a wall? Yellow ivy: that was all right. Yellow ivory also. And what about ivory ivy? (P 150)

Initially his experience is of the death of language: words are emptied of sense and are thus rendered useless. And yet from the detritus of meaningless sounds a different kind of linguistic perception is created: freed from referentiality, the syntagmatic function is set in motion, forming meaningless patterns of association. Language gets carried away by its own ‘wayward rhythms’ and sound-patterns; the result, as Stephen realises, is drivel. He becomes so estranged from English as to perceive it as a foreign language. And yet the associations – from yellow ivy, to yellow ivory, to ivory ivy – create a kind of linguistic alchemy whereby Stephen apprehends the word ‘ivory’ in its full glory of signification:

The word now shone in his brain, clearer and brighter than any ivory sawn from the mottled tusks of elephants. *Ivory, ivoire, avorio, ebur.* (P 150)

³⁵ Perhaps the most prominent use of this quality of language is in ‘Sirens’, an episode that I will return to later in the chapter. It is indeed especially significant that linguistic materiality in ‘Sirens’ seems deliberately to exploit ‘the remainder’ in language for aesthetic effect – in order to express the musical seduction of the Siren-song, as well as some of the more mundane sexual activities of the Dubliners who frequent the Ormond Bar.

The word not only signifies, but is somehow 'clearer and brighter' than its referent – it seems to invigorate the very concept of ivory. The complete apprehension of both word and object is expressed multilingually, in English, French, Italian and Latin. The experience of the foreignness of the English language becomes the basis of a multilingual epiphany. Stephen defines the epiphany in *Stephen Hero* as 'a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself.'³⁶ This theory is developed from Aquinas: as Stephen explains to Cranly, epiphanic apprehension of an object occurs when '[its] soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany.'³⁷ In Stephen's epiphanic apprehension of 'ivory,' it is the *word* which, in its materiality, is rendered more vibrant, not the referent: the word is 'clearer and brighter' than any real ivory. This in turn invigorates the concept of 'ivory': for Shklovsky, it is defamiliarisation of the description of a stone which makes us perceive it anew, makes it 'feel stony'³⁸; for Stephen it is, likewise, the increased opacity of language and the de-automatisation of signification which makes him perceive the *whatness* of both word and concept. As he expresses it in *Stephen Hero*, it is through the repetition of words 'till they [lose] all instantaneous meaning' that they become 'wonderful vocables.'³⁹ The linguistic epiphany, and the complete apprehension of 'ivory' (as unified word and concept), is attained by paradoxically estranging the word from its referent. The completeness of this signification is then expressed in four different languages: the complementarity of those languages signals a more complete process of signification, while further

³⁶ Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodor Spencer (New York: New Directions, 1963) 211.

³⁷ Joyce, *Stephen Hero* 213.

³⁸ Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* 6.

³⁹ Joyce, *Stephen Hero* 30.

estranging the word by increasing its foreignness. Giorgio Melchiori writes of *Finnegans Wake* that it 'is a constant epiphanisation of the current, familiar, obvious everyday language, by a process of translation that intensifies to the utmost its semantic values, so that the banal becomes memorable, the common word becomes a wonderful vocable.'⁴⁰ Epiphanic language is multilingual.

For Benjamin, the translation of literary texts can cause a productive hybridisation of language whereby different languages are brought into complementarity with each other. The product of this, for Benjamin, is language that can gesture towards a pre-Babelian 'pure language'. Benjamin cites a passage from Mallarmé's essay 'Crise de vers', where Mallarmé describes the inadequacy of language, post-Babel:

Les langues imparfaites en cela que plusieurs, manque la suprême: penser étant écrire sans accessoires, ni chuchotement mais tacite encore l'immortelle parole, la diversité, sur terre, des idiomes empêche personne de proférer les mots qui, sinon se trouveraient, par une frappe unique, elle-même matériellement la vérité.⁴¹

It is an awareness of Babel, of the inability of any single language to attain 'truth', that for Mallarmé provides the poet's main motivation:

Le souhait d'un terme de splendeur brillant, ou qu'il s'éteigne, inverse; quant à des alternatives lumineuses simples – *Seulement, sachons n'existerait pas*

⁴⁰ Giorgio Melchiori, 'The Languages of Joyce,' *The Languages of Joyce: Selected Papers from the 11th International James Joyce Symposium*, ed. Rosa Maria Bolletieri Bosinelli, C. Marengo Vaglio and Christine van Boheemen (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1992) 4.

⁴¹ 'Languages are imperfect because multiple; the supreme language is missing. Inasmuch as thought consists of writing without pen and paper, without whispering even, without the sound of the immortal Word, the diversity of languages on earth means that no one can utter words which would bear the miraculous stamp of Truth Herself Incarnate.' Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crise de vers,' *Igitur, Divagations, Un coup de dés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) 244; 'Crisis in Poetry,' *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays and Letters*, trans. Bradford Cook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956) 38. All subsequent English translations are taken from this edition. It should be noted, however, that Benjamin leaves the Mallarmé quotation untranslated. Indeed, as Derrida comments, this retention of the French is symptomatic of the untranslatability of Mallarmé. Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph Graham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 220-1. Bradford Cook's translation of 'Crise de vers' cited above (and in subsequent footnotes), for example, often fails to transfer the syntactical, punning and phonetic effects that characterise Mallarmé's highly stylised and estranged prose.

le vers: lui, philosophiquement rémunère le défaut des langues, complément supérieur.⁴²

Mallarmé invokes the poetic potential of linguistic estrangement by placing emphasis not only upon the referential failure of language – its post-Babelian ‘fall’ – but also upon the importance of material sounds to create verbal music. This is characteristic of a wider Symbolist aesthetic, whereby the poetic manipulation of ‘musicality’ in language aims to create a more affective and allusive form of synaesthetic expression (Verlaine’s ‘Art Poétique’, for example, famously calls for ‘[d]e la musique avant toute chose’⁴³). Indeed, the avoidance of direct referentiality and deliberate cultivation of semantic vagueness and indirection is fundamental to such a poetics – Verlaine, in the same poem, celebrates the qualities of ‘la chanson grise / Où l’Indécis au Précis se joint’⁴⁴ and Mallarmé himself praises the use in poetry of ‘de délicieux à-peu-près.’⁴⁵ Estrangement from language, articulated in terms of an awareness of linguistic diversity, thus leads to an attempt to make language more expressive: the poet produces language which is new and strange and which signifies via its material and phonetic functions rather than through any attempt at direct referentiality.

Mallarmé’s essay, like Benjamin’s, is founded upon a belief in the redemptive role of interlingual complementarity, however. Each individual poet’s voice contributes to a proliferation of modernist poetic voices which he describes as ‘la multiplicité des cris d’une orchestration, qui reste verbale’.⁴⁶ The redemptive

⁴² ‘We dream of words brilliant at once in meaning or in sound, or darkening in meaning and so in sound, luminously and elementally self-succeeding. *But*, let us remember that if our dream were fulfilled, *verse would not exist* – verse which, in all its wisdom, atones for the sins of languages, comes nobly to their aid.’ Mallarmé, ‘Crise’ 245; ‘Crisis’ 38.

⁴³ ‘Music above all else.’ Paul Verlaine, ‘Art Poétique’ (1874). *Oeuvres poétiques de Verlaine* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1969) 261.

⁴⁴ ‘the grey song / In which indefiniteness and precision are joined’. Verlaine, ‘Art Poétique’ 261.

⁴⁵ ‘delightful approximations.’ Mallarmé, ‘Crise’ 241; ‘Crisis’ 35.

⁴⁶ ‘the multiple sounds issuing from a purely verbal orchestration.’ Mallarmé, ‘Crise’ 240; ‘Crisis’ 35.

function of poetry lies not only in the musicality of each individual poet's voice. but in this modernist orchestra:

Quelque symétrie [...] qui, de la situation des vers en la pièce se lie à l'authenticité de la pièce dans le volume, vole, outre le volume, à plusieurs inscrivant, eux, sur l'espace spirituel, le paraphe amplifié du génie, anonyme et parfait comme une existence d'art.⁴⁷

The function of poetry is thus both individual and collective: each poet develops his own 'language' which in turn contributes to the collective voice of poetry. This notion of the complementarity of different poetic voices is esoteric and abstract. Nevertheless, from it we can separate out two aspects of redemptive signification that are relevant to Joyce's project. On the local level there is the defamiliarisation of language – the individual attempt to make language signify more effectively. And on the collective level is a process of complementarity, whereby the different poetic voices, speaking together, somehow add up to some form of complete, pre-Babelian Language. Stephen's phonetically-derived play on the 'wayward rhythms' of language recalls (and is no doubt influenced by) the Symbolist pursuit of semantic imprecision and verbal musicality, while his multilingual apprehension of the word 'ivory' echoes the Babelian idealism implicit in both Benjamin and Mallarmé's theories: it suggests that a more complete process of signification can be attained through interlingual complementarity.

Stephen's transcendental yearnings in *Portrait* are ironised as youthful idealism, however, and Joyce's later work manifests a far more effective formal manipulation of multilingual complementarity. For Melchiori it is *Finnegans Wake* that achieves a full 'epiphany of languages'⁴⁸; I would argue, however, that though

⁴⁷ 'the perfect symmetry of verses within the poem, of poems within the volume, will extend even beyond the volume itself: and this will be the creation of many poets who will inscribe, on spiritual space, the expanded signature of genius – as anonymous and perfect as a work of art.' Mallarmé, 'Crise' 249; 'Crisis' 41.

⁴⁸ Melchiori 4.

Joyce's last novel of course embodies its most extreme form, this is fully developed in *Ulysses*. Whereas in *Portrait* we are presented with basic processes of defamiliarisation, centred around the linguistic and aesthetic experiences of one character, in *Ulysses* we are faced with an extraordinary proliferation of different languages, discourses, idioms and forms of defamiliarisation. Each chapter is written in a different style, and some chapters, such as 'Cyclops' and 'Oxen of the Sun', are characterised by a further internal stylistic variety. In a sense, the extreme heteroglossia contained in *Ulysses* makes it a model for the Bakhtinian definition of the novel form. Processes of multilingualism and multiple defamiliarisation at times trouble the referential function of language to an extreme degree. Yet it is the complementarity of these languages which ultimately constitutes the signifying potential of the novel as a whole: signification resides between chapters, between languages; our understanding of *Ulysses* thus occurs through the complementarity of all its different parts (it is partly for this reason that the novel only really begins to make sense on a second reading, when retrospective and prospective connections and disjunctions between chapters can be established). The multiplicity of languages and discourses within the text thus produces, albeit in microcosmic and far less idealistic forms than those expressed by Mallarmé, multilingual processes of complementary referentiality.

Languages in *Ulysses* are not complementary in any straightforward sense, however. On the contrary, the novel manifests a fascination with the distortions and misunderstandings produced in the process of translation. Translation in *Ulysses* usually does not serve its traditional function of making a foreign text comprehensible, and indeed is *intralingual* (translates between different discourses

in the same national language) as often as it is interlingual.⁴⁹ Characters, objects and events are presented from different linguistic perspectives without being elucidated by, or translated into, any central authoritative (or authorial) discourse. And where translation occurs, it is often used as a means of making language strange to the reader and of rendering it *less*, rather than more, comprehensible. In 'Oxen of the Sun,' for example, tinned sardines are rendered almost unrecognisable:

And there was a vat of silver that was moved by craft to open in the which lay strange fishes withouten heads though misbelieving men nie that this be possible thing without they see it natheless they are so. And these fishes lie in an oily water brought there from Portugal land because of the fatness that therein is like to the juices of the olivepress. (U 14.149-154)

The language of medieval travel stories, having no vocabulary to deal with the concept of canned fish, comically estranges the description of what would otherwise be a mundane, and therefore unremarkable, description of a familiar object. Such a perverse function of translation comes under particular scrutiny in another section of 'Oxen':

Universally that person's acumen is esteemed very little perceptive concerning whatsoever matters are being held as most profitably by mortals with sapience endowed to be studied who is ignorant of that which the most in doctrine erudite and certainly by reason of that in them high mind's ornament deserving of veneration constantly maintain when by general consent they affirm that other circumstances being equal by no exterior splendour is the prosperity of a nation more efficaciously asserted than by the measure of how far forward may have progressed the tribute of its solicitude for that proliferent continuance which of evils the original if it be absent when fortunately present constitutes the certain sign of omnipollent nature's incorrupted benefaction. (U 14.7-17)

Gifford and Seidman affirm that the style of this passage is an imitation of the Latin prose styles of the Roman historians Sallust and Tacitus and that '[the] manner of

⁴⁹ It is important to acknowledge the importance of different discourses and different idioms within *Ulysses* as different languages in the Bakhtinian sense: as different forms of verbal expression, even where they share the same national language. Indeed, linguistic estrangement in Joyce is characterised by an extreme sensitivity to the different representations produced by different ideologically or culturally-bound discourses. As Senn writes, *Ulysses* 'exposes not only a wide range of languages, but also the regional, temporal, social, and hierarchical width of the English language.' Senn 52.

this passage suggests a literal translation, without Anglicization of word usage and syntax.’⁵⁰ Such extreme literality has created what Lawrence Venuti would call a foreignizing translation – one that prioritises the source text, allowing the source language to influence and even deform the target language. The result here is near incomprehensibility: the literal translation deforms the target language and transforms the referent to such an extent that meaning is almost entirely obscured.

If the process of translation distorts the referent, this also occurs in the transposition of subject matter between different ideologically-bound languages or discourses. This is made especially clear in the ‘Cyclops’ episode, where the technique of ‘gigantism’⁵¹ constitutes a gross exaggeration of a range of different discourses. Under particular scrutiny in ‘Cyclops’ are the languages of nationalism and Irish mythology in their various guises, which are satirically magnified to the extent that ordinary characters and events are transformed into mythic exaggerations. A pint of beer becomes ‘a cup of joy’ (U 12.244), or, even more hyperbolically, ‘a crystal cup full of the foaming ebon ale’ (U 12.280-1). In a similar process, the Citizen, a singularly unsympathetic character – anti-Semitic, bigoted and blinded by a particularly mindless form of nationalism – becomes ‘a broadshouldered deepchested stronglimbed frankeyed redhaired freelyfreckled shaggybearded widemouthed largenosed longheaded deepvoiced barekneed brawnyhanded hairylegged ruddyfaced sinewyarmed hero’ (U 12.152-5) while the barking of his ‘bloody mangy mongrel’ Garryowen is transformed into a poetic imitation of classical Irish verse (U 12.740-7). Joyce in ‘Cyclops’ emphasises the extent to which the referent can be modified for ideological purposes through its translation into the context of heroic or archaic discourses.

⁵⁰ Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *‘Ulysses’ Annotated: Notes for James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’*, 2nd edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 409.

⁵¹ Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’: A Study* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 38.

The relationships between different languages and discourses are clearly troubled in *Ulysses*. 'Oxen of the Sun' is a chapter which exemplifies this: its difficulty lies not only in its erudition and in the detailed literary knowledge necessary to understanding its different parts, but, quite simply, in the opacity or even incomprehensibility ensuing from such a complex combination of and translation between different languages and discourses. The final section of 'Oxen', therefore, rather than merely being a linguistic aberration, actually sums up the difficulty of the chapter. This inebriated mix of debased languages was described by Joyce as 'a frightful jumble of pidgin English, nigger English, Cockney, Irish, bowery slang and broken doggerel.'⁵² Apart from the formal relevance of such linguistic anarchy to the intoxicated state of Stephen and his friends, language here does not benefit from the complementarity of different languages – on the contrary, it is hybridity which obscures meaning. Joyce here appears to mock the reader's attempts at comprehension: these debased languages demand just as much concentrated and attentive reading as the previous – extremely erudite and notoriously difficult – sections of 'Oxen', thus equating the difficulty of high and low forms of multilingualism and blurring our notions of where readerly effort is due. Multilingualism, evidently, is not merely the domain of erudition, nor does it further comprehension.

In 'Eumaeus' Bloom and Stephen overhear some Italians 'in heated altercation'; the passage in Italian which follows is full of obscenity. This mocks the reader's expectations: faced with a passage in a foreign language related in italics, especially when Stephen is present, we are used to Dante, not '*putana madonna*' and '*culo rotto!*' The final section of 'Oxen of the Sun' in part prepares us for this, but

⁵² Ellman, ed., *Selected Letters of James Joyce* 252.

the non-Italian-speaker still receives a jolt in discovering the meaning of these words. Our reception of a foreign language in a text, and in particular of the Italian language, so romanticised for the Anglophone, is directly ironised in Bloom's inappropriate response:

– A beautiful language. I mean for singing purposes. Why do you not write your poetry in that language? *Bella Poetria!* It is so melodious and full. *Belladonna. Voglio.*

Stephen, who was trying his dead best not to yawn, if he could, suffering from dead lassitude generally, replied:

– To fill the ear of a cow elephant. They were haggling over money.

– Is that so? Mr Bloom asked. Of course, he subjoined pensively, at the inward reflection of there being more languages to start with than were absolutely necessary, it may be only the southern glamour that surrounds it.

[...]

– Sounds are impostures, Stephen said [...] (U 16.345-362)

For Bloom it is the multiplicity of languages which causes him to mistake the more vulgar nuances of the Italian language for 'southern glamour' and to praise the melodious beauty of what is little more than a string of obscenities. He also misuses that language: his invocation of beautiful poetry (*Bella Poetria!*) is misspelt (it should be *Bella Poesia!*) and, when he attempts to say that he wants a beautiful woman, the dual meaning of *belladonna* as both beautiful woman and deadly nightshade emphasises the deceptive duality of the foreign language. Bloom's incomprehension makes him focus on the phonetic qualities of Italian but, as Stephen wryly observes, '[s]ounds are impostures'. The effects of such misuse are not entirely negative, however: the mistake accidentally invokes not only poetry, but also *la Bella Patria!* – the (Italian) fatherland. Bloom's pun thus works in correspondence with Homeric references to Odysseus' homecoming, while also retaining a certain poignancy with regard to his status as a Jewish outsider. In the context of Joyce's interest in the Italian Irredentist movement of Trieste, as well as his ambivalence towards Irish linguistic nationalism, *Bella Poetria!* is also a

significantly *hybrid* punning celebration of both nationality and poetry, thus adding political undertones to the foreigner's linguistic perspective.

Bloom is unaware of these subtleties embedded in his language, however (much as he is unaware that he is misusing Italian at all). Likewise, the narrator of 'Eumaeus' (who is generally thought to be Bloom) is unaware that his attempts at stylishness and elegance have in fact produced a language that is characterised by linguistic clumsiness and inadequate erudition. The surface effects of the chapter's language thus stand in marked contrast to the elaborate linguistics of much of *Ulysses*. In this sense, 'Eumaeus' (alongside the final part of 'Oxen') stands as a negative image to the rest of the novel. There is frequent tautology: Stephen 'thought to think of Ibsen' (U 16.52), and Bloom 'was just pondering in pensive mood' (U 16.604). Repetitive excess is mirrored in the generally rambling nature of the narrative, where the meaninglessness of a hackneyed phrase such as 'to cut a long story short' (U 16.1691) is emphasised by its use to extend that story still further. Similarly overused phrases purporting to increase linguistic precision – 'that is to say' (U 16.719; 16.1789), 'in a word' (U 16.1602) – play an impressively irrelevant part in the passages in which they appear. And the metaphors used cannot be missed – the narrator signals their presence and in the process highlights their mundaneness:

it took the civilized world by storm, *figuratively speaking* (U 16.607, my emphasis)

as if both their minds were travelling, *so to speak*, in the one train of thought. (U 16.1580-1, my emphasis)

Dead metaphors are those that we no longer perceive as metaphoric. By drawing our attention to his metaphors, the narrator of 'Eumaeus' makes us re-experience their death.

'Eumaeus' is a beautifully constructed catalogue of linguistic blunders, where language becomes a vehicle for irrelevance and misunderstanding. This is encapsulated in the use of foreign languages in the chapter: attempted elegance appears instead as misplaced pretentiousness when the narrator italicises foreign words such as *protégé*, *sang-froid*, *hoi polloi* or *via* which have been fully assimilated into the English language and which, moreover, add nothing to their context apart from supposed embellishment. At times such pretension is even the cause of semantic confusion: when Bloom ponders the benefits of a 'radical change of *venue* after the grind of city life' (U 16.545), the italicisation of *venue* merely emphasises a false friend between English and French, changing the English 'venue' (place) to the French word for 'arrival.' Elsewhere, we learn the 'the *coup d'oeil* was exceedingly grand' (U 16.554-5) which roughly translates into an appreciation of the grandness of a *glance* not a 'view', as the narrator seems to intend. Throughout *Ulysses* we, like Bloom, have been led to expect the beauty of classical or literary quotation from italicised passages: the misuse of language, and especially of foreign words, in 'Eumaeus' reproduces for the reader Bloom's experience of the arguing Italians.

The language of 'Eumaeus' is characterised by the narrator's inability to manipulate the ambiguities and complexities, not only of the English language, but of all languages; indeed, the misuse of multilingualism in the chapter encapsulates that theme of linguistic deception. Linguistic complexity, which in this chapter appears to be the narrator's downfall, can also be the source of linguistic productivity, however. Stephen at one point sobers up just enough to come up with a decent play on words: his reason for leaving his father's home, he claims, was 'to seek misfortune' (U 16.253). It is precisely the slipperiness of language, its double-

meanings and its misleading sounds which allow for such play; the interrelation of different languages, in increasing the potential for punning, but also for confusion, stretches language in *Ulysses* still further. Bloom's pun on *Bella Patria / Poesia* may have been accidental, but it highlights the productive possibilities of hybridisation, and indeed of linguistic misuse: the deceptions of language can be punningly manipulated, and language can thus be overdetermined such that its range of reference is greatly enriched. Appearances, like sounds, are particularly deceptive in 'Eumaeus' – in the Homeric episode, Odysseus' disguise conceals his royal status; in Joyce's chapter, the apparent clumsiness of the narrator's style conceals a linguistic sophistication that makes productive and comic use of the fact that '[s]ounds are impostures'.

An interesting counterpart to 'Eumaeus' is the 'Proteus' chapter. The 'art' of the chapter, as specified in Stuart Gilbert's chart,⁵³ is philology, the study of languages, and foreign languages play an important part, not only in Stephen's thoughts about philosophy, travel and foreign countries, but also in forming the protean nature of language within the chapter. Whereas in 'Eumaeus' foreign languages are used both pretentiously and incorrectly, 'Proteus' parades a multilingual sophistication that makes far more explicit use of overdetermination and multilingual complementarity; it is therefore key to any analysis of linguistic estrangement in *Ulysses*.

Stephen, thinking about his time in Paris, remembers the linguistic difficulties he encountered there:

You were a student, weren't you? Of what in the other devil's name?
Paysayenn. P.C.N., you know: *physiques, chimiques et naturelles*. (U 3.175-7)

⁵³ Gilbert 38.

His thoughts thus illustrate for the reader how material language can become for the foreigner. Meaning is only progressively revealed: first comes the phonetic inscription of the acronym 'P.C.N.' which, with French pronunciation (presumably along with an Irish accent), makes 'Paysayenn'. This (lexically) produces a pun on *paysan* (farmer), thus withholding the referent not only by foregrounding the sounds of the letters, but also by providing hints of an alternative (and contextually irrelevant) significance. (The materialisation of language for the uncomprehending foreigner is further ironised by the at-homeness indicated by *paysan* which, etymologically, invokes the native of a place – *pays* – as opposed to the *étranger*.) It is only at this stage that the acronym 'P.C.N.' itself is revealed and then explained as '*physiques, chimiques et naturelles*'. As a result, we are aware of the sound of what is being expressed and its textual presence as a written word before we know what it means. The very process of incomprehension is thus represented: the deliberate deferral of meaning replicates the experience of Stephen's non-French-speaking interlocutor.

Ferenc Takács, in a paper presented at the 18th Joyce Symposium, indicated the significance of Joyce's work as an English Language Teacher at the Berlitz School in Trieste. From his students he learnt a multitude of different ways in which 'native linguistic competence can interfere with English in the course of the learning process'. The mistakes of the language student were thus fundamental to Joyce's linguistic perspective: 'while teaching the English language to his students he also learnt from them all sorts of ways he [could] unlearn the same language' – a practice that indicated Joyce's resistance to Standard English (which he would have been expected to teach) and that enabled him to construct, in *Finnegans Wake*, 'a radically fluid idiom that subverts the limits and transcends the frontiers of standard

use and language identity.’⁵⁴ The above treatment of foreign languages in ‘Proteus’ indicates that Joyce was already acutely aware of the potential productivity of linguistic misuse in *Ulysses*.⁵⁵ The representation of incomprehension is not only extremely effective (the reader is made to undergo the same process of incomprehension as that which is represented), but demonstrates the punning potential produced by the foreigner’s material perception of language.

The predominance of sound effects and sound patterning in ‘Proteus’ indicates the centrality of linguistic materiality to Joyce’s language. Stephen’s sensual perception, and particularly his aural experience, is reproduced in language through onomatopoeia, both lexical – in the noise made by his boots on the pebbles: ‘Crush, crack, crick, crick’ (U 3.19), and nonlexical – in the ‘fourworded wavespeech’ as he urinates on the beach: ‘seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, ooos.’ (U 3.456-7). As language in ‘Proteus’ is made to signify a very material world, so language itself becomes very material: onomatopoeia of course relies heavily on the phonetic characteristics of language. Attridge’s analysis of onomatopoeia demonstrates, however, that such sound effects also draw attention to their own presence as signifiers. Though lexical onomatopoeia seems to bypass the arbitrariness of the sign, giving the reader the sense of a ‘momentary and surprising reciprocal relationship established between phonetic and semantic properties’,⁵⁶ its effect is in fact also metalinguistic. As Attridge concludes, the result of successful lexical

⁵⁴ Ferenc Takács, “‘impulsory irelitz’”: James Joyce, the Berlitz School and the Unlearning of the English Language, paper presented at the 18th International Joyce Symposium, Trieste, June 2002. I am grateful to Dr Takács for having sent me a copy of this paper, which will be published in the symposium proceedings.

⁵⁵ Alistair Stead notes that one of the books in Joyce’s Trieste library was William Ballantyne Hodgson’s *Errors in the Use of English* – a book which Joyce used ‘to enrich the grammatical mayhem of a paragraph in *The Oxen of the Sun*’ and which, Stead argues, also ‘presided over the linguistic farce’ of sections of ‘Eumaeus’. Alistair Stead, ‘Reflections on Eumaeus: Ways of Error and Glory in *Ulysses*.’ *James Joyce and Modern Literature*, ed. W.J. McCormack and Alistair Stead (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) 150.

⁵⁶ Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Methuen, 1988) 151.

onomatopoeia 'is neither direct apprehension of the physical world nor a focus on the sounds of speech as sounds; rather, it might be called a heightened experience of language *as language*.'⁵⁷ This is not a focus on the physical properties of language, but on 'the materiality of language *as it does its work of bringing meaning into being*'.⁵⁸ The metalinguistic effects of nonlexical onomatopoeia are still more apparent: nonlexical forms in particular work on a visual as well as a phonetic level, so that we are drawn to their physical presence as words on the page. In the case of unpronounceable lexical sequences, this is particularly apparent: verbal 'sounds' like the 'Mrkrnao!' of Bloom's cat (U 4.32), for example, 'remain resolutely visual, rendering any attempt to convert them into sound arbitrary and inadequate.'⁵⁹ In addition to this material presence of words on the page, the experience of nonlexical onomatopoeia is 'not primarily the result of an unusually close resemblance between the sounds of language and the sounds of the external world', but can actually be accompanied 'by a heightened consciousness of the sounds of language themselves.'⁶⁰ Various forms of onomatopoeia thus draw our attention to the phonetic, visual and semantic functions of language.

Just as the representation of sound draws attention to the words themselves, so onomatopoeia becomes a part of Stephen's aesthetic perception of language. The sound of boots walking on pebbles leads into Stephen's perception of 'Acatalectic tetrameter of iambs marching' in a remembered song (U 3.3-4). The substitution of iambs for boots indicates the metalinguistic turn produced by onomatopoeia, and this focus on the phonetic characteristics of words that try to imitate sound leads Stephen to experiment with more abstract aesthetic effects:

⁵⁷ Attridge, *Peculiar Language* 152.

⁵⁸ Attridge, *Peculiar Language* 154.

⁵⁹ Attridge, *Peculiar Language* 142.

⁶⁰ Attridge, *Peculiar Language* 147.

His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her moomb.
Oomb, allwombing tomb. His mouth moulded issuing breath, unspeched:
ooeehah: roar of cataractic planets, globed, blazing, roaring
wayawayawayawayaway. (U 3.401-4)

Though resembling the play on phonetic effects apparent in Stephen's onomatopoeic experiments, the above sound-play is in fact related to a poem that he is composing. Stephen's exploration of the referential dimension of verbal noise is thus closely related to the non-referentially-motivated aspects of poetic form.

In 'Proteus', the materiality of language is related not only to sound effects or to poetic form, however; it can also become semantically productive. When Stephen is thinking about Aristotle's theories of sensual perception, the syntactic deformation of his language makes the words themselves very material:

Then he was aware of them bodies before of them coloured. How? By
knocking his sponce against them, sure. (U 3.4-6)

The strange collocations – 'them bodies', 'them coloured' – firmly place the stress of the sentence on the two words referring to Stephen's sensual perception of the material world. The words indicating physical reality are themselves turned into material entities – they formally embody what they represent. The above passage provides a clear example of what Bosinelli calls 'the foreignizing power of Joyce's language.'⁶¹ But the effect is not merely one of 'foreignization': the strangeness of Joyce's English ultimately serves here to make language signify more effectively, and indeed iconically. Though monolingual, the effect of this passage is a product of linguistic estrangement: a material perspective on language is at the heart of the syntactic deviations, and the referential dimension of the phrase works in turn by rendering that language material for the reader (thus also estranging the reader).

⁶¹ Bosinelli 398.

The other characteristic of linguistic estrangement – semantic ambiguity – is also fundamental to Joyce’s aesthetic and referential effects, especially in producing productive forms of overdetermination and figures of speech. The following passage illustrates the potential for language play which results from interlingual incomprehension:

Il est irlandais. Hollandais? Non fromage. Deux irlandais, nous, Irlande, vous savez? Ah oui! She thought you wanted a cheese hollandais. (U 3.220-21)

The Frenchwoman’s inability to understand the Irishman’s French produces a doubling of meaning: *irlandais* (Irish) becomes *hollandais* (Dutch), so that instead of explaining their nationality, the Irish students seem to ask for cheese. Yet the focus here is less on communicative need, and more on the punning potential between languages. Attempted communication between languages produces an excess of meaning, but the source of misunderstanding also contains the potential for productive overdetermination. Such phonetic similarity between words in different languages is the source of one of Stephen’s stranger images:

he lapped the sweet *lait chaud* with pink young tongue, plump bunny’s face. Lap, *lapin*. (U 3.165-6)

Stephen here uses the semantic duality inherent in a false friend to construct a metaphor (thus literalising Shklovsky’s claim that a semi-comprehensible language can ‘[seem] to the reader, by reason of its unfamiliarity, more figurative.’⁶²) The association of the French word for rabbit – *lapin* – with the English word ‘lap’ creates a compound image: a person drinking milk is represented, through a false friend, as a rabbit lapping milk. The above example makes effective use of the homonymic effects and double-meanings of sounds across different languages. In the following example Joyce *constructs* a hybrid word from English and French

⁶² Shklovsky, ‘The Resurrection of the Word’ 47.

which, like a false friend, signifies in both languages at once. Unlike a false friend, however, the different languages are made to complement each other semantically:

Number one swung *lourdily* her midwife's bag (U 3.32)

The compound word *lourdily* is derived from several different words, of which the most apparent are 'heavily,' '*lourd*,' and 'lordly' (other associations include 'lordy' and 'loudly'). Two different languages, English and French, converge onto the same referent: Joyce redeems the lightness of the English word 'heavily' by combining it with the more phonetically effective sound of *lourd*. This conjunction in turn produces the further association of 'lordly' so that the word signifies not only the heaviness of the midwife's bag, but also the manner in which she carries it: it becomes both adjective and adverb. 'Lourdily' demonstrates the potential referential richness of multilingual signification – this multilingual strategy intensifies referentiality.

Nevertheless, it is important to note the subtle semantic as well as phonetic differences between words of ostensibly the same referent in different languages: 'heavy' and '*lourd*', for example, are subject to different cultural associations, and do not, therefore, mean exactly the same thing or hold the same connotations. Such interlingual difference of course becomes most apparent in the process of translation: any translation, as we have seen in 'Oxen of the Sun' and 'Cyclops', also incurs referential mutation. A hybrid word such as *lourdily*, however, contains *within itself* the referential and phonetic mutations which occur in translation, but retains the meanings – and to some extent phonetic characteristics – of the word in *both* languages.

Another passage makes explicit this process of interlingual mutation and multilingual supplementarity, when Stephen describes the gypsy woman on the beach:

Across the sands of all the world, followed by the sun's flaming sword, to the west, *trekking* to evening lands. She *trudges*, *schlepps*, *trains*, *drags*, *trascines* her load. (U 3.391-3, my emphasis)

The gypsy woman's travels are evoked multilingually: the description itself travels between English (*trudges*, *drags*), German/Yiddish (*schlepps*), French (*trains*) and Italian (*trascines*). And if we include *trekking* we can add Afrikaans/Dutch to this list of languages. The differences between each of these words distance us from any notion of a stable referent: what we have here is *not* referential repetition. Instead, a process of translation creates an unstable signified which moves between all the different languages. With characteristic Joycean linguistic economy, the resultant signification instability is paradoxically but iconically relevant to the travelling subject of the sentence, while also producing complementary rhythmic and phonetic effects. Joyce told Frank Budgen that the 'crescendo of verbs' expresses 'the irresistible tug of the tides'⁶³: though the words still ostensibly refer to the gypsy woman, an iconic insistence and repetition simultaneously mimics the movement of the tides.

The above examples all relate to the protean theme of the chapter: the sea-god Proteus' power of metamorphosis is represented through interlingual mutation. And just as Proteus' metamorphoses are a powerful weapon against Menelaus' grasp, so in this chapter, interlingual mutation is a powerful tool for rendering language more effective. Multilingual flux also affects the nature of monolingual

⁶³ Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960) 55.

defamiliarisation, however. Joyce explained the nature of protean language to

Budgen:

“I am almosting it” [...] That’s all in the Protean character of the thing. Everything changes: land, water, dog, time of day. Parts of speech change too. Adverb becomes verb.⁶⁴

Multilingual strategies in ‘Proteus’ create a fluid language which metamorphoses between languages, alters the structures of language itself, and as a result allows for a greater number of interchanging meanings to be contained within the protean language. For Benjamin it is translation which demonstrates ‘die Verwandtschaft der Sprachen’ (‘the kinship of languages’)⁶⁵; Joyce incorporates such kinship into the one text – even, in the above examples, into single words or phrases. He thus exposes at once the inadequacy of any single language, while attempting to combat that failure through the complementarity of multilingual signification.

Interlingual complementarity is also apparent in *Ulysses* on a larger, structural level. The function of transposition and translation in *Ulysses* and the confusions caused by a plurality of languages demonstrate the distortions inherent in language. By such logic, no single language is adequate, and expression needs to be multiple. The multiplicity of languages and discourses in *Ulysses*, is not, therefore, merely a source of confusion and distortion. Examples of translational language in ‘Oxen’ and ‘Cyclops’ demonstrate how intralingual translation can generate processes of defamiliarisation, often to comic effect, while containing a critique of the distortions produced by ideologically-bound discourse. As the above examples from ‘Proteus’ demonstrate, more abstract processes of referential distortion are produced by interlingual translation. As I have argued, the extreme multiplicity of discourses and languages in *Ulysses* as a whole is not centred by any single

⁶⁴ Budgen 54.

⁶⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961) 60; *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999) 73.

authoritative language; on the contrary, different languages and discourses are explicitly used to present a variety of different perspectives and signifying systems, thus combating any illusive faith in an organising narrative consciousness.

The different voices of the text present a myriad of different perspectives. The recurrence of events described by different characters in different episodes provides a practical example of how translation (in this context usually intralingual translation between different discourses) creates a plenitude of often contradictory perspectives that form refrains or echoes within the text. The structural centrality of the 'Wandering Rocks' chapter indicates the significance of its labyrinthine technique of narration,⁶⁶ whereby each section shifts its focus onto a different character. Indeed, Gilbert argues that in terms of structure and technique the chapter 'may be regarded as a small-scale model of *Ulysses* as a whole.'⁶⁷ The recurrence of individual incidents indicates the simultaneity of these sections: A young woman detaches a twig from her skirt in the first and eighth sections, Molly Bloom throws a coin from her window to a one-legged sailor in the second and third sections, and in the ninth replaces a card that she had knocked off the window while opening the blind, and the journey of the viceregal cavalcade (narrated in the final section) appears in several other sections (the ninth, eleventh, twelfth and fifteenth). Such recurrent incidents, recounted from different perspectives and in different contexts, are also present throughout *Ulysses*. To take a few examples: the barmaids of 'Sirens' have already watched the viceregal cavalcade go by from two different perspectives in 'The Wandering Rocks' (U 10.962-3 and 1197-9) when in 'Sirens' we first hear that 'Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing' (U 11.1), the 'Jingle jaunty jingle' (U 11.245) of Boylan's carriage in 'Sirens' becomes the

⁶⁶ Gilbert's chart defines the technique of 'Wandering Rocks' as 'labyrinth'. Gilbert 38.

⁶⁷ Gilbert 200.

jingling of Molly's bed in 'Circe' (U 15.1136), and Bloom and Molly present very different accounts of a night at the opera in 'Sirens' (U 11.1056-60) and 'Penelope' (U 18.1113-16). The inadequacies of the various transpositions and translations in *Ulysses* correspond to the different perspectives provided, for example, by Bloom and Molly in their accounts of events: languages, rather than merely distorting the referent, ultimately combine to present a variety of different perspectives. Indeed, it is precisely the differences produced by the translation of events and ideas into different contexts that produces the multiple perspectives contained within *Ulysses*.

On a thematic level, then, different voices and 'languages' are interposed such that they combine in disjunctive and yet complementary ways – they are complementary in the sense that they contribute to a Bakhtinian representation of heteroglossia and to a fullness of multi-voiced representation. Perhaps more remarkable, however, are the effects of multilingual flux upon individual cases of defamiliarisation (whether or not the language is explicitly multilingual). As my analysis of 'Proteus' demonstrates, the multilingual consciousness creates an awareness of linguistic instability, and hence of the need to supplement and improve language, while providing that very instability necessary for the defamiliarisation of language. If the foreignness of language brings out an awareness of the materiality of language and the plurality of semantic potential, then protean multilingualism can be related to Joycean language throughout *Ulysses*.

Stephen, pondering Lessing's concept of the *nebeneinander* in visual perception, looks down at the boots passed on to him by Buck Mulligan: 'My two feet in his boots are at the end of his legs, *nebeneinander*.' (U 3.17-18) For Lessing, in visual art 'the action is visible and stationary, its different parts developing in co-

existence (*nebeneinander*) in space.’⁶⁸ Stephen, while considering Lessing’s theory, also considers the literal meaning of *nebeneinander*: ‘side by side.’ He then uses the word in such a way that it signifies both its philosophical meaning and its literal meaning: his feet are – literally – next to each other; they thus also exemplify the kind of visible and stationary ‘action’ denoted by Lessing. The word itself is given two simultaneous *meanings*, side by side: the overdetermined use of *nebeneinander* thus exemplifies the concept denoted by that word. This complex use of language is related to the foreignness of the word for Stephen: in understanding Lessing’s German, he would first translate *nebeneinander* into its literal meaning before grasping its philosophical signification. In his subsequent use of the word, he retains this doubleness of literal and figurative meaning. Such a perspective of externality to the German language is similar to Stephen’s estranged relation to English, and overdetermination of this kind is equally common in a monolingual context.

Stephen observes a dog on the beach barking at ‘the wavenoise, herds of seamorse’ (U 3.339): ‘seamorse’, while evoking ‘seahorses’ is in fact an obsolete word for walrus; it also seems to hint at ‘morse code,’ implying that there is a language in the wavenoise. Two ideas are presented simultaneously and *nebeneinander* through one word.

Overdetermination is a consistent feature of Joyce’s language. Often, it is manifest in the literalisation of figurative expressions. Bloom at one point observes the evident poverty of a girl he sees in the street: ‘Underfed she looks too. Potatoes and marge, marge and potatoes. It’s after they feel it. *Proof of the pudding.*’ (U 8.41-2, my emphasis) The figurative expression is literalised through the culinary context. It is also significant that the above phrase appears in ‘Lestrygonians’, the

⁶⁸ Cited in Gifford and Seidman 45.

chapter about food: figurative language in *Ulysses* often corresponds, directly or indirectly, to the Homeric context. So, when Bloom professes that he feels as if he ‘had been eaten and spewed’ (U 8.495), this not only expresses his professed lack of vitality, but refers to the cannibal Lestrygonian people who make a meal of Odysseus’ crew. Hence also the nautical metaphors in ‘Eumaeus’, and the concern with Irish, papal and literal bulls in ‘Oxen of the Sun’. It is in ‘Aeolus’, however, that we find some of the most impressively overdetermined use of figurative language. Extracted from their direct contextual significance and placed in order, the wind-related expressions of the chapter are in direct chronological relation to the Homeric story (briefly summarised below, to the left of the relevant citations):

Odysseus, on Aeolus’ island, wants to return home, and asks Aeolus for help:	‘They always build one door opposite another for the wind to. Way in. Way out.’ (U 7.50-51) ‘Want to get some wind off my chest first’ (U 7.192)
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Aeolus, warden of the winds, makes Odysseus a bag full of all the winds that will speed his return:	‘Bladderbags’ (U 7.260) ‘gale days. Windfall when he kicks out.’ (U 7.266-7)
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Odysseus and his crew sail on steadily for nine days, until the crew begin to wonder what is in Aeolus’ bag. They suspect that it might be full of treasure:	‘What’s in the wind, I wonder’ (U 7.293-4) ‘Reaping the whirlwind’ (U 7.304) ‘when they get wind of a new opening’ (U 7.309)
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They decide to open the bag:	‘Bombast! [...] Enough of the inflated windbag!’ (U 7.315)
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Once it is opened, the winds are released, and a tempest drives the ship back, away from home:	‘There’s a hurricane blowing’ (U 7.399-400) ‘O, for a breath of fresh air!’ (U 7.612) ‘She was a nice old bag of tricks’ (U 7.785) ‘Gone with the wind’ (U 7.880) ‘The tribune’s words, howled and scattered to the four winds’ (U 7.881-2)
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Odysseus and crew are thus returned to Aeolus’ island and ask for his help. Aeolus,

however, refuses, and the crew ‘But he wants just a little puff’ (U 7.978)
are forced to row the ship ‘RAISING THE WIND’ (U 7.995)
homewards:

In ‘Aeolus’, these metaphors serve two very different functions: they are figures of speech used by the characters in the newspaper office, but they also refer to the Homeric context. The mythical references are more complex than those found in other chapters, however: placed in order, they construct Odysseus’ story, embedding a separate and hidden narrative within the text.

Joyce’s language thus produces extremely complex systems of overdetermination: language is made plural, not only through the complementarity of different languages, but through monolingual processes of defamiliarisation. Linguistic estrangement, as I have demonstrated, is characterised by an awareness of the phonetic qualities of language, and this can be manipulated for the purposes of onomatopoeia or punning: onomatopoeia combines phonetic and semantic qualities to bring together sound and sense, while punning uses phonetic ambiguity to produce semantic overdetermination. Both are apparent throughout *Ulysses*; it is in ‘Sirens’, however, that we are presented with some of the novel’s most extreme forms of linguistic estrangement: language is materialised to such an extent that it imitates music, and can be so misleading that it constantly – and deliberately – courts incomprehensibility. The language of ‘Sirens’ embodies an abstract estrangement which is not directly derived from multilingualism: the infrequent occurrences of foreign languages in the chapter are of relatively minor importance. Such language is nevertheless the culmination of Joycean linguistic estrangement. Its foreignness is derived, not from combinations of different languages or discourses, but from the conjunction of words and music. Music could be perceived as a kind of language; its expressiveness, however, is not bound by referentiality.

Onomatopoeic sound-forms, in imitating that which they describe, enact a form of multiple signification through the convergence of sound and meaning. The effect of music, however, is not referential, but affective: 'Sirens' combines linguistic referentiality with musical affect, so that language both signifies and sings.

In 'Sirens' the referential function is consistently subordinated to the phonetic and rhythmic effects of language, not only for onomatopoeic effect, but also as a means of constructing a verbal imitation of musical phrasing, refrains, and what Joyce identified as the fugal form of the chapter. Withholding the referent in 'Proteus', as we have seen, is a means of representing the foreigner's incomprehension; in 'Sirens', however, it is fundamental to making words sing. As Sebastian Knowles observes, the less we understand these words, the more we *hear* them,⁶⁹ and so Joyce, in this chapter, either overdetermines words and phrases or withholds the context that makes them comprehensible. This is most apparent in the opening sequence of the chapter, a series of 59 apparently nonsensical snippets of speech or narrative. This sequence introduces the rhythmic and melodic themes which will recur as refrains throughout the chapter, and is therefore generally acknowledged to be an 'overture'. In the context of fugal form, each of these extracts can be defined as one of the 'voices' of the fugue. Each 'voice' is a short verbal or onomatopoeic sound-pattern that is associated with a particular character or event within the chapter and is derived either from words spoken or sung by that character, a noise that character makes, or the sound of that character's name. Our initial apprehension of each 'voice' of the overture is, however, thoroughly decontextualised: sounds can only retrospectively be assigned to specific characters. In addition, the high degree of sound-patterning in this section means that the

⁶⁹ Sebastian Knowles. 'Introduction.' *Bronze by Gold: The Music of Joyce*, ed. Sebastian D.G. Knowles (New York: Garland, 1999) xxvii.

referential signification of each phrase is obscured further by the foregrounded materiality of language. 'Warbling. Ah, lure! Alluring' might be Bloom thinking of Molly singing, but all we initially apprehend are the sounds and visual forms of these words: we are turned into 'foreign readers'.⁷⁰ Semantic ambiguity does not only serve the purpose of making us focus on the sounds of words, however. In 'Sirens', the deceptive qualities of sounds in language are used by Joyce, not only to make language confusing, but also as fundamental tools for creating musical form.

In 'Proteus' we have seen how Joyce makes use of a homonym between languages to create a figure of speech; in 'Sirens', homonyms and words that sound similar are used to create the phonetic repetition essential to verbal sound patterning. For example:

She rose and closed her reading, rose of Castille: fretted forlorn, dreamily
rose. (U 11.331-2)

The pattern of the passage is dependent upon the repetition of the homonym 'rose'. Repetition, however, is accompanied by semantic mutation: Joyce makes use of both meanings of the word. Indeed, he consistently manipulates the semantic ambiguity inherent in words that sound similar so that phonetic repetition in 'Sirens' is rarely *semantically* repetitive:

'Neatly she poured slowsyrupy sloe.' (U 11.369)
'Wait, wait. Pat, waiter, waited.' (U 11.393)
'mild she smiled on Boylan.' (U 11.417)

Jakobson's analysis of sound patterning in 'poetic' language concludes that '[in] a sequence, where similarity is imposed on contiguity, two similar phonemic sequences near to each other are prone to assume a paronomastic function. Words similar in sound are drawn together in meaning.'⁷¹ In 'Sirens', however, this process

⁷⁰ Senn 54.

⁷¹ Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,' *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Robert E. Innis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 167.

is reversed: rather than using phonetic patterning to bring words into semantic similarity, Joyce broadens their semantic scope. To multiply meanings is also to destabilise the referential function of the words: the increased semantic range increases semantic ambiguity, which in turn redirects our focus onto the surface of language. And just as homonyms in ‘Sirens’ play on their different potential meanings, so even non-homonymic words and phrases are made to mutate. Thus ‘With the greatest alacrity’ becomes ‘With grace of alacrity’ (U 11.213-4) and Dollard’s voice is described as a ‘vast manless moonless womoonless marsh’ (U 11.1012): phonetic recurrence is again accompanied by referential development.

Names are also crucial to the phonetic play of ‘Sirens’: descriptions of characters, for example, are directed by the sounds of their names, from ‘deepsounding’ Ben Dollard to the monosyllabic percussive effect of Pat the waiter’s refrain. Just as Joyce uses sound patterning to expand the semantic potential of words, so names are invested with wider signifying potential:

‘George Lidwell eyelid well expressive’ (U 11.1038-9)
‘Woodwind like Goodwin’s name’ (U 11.1055)
‘Blew. Blue bloom is on the.’ (U 11.6)

And Lydia’s name is at one point turned into a verb:

Miss Douce of satin douced her arm away (U 11.203)

Such phrases are akin to the verbal metamorphoses of ‘Proteus.’ But ‘Sirens’ at other times takes protean language even further in the interests of producing music.

Blazes Boylan’s name merges into the description of Lydia’s eyes:

‘Sparkling bronze azure eyed Blazure’s skyblue bow and eyes.’ (U 11.394)

And in the following description of Molly’s hair ‘wavy’ mutates into ‘heavy’:

Her wavyavyeavyheavyeavyevyevyhair un comb:’d. (U 11.808-9)

The incorporation of at least three words (blaze, azure, blazer) into 'Blazes', and of 'heavy' into 'wavy' echoes the kind of multilingual complementarity that we see in 'Proteus'. In 'trudges, schlepps, trains, drags, trascines', the complementarity of the signifiers in different languages incurs the mutation of the referent and produces a rhythmic effect. In 'Blazure' and the heavy/wavy hybrid, the process is reversed: the rhythmic deformation of language creates a similar mutation of the referent, but this time via the complementarity of two different words in the same language.

Lexical and nonlexical onomatopoeia are, inevitably, prominent in a chapter which is about music: Joyce incorporates into 'Sirens' the whole range of Dublin sounds to be heard in and around the Ormond Bar. Analyses of the language of 'Sirens,' therefore, often focus on the function of onomatopoeia in the chapter – as a form of rhetoric which signifies by sound, onomatopoeia would certainly appear to be central, not least as the main example of how Joyce's musical deformations actually retain a strong signifying function. As signifiers of the actual 'real' events in 'Sirens', such cases of sound-formed 'lipspeech' (U 11.1002) are in various ways iconic and performative: they enact the sounds that they describe. And yet these sound-patterned verbal forms only signify on very local levels: if a sound is very clearly heard through the words of 'Sirens', the referentiality of the word is less important on its own than as a part of the overall rhythmic and musical structure of the chapter. There are thus two main forms of sound-patterning in 'Sirens': onomatopoeia (with its corresponding illusion of referential directness), and a more abstract musical patterning, which sets up verbal pitch and rhythm for non-referential purposes. Bloom ponders the difference between noise and music: 'There's music everywhere. Ruttledge's door: ee creaking. No, that's noise.' (U 11.964-5) The referential function of onomatopoeia represents noise in language.

but it is Joyce's use of onomatopoeia which makes music out of that noise: from the lexical 'Jingle jaunty jingle' of Blazes Boylan's carriage to the nonlexical 'Ppprrpffrrppfff' of Bloom's fart, each sound plays a part as both onomatopoeic signifier and abstract musical sound-form.

In the process of constructing musical form from sounds, even onomatopoeia must at times be rendered referentially ambiguous. The second phrase of the overture, for example, seems initially to provide the sound effects of the viceregal cavalcade:

Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing.
Imperthnthn thnthnthn. (U 11.1-2)

The phrase's association with 'hoofirons' makes it evoke the thudding of the horses hooves. Later, however, we realise that this sound has lexical origins – it is a distortion of the words 'impertinent insolence':

– Imperthnthn thnthnthn, bootssnout sniffed rudely, as he retreated as she threatened as he had come. (U 11.100-1)

This onomatopoeic phrase has already been associated with two very different sounds when it reappears in yet another context:

Miss Douce huffed and snorted down her nostrils that quivered imperthnthn like a snout in quest. (U 11-144-5)

'Imperthnthn' is thus highly unreliable as an onomatopoeic signifier. Its repetition in different contexts, however, gives it the quality of a recurrent refrain. Again, phonetic and rhythmic repetition is prevented from becoming semantically repetitive, and semantic ambiguity helps to turn our attention from the meaning of the nonlexical sequence to its sound. 'Imperthnthn' thus becomes one of the refrains that make up the fugal form of 'Sirens'.

The overdetermination of the above sound-effect is also musical in another, more abstract, sense. By its third appearance, 'imperthnthn' evokes three different

sounds, thus producing a form of simultaneous multiple referentiality. Such overdetermination is one of the defining characteristics of Joyce's style – we are reminded, for example, of the compound word 'lourdily' which speaks at once in two different languages and evokes three different words, or of the multiple signifieds evoked by 'Blazure'. But the above case of onomatopoeic overdetermination in particular emphasises the peculiar nature of referential simultaneity. As Beckett realised, it is characteristic of music rather than language:

literature can no more escape from chronologies to simultaneities, from Nebeneinander to Miteinander, that [than] the human voice can sing chords. [...] *Work in Progress* is the only possibility [possible] development from *Ulysses*, the heroic attempt to make literature accomplish what belongs to music – the Miteinander and the simultaneous.⁷²

So, in 'Sirens', though language is referentially destabilised, it does not degenerate into nonsense. On the contrary, Joyce makes use of semantic ambiguity and linguistic materiality in order to construct a hybrid form of verbal music. Words in 'Sirens' are about music, not only referentially (by describing music), but also formally: words both manipulate the sounds of language such that they imitate the effects of music, and echo the simultaneity of chords through referential overdetermination.⁷³

Joyce, in a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, described the form of 'Sirens' as a '*fuga per canonem*', the only way he could find of describing 'the seductions of music beyond which Ulysses travels.'⁷⁴ This has prompted many critics to attempt to translate the language of 'Sirens' into musical form. It is extremely difficult to do so, however: qualities as fundamental to music as pitch and rhythm only serve such

⁷² Cited in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) 258.

⁷³ Such overdetermination is, it must be noted, primarily textual: when reading Joyce aloud, usually only one of several meanings can be chosen; if read silently, however, all the different sounds can be 'heard' simultaneously. 'Sirens', then, is textual music.

⁷⁴ Ellmann ed., *Selected Letters of James Joyce* 242.

secondary functions in language as emphasis and intonation.⁷⁵ Though precisely represented in musical notation, such qualities can, as a result, only be imitated in language. This process in turn greatly destabilises the balance of ordinary linguistic functions, rendering impossible any accuracy of linguistic or musical analysis. Even those modes of analysing poetic discourse which take into account pitch and rhythm in language (scansion, annotation of alliterative and assonant functions etc.), are problematic as they focus on the relationship between sound and meaning, and on the relation of the text to existing *literary* forms and rhythms rather than music.⁷⁶ In general reading and in more precise analysis, therefore, the reader does not have the tools to *read* melody and musical structure in ‘Sirens’.

The fugal ‘subject’ – the main theme of the fugue that is taken up by all the ‘voices’, often in transposed, modified or inverted form – is particularly difficult to locate: melody is unrepresentable in language, and even where certain tonal and rhythmic effects can be recognised in language, any transposition or variation of a verbal ‘melody’ would transform it beyond recognition. Yet ‘Sirens’ is not music, it is language, and the ‘subject’ of the fugue is not necessarily melodic. The musical ‘subject’, could in fact be read as the *referential* subject of ‘Sirens’, which Joyce defined as ‘the seductions of music beyond which Ulysses travels’. All the voices and refrains of the chapter, covering an extraordinary tonal and rhythmic range, relate to or work around this linguistic subject, both semantically and musically: they not only sing, but sing *about* musical seduction.

The ‘subject’ of ‘Sirens’ is evoked by indirectly referential means, however. As I have indicated, the destabilisation of the referential function, necessary to the

⁷⁵ For a summary of the differences between words and music, see Andreas Fischer, ‘Strange Words, Strange Music: the verbal music of “Sirens”’, *Bronze by Gold* 245-8.

⁷⁶ Scansion, for example, measures rhythm in feet – a linguistic and literary measurement which is more adapted to the rhythms of speech than of music. Scansion as a result cannot accommodate the more complex musical rhythms of ‘Sirens’.

musical effects of the chapter, precludes any straightforward signification. 'Tenors get women by the score' (U 11.686) thinks Bloom; meanwhile the tenor Blazes Boylan makes his way to Molly Bloom's bed. Boylan's journey is expressed, not descriptively, but through the occasional interpolation of his jingling refrain into the noises of the Bar. His arrival, likewise, is more musical than referential:

Jog jig jogged stopped. Dandy tan shoe of dandy Boylan socks skyblue
clocks came light to earth. (U 11.977-8)

Such language is fairly nonsensical, though we can, with a little effort, decipher what is happening. The phrase is more important, however, for its presence as one of the 'voices' in the fugue: Boylan's cockiness is represented through the sounds he makes (his particular 'voice' is the jaunty tune of adulterous seduction). Further variations on the theme of musical seduction are provided by the general flirtation that goes on in the bar with the Sirens themselves, Mina Kennedy and Lydia Douce. This flirtation is both accompanied by and itself produces music: conversation is punctuated by Lydia, Ben Dollard and Simon Dedalus' songs, while Lenehan's attempt to catch Mina's attention – 'Peep! Who's in the corner?' (U 11.242) – becomes central to his refrain. Lydia, in Lydian convivial mode,⁷⁷ not only sings, but produces a percussive effect with the smack of her garter against her leg, and then later, 'lost in pity for Croppy' (listening to Ben Dollard's rendition of 'The Croppy Boy') engages in some extremely suggestive activity with the beerpull: 'Fro, to: to, fro: over the polished knob (she knows his eyes, my eyes, her eyes) her thumb and finger passed in pity' (U 11.1113-15). Mina's refrain, on the other hand, sings wistfully in minor (Aeolian) mode: 'Miss Kennedy sauntered sadly from bright light,

⁷⁷ There are seven such 'modes' in traditional Western music: Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian and Locrian. Lydia is clearly associated with the Lydian mode, described by Socrates as 'relaxing'; Mina's name recalls the minor or Aeolian mode, generally associated with sadness. See Margaret Rogers, 'Mining the Ore of "Sirens": An investigation of structural components,' *Bronze by Gold* 268.

twining a loose hair behind an ear. Sauntering sadly, gold no more, she twisted twined a hair. Sadly she twined in sauntering gold hair behind a curving ear.' (U 11.81-3) We also note that Mina, reading, is mainly silent – 'In drowsy silence gold bent on her page' (U 11.312) – the seductiveness of music is located in the refrain representing her rather than in any songs of her own.

In most refrains, then, we find a direct contextual reference to sex or flirtation (Boylan's journey to Molly, Lydia's various flirtatious activities or Bloom's letter to Martha), thus evoking 'the seductions of music' through the musical accompaniment to and encouragement of the sexual over- or undertones in the text. In other cases, such as in Mina's refrains, it is specifically the seductiveness of music itself which is represented through wistful descriptions of an attractive though silent barmaid. The accompaniments provided by the various male characters in the Ormond Bar broadens the rhythmic and melodic range of the episode's variations on the subject. Though 'the seductions of music' are indeed represented in the subject matter of many of the refrains, the primary purpose of these refrains is musical: to evoke and to create a seductive verbal music through the contrapuntal interrelation of the fugal 'voices'. Joyce, in creating exaggerated sound-forms out of language, makes us hear rather than understand language.

Meanwhile, if the nature of the fugue form itself includes what Percy Scholes defines as a general wandering of the various voices around various already established motifs,⁷⁸ 'Sirens' literalises this both in the form of conversations, and in the actual wanderings of the various characters as they come and go from the bar. Spatial distance, however, does not prevent the refrains of, for example, Bloom and Boylan intertwining – 'Jingle. Bloo' – or the tapping of the blind stripling's cane

⁷⁸ Percy A. Scholes. *The Oxford Companion to Music*, tenth edition, ed. John Owen Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) 376.

from providing percussive accompaniment to the bar-room sounds. Physical reality in such cases is clearly subordinated to musical structure, and indeed distance in space is manipulated for musical ends: as sounds are articulated simultaneously from different places, so the different sounds from different environments can be heard together, producing spatial (rather than merely tonal) chords.

Scholes describes the return home from the wanderings of the fugue as ‘the piece veers round to the original key’.⁷⁹ Key is, as I have already intimated, impossible to define here, due to the different functions of pitch in language. Home can, however, be recognised in the recurrence of the most important and most seductive of the refrains: ‘Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing’ (U 11.1). This phrase reappears consistently throughout the chapter in various guises; it is the most evocative description of the siren-barmaids, and is thus the central controlling force in the, at times, apparently untraceable forms of ‘Sirens’. So this refrain, the first line of the chapter, reappears at the end, bringing the tonal and rhythmic focus back to the barmaids:

Near bronze from anear near gold from afar they chinked their clinking glasses all, brighteyed and gallant, before bronze Lydia’s tempting last rose of summer, rose of Castille. (U 11.1269-71)

The rest of the company are then drawn into the refrain in an imitation of the Tonic sol-fa:

First Lid, De, Cow, Ker, Doll, a fifth: Lidwell, Si Dedalus, Bob Cowley, Kernan and Big Ben Dollard. (U 11.1271-2)

The company, seduced by the Sirens, are transformed into the notes of the central siren-refrain; the musical return incorporates all the characters present in the bar. Their musical dehumanisation is then followed by the percussive ‘Tap’ of the blind stripling; blind to the charms of Lydia and Mina – ‘He saw not bronze. He saw not

⁷⁹ Scholes 376.

gold' (U 11.1281-2) – his sound is not incorporated into the refrain. Bloom, outside the Ormond Bar, is similarly excluded from the music; his phrase thus provides a melody in counterpoint to that of the Sirens, retaining its characteristic Bloom-sounds and remaining separate from feminine seduction: 'Bloom viewed a gallant pictured hero' (U 11.1274). His interest is focused, not on the Sirens, but on the portrait of Robert Emmet: the temptations of feminine sexuality have been replaced with a very masculine world of political heroism. The final part of the chapter then continues after the harmonic return home: the presence of the blind tuner and Bloom, separate from Mina and Lydia's besotted company, leads into the irreverent coda of Bloom's fart, a noise which in its percussive finality, marks Bloom's resistance to seduction.

The 'subject' of the fugue is sung in a variety of different voices which interact in a complex contrapuntal form. And, as the verbal subject is, in Joyce's words, 'the seductions of music', so this also provides the fugal 'subject' around which the voices revolve. What 'Sirens' is 'about' is thus enacted both on the referential and formal levels. The language itself is performative: the subject is enacted in the telling.

The decontextualised refrains of the overture, then, rather than merely providing a melodic introduction to 'Sirens', encapsulate the very nature of language in this chapter. Retrospectively, with very careful reading, we can recontextualise each refrain and restore its significance; to a certain extent this is true of *Ulysses* as a whole, which requires a certain level of investigative and intertextual study for fuller appreciation and understanding of the text. The recuperability of referentiality in the chapter, our ability to piece together the events that are taking place of course indicates that 'Sirens' does signify, and quite precisely, given enough careful

reading – Gifford and Seidman, for example, are even able to provide specific addresses, as well as explaining the source references for the most slight or fragmented of allusions. And yet such precise evaluative reading, though inevitable from a scholarly perspective (it is of course necessary to refer to what happens and who is being described at any particular moment), is highly problematic: it is only through reduced referentiality that the words *sound*, and it is only thus that the music of the chapter is expressed in language. To attempt to restore the full allusive significance of ‘Sirens’, or indeed of any part of *Ulysses*, is to attempt to restore a more stable referential function to Joyce’s language: if we treat the text as a puzzle to be deciphered, we make explicit the meaning that should remain latent, in the process distracting our attention from language as a material presence, and hence from some of the more significant effects of Joyce’s prose. In the case of ‘Sirens’, such reading prevents us from realising (or indeed *hearing*) the full impact of the chapter’s musical effects. As verbal notation, ‘Sirens’ is, as we have seen, extremely faulty: different levels of significance *are* embedded within the text, but it takes great effort to work out what is actually ‘happening’ in the scene, and even then, our picture remains at times incomplete. The language of the chapter is also imperfect as musical notation: though there have been numerous, often fascinating, attempts to decipher proper musical melody and rhythm from the text, the lack of agreement between critics on this point seems to indicate that Joyce’s words do not work as musical notation.⁸⁰ However distorted they may be, these words nevertheless signify verbally. Music cannot be accurately written in words: musical notation is a precise and arbitrary code which works very differently to verbal notation. Joyce’s words in ‘Sirens,’ as I have demonstrated, are about music by

⁸⁰ For a selection of musical readings, see, for example, *Bronze by Gold*.

manipulating the sounds of language such that they imitate the effects of music: language here works both as verbal representation and (textual) musical performance. Joyce thus constructs a pseudo-semantic function from estranged language. If we try to pinpoint a field of precise referentiality and to restore the referential function to the language of 'Sirens', we in fact impede the chapter's pseudo-semantic as well as its authentic syntactic effects – we prevent ourselves from 'hearing' the language's textual performance of music.

'Sirens' is very closely related to language throughout *Ulysses*. The main features of linguistic estrangement – semantic ambiguity and linguistic materiality – which form the basis of Joyce's multilingual aesthetic, are intensified to such a degree that this episode in many ways embodies the general iconicity of Joyce's language. In 'Proteus', as I have shown, the semantic distortions of interlingual communication are productively harnessed to produce multilingual complementarity and a language that can iconically reflect protean flux. A form of referentiality is thus recuperated via the language's iconic performance of meaning. In 'Proteus' this language is explicitly multilingual; in 'Sirens' it is through quasi-musical processes that Joyce hybridises language – hence the referential function of language is replaced by a more abstract, *affective* (pseudo-musical) aesthetic. Iconicity is a significant feature of language throughout *Ulysses*: in 'Aeolus', the scene at the newspaper office is reflected in journalistic language and newspaper format, in 'Oxen of the Sun', the gestation of the foetus is mirrored in the development of different styles of language over the ages, in 'Wandering Rocks' the narrative itself wanders from character to character, and so on. As I have demonstrated, linguistic estrangement also produces iconicity on more local levels, in the formal performance of individual words or phrases. As Beckett noted of the *Work in*

Progress: '[h]is writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*.'⁸¹ It is clear that this is also the case for *Ulysses*.

I have cited Beckett's perception of simultaneity in the *Work in Progress* and indicated its relevance to 'Sirens'. Simultaneity is also, however, a crucial feature of linguistic estrangement elsewhere in *Ulysses*: the overdetermination of 'imperthnthn', for example, enacts a form of referential simultaneity that is reflected in overdetermination throughout the novel. The spatial 'chords' of 'Sirens' are created from the interposition of refrains from different characters in different places; a very similar process occurs in 'Wandering Rocks' where every section occurs simultaneously, but presents different places, characters and situations. Where different perspectives of the same incidents are presented, processes of complementarity are particularly apparent. Nevertheless, the repetition of allusive refrains also creates a system of echoes within the text that function as more oblique referential 'chords': this occurs wherever a word or phrase recalls another part of the text or brings to mind one of Joyce's many intertexts. Joyce's inter- and intratextuality is dislocutionary; it causes 'a process of instantaneous mental dislocation, substitution, transposition'⁸² whereby we are made to 'translate' words and events into other contexts. The process is also, of course, associative; the disjunctive effects of Joyce's language often override the carefully ordered nature of many of the intertexts of *Ulysses*. As André Topia argues, in *Ulysses* '[o]n a affaire en effet à un texte éminemment organisé, fortement codé et programmé jusque dans ses plus petites unités, mais dont la loi d'organisation a été soigneusement camouflée par une fragmentation et même un concassage systématiques.' Joyce 'met soigneusement en place aux endroits stratégiques d'insidieuses discordances,

⁸¹ Samuel Beckett, 'Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce.' *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, ed. Samuel Beckett et al (London: Faber and Faber, 1929) 14.

⁸² Melchiori 5.

les accole les unes aux autres dans un montage par juxtaposition et en fait le véhicule privilégié du sens.’⁸³ The supplementarity of words and music in ‘Sirens’ recalls the inter- and intralingual supplementarity that is crucial to *Ulysses* both on an overall structural level (as in the supplementarity of the different ‘languages’ of the chapters), and in individual cases of overdetermination. But the difficulty of ‘Sirens’ also demonstrates the semantically discordant effects of such associative processes. Joyce’s language works through its dislocations: interlingual supplementarity, as well as the presence of heterogeneity in intertextuality, works not to stabilise meaning, but to allow for the constant presence of a diversity of different signifying systems that are not quite brought into order: they are not translated into any single comprehensible (and monologic) discourse.

From the child-language of *Portrait* to the linguistic virtuosity of *Ulysses*, then, we can perceive the textual effects of linguistic estrangement. Foreignness from language results not only in an awareness of language as a surface arbitrary system, but also produces a perspective that requires language to contain alterity and that attempts to make inadequate language signify more effectively. If Stephen’s sense of the foreignness of English indicates the inadequacy of that language to express his – and the Irish writer’s – experience, it is also that very perspective which enables him to defamiliarise English in a way that is semantically productive. Bakhtin writes that, in a multilingual context, ‘completely new relationships are established between language and its object.’⁸⁴ Joycean language does not allow the

⁸³ ‘We are dealing with a text that is highly organized, firmly coded and programmed down to its most minute units, but whose organizational law has been carefully camouflaged by systematic fragmentation and even pulverization.’ Joyce ‘carefully places insidious discordances at strategic spots, gathers them together in a montage by juxtaposition and makes this the privileged vehicle of meaning.’ André Topia, ‘Contrepoints joyciens,’ *Poétique* 27 (1976): 354; ‘The matrix and the echo: Intertextuality in *Ulysses*,’ trans. Elizabeth Bell and André Topia, *Post-Structuralist Joyce* 106-7.

⁸⁴ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 12.

reader to indulge in the illusion of untroubled referentiality. Nevertheless, the languages of *Ulysses* do demonstrate the validity of Bakhtin's claim: the forms of iconic and performative signification that we find in the novel make direct use of the multilingual's sense of linguistic materiality and semantic ambiguity, and use this linguistic perspective to construct different modes of signification. The resultant language works simultaneously to emphasise its own arbitrariness, and, paradoxically, to create textual effects that are so semantically productive that they at times even induce an illusion of intensified referentiality. In *Ulysses*, however, no single language or discourse, no matter how defamiliarised, iconic or overdetermined, is adequate. Processes of complementarity are thus enacted throughout the novel, either by combining different languages, or by altering one language such that it signifies excessively, through overdetermination or through the combination of, for example, phonetic and referential effects. *Ulysses* is in many ways a small-scale version of Mallarmé's modernist orchestra: its individual voices themselves estrange language in order to become more expressive, while the novel as a whole is constructed from the complex complementarity of all its different voices.

CHAPTER 2: SAMUEL BECKETT

Mais cet innombrable babillage, comme
d'une foule qui chuchote? Je ne
comprends pas.

– *Malone meurt*

Joyce's multilingualism is essentially redemptive: he turns linguistic ambiguity, misunderstanding and misuse into a form of multilingual supplementarity which ultimately renders language more effective. If Stephen's sense of the foreignness of language is fundamental to the Irish writer's need to reconstruct and reconfigure language to signify more effectively, Beckett's use of French serves the opposite purpose. For Beckett, the only linguistic certainty is a failure to signify; he thus makes language work in the only way it can: through that failure. It is impossible to ignore the importance of Beckett's bilingualism to this art of failure. *Molloy*, Beckett's first work in French to be published, marks the beginning of that period of extraordinary productivity, from 1946 to 1950, which sees the writing of some of his most famous work – all initially written in French.¹ Even before this explicit use of a foreign language, Beckett is using Gallicisms in *Watt* to increase the strangeness of his language;² it is in the Trilogy, however, that he makes most effective and consistent use of the foreigner's perspective on language.

In Beckett's last English language novel before his turn to French, the incomprehension indicated by Watt's name is reflected in this character's consistent sense of exclusion from language as a signifying system. Watt's 'need of semantic

¹ Ruby Cohn writes that, in this period, Beckett produced 'four stories, four novels, six poems, two plays, thirteen texts, and some art criticism. All in French.' Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973) 58.

² John Fletcher points to several Gallicisms, some of which he concludes to be accidental. See John Fletcher, 'Ecrivain bilingue,' in Tom Bishop and Raymond Federman, eds., *Cahier de L'Herne: Samuel Beckett* (Paris: L'Herne, 1976) 203. For a more conclusive and comprehensive study of the full importance of Gallicisms in *Watt*, see Anne Beer, 'Watt, Knott and Beckett's Bilingualism,' *Journal of Beckett Studies* 10 (1985): 37-75 and Daniel Katz, *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999) 45-58.

succour'³ has been often noted by critics. But what is remarkable about Beckett's work is not so much his representation of characters' externality to and lack of faith in language, but his attempts to destroy the very language by which his characters' incomprehension could be represented. Watt's verbal crisis is by definition unrepresentable: 'And the state in which Watt found himself resisted formulation in a way no state had ever done' (W 78). The attempt to represent this linguistic unease, then, produces that paradoxical and impossible project which characterises Beckett's oeuvre: the aim to write to destroy language. This project is also, of course, impossible to comprehend or to explain in language. Beckett provides us with the clearest explanation of his artistic aims in his letter to Axel Kaun:

Hoffentlich kommt die Zeit [...] wo die Sprache da am besten gebraucht wird, wo sie am tüchtigsten missbraucht wird. Da wir sie so mit einem Male nicht ausschalten können, wollen wir wenigstens nichts versäumen, was zu ihrem Verruf beitragen mag. Ein Loch nach dem andern in ihr zu bohren, bis das Dahinterkauernde, sei es etwas oder nichts, durchzusickern anfängt – ich kann mir für den heutigen Schriftsteller kein höheres Ziel vorstellen.⁴

This pronouncement is still heavily relied upon by critics, however, for precisely the same reason that Beckett himself later denounced it as 'German bilge'⁵: it explains linguistic failure in terms that are clear and comprehensible – far too clear, in fact, to be consistent with Beckett's aims.

It is this kind of clarity that Beckett's work increasingly avoids: he moves away from portraying difficulty with language towards a far more nihilistic linguistic ideal – that of attempting to bring the tools of his art (words) closer to what they represent (the failure of words). His systematic estrangement of language

³ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (London: John Calder, 1976) 79. (All subsequent references to *Watt* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'W').

⁴ 'Let us hope the time will come [...] when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused. As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.' Samuel Beckett, 'letter to Axel Kaun,' *Disjecta*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: Calder, 1983) 52; trans Martin Esslin 171-2.

⁵ Beckett, *Disjecta* 170.

thus becomes increasingly focused on the process of emptying words of meaning. This trajectory eventually leads him to turn away from fiction, exploring other, dramatic, forms of art: wordless plays such as *Souffle* or *Acts Without Words*, and radio plays which emphasise the artificiality of represented sounds and use their purely aural form to foreground silence, or which place music in dialogue with words (*Cascando* and *Words and Music*). At the centre of this endeavour to bring disrepute upon language, and in the middle of his literary career, is the Trilogy – three novels: *Molloy*, *Malone meurt* and *L’Innommable* – whose trajectory presents, in microcosm, Beckett’s increasingly intensive endeavour to both represent and enact verbal disintegration; a verbose nihilism which, to steal Molloy’s pun, could best be defined as a process of *décomposition*.⁶

Estrangement from language is itself a theme within the Trilogy. Molloy tells us that ‘J’ai oublié l’orthographe aussi, et la moitié des mots’ (M 8), which translates into English as a general difficulty with language: ‘I’ve forgotten how to spell too, and half the words’.⁷ In the French text of the Trilogy, however, linguistic difficulty is more specifically related to the fact that the narrators are actually writing or speaking in a foreign language: at one moment of linguistic crisis Molloy exclaims ‘Quelle langue’ (M 15) while Malone describes the language in which he is writing as ‘votre langue’.⁸ This refers specifically to the French language, as is made clear by the English translation, which transforms Molloy’s exclamation into ‘What rigmarole’ (T 13) and omits Malone’s ‘votre langue’ altogether. Even Moran,

⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (Paris: Minuit, 1951) 32. (All subsequent references to *Molloy* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation ‘M’).

⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Calder, 1994) 8. (All subsequent references to Beckett’s Trilogy in English will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation ‘T’).

⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Malone meurt* (Paris: Minuit, 1951) 46. (All subsequent references to *Malone meurt* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation ‘MM’).

who is using his mother tongue, signals, by the end of his narrative, the importance of a language that is not his own:

J'ai parlé d'une voix qu me disait ceci et cela. [...] Elle ne se servait pas des mots qu'on avait appris au petit Moran, que lui à son tour avait appris à son petit. De sorte que je ne savais pas d'abord ce qu'elle voulait. Mais j'ai fini par comprendre ce langage. Je l'ai compris, je le comprends, de travers peut-être.⁹ (M 238)

L'Innommable, in keeping with his more advanced state of linguistic degeneration, refers most frequently to the foreignness of 'cette langue morte des vivants',¹⁰ talking of his words as being in 'une langue qui n'est pas la mienne' (I 33). The sense of alienation from language which pervades the Trilogy is of course not confined to the experience of a foreign language, so that the Unnamable still speaks of 'a tongue that is not mine' (T 308). Nevertheless, it is most explicit – and can therefore be best understood – in the context of the foreigner's relationship to language, the importance of which is of course confirmed by Beckett's own choice of French as his initial language of composition.¹¹

Stephen Dedalus in the 'Eumaeus' chapter of *Ulysses* tells Bloom that 'sounds are impostures' (U 16.362), a pronouncement which is directly related to the experience of hearing a foreign language, but which hints at the potential for deception inherent in all language. Molloy at times hears language 'comme des sons purs, libres de toute signification' (M 66),¹² an experience which quite literally corresponds to the perception of a foreign language. In Joyce, such a phonetically-

⁹ 'I have spoken of a voice telling me things. [...] It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in his turn had taught to his little one. So that at first I did not know what it wanted. But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understand it, all wrong perhaps.' (T 176)

¹⁰ Samuel Beckett, *L'Innommable* (Paris: Minuit, 1953) 85. (All subsequent references to *L'Innommable* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'I').

¹¹ Beckett's practice of writing in French and translating his own work back into English can be seen as a means of estranging himself from his own language. Apart from *Molloy*, which he translated in collaboration with the South African writer Patrick Bowles, Beckett translated the Trilogy from French into English himself.

¹² 'as pure sounds, free of all meaning' (T 50).

bound and non-referential perception of words forms the basis of a reconfiguration of language: referential instability is used, ultimately, to make words work more effectively, through complex forms of complementary overdetermination or through the performativity of musical language in 'Sirens.' Joyce's language, Beckett tells us, moves towards 'ein Apotheose des Wortes'¹³; Beckett's own work, on the other hand, seeks not only to portray but also to embody Molloy's state of incomprehension, and thus to attain the foreigner's experience of language as 'des sons purs, libres de toute signification'.

The effect of Beckett's prose in the Trilogy is, increasingly, to render language foreign to the reader and to withhold meaning, so that we find ourselves focusing on the words more as material entities, as patterned sound, than as signifiers. In *L'Innommable*, where language is most effectively materialised in this way, the effect is extremely disorientating: whereas in Joyce's 'Sirens' such language is explicitly musical, in *L'Innommable* the sound-forms made by repetition and phonetic patterning (though also implicitly related to musical form) provide as little satisfaction to our aesthetic sensibility as they do to our desire for meaning. The reason for this is that, according to Beckett, our aesthetic sensibility is closely linked to that desire for meaning. 'The history of painting,' he tells us, 'is the history of its attempts to escape from this sense of failure [of representation], by means of more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee'.¹⁴ We could also attribute such 'estheticized automatism'¹⁵ to other art-forms, and literature in particular; indeed his words on what painting should aim for instead are extremely relevant to his own linguistic project:

¹³ 'an apotheosis of the word'. Beckett, *Disjecta* 52; trans. Martin Esslin 172.

¹⁴ Beckett, *Disjecta* 145.

¹⁵ Beckett, *Disjecta* 145.

All that should concern us is the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself [between representer and representee], as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all that it excludes, all that it blinds to.¹⁶

Beckett's language, which both signals and is formed by its own inadequacy, thus de-automatises not only the relationship between signifier and signified, but also our own aesthetic impulses.

Such a deliberate project of linguistic estrangement is literalised in Beckett's choice of French: a foreigner is inevitably distanced from the signifying systems and cultural contexts of language, so in writing in a foreign language, he de-automatises his linguistic impulses. Contrasting himself with Joyce, Beckett purportedly stated that '[t]he kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material.'¹⁷ Lack of mastery is not artistic inadequacy, however; language, as Beckett sees it, cannot be mastered, and to attempt to do so would be merely to succumb to 'estheticized automatism'. To write in a foreign language serves to prevent any illusion of linguistic mastery. Read in this light, Beckett's oft-quoted words to Niklaus Gessner – that in French 'c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style'¹⁸ – make perfect sense, indicating, quite simply, Beckett's attempt to avoid an impulse to aestheticise language. As he once remarked to Richard Coe, the problem with writing in English was that 'you couldn't help writing poetry in it.'¹⁹ Of course, as has been noted by many critics, Beckett's French is by no means written without style – what *is* apparent, however, is the extreme unconventionality of Beckett's style: it is

¹⁶ Beckett, *Disjecta* 145.

¹⁷ Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters,' *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) 148. Beckett himself cast doubts upon the reliability of this article as, apparently, no interview took place at all. However, I agree with S.E. Gontarski's affirmation that 'the observations seem so accurate, so Beckettian, that it is difficult to believe that Shenker's information has no merit.' S.E. Gontarski, 'Samuel Beckett, James Joyce's "Illstarred Punster",' *The Seventh of Joyce*, ed. Bernard Benstock (Bloomington: Indiana University Press / Brighton: Harvester, 1982) 31.

¹⁸ 'it's easier to write without style'. Cited in Cohn, *Back to Beckett* 58.

¹⁹ Richard Coe, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1964) 14.

deliberately distanced from any linguistic traditions where stylishness and rhetoric are used to reinforce meaning.

In distancing himself from traditions of stylistic elegance, Beckett consistently frustrates our aesthetic expectations, and his style tends more towards inelegance than poetry – a tendency entirely in keeping with the hope, expressed to Axel Kaun, for a time ‘wo die Sprache da am besten gebraucht wird, wo sie am tüchtigsten missbraucht wird.’²⁰ Again, the desire to misuse language is directly linked to Beckett’s French. Joyce’s ‘Eumaeus’ chapter is not only concerned with the misunderstanding of foreign languages; it also directly relates the misuse of foreign languages to stylistic inelegance. In Beckett, the foreigner’s linguistic inelegance is related to a distance from the stylistic traditions of that language. Even more significant, however, is the foreigner’s natural tendency to make mistakes, which appears in the prose in the form of Anglicisms and other errors traceable to the author’s – and the narrator’s – estrangement from the language of composition. Critics have often attributed Beckett’s Anglicisms to unintentional linguistic clumsiness, though others have noted the possible functions of such ‘mistakes.’ Steven Connor, for example, writing about Beckett’s later translations of the early works *Mercier et Camier* and *Premier amour* into English, suggests that Gallicisms in the English translations are perhaps ‘Beckett’s grim revenge on himself for the embarrassing Anglicisms to be found in his early French work.’²¹ It would seem more likely, however, that these Gallicisms simply translate the intended estranging effect of hybridised language. As John Fletcher observes of *Watt*, though it is difficult to ascertain whether some Gallicisms are intentional or the products of unconscious linguistic interference, others are actively foregrounded in the text and

²⁰ ‘when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused.’ Beckett, *Disjecta* 52; trans. Martin Esslin 171-2.

²¹ Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition. Theory and Text* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988) 108.

therefore seem to serve a deliberate function.²² Ludovic Janvier, commenting on Beckett's French, describes 'la permanence de l'anglais et peut-être du gaélique dans la maîtrise du nouveau langage'²³; certainly, in the context of Beckett's desire to estrange language in the Trilogy, the Irishness of his French is extremely important, not least as a means of defamiliarising the French language even for the French reader.

Writing in French was also a means of deliberately disadvantaging himself linguistically. As he told Janvier:

A la libération, je pus conserver mon appartement, j'y revins, et me remis à écrire – en français – avec le désir de m'appauvrir davantage. C'était ça le vrai mobile.²⁴

Such reasoning seems to be behind another of the comments that Beckett made, when asked the question of why he turned to French: 'Pour faire remarquer moi.'²⁵ That Beckett speaks in deliberately bad French here has led some critics to dismiss the comment as merely 'facetious'²⁶ or 'a joke'²⁷; at the very least, however, it reflects the nature of Beckett's chosen linguistic obstacle – that the poverty of his French in relation to his English might actually be the point. Michael Edwards signals the importance of such playfully incorrect language:

He speaks pidgin French here as if to indicate, in a way very much his own, that French written by a foreigner, were it even impeccably correct, is not the same thing as French written by a Frenchman. Without moving in the least, the words change meaning. Beckett's French is not French.²⁸

²² Fletcher 263.

²³ 'the persistent presence of English and perhaps of Gaelic in his command of the new language.' Ludovic Janvier, *Pour Samuel Beckett* (Paris: Minuit, 1966) 227.

²⁴ 'After liberation, I was able to keep my apartment, to which I returned, and began writing again – in French – with the intention of further impoverishing myself. That was the real motive.' Cited in Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 37.

²⁵ Cited in Cohn, *Back to Beckett* 58.

²⁶ Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1962) 95.

²⁷ James Acheson, *Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice: Criticism, Drama and Early Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) 80.

²⁸ Michael Edwards, 'Beckett's French,' *Translation and Literature* 1 (1992): 69.

This is certainly important; closer examination of Beckett's jokingly bad French, however, reveals a further dimension of formal meaning and perhaps even provides the fullest answer given by Beckett to this question. The phrase 'pour faire remarquer moi' is an incorrect rendition of 'pour me faire remarquer' – 'to get myself noticed.' Taken at face value, such a statement would indeed be rather dismissive. And yet, if we look closely at the effect of such linguistic misuse, what becomes apparent is that the word 'moi' is foregrounded by its position at the end of the sentence; it is also a more emphatic personal pronoun than the correct 'me.'²⁹ The overall effect of this grammatical deviation, then, is to get the *word* 'moi' noticed. Beckett is thus making the words work performatively: as he tells us that he wants to be noticed, he makes the word for himself particularly noticeable.

Beckett tells Axel Kaun of the 'efficiency' of linguistic misuse, which is of course a contradiction in terms. And yet the sentence 'pour faire remarquer moi' itself embodies an extreme efficiency of expression. Not only does it express his irreverence for the French language and the importance of his misuse of that language, it also demonstrates how linguistic misuse can make words work materially as well as referentially. The paradox here is that Beckett is making language signify its own inadequacy. On the one hand, the language performs what it signifies, so that the grammatical deviation reinforces what the words purport to say. On the other hand, this intensified linguistic materiality itself destabilises referentiality: we perceive the words and their form over what they signify, while the accuracy of verbal representation is also called into doubt through the apparent and emphasised misuse of language – our instinct is to doubt that the foreigner is actually saying what he wants to say.

²⁹ 'Moi' is often used as an emphatic supplement to 'je', as in, for example, 'moi, je veux y aller.' literally: 'me, I want to go there.'

In addition to this extremely effective performance of meaninglessness is an emphasis on the linguistic expression of self. On the surface, the misuse of the word 'moi' indicates the speaking subject's difficulty with language; the misused language thus contains the struggle between the foreigner's desire to express himself and the inadequate words he must use to do so. But the increased materiality of the word precludes any automatic faith in its ability to signify at all, so that 'moi' signifies a self emphatically *in language* rather than an individual using that language. The word 'moi', thus emphasised, seems to supersede the notion of any self existing external to language and to whom that language is or seems foreign.

It is through Beckett's use of French that he can most explicitly problematise the expression of the self in language. The arbitrariness of language means that the linguistic subject is inevitably an artificial construct by which it is impossible to express the individual consciousness: 'I' is a collective notion used by every one of us to denote ourselves, and it is thus by definition inadequate to express individuality. Beckett's phrase 'pour faire remarquer moi' foregrounds the word for the self – moi – through the misuse of that word: the phrase both presents language *as language* and, through its flagrant misuse of that language, prevents us from trusting the semantic accuracy of those words. Moreover, the arbitrariness of 'I' is much more obvious in a foreign language: l'Innommable expresses his intent to 'Dire je. Sans le penser.' (I 7) – this is much easier to do when 'je' is, literally, a foreign word. As a result, the English Unnamable must speak 'I' differently: 'I, say I. Unbelieving.' (T 293). 'I' must be repeated in order to emphasise its tangible presence as a *word*, and to prevent any illusions of unproblematic signification of the self.

It is significant that *Molloy*, Beckett's first published work in French, is also his first novel to be written in the first person; Beckett also continues to make use of the first person narrative throughout the Trilogy. He manipulates his own distance from the French language in order to further estrange it, but his characters are also speaking or writing in a foreign language. The Irishness of the characters of the Trilogy decreases as characterisation itself is increasingly called into question, but consistent Anglicisms, references to English measurements and Irish-sounding place-names remind us that their difficulties with language are related to the foreignness of that language.

Molloy's trouble with French at one point directly reflects his sense of distance from the linguistic subject. He stumbles over a point of grammar which is a classic cause of confusion for the Anglophone:

ce n'est pas la peine que je prolonge le récit de cette tranche *de ma, mon, de mon existence*, car elle n'a pas de signification, à mon sens. (M 74, my emphasis)

'Existence,' a feminine noun, must be preceded by 'mon' rather than 'ma' because it begins with a vowel. Molloy gets it right in the end, but it is significant that Beckett highlights such difficulty with French grammar, which in English becomes a more general form of hesitation over words:

But it is useless to drag out this chapter of *my, how shall I say, my existence*, for it has no sense, to my mind. (T 56, my emphasis)

In both cases, the doubt over how to express his existence is directly related to the inability of the abstract and general term 'existence' to express Molloy's own experience: the repetitive insistence of the possessive pronoun – 'de ma, mon, de mon' / 'my, how shall I say, my' – both indicates his emphatic attempt to assert individual experience and the impossibility of expressing that experience in a collective – and alien – language. Such efficient misuse of language, directly

produced by the foreigner's hesitation over unfamiliar syntax, signifies not only Molloy's difficulty with language, but also the extent to which the 'subject' is a grammatical term and subjectivity is a linguistic construct.

Proper names are rendered just as arbitrary as are abstract linguistic terms of identity, culminating in the unnamed and unnameable speaker of the last part of the Trilogy. Just as 'je' estranges narrators from their Irish identity, so also Irish names are made strange in the context of the French language. The arbitrariness of Molloy's own name is emphasised through events in the novel. Questioned by a policeman, Molloy seems to make up his name on the spot:

Et tout d'un coup je me rappelai mon nom, Molloy. Je m'appelle Molloy, m'écriai-je, tout à trac, Molloy, ça me revient à l'instant.³⁰ (M 28-9)

But it is the very presence of 'Molloy' amidst French words which most effectively defamiliarises that name. As Leslie Hill writes:

The effect of the name as a title, as *Molloy*, on the first page of a text written in French is something no other language can render. It opens up, within French, a space of strangeness, a pocket of otherness, a borderline with Irish English, which suddenly begins to exist in 'French'.³¹

The Irishness of 'Molloy' makes the surrounding French language seem strange, but the French language also turns this extremely common Irish name into something strange, making us focus on its phonetic and lexical presence, and preventing it from working *as a name*.

English and French thus work against each other in the text: each language estranges the other. Such is the effect of many of the Anglicisms in the French text of the Trilogy – the persistence of English Imperial measurements and English currency throughout all three novels is a particularly striking example of this. In *Molloy* we find shillings, 'livres', 'milles' (miles) and pennies (M 192-3), Malone

³⁰ 'And suddenly I remembered my name, Molloy. My name is Molloy. I cried, all of a sudden, now I remember.' (T 23)

³¹ Hill, *Beckett's Fiction* 53.

translates inches into ‘pouces’³² (MM 112), l’Innommable speaks of Malone orbiting ‘à trois pieds de moi’³³ (I 20), and Macmann in the asylum is offered ‘une demi-pinte impériale de porter’³⁴ (MM 136). The effect of the English words in the French text is similar to the ‘pocket of otherness’ produced by Irish names. Where inches and feet have been translated into French, however, that strangeness is intensified, emphasising the presence of measurements which would normally be invisible to a native English speaker. The French reader is apt to find these measurements faintly ridiculous or comic – certainly, they will stand out as particularly arbitrary words – while for the Anglophone reader the effect is to impart something of the French reader’s amused perspective. The effect of juxtaposing English, French and Irish words is to make us perceive them differently: we read each language from a different perspective, to peculiar effect. Bakhtin writes that ‘[l]anguages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language.’³⁵ In Beckett, the interrelationship of English and French causes us to perceive language in a certain light: the material presence of words is clarified and our metalinguistic focus is sharpened, and yet the result is not of any referential clarity, but rather of further estranging words from their referents – in the above examples, we focus more on the words for the measurements than the measurements themselves.

The mutual estrangement of Irish English and French in the text is itself mirrored in the overall structural duality of *Molloy*: Jacques Moran, whose ‘report’ provides the second half of the novel, is French, and is therefore writing in his

³² The French word for ‘inches’ literally means ‘thumbs’.

³³ ‘at a distance of say three feet’ (T 301).

³⁴ ‘an imperial half-pint of porter’ (T 257).

³⁵ M.M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 12.

mother tongue.³⁶ It is characteristic of the Trilogy's complexity, however, that any notions of 'foreignness' or 'at-homeness' are themselves problematised: Molloy, though apparently Irish and living in a place that resembles Ireland, writes in French. Moran, on the other hand, though a French native speaker, lives in the same country as Molloy, uses Imperial measurements and pays for things in pounds. Molloy is 'at home' but linguistically displaced, while Moran, though apparently abroad, acts and speaks as if he were in his native country. Moran's initial attitude to language is accordingly confident: he is unaware of the arbitrariness of his own language, and is sure of the effectiveness of naming and categorisation: 'Je m'appelle Moran, Jacques. On m'appelle ainsi.'³⁷ (M 125) He is strangely untroubled by the fact that his son shares the same name, asserting that '[ç]a ne peut pas prêter à confusion.'³⁸ (M 125) The name 'Jacques Moran', by referring to two completely separate people, advertises its own arbitrariness – which is, of course, the nature of all names; Moran, however, completely ignores the paradoxical nature of collective naming. This sense of linguistic security is characteristic of his monolingual perspective.

Moran's blind belief in the economy of sharing names also corresponds to his dislike of linguistic excess: if language is not doubted, there is no need for rhetoric or embellishment. Confessing to his occasional tendency towards obscenity in language, he writes that '[i]l me semblait que tout langage est un écart de langage'

³⁶ Phil Baker notes an interesting possible source for the name 'Moran', observing that '[f]or many young Dubliners early this century the name of "Moran" must have been almost synonymous with acquiring the French language, because it was the name of an immensely successful Dublin French primer, *French Grammar and Composition*, by J.A. Moran'. Baker notes that this book was reprinted several times, with over 195,000 copies having been printed by 1919. As he concludes, 'it would be difficult for the privileged minority who learned French to do so without being exposed to a copy of Moran.' (Phil Baker, 'Beckett's Bilingualism and a Possible Source for the Name of Moran in *Molloy*,' *Journal of Beckett Studies* 3.2 [Spring 1994]: 81). Though Beckett could not have intended readers of *Molloy* to recognise the source of the name, it nevertheless opens up another layer of interplay between Irish and French in the text: Moran is not merely a Frenchman, but is associated with the learning of French by Irish students.

³⁷ 'My name is Moran, Jacques. That is the name I am known by.' (T 92)

³⁸ 'This cannot lead to confusion.' (T 92)

(M 158) – faith in linguistic simplicity makes all words seem excessive; or, as the English Moran puts it, ‘[i]t seemed to me that all language was an excess of language’ (T 116). But in Moran’s very words are the seeds of his subsequent linguistic disintegration: the phrase ‘*écarts de langage*’ means ‘strong language,’ but as the English translation emphasises, it also hints at the distance (*écart*) of words from what they name. By referring to two things at once, the phrase embodies the linguistic excess that it signifies. Moreover, obscenities themselves are deliberately non-signifying exclamations which rarely hold any relevance to their literal meanings. As Kristeva writes, obscene words, explicitly abstracted from objective referents, ‘ont une fonction analogue au découpage de la syntaxe par le rythme: fonction de *désémantisation*. [...] Rien de mieux qu’un mot obscène pour entendre les limites d’un linguistique phénoménologique face à l’architectonique hétérogène complexe de la signifiante.’³⁹ Moran’s swearing thus brings him closer to Molloy’s semantic crisis, a difficulty with language which, taken to its extreme, leads l’Innommable, in a parody of Flaubertian linguistic precision, to claim ‘merde’ as just the word he has been looking for: ‘c’est comme de la merde, voilà enfin, le voilà enfin, le mot juste’⁴⁰ (I 131).

³⁹ Obscene words ‘exercise a *dese semanticization* function analogous to the fragmentation of syntax by rhythm. [...] There is nothing better than an obscene word for perceiving the limits of a phenomenological linguistics faced with the heterogeneous and complex architectonics of significance.’ Julia Kristeva, ‘D’une identité l’autre,’ *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977) 168; ‘From One Identity to an Other,’ *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) 142-3.

⁴⁰ ‘it’s like shit. there we have it at last, there it is at last, the right word’ (T 368). It is apt to note at this point that it is much easier to swear in a foreign language – the very distance from that language also incurs a certain freedom from the taboos related to certain words. This is apparent in Beckett’s use of French. Ruby Cohn observes that Beckett’s French translation of *Murphy* introduces a degree of vulgarity, colloquialism and obscenity that is absent from the English text. With Beckett’s translation of *Godot* into English, however, ‘in reversing the linguistic direction of *Murphy*, he also reversed his trend towards vulgarization and colloquialization.’ (Ruby Cohn, ‘Samuel Beckett Self-Translator,’ *PMLA* LXXVI [Dec 1961]: 613-4; 616). Ludovic Janvier, also noting the greater vulgarity of the French *Godot* than its English counterpart, remarks that Beckett, writing in French, throws himself into ‘[le] jeu libérateur du blasphème, de la scatologie, de l’ordure’ (‘the liberating game of blasphemy, scatology, filth’), *Pour Samuel Beckett* 227. Whether translating into or writing directly in French, it would seem, then, that the foreign language is scatologically liberating.

Moran, increasingly, perceives the arbitrariness (and heterogeneity) of language in general. Unlike his own name, 'Molloy' is literally foreign to him, and therefore parades its own arbitrariness. For the reader, 'Molloy' proclaims its otherness to the surrounding French words within the text; for Moran it becomes so foreign that its very syllables are alien and indistinct:

Ce que j'entendais, dans mon for intérieur sans doute, à l'acoustique si mauvaise, c'était une première syllabe, Mol, très nette, suivie presque aussitôt d'une seconde des plus cotonneuses, comme mangée par la première, et qui pouvait être oy comme elle pouvait être ose, ou ote, ou même oc. Et si je penchais pour ose, c'était probablement que mon esprit avait un faible pour cette finale, tandis que les autres n'y faisaient vibrer aucune corde.⁴¹ (M 153)

The different possible endings to 'Mol' even contain implicit references to the existence of different *French* languages – the *langue d'oc* and the *langue d'oy* or *oïe*. Beckett thus literalises Moran's nascent awareness of the foreignness of his own language by hinting at the existence of different languages and dialects within his mother tongue.

The name 'Molloy' is *literally* without a referent for Moran: it denotes a person of whom he knows almost nothing. And so, in addition to the instability of that word, Moran begins to realise that 'Molloy' is an imaginary construct without any basis in external reality:

Peut-être l'avais-je inventée, je veux dire trouvée toute faite dans ma tête.⁴² (M 152)

This awareness leads to a realisation that 'Molloy' actually exists in several different guises – each definition of 'Molloy' produces a different referent for the name:

Il y avait en somme trois, non, quatre Molloy. Celui de mes entrailles, la caricature que j'en faisais, celui de Gaber et celui qui, en chair et en os,

⁴¹ 'What I heard, in my soul I suppose, where the acoustics are so bad, was a first syllable, Mol, very clear, followed almost at once by a second, very thick, as though gobbled by the first, and which might have been oy as it might have been ose, or one, or even oc. And if I incline towards ose, it was doubtless that my mind had a weakness for this ending, whereas the others left it cold.' (T 113)

⁴² 'Perhaps I had invented him, I mean found him ready-made in my head.' (T 112)

m'attendais quelque part. [...] J'ajouterai [...] un cinquième Molloy, celui de Youdi. Mais ce cinquième Molloy ne se confondait-il pas forcément avec le quatrième, le vrai comme on dit, celui qui accompagne son ombre?⁴³ (M 156)

Several Molloys are created in language, though for Moran, Youdi still retains the power of non-arbitrary naming.⁴⁴ Such semantic perfection, however, is by now an unattainable ideal for Moran, whose sense of the strangeness of his own words is increasingly evident:

Prends ma main, dis-je. J'aurais pu dire, Donne ta main. Je dis, Prends ma main. Bizarre.⁴⁵ (M 173)

As he perceives the foreignness of his own language, so he also starts to estrange that language further: repetition and self-contradictions help to empty words of meaning, so that a simple phrase such as 'prends ma main' does indeed start to seem strange. Moran thus acknowledges the inevitable fate of language, which is to impose definition upon reality. Any pretence of verisimilitude is abandoned:

Et cela ne m'étonnerait pas que je m'écarte, dans les pages qui vont suivre, de la marche stricte et réelle des événements.⁴⁶ (M 181)

And Moran starts to speak to say nothing:

D'où Ballyba tirait-il donc son opulence? Je vais vous le dire. Non, je ne dirai rien. Rien.⁴⁷ (M 183)

The repetition of 'rien' here reminds us of the central paradox of the Trilogy: that language can only be destabilised and rendered meaningless through excessive verbosity. The act of actually expressing 'rien', of foregrounding the emptiness of

⁴³ 'The fact was there were three, no, four Molloys. He that inhabited me, my caricature of same, Gaber's and the man of flesh and blood somewhere awaiting me. [...] I will [...] add a fifth Molloy, that of Youdi. But would not this fifth Molloy necessarily coincide with the fourth, the real one as the saying is, him dogged by his shadow?' (T 115-6)

⁴⁴ Youdi's own name recalls Yehudah/God, as Gaber the messenger recalls the Angel Gabriel.

⁴⁵ 'Take my hand, I said. I might have said, Give me your hand. I said, Take my hand. Strange.' (T 127)

⁴⁶ 'And it would not surprise me if I deviated, in the pages to follow, from the true and exact succession of events.' (T 133)

⁴⁷ 'What then was the source of Ballyba's prosperity? I'll tell you. No, I'll tell you nothing. Nothing.' (T 135)

language, is in the above example carried out through two contradictory statements. 'Je vais vous le dire' and 'je ne dirai rien' which cancel each other out semantically. The final 'Rien' then in turn contradicts the preceding claim that he will say nothing. Instead of silence, 'rien' is emphatically present in words.

This process of making language speak its emptiness and silence can most aptly be described by Molloy's term *décomposition* – a term which, by containing both *composition* and its opposite, thus embodies the linguistic act whereby language paradoxically articulates its own disintegration:

C'est dans la tranquillité de la décomposition que je me rappelle cette longue émotion confuse que fut ma vie [...] Décomposer c'est vivre aussi [...] ⁴⁸
(M 32)

This passage inverts Wordsworth's description, in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, of the origin of poetry as 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' – a 'mood' in which 'successful composition generally begins'.⁴⁹ For Molloy, tranquil *decomposition* is the means of remembering the 'longue émotion confuse' that is his life (a *decomposition* which is also, of course, *composition* in the literal sense of Molloy's report). But *décomposition* also signifies Molloy's physical disintegration – the economy of the pun thus also contains this relationship between language and the body. This correlation of physical and linguistic disintegration is particularly apparent in Moran's report, where, as language increasingly fails to provide meaning and structure to his existence, so he gradually attains both the aphasia and physical state of Molloy. Moran's initial illusion of stable identity is imparted by naming. His construction of a succession of different imaginary Molloys in his report indicates his reliance upon language to create identity. His growing sense of the

⁴⁸ 'It is in the tranquillity of decomposition that I remember the long confused emotion which was my life [...] To decompose is to live too [...]' (T 25).

⁴⁹ William Wordsworth, 'Preface,' *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Michael Mason (London: Longman, 1992) 82.

strangeness of language and of unnamability becomes the source of his actual disintegration, however, indicating the failure of language to express, let alone construct, identity.

Linguistic misuse is fundamental to *décomposition* in Beckett. As my earlier analysis of Beckett's phrase 'pour faire remarquer moi' indicates, it is through careful misuse that language can perform its own meaninglessness: the utterance is undermined by its own incorrectness. Molloy seems to enjoy distorting language in this way. As he explains, calling his mother 'Mag' instead of 'Ma' is a deliberate strategy:

Et si je l'appelais Mag c'était qu'à mon idée, sans que j'eusse su dire pourquoi, la lettre G abolissait la syllabe ma, et pour ainsi dire crachait dessus, mieux que toute autre lettre ne l'aurait fait. Et en même temps je satisfaisais un besoin profond et sans doute inavoué, celui d'avoir une ma, c'est-à-dire une maman, et de l'annoncer, à haute voix. Car avant de dire mag on dit ma, c'est forcé.⁵⁰ (M 21)

Abuse of language becomes a means of satisfying the need to speak while simultaneously undermining that speech as a mode of signification. It also appeases his desire for motherly affection even as it expresses a negation of that desire. The addition of the letter 'g' to 'ma' is an act of linguistic violence, abolishing the previous syllable and the meaning of the word, while still allowing the word 'ma' to be spoken. Indeed, in order to destroy a word that word must first be used: 'Mag' contains 'ma', but the excess of an extra letter destabilises the original word.

Molloy's attack on language, like Beckett's, is facilitated by his foreignness. By translating for us, he makes explicit the foreignness of 'ma' and 'da' to the surrounding French: 'Et da, dans ma région, veut dire papa.' (M 21) – a foreignness which, interestingly, is also affirmed in the English text: 'And da, in my part of the

⁵⁰ 'And I called her Mag because for me, without my knowing why, the letter g abolished the syllable Ma, and as it were spat on it, better than any other letter would have done. And at the same time I satisfied a deep and doubtless unacknowledged need, the need to have a Ma, that is a mother, and to proclaim it, audibly. For before you say mag, you say ma, inevitably.' (T 17)

world, means father.’ (T 17) It is not only easier to misuse foreign words; it is also easier to misuse one’s own words when they are placed in the context of a foreign language (which can also be related to Beckett’s self-imposed distance from the English language when he writes in English only through translation from the French). The expression of difficulty with language, and the subsequent attempt to destabilise that language, is reflected in the struggle between two different languages in the text.

The problem with Molloy is that he manages to describe his problems with language fairly coherently (it is for this reason that we as critics rely as much upon Molloy to describe the indescribable as we do upon Beckett’s letter to Axel Kaun). The above passage, for example, describes his dedication to linguistic misuse in a clear discursive form. Molloy has more trouble, however, expressing his inability to remember the name of his town:

Il y avait si longtemps que je vivais loin des mots, vous comprenez, qu’il me suffisait de voir ma ville par exemple, puisqu’il s’agit ici de ma ville, pour ne pas pouvoir, vous comprenez. C’est trop difficile à dire, pour moi.⁵¹ (M 40)

The appeal to the reader’s understanding – ‘vous comprenez’ – becomes a means of punctuating and completing an incoherent and unfinished sentence. The very presence of that word highlights Molloy’s inability to express himself, and hence also the reader’s inability to understand fully what he is writing. Molloy thus indicates the impossibility of conveying his relationship to language in words, because to succeed in expressing this condition would contradict the condition itself – you can’t use words to say that you can’t use words. And yet this aphasia proves

⁵¹ ‘I had been living so far from words so long. you understand. that it was enough for me to see my town. since we’re talking of my town. to be unable. you understand. It’s too difficult to say. for me.’ (T 31)

to be temporary, and Molloy continues the passage in language of peculiar eloquence:

Je dis ça maintenant, mais au fond qu'en sais-je maintenant, de cette époque, maintenant que grêlent sur moi les mots glacés de sens et que le monde meurt aussi, lâchement, lourdement nommé? J'en sais ce que savent les mots et les choses mortes et ça fait une jolie petite somme, avec un commencement, un milieu et une fin, comme dans les phrases bien bâties et dans la longue sonate des cadavres.⁵² (M 41)

Evocative figures of speech, which speak of icy words as hailstones, and of *la longue sonate des cadavres*, and sophisticated sound patterning – *le monde meurt aussi, lâchement, lourdement nommé* – combine to proclaim the emptiness of ordered stories and nicely constructed phrases. The emptiness of words is paradoxically conveyed through just those ‘phrases bien bâties’ that symbolise the death of language for Molloy. Beckett is of course ironising the use of poeticised language – as Molloy claims immediately afterwards, such eloquence is only illusory:

On n'invente rien, on croit inventer, s'échapper, on ne fait que balbutier sa leçon, des bribes d'un pensum appris et oublié, la vie sans larmes, telle qu'on la pleure. Et puis merde.⁵³ (M 41)

Yet it is only once he has finished describing the death of language that he resorts to swear words – eloquence is apparently necessary to cast doubt on eloquence.

Beckett writes in French to *deautomatise* his aesthetic impulses, however.

As the above examples demonstrate, *Molloy* provides a critique of its own eloquence, which should warn us against the unquestioning use of certain passages from the novel to explain Beckettian *décomposition*. It is through interlingual

⁵² ‘I say that now, but after all what do I know now about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named. All I know is what the words know, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle and an end as in the well-built phrase and the long sonata of the dead.’ (T 31-2)

⁵³ ‘You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten, life without tears, as it is wept. To hell with it anyway.’ (T 32)

struggle, however, that language is most effectively – if less explicitly – problematised. In Molloy's attack on the word 'ma,' it is the decontextualisation of the Irish word into French prose which facilitates the violence against that word. But, as we have seen, Irish names, Imperial measurements and other Anglicisms are effectively estranged by such decontextualisation even without a commentary explaining any deliberate attack on them.

The interplay of English and French within the text is often enacted more subtly than through the actual incursion of foreign words within the text. Indeed, the reader, rather than gaining an awareness of overt linguistic misuse or hybridisation, is often left with a sense of vague strangeness. Beckett's treatment of idioms in both English and French, for example, exploits a foreigner's linguistic perspective to estrange language. An idiomatic expression is often a figure of speech which familiarity has turned into a dead metaphor. Blind to its literal meaning, we usually allow idioms to impart the illusion of direct signification. The foreigner's perspective, on the other hand, is directed by a very literal understanding of words. Deciphering what the words of a common idiom mean, however, usually fails to indicate its actual cultural significance. Beckett, like Joyce, breaks the automatism of our perception of these idioms and makes us perceive their literal meanings – meanings which are often ridiculous or at least illogical. Molloy, watching 'C' as he walks past, considers following him, and describes this urge to make contact as '*cet élan vers lui de mon âme, au bout de son élastique.*' (M 13) The 'élan' here expresses a metaphorical surge or rush of Molloy's soul towards another, but the mention of 'élastique' literalises this emotional movement, turning it into an image of actual physical movement. The very notion of a soul is dependent upon its separation from and indeed transcendence of physical reality. In literalising the

metaphor, Molloy makes the transcendence of the soul impossible – it is, literally, tied to the body with elastic. Beckett not only brings out the literal meaning of the idiomatic expression, but causes the figurative and literal meanings to cancel each other out. If it is the foreigner's linguistic perspective which produces such semantically destructive wordplay, this perspective is nevertheless translated back into English: Molloy talks of his 'soul's leap out to him, at the end of its elastic' (T 11). Properly bilingual wordplay translates the same effect from French to English.

This process can also be perceived elsewhere. The French Molloy tells us that:

Je n'étais pas dans mon assiette. Elle est profonde, mon assiette, une assiette à soupe, et il est rare que je n'y sois pas. (M 24)

'Ne pas être dans son assiette' figuratively means 'to feel out of sorts.' Its literal meaning, however, is 'to be out of one's plate' – a particularly obscure and even ridiculous metaphor which completely loses its meaning in translation. Molloy, extending the metaphor, and commenting on the depth of his soup-plate, makes the absurdity of the expression impossible to ignore. Beckett here makes fun of the French language, but he nevertheless succeeds in translating this ridicule back into English:

I was out of sorts. They are deep, my sorts, a deep ditch, and I am not often out of them. (T 20)

The phrase 'out of sorts', though making figurative use of displacement, is far less obviously ridiculous than 'je n'étais pas dans mon assiette.' Yet Beckett, making the most of the process of translation, changes a soup-plate into a ditch, and thereby uses his extension of the French metaphor as an addition to the English. To follow 'out of sorts' with the image of a 'deep ditch' is far from logical – it is via the French that the notion of externality is made to be literal as well as figurative; the

English is rendered absurd by following the literalised logic of being in or out of one's *assiette*.

The bilingual effects of Beckett's fiction are often produced through the process of translation. Derrida, as we have seen, explains that metalinguistic effects are inherently translational: '[i]ls laissent trembler à l'horizon, visible et miraculeux, spectral mais infiniment désirable, le mirage d'une autre langue.'⁵⁴ In the above examples, Beckett transfers his inherently metalinguistic perspective on a foreign language into English by translating the metalinguistic effects of the French text. Brian T. Fitch writes that '[i]n whichever of the two languages Beckett happens to be writing at a given moment, there is always the presence of the other language with its wholly different expressive potential hovering at his shoulder, always at arm's reach and within earshot.'⁵⁵ Fitch is referring here to the bilingual writer's linguistic consciousness, whereby both languages 'take on [...] something of the strangeness that characterizes any foreign language' because, regardless of which language he is working in, 'there remains ever present, ever available, ready to hand, the other alternative language.'⁵⁶ The presence of the foreign language is also very literally present in both English and French versions of Beckett's texts – in the subtle Gallicisms and Anglicisms that pervade those texts. As I will demonstrate, this hybridisation of English and French in both texts is also facilitated by Beckett's self-translation, thus putting into practice the Benjaminian aim to allow source language to affect target language.

⁵⁴ 'At the horizon, visible and miraculous, spectral but infinitely desirable, they allow the mirage of another language to tremble.' Jacques Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l'autre: ou la prothèse d'origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996) 43-44; *Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 22.

⁵⁵ Brian T. Fitch, *Beckett and Babel: An Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 156.

⁵⁶ Fitch 160.

Beckett's translations take full advantage of the literal *authority* of the self-translator, which affords him relative freedom in translation. As Oustinoff remarks, '[u]n texte autotraduit par Beckett contient souvent des facons de "rendre" l'original qu'aucun traducteur – hormis l'auteur lui-meme – ne se serait raisonnablement jamais aventuré à envisager'.⁵⁷ This is confirmed by Richard Seaver's conclusion that his and Beckett's co-translation of 'La Fin' was 'not a translation' but 'a completely new creation',⁵⁸ and Patrick Bowles' report that '[f]rom the outset [Beckett] stressed that [Molloy] shouldn't be merely "translated"; we should write a new book in the new language.'⁵⁹ The ostensible effects of this translational freedom do not always seem to produce a radical divergence from the 'original' text, however: to cite Seaver, 'even though [the translation] was completely different, [Beckett] was totally faithful to the French'.⁶⁰ What Seaver means here by 'faithful' is extremely unclear, however. At the very least, he demands that we reconsider completely what constitutes 'fidelity' to the original text: a 'faithful' translation, in the traditional sense, could never be proclaimed to be 'completely different' to the original.

Though Benjamin's analysis is relevant to the transformational nature of Beckett's translations, it is clear that, in Beckett, the aims of interlingual contact are not redemptive. For Steiner, the relationship between the English and French texts is evidence of Beckett's consummate bilingualism:

Both language currents seem simultaneously active in Beckett's inter- and intra-lingual composition; translating his own jokes, puns, acrostics, he seems to find in the other language the unique, natural analogue. It is as if

⁵⁷ 'a text which has been self-translated by Beckett often contains ways of "rendering" the original that no translator – other than the author himself – could ever reasonably risk contemplating.' Michaël Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d'écriture et auto-traduction: Julien Green, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001) 8-9.

⁵⁸ Cited in Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (London: Vintage, 1990) 464.

⁵⁹ Cited in Bair 464.

⁶⁰ Cited in Bair 464.

the initial job of invention was done in a crypto-language, compounded equally of French, English, Anglo-Irish, and totally private phonemes.⁶¹

But Steiner's assertion of a private 'crypto-language' preceding Beckett's bilingual oeuvre is highly problematic, implying as it does that Beckett transcends the difference between languages. The notion of a 'crypto-language' carries implications of a more effective, purely Beckettian, pre-Babelian multilingual mode of thought. Steiner thus implies the presence of what Derrida calls the 'signifié transcendantal' ('transcendental signified'), 'un concept signifié en lui-même, dans sa présence simple à la pensée, dans son indépendance par rapport à la langue, c'est-à-dire par rapport à un système de signifiants.'⁶² Such a concept, Derrida explains, took shape 'dans l'horizon d'un traductibilité absolument pure, transparente et univoque'.⁶³ Beckett's bilingual style, however, makes direct use of the *differences* between English and French and of those elements of language that are untranslatable, or translated only with difficulty. The language of each individual text manifests the direct and often palpable influence of the other language. English and French are thus pitted against each other with the effect of estranging each language from the other and increasing the distance between signifier and signified. And, despite the frequently remarkable equivalence of Beckett's translations, especially of punning and phonetic effects, the above-quoted comments by Bowles and Seaver confirm that Beckett's approach in translating was to create a 'new work' in the new language. Beckett's bilingualism was in no way marked by any faith in the interlingual equivalence of transcendental signifieds.

⁶¹ George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972) 5.

⁶² 'a concept signified in and of itself, a concept simply present for thought independent of a relationship to language, that is of a relationship to a system of signifiers.' Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Paris: Minuit, 1972) 30; *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Athlone Press, 1981) 19.

⁶³ 'within the horizon of an absolutely pure, transparent, and unequivocal translatability.' Derrida, *Positions* 31; *Positions* (trans.) 19.

Charles Krance's important analysis of Beckett's bilingualism demonstrates the interlingual processes inherent in the production of Beckett's texts and provides a means of conceptualising the convergence of English and French texts without resorting to linguistic idealism. In the introduction to his bilingual edition of *Company/Compagnie* and *A Piece of Monologue/Solo*, Krance demonstrates the influence of translation on processes of textual revision, not only between the final text and its translation, but in earlier revisions of the so-called 'original' English. Translations into French of early drafts of *A Piece of Monologue* are thus directly related to subsequent revisions of the English:

[...] it is with the first typescript of "Gone" (the working title of *A Piece of Monologue*) that Beckett began the translation into French, as *Solo*. Then, after revising the translation, he produced "Gone"'s second typescript. The translation – or as he later corrected this designation (in the proofs of *Solo*), first changing from "traduit de" to "d'après," then finally to "adapté de" – rather than representing the final stage of this bilingual composition, thus led to a final revision of the "original" composition in English.⁶⁴

Krance also demonstrates how the English text of *Company* becomes increasingly gallicised in revisions subsequent to early French translations, giving several examples 'of how a translational shift between manuscript drafts contributes to the process of transtextual confluence.'⁶⁵ This notion of 'transtextual confluence' is extremely important to Beckett's bilingualism: translation is a process that cannot be separated from the writing of the texts. English and French versions, then, are closer to each other than their status as 'translations' will allow: each contributes to the production of the other text. 'Transtextual confluence' can thus account for much of the apparent 'closeness,' as perceived by Steiner, between English and French texts.

The relationship between 'original' and 'translation' is, however, different between earlier and later works. Novels such as *Murphy* or *Watt*, for example, were

⁶⁴ Charles Krance, 'Introduction,' *Samuel Beckett's 'Company/Compagnie' and 'A Piece of Monologue/Solo': A Bilingual Variorum Edition* (New York: Garland, 1993) xviii.

⁶⁵ Krance, *Company* xxii.

translated at a much later date than their original composition, and thus of course cannot have been affected by their French versions. The later the work, however, the sooner it was translated, so that, as Krance points out, Beckett's late works were produced almost at the same time as their translations – and were thus directly affected by their French or English counterparts.⁶⁶ The Gallicisms in *Watt* signal Beckett's move towards bilingual techniques and linguistic hybridisation as a particularly effective form of linguistic estrangement. As Beckett switches to writing in French, so he also increasingly makes use of translation as a means of effecting such bilingual estrangement, so that, once he returns to English in his later work, the parallel production in French is used to estrange the text, signalling an increase of 'transtextual confluence.'

The actual extent of 'transtextual confluence' (in the sense of direct reciprocal influence of translation upon the 'original') in the Trilogy is uncertain. Nonetheless, certain phrases of *Molloy* have, as I have demonstrated, the quality of already-translated language – even if this is not literally the effect of actual translation, it is nonetheless traceable to the foreignness of the author from the language of composition. Gallicisms in *Watt*, Anglicisms in the French Trilogy, and the bilingual genesis of the later works are all nevertheless very closely related: writing in French and the process of translation are tools to produce or intensify the specifically bilingual forms of defamiliarisation that we find in Beckett. Even where the translation cannot have had direct influence upon the 'original,' then, it is still possible to describe the novels of the Trilogy as already-translated texts: French is mediated through the foreigner's consciousness, and it is estranged such that at times the presence of the English language can actually be felt.

⁶⁶ Charles Krance. 'Traces of transtextual confluence and bilingual genesis: *A Piece of Monologue* and *Solo for Openers*.' *Samuel Beckett Today. Aujourd'hui* 2 (1993): 134.

It is even likely that *Malone meurt* was produced bilingually, in a process similar to that of later texts such as *Company* and *A Piece of Monologue*. Beckett published English translations of extracts from *Molloy* and *Malone Meurt* in *Transition* before their publication in French.⁶⁷ Indeed, Paul St. Pierre, highlighting the interconnection of writing and translation in Beckett, demonstrates that the English excerpt from *Malone meurt* in *Transition* differs significantly from the final published versions both of *Malone meurt* and *Malone Dies*. This early translation clearly derives from an earlier version of *Malone meurt*, and St. Pierre's implication is that subsequent revisions to the French text can, in part, be traced to this early translation into English.⁶⁸ The effects of such bilingual genesis in *Malone meurt* are at times extremely similar to some of the effects of bilingual genesis of *Company/Compagnie* detailed in Krance's introduction to the bilingual edition. The increasingly gallicised English text of *Company* indicates the importance of the French 'translation' in revisions of the original; the correspondence of English and French idioms in *Malone meurt* detailed below can perhaps be traced to a similarly bilingual genesis.

In *Malone Meurt*, idioms, if not Anglicisms as such, are often directly translatable to – or from – English:

Les Louis avaient du mal à vivre, je veux dire à *joindre les deux bouts*. (MM 41, my emphasis)

The Lamberts found it difficult to live, I mean *to make ends meet*. (T 199, my emphasis)

Or:

Voilà comme il faut faire, comme si j'avais encore *du temps à tuer*. (MM 124, my emphasis)

That's the style, as if I still had *time to kill*. (T 249, my emphasis)

⁶⁷ Bair 429n.

⁶⁸ Paul St. Pierre. 'Translation as writing across languages: Samuel Beckett and Fakir Mohan Senapati.' *TTR* 9.1 (1996): 244-245.

And at times the idiom, though correct in French, is explicitly anglicised:

Et je me dis aussi que depuis le dernier contrôle de mes possessions *il est passé de l'eau sous Butt Bridge*, dans les deux sens. (MM 127, my emphasis)

And I remind myself also that since I last went through my possessions *much water has passed beneath Butt Bridge*, in both directions (T 251, my emphasis)

In the above example, in both languages, the figurative passage of time signified by 'water under the bridge' plays against the literalisation of the expression where water passes under a specific, and rather comical, bridge. The French is more complex, however: the Englishness of *Butt Bridge* in French brings a hybridisation of language into play which is absent from the English, and the pun, 'dans les deux sens' – meaning 'in both senses of the word' as well as 'in both directions' – is also sacrificed in translation. Nevertheless, the semantic doubleness of the English phrase (it signifies both figuratively and literally) is closely related to the French pun on direction and meaning. The reciprocity of these passages thus indicates a hybrid process even in the English text: if *Butt Bridge* explicitly anglicises the French, the English version enacts the pun which occurs in the French.

Such interlingual play is similar to that which we find in *Molloy*, but as the Trilogy progresses these hybrid linguistic techniques become more frequent and produce more extreme effects. What is particularly apparent in the stylistic transition from *Molloy* to *Malone meurt* is the increased importance of linguistic misuse in creating a pervasively self-negating style – which begins to enact a linguistic *décomposition* rather more effectively than is apparent in *Molloy*.

In addition to the Anglicisms that we find in Malone's narrative is a striking increase in self-contradictions, wordplay, overdetermination in general, repetition and sound-patterning. The nature of Malone's language, however, is also

thematically relevant: waiting for death, he aims to attain an absolute neutrality which could approach that state of non-existence, thereby allowing himself to die:

Je mourrais aujourd'hui même, si je voulais, rien qu'en poussant un peu, si je pouvais vouloir, si je pouvais pousser. Mais autant me laisser mourir, sans brusquer les choses. [...] Je ne veux plus peser sur la balance, ni d'un côté ni de l'autre. Je serai neutre et inerte. Cela me sera facile. Il importe seulement de faire attention au sursauts.⁶⁹ (MM 7-8)

Malone's desire for death is expressed through an impatience for death – which itself upsets the balance of neutral non-existence, thus affirming the fact that he is still alive, and perhaps even prolonging that life. So Malone tells himself stories in which he tries to attain this perfect balance:

D'ici là je vais me raconter des histoires, si je peux. [...] Ce seront des histoires ni belles ni vilaines, calmes, il n'y aura plus en elles ni laideur, ni beauté, ni fièvre, elles seront presque sans vie, comme l'artiste.⁷⁰ (MM 8)

L'Innommable speaks of Malone's 'vivacité mortelle'⁷¹ (I 9); 'mortelle,' meaning both 'fatal' and, idiomatically, 'deadly boring,' aptly expresses Malone's aim – a perfect boredom which might literalise the notion of being bored to death.

This balance is matched in the linguistic neutrality of the prose where, if anything is affirmed, it will be contradicted in some way. Even Malone's expressed intention to tell stories is undermined by his subsequent incomprehension, even ignorance, of that intention: 'Qu'est-ce que j'ai dit là? Ça ne fait rien.'⁷² (MM 8)

The kind of overdetermination which we see in Beckett's play on the literal and the figurative in idiomatic expressions becomes central to this aim of linguistic neutrality: Beckett, bringing out the different meanings produced by words and

⁶⁹ 'I could die to-day, if I wished, merely by making a little effort. But it is just as well to let myself die, quietly, without rushing things. [...] I will not weigh upon the balance any more, one way or the other. I shall be neutral and inert. No difficulty there. Throes are the only trouble.' (T 179)

⁷⁰ 'While waiting I shall tell myself stories, if I can. [...] They will be neither beautiful nor ugly, they will be calm, there will be no ugliness or beauty or fever in them any more, they will be almost lifeless, like the teller.' (T 180)

⁷¹ 'his mortal liveliness' (T 294).

⁷² 'What was that I said? It does not matter.' (T 180)

phrases, makes those meanings contradict each other – an excess of meaning makes language cancel itself out. So when Malone expresses his desire for linguistic clarity, the phrase ‘être clair’ is itself rendered ambiguous:

Je veux dorénavant *être clair* sans être maniaque, c’est dans mes projets. *Il est clair* que je suis susceptible de *m’éteindre* subitement, d’un instant à l’autre.⁷³ (MM 11, my emphasis)

‘Éteindre’ – to switch off – brings out the homonymic quality of ‘clair’ which means ‘light’ as well as ‘clarity’ in the linguistic sense, making the expression of clarity itself unclear.

Malone consistently treats idioms from a foreigner’s perspective. Taking phrases literally, he produces forms of overdetermination which comically estrange those phrases:

Les poules [...] ont la vie *plus têtue*, et on en voit même qui, n’ayant déjà *plus de tête*, font encore quelques derniers entrechats avant de s’écrouler.⁷⁴ (MM 67)

Comment ça va, merci, ça vient.⁷⁵ (MM 98)

C’est curieux, *je ne sens plus mes pieds*, la sensation les ayant miséricordieusement quittés, et cependant je les sens hors de portée du télescope le plus puissant. Serait-ce là ce qu’on appelle *avoir un pied dans la tombe*?⁷⁶ (MM 99)

Car nous mourrons bientôt tous les deux, cela *tombe* sous le sens.⁷⁷ (MM 145)

Le soleil se levait *à peine, avec peine*⁷⁸ (MM 177-8)

(my emphasis in all of the above examples)

⁷³ This particular pun is lost in translation: ‘My desire is henceforward to be clear, without being finical. I have always wanted that too. It is obvious I may suddenly expire, at any moment.’ (T 181)

⁷⁴ ‘Hens [...] are more stubborn livers and some have been observed, with the head already off, to cut a few last capers before collapsing.’ (T 215) The pun on tête / têtue in the French is, inevitably, absent in English, but is replaced with the pun on hens *cutting* capers (having had their heads cut off).

⁷⁵ ‘How goes it, thanks, it’s coming’ (T 234) – the pun translates perfectly into English.

⁷⁶ ‘Strange, I don’t feel my feet any more, my feet feel nothing any more, and a mercy it is. And yet I feel they are beyond the range of the most powerful telescope. Is that what is known as having a foot in the grave?’ (T 235) – again, the pun translates directly back into English.

⁷⁷ ‘For we shall soon die, you and I, that is obvious.’ (T 262)

⁷⁸ ‘The sun was dragging itself up’ (T 282).

Such linguistic contradictions are not created by Malone; he merely emphasises ambiguities that already exist in language. The above phrases, therefore, do not impose failure upon language, but express a potential for failure that is already inherent in language.

Elsewhere, linguistic ambiguity is due more to explicit patterns of self-contradiction. Malone, articulating the paradox of his own 'vivacité mortelle,' tells us that '[l]a fin d'une vie, ça ravigote.'⁷⁹ (MM 62) This phrase, which has the initial appearance of a platitude, actually emphasises its own absurdity through its contradictory assertion that the end of life brings a new lease of life. The following example, however, relies less on wordplay than on a balanced process of affirmation and negation:

J'ai juste le temps, si j'ai bien calculé, et si j'ai mal calculé tant mieux, je ne demande pas mieux, d'ailleurs je n'ai rien calculé, je ne demande rien non plus.⁸⁰ (MM 104)

This self-negating sentence carefully repeats words and phrases so that any initial affirmation gradually decreases in strength: the already speculative 'si j'ai bien calculé [...] si j'ai mal calculé' is finally denied any veracity at all with the denial 'je n'ai rien calculé'. Yet even this apparently clear denial is then rendered ambiguous by 'je ne demande rien non plus', which means that he doesn't ask for anything, but which also thereby means that he doesn't ask for *nothing* either.

Such consistent negation requires the repetition of words and phrases, and this creates patterns both through the sounds of words, and in the rhythms of repetitive syntax. Repetition plays a complex role in Beckett: not only is it the basis of Malone's linguistic balancing act; it also materialises language for the reader, emphasising the presence of words on the page, thus distancing us from their

⁷⁹ 'The end of a life is always vivifying.' (T 212)

⁸⁰ 'I have just time, if I have calculated right, and if I have calculated wrong so much the better. I ask nothing better, besides I haven't calculated anything, don't ask anything either [...]' (T 237)

meanings. In the following example, it is verbal precision – or rather the need to emphasise the *imprecision* of the chosen words – that causes excessive repetition:

dans une sorte de pâte boueuse, pas une pâte boueuse, une sorte de pâte boueuse.⁸¹ (MM 113)

Malone, in his anxiety to emphasise the inadequacy of the words ‘pâte boueuse’ does indeed distance them from any signified. Elsewhere, the repetition of homonyms is a source of sound-patterning:

c’est là en effet l’effet qu’il fait⁸² (MM 88)

Or patterns are made from similar sounding words with opposite meanings:

L’essentiel est de *s’alimenter* et *d’éliminer*, si l’on veut tenir.⁸³ (MM 17, my emphasis)

At other times, patterning is produced through syntactic repetition:

allant et venant, pleurant et riant, ou bien rien.⁸⁴ (MM 13)

And sometimes even takes the form of internal rhymes:

Surpris par la *pluie* loin de tout *abri* Macmann *s’arrêta* et se *coucha*⁸⁵ (MM 107, my emphasis)

Repetition – of words, of sounds, of syntax – begins to produce the effect, not only of distancing words from their meanings, but also of a strange form of linguistic poeticisation.

There is an interesting link, in formalist poetic theories, between ‘poetic language’ and semi-comprehensibility. As I indicated in my Introduction, Shklovsky’s theory of defamiliarisation asserts that poetic language must seem strange and foreign, even to the point of rendering language semi-comprehensible, while for Jakobson, the ‘poetic function’ of language ‘deepens the fundamental

⁸¹ ‘into a kind of muddy pulp. not a muddy pulp. a kind of muddy pulp.’ (T 243)

⁸² ‘for that is indeed the impression it gives’ (T 228)

⁸³ ‘What matters is to eat and excrete.’ (T 185)

⁸⁴ ‘coming and going, weeping and laughing, or nothing at all, no sounds at all.’ (T 183)

⁸⁵ ‘Caught by the rain far from shelter Macmann stopped and lay down’ (T 239) – the effect is completely absent from the English.

dichotomy of signs and objects.’⁸⁶ Shklovsky asserts the necessity of destabilising the referential function in art; Jakobson writes that this is an inevitable aspect of ‘poetic language’. Both, however, attempt to turn this heightened sense of the palpability and arbitrariness of words into a mode of signification that is somehow more effective. For Shklovsky, the paradoxical purpose of *ostranenie* is one of increased referential intensity: in making us see language anew, it also makes us perceive the object of that language anew. Jakobson, though perhaps less idealistic than Shklovsky on the potential of verbal art, provides a more detailed analysis of how defamiliarisation could produce intensified forms of referentiality: the ‘poetic function’, rather than merely rendering language arbitrary, makes use of a ‘paronomastic function’ of language to enhance sound symbolism and to draw ‘[w]ords similar in sound [...] together in meaning.’⁸⁷ The palpability of signs thus works to supplement the divide between signifier and signified. Both Jakobson and Shklovsky, in formulating theories that turn the semi-comprehensibility produced by defamiliarisation into more ample forms of verbal representation, make those theories correspond to the kind of ‘estheticized automatism’ that Beckett writes about in the Duthuit Dialogues: they aim to improve representation ‘by means of more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee’.⁸⁸

In making language strange, Beckett does indeed succeed in de-automatising our perception of language, and as the Trilogy progresses (or degenerates), language is increasingly material. But instead of trying to make this defamiliarised and often

⁸⁶ Roman Jakobson, ‘Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,’ *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Robert E. Innis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 153.

⁸⁷ Jakobson, ‘Closing Statement’ 167.

⁸⁸ Beckett, *Disjecta* 145.

semi-comprehensible language signify more effectively, Beckett attempts to take defamiliarisation to its logical extreme: that of non-signification.

This is perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Beckett's aim to write against the 'estheticized automatism' that characterises most art: he actively makes use of the inherent potential of 'poetic' language to destabilise referentiality. The above examples of sound-patterning and punning in *Malone meurt* are all produced from a perspective of estrangement from language, and they all perpetuate that estrangement through perverse forms of 'poeticisation'. Figurative language plays a particularly important part in this process of estranging language. Schemes in Beckett – figures of speech that are syntagmatically formed, through syntactic deviation, for example – are characterised by forms of sound-patterning that empty words of meaning. This is not only enacted through the repetition of words and sounds: Beckett also emphasises the semantic difference of homonyms, thereby reversing the Jakobsonian notion of the 'paronomastic function' of similar 'phonemic sequences' where '[w]ords similar in sound are drawn together in meaning.' Instead, words similar in sound are drawn apart semantically. As we have seen, tropes are also destabilised: metaphorical signification, for example, is constantly undermined by the play on the literal, and thus becomes the source of much of Beckett's overdetermination, where literal and figurative meanings cancel each other out. Beckett even directly parodies metaphor: rather than constructing new, figuratively evocative modes of description, he often takes old and hackneyed metaphors and, by emphasising their literal meaning, makes them seem figurative again. Dead metaphors and idioms are thus brought back to life, only to make apparent their absurdity. This reversal of traditional poeticisation – resurrecting old metaphors rather than constructing new ones – thus also reverses both the signifying

and the aesthetic effect of metaphor, producing an effect of peculiar inelegance and even humour.

For Shklovsky, one of the features of our automatised perception of language is that words have become ‘algebraic symbols [...] devoid of imagery’.⁸⁹ Their ‘original’ nature, however, was figurative, and, Shklovsky writes, ‘when you get through to the image which is now lost and effaced, but once embedded at the basis of the word, then you are struck by its beauty – by a beauty which existed once and is now gone.’⁹⁰ Estranged, semi-comprehensible language resurrects this quality by ‘[seeming] to the reader, by reason of its unfamiliarity, more figurative.’⁹¹ In a sense, words, for Shklovsky, have all become dead metaphors; their resurrection in art returns to them both their signifying force and their aesthetic qualities.

Figurative language, however, is inherently arbitrary: in taking a word for one thing to signify another, it denies any illusion of direct referentiality. Estranged language, by restoring this figurativeness, thus also restores our sense of the arbitrariness of language – indeed, it is precisely the illusion of direct referentiality that Shklovsky declares must be destroyed. Joyce’s language works carefully round this paradox: though at times the foregrounding of dead metaphors is a means of emphasising stylistic clumsiness, elsewhere, the play on the figurative and the literal is meticulously controlled to produce semantic complementarity and even a sense of intensified referentiality. Beckett’s resurrection of dead metaphors, however, simply reinforces the paradox inherent in defamiliarisation: language which takes Shklovskian defamiliarisation to its logical conclusion merely increases our sense of the arbitrariness of language.

⁸⁹ Viktor Shklovsky. ‘The Resurrection of the Word.’ trans. Richard Sherwood. *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, ed. Stephen Bann and John E. Boulton (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973) 41.

⁹⁰ Shklovsky. ‘Resurrection’ 41.

⁹¹ Shklovsky. ‘Resurrection’ 47.

The end product of both metaphorical and syntagmatic forms of figurative language in Beckett, then, are warped, strange and often comical forms of poeticisation – which are anything but ‘poetic’ in the traditional sense of the word. Our aesthetic perception is thus de-automatised: the product of Beckettian defamiliarisation is not intensified referentiality (as in Joyce), nor is it ‘beautiful’ in any accepted or traditional sense. It even fails to conform to Shklovsky’s archetypally modern theory of ‘poetic’ language. Defamiliarisation in Beckett perpetuates the foreigner’s linguistic perspective, and consistently avoids the pervasive link in traditions of art between aesthetics and semantics.

At times, Beckett even plays directly with poetic convention. Malone, writing about the contrast between the light outside and the dark inside his room, makes explicit use of ‘bright,’ sharp, high sounds to express light, and low, warm sounds to express the dark:

Elle est là dehors, la *clarté*, l’*air en pétille*, le *granit* du *mur* d’en face *brille* de tout son *mica*, elle est contre ma *vitre*, la *clarté*, mais elle ne passe pas, de sorte qu’*ici* tout baigne, je ne dirai pas dans l’*ombre*, ni même dans la *pénombre*, mais dans une sorte de lumière de *plomb* qui ne jette pas d’*ombre* et dont par conséquent il m’est difficile de savoir d’où elle vient [...] ⁹² (MM 76, my emphasis)

Mallarmé, in ‘Crise de vers’, complained that ‘[à] côté d’*ombre*, opaque, *ténèbres* se fonce peu; quelle déception, devant la perversité conférant à *jour* comme à *nuit*, contradictoirement, des timbres obscur ici, là clair.’ ⁹³ Beckett reverses this natural disjunction of sound and meaning in the French language by assigning iconically

⁹² ‘The light is there, outside, the air sparkles, the granite wall across the way glitters with all its mica, the light is against my window, but it does not come through. So that here all bathes. I will not say in shadow, nor even in half-shadow, but in a kind of leaden light that makes no shadow, so that it is hard to say from what direction it comes [...]’ (T 221). Note that the sound-effects are much less predominant in the English translation.

⁹³ ‘When compared to the opacity of the word *ombre*, the word *ténèbres* does not seem very dark; and how frustrating the perverseness and contradiction which lend dark tones to *jour*, bright tones to *nuit*!’ Stéphane Mallarmé, ‘Crise de vers,’ *Igitur, Divagations, Un coup de dés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) 245; ‘Crisis in Poetry,’ *Mallarme: Selected Prose Poems, Essays and Letters*, trans. Bradford Cook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956) 38.

‘light’ and ‘dark’ sounds to corresponding expressions of light and dark.

Mallarmé’s Symbolist call for the poetic correspondence of sound and meaning and for musicality in poetry was extremely influential, however, and by the time Beckett is writing, such explicit use of ‘light’ and ‘dark’ sounds in French has itself become poetic cliché. The sound-patterning, moreover, parodies poetic musicality through its excessive and repetitive insistence on particular sounds without modulation or variation. The passage thus both makes use of poetic convention to highlight the phonetic characteristics of the words, and at the same time ironises that convention.

The significance of sound-patterning in Beckett is striking. Billie Whitelaw talks of the ‘dynamic rhythms of Beckett’s word-music’,⁹⁴ and Beckett once described his own work as ‘a matter of fundamental sounds’.⁹⁵ Though most apparent in his dramatic works, the importance of phonetics is also crucial to the Trilogy. Enoch Brater observes that the memorable passages from the Trilogy ‘are remembered precisely because they are so wonderfully *speakable*: they are written for the performative voice, a resonant human voice, and they attain their full spontaneity only when spoken aloud.’⁹⁶ Ludovic Janvier, writing about his work with Beckett on a French translation of *Watt*, tells us that the initial process of translation was oral, and that this focus on the sounds of words was sometimes even taken so far as to produce phonetic and rhythmic rather than semantic translations:

Dans les ‘exercices’ de diction à haute voix où l’on essayait la traduction, la similitude absolue des termes ou à défaut l’adéquation exacte à l’idée exprimée comptaient parfois moins que la situation sonore et rythmique du mot dans le syntagme, du syntagme dans la phrase, de la phrase dans la séquence.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Billie Whitelaw, *Billie Whitelaw ... Who He?* (New York: St.Martin, 1995) 78.

⁹⁵ *Disjecta* 109.

⁹⁶ Enoch Brater, *The Drama in the Text: Beckett’s Late Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 4.

⁹⁷ ‘In the “exercices” of reading aloud by which we tested the translation, the precise correspondence of terms or, failing that, the exact equivalence of the idea expressed mattered less, at times, than the phonetic and rhythmic position of the word within the syntagm, of the syntagm within the phrase, of

This indicates the importance of linguistic materiality over referentiality in Beckett. As Brater states of the Trilogy, '[s]ound literally makes sense here',⁹⁸ which is not to say that the sounds of Beckett's words intensify the referential function; rather, much of the 'sense' of Beckett (especially where the representation of meaninglessness is concerned) is derived from the sounds of words. Hence Beckett's greater concern with translating the phonetic characteristics of his signifiers than their signifieds. I have provided a range of examples that demonstrate the prominence of sound-patterning in Beckett's prose. As I have indicated, one effect of such phonetic play is to invert Jakobson's 'poetic function' of language: words, made palpable, destabilise the referential function, but instead of making the phonetic aspects of language fulfil a paronomastic function, Beckett manipulates them for the purposes of his radical linguistic scepticism.

In the above example, however, the correspondence of light and dark sounds to what they represent, though undoubtedly a poetic cliché, nonetheless makes the material aspect of language correspond more closely to what it signifies. Similarly, Malone describes being by the sea in unpunctuated fluid language reminiscent of Molly Bloom's language of flow:

dans les cavernes où j'étais heureux, tapi sur le sable à l'abri des rochers dans l'odeur des algues et de la roche humide au bruit du vent des vagues me fouettant d'écume ou soupirant sur la grève et griffant à peine le galet [...]⁹⁹
(MM 85)

Or Malone's description of the comings and goings of men imitates phonetically the noises that it describes:

the phrase within the sequence.' Ludovic Janvier, 'Au travail avec Beckett,' *Cahier de L'Herne: Samuel Beckett* 105.

⁹⁸ Brater 4.

⁹⁹ 'in the caves where I was happy, crouched on the sand in the lee of the rocks with the smell of the seaweed and the wet rock and the howling of the wind the waves whipping me with foam or sighing on the beach softly clawing the shingle [...]' (T 226)

Et ils ne s'en font pas faute et vont et viennent, dans le fracas de crécelle de leurs déclics de grands articulés, chacun de son côté.¹⁰⁰ (MM 98)

And on a syntactic level, doubleness is reflected in the repetition of words:

Vite, vite mes possessions. Du calme, du calme, deux fois, j'ai le temps, tout le temps, comme d'habitude. Mon crayon, mes deux crayons [...] ¹⁰¹ (MM 120)

Such repetition is both iconic and performative: the form of the language itself signifies and performs the doubleness that it describes.

The greater palpability of language in *Malone meurt* than *Molloy* thus produces complex and contradictory effects. Though such materiality accompanies an increased estrangement of language and produces a far less comprehensible narrative than *Molloy*'s, sound-patterning and other formal qualities of language at times contribute to a correspondence of form and meaning. Brater notes 'the crucial link between Beckett's work in fiction and drama'¹⁰² – the importance of sound in his fiction seems to demand the verbal performance of that prose. It is also important, however, to note the prominence of the *performative function* of language in the Trilogy, which is enacted textually as well as phonetically. This performative function – whereby Beckett's language performs or enacts what it describes – becomes more prominent as the Trilogy progresses. The first sentence of *Malone meurt*, for example, plays a linguistic game that would be much harder to find in *Molloy*:

Je serai quand même bientôt tout à fait mort enfin.¹⁰³ (MM 7)

The excess of adverbs – *quand même bientôt tout à fait* – extends the sentence, producing the effect, not only of verbal relentlessness, but also of delaying the final

¹⁰⁰ 'And they make full use of it and come and go, their great balls and sockets rattling and clacking like knackers, each on his way.' (T 234)

¹⁰¹ 'Quick quick my possessions. Quiet, quiet, twice. I have time, lots of time, as usual. My pencil, my two pencils [...]' (T 247)

¹⁰² Brater 7.

¹⁰³ 'I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all.' (T 179)

ending – of the sentence, and of Malone’s life. The syntactical make-up of the sentence performs in microcosm the overall movement of *Malone meurt*: death delayed by, but perhaps also attained through, excessive verbosity. ‘Enfin’ thus announces not only the finality of death, but also the end of the sentence.

The performative function of such a sentence is enacted lexically rather than phonetically, and this is entirely in keeping with the explicitly written nature of Malone’s narrative. As Malone’s frequent references to his exercise book and his pencil emphasise the fact that he is writing, so also the concrete, written presence of words on the page is made particularly apparent. This is clearest in the context of the gaps in Malone’s text: rather than using paragraphs as a means of maintaining thematic clarity, Malone breaks his text in such a way as to emphasise the absence of words in between paragraphs (this is more emphatically the case in the French Minuit edition, which puts a clear space between paragraphs). Indeed, in many cases, the gap itself signifies. Such a device is apparent, for example, in Malone’s description of Sapo:

C’était un garçon précoce. Il était peu doué pour les études et ne voyait pas l’utilité de celles qu’on lui faisait faire. Il assistait au cours l’esprit ailleurs, ou vide.

Il assistait aux cours l’esprit ailleurs [...] ¹⁰⁴ (MM 20)

The emptiness of Sapo’s mind is effectively evoked through the empty space on the page – the gap in the text itself echoes and substantiates ‘vide.’ Sapo’s absent-mindedness is also reflected in the narrator’s own distraction: Malone stops writing in mid-narrative, then resumes the story with a repetition of what he has already written.

¹⁰⁴ ‘He was a precocious boy. He was not good at his lessons, neither could he see the use of them. He attended his classes with his mind elsewhere, or blank. [new paragraph] He attended his classes with his mind elsewhere [...]’ (T 187)

Gaps also embody a different kind of distraction, however:

Ah oui, j'ai mes petites distractions et elles devraient

Quel malheur, le crayon a dû me tomber des mains, car je viens seulement de le récupérer après quarante-huit heures (voir plus haut quelque part) d'efforts intermittents.¹⁰⁵ (MM 79)

Here, the gap in the text breaks the monotony of the narrative, thus itself providing a 'petite distraction.' It also represents the 48-hour gap in time incurred by Malone's loss of his pencil – two days, Malone tells us, of unsurpassed eventfulness. The loss of the pencil and the gap in the text both interrupt an account of Malone's distractions and themselves provide a distraction. It is particularly significant that the 'deux journées inoubliables' spent by Malone are expressed through an absence of words. As Malone attempts to explain, the predominant feeling of those days was of an indescribable sense of absence:

Et c'était, en moins dicible, comme deux éboulements de sable fin ou peut-être de poussière ou de cendre, d'importance certes inégale mais allant en quelque sorte de concert, et laissant derrière eux, chacun en son lieu et place, la chère chose qu'est l'absence.¹⁰⁶ (MM 79)

The breaks in Malone's narrative are thus capable of enacting a strange mimesis, either reflecting the notion of emptiness (after 'vide') or finality (after 'Allez, assez, adieu',¹⁰⁷ MM 107), or actually signifying gaps in time which break Malone's narrative – when he falls asleep (MM 57) loses his pencil (MM 79), or simply treats himself to a break (MM 29).

¹⁰⁵ 'Ah yes. I have my little pastimes and they [new paragraph] What a misfortune, the pencil must have slipped from my fingers, for I have only just succeeded in recovering it after forty-eight hours (see above) of intermittent efforts.' (T 222)

¹⁰⁶ 'And it was, though more unutterable, like the crumbling away of two little heaps of finest sand, or dust, or ashes, of unequal size, but diminishing together as it were in ratio, if that means anything, and leaving behind them, each in its own stead, the blessedness of absence.' (T 223)

¹⁰⁷ 'Enough, enough, good-bye.' (T 239)

The concrete, textual nature of language in *Malone meurt* thus plays a disproportionately important part in how that language works. Even Sapó, Malone tells us, understands language in very material terms:

Alors il regrettait de ne pas avoir voulu apprendre l'art de penser, en commençant par replier les deuxième et troisième doigts afin de mieux poser l'index sur le sujet et sur le verbe l'auriculaire, comme le voulait son professeur de latin, et de ne rien entendre, ou si peu, au charabia de doutes, désirs, imaginations et craintes qui déferlaient dans sa tête.¹⁰⁸ (MM 30)

The 'art of thinking' is defined in terms of grammatical knowledge and control over language, and such control is expressed in purely physical terms – through the ability to place one's fingers on the relevant parts of speech. Such linguistic control, it is important to note, however, is not the basis of adequate linguistic use. In the absence of any real access to the referential function of language, Sapó merely perceives its formal qualities, and as a result concludes that to be able to master linguistic structure is to master language itself.

Control over the material function of language is thus merely a supplement to an inadequate relationship to language, and all it can achieve is an *exclusion* rather than accommodation of the 'charabia' of voices that Sapó hears. *Malone Dies* translates 'charabia' into 'babel,' making explicit the nature of the linguistic multiplicity which is masked but not redeemed by the illusion of comprehension:

Mais je me dis tant de choses, qu'y a-t-il de vrai dans ce babil?¹⁰⁹ (MM 102)

Mais cet innombrable babil, comme d'une foule qui chuchote? Je ne comprends pas.¹¹⁰ (MM 168)

Materiality is symptomatic of language that has already failed: to perceive the palpability of words in the first place is to confirm one's position outside of the

¹⁰⁸ 'Then he was sorry he had not learnt the art of thinking, beginning by folding back the second and third fingers the better to put the index on the subject and the little finger on the verb, in the way his teacher had shown him, and sorry he could make no meaning of the babel raging in his head, the doubts, desires, imaginings and dreads.' (T 193)

¹⁰⁹ 'But I tell myself so many things, what truth is there in all this babble?' (T 236)

¹¹⁰ 'But this innumerable babble, like a multitude whispering? I don't understand.' (T 276)

semantic function of those words; to attempt to redeem that language by making use of that materiality merely emphasises the failure of language.

Beckett ironises this process with his mock-poetic sound-patterning: the correspondence of sound and sense, as well as the concrete modes of signification that are so abundant in *Malone meurt*, are always undermined by the increased palpability of language from which they are produced and which they perpetuate. Malone still seems to want to make language express something, but the overall effect of Beckettian mock-poeticisation is not to reinforce meaning but to obscure it. As Malone realises,

mes notes ont une fâcheuse tendance, je l'ai compris enfin, à faire disparaître tout ce qui est censé en faire l'objet.¹¹¹ (MM 143)

The linguistic *décomposition* of the Trilogy, then, is accompanied by increasing levels of phonetic play and other forms of so-called 'poetic' language – all of which attain their most extreme form in *L'Innommable*.

Sapo wishes he had grammatical control; *l'Innommable* displays the full artificiality of such control over language by merely mimicking a grammatical exercise:

Qui me font dire que je le suis peut-être, comme eux ils le sont. Qui me font dire que, ne pouvant l'être, j'ai à l'être. Que, n'ayant pu être Mahood, comme je l'aurais pu, j'ai à être Worm, comme je ne le pourrai.¹¹² (I 101)

The excessive formality of the passage effectively confuses its meaning, and the control is symptomatic of a student's insufficient mastery over a foreign language – which is indeed how *l'Innommable* describes the language that he uses:

ce sont des mots qu'on m'a appris, sans bien m'en faire voir le sens, c'est

¹¹¹ 'But my notes have a curious tendency, as I realize at last, to annihilate all they purport to record.' (T 261)

¹¹² 'Who make me say that I can't be Worm, the inexpugnable. Who make me say that I am he perhaps, as they are. Who make me say that since I can't be he I must be he. That since I couldn't be Mahood, as I might have been, I must be Worm, as I cannot be.' (T 350)

comme ça que j'ai appris à raisonner, je les emploie tous, tous les mots qu'on m'a montrés [...] ¹¹³ (I 201)

Like *Malone meurt*, *L'Innommable* contains clearly perceptible traces of foreignness, in Anglicisms and in the clever misuse and adaptation of French idioms, as well as in the apparently deliberate choice of French words and expressions that translate literally into English. The formality and tangibility of Beckett's prose in *L'Innommable*, however, is greatly increased, and Beckett's French is more radically estranged. Moreover, whereas in *Molloy* and *Malone meurt* the explicit foreignness of the French language for Molloy and Malone facilitates the representation of a general state of linguistic unease, in *L'Innommable* the dissolution of subjectivity is such that the very notion of the speaker's foreignness is called into extreme doubt. *L'Innommable* describes Mahood's stories as 'étrangères, à quoi, je ne sais pas, à mon pays, que je ne connais pas' (I 46). ¹¹⁴ The stories are foreign, but only to a native land that is itself foreign to him – a circular motion that breaks down the dichotomy between 'foreignness' and 'at-homeness'. In the specifically linguistic sense, the notion of 'foreignness' is problematic in *L'Innommable* for the simple reason that it is based on the assumption that an individual exists external to language. Language is inadequate to express anything, and the first person thus fails to signify the speaker. The very construction of identity is in turn problematised because it is so bound to language. ¹¹⁵ *L'Innommable* thus reaches the point where

¹¹³ 'that's all words they taught me, without making their meaning clear to me, that's how I learnt to reason. I use them all, all the words they showed me [...]' (T 411)

¹¹⁴ 'foreign, to what, to that unfamiliar native land of mine' (T 317).

¹¹⁵ Indeed, as Leslie Hill observes, this awareness of the 'fictionality of self' is not confined to the work of Beckett: 'many authors, including both Nietzsche and the logico-positivists, have insisted upon the illegitimate fashion in which philosophical discourse itself, working in complicity with the language of everyday communication, passes from what are the major syntactical categories of the Indo-European languages to the postulation of fixed metaphysical concepts. In this perspective, the entire chain of concepts that have organised the thought of the West from Socrates to the present – terms such as "being," "self" or "identity" – can be considered as fictions deriving from the speculative use of what are autonomous and culturally relative grammatical structures.' Leslie Hill.

he doubts his own existence (because he can only express that existence in words):

[...] je venais à douter de mon existence, et encore, aujourd'hui, je n'y crois pas une seconde, de sorte que je dois dire, quand je parle, Qui parle, et chercher, et quand je cherche, Qui cherche, et chercher, et ainsi de suite et de même pour toutes les autres choses qui m'arrivent et auxquelles il faut trouver quelqu'un, car les choses qui arrivent ont besoin de quelqu'un, à qui arriver [...]¹¹⁶ (I 173-4)

Even the expression of linguistic alienation becomes problematic, however: because the subject's sense of difference from language can only be expressed *in* language, the means of expression contradicts its content.

For Malone, linguistic *décomposition* becomes a means of trying to attain the ultimate physical decomposition – death. In *L'Innommable*, *décomposition* causes a disintegration so complete that the speaker is not certain that he *has* a body, an existence and an identity. He is even unsure that the voice is his own: he toys with the possibility of using the third person ('Puis assez de cette putain de première personne'¹¹⁷ [I 93]), and frequently refers to the otherness of his voice – a voice which he *hears*, and which imposes itself upon him as much as it is spoken by him:

Ma voix. La voix. Oui, je l'entends moins bien. [...] Ne plus entendre cette voix, c'est ça que j'appelle me taire.¹¹⁸ (I 177)

Y a-t-il un seul mot de moi dans ce que je dis? Non, je n'ai pas de voix, à ce chapitre je n'ai pas de voix.¹¹⁹ (I 101)

This extreme disembodiment is accompanied by an excessive formalisation and *embodiment* of language.

'Fiction, Myth and Identity in Samuel Beckett's Trilogy,' *Samuel Beckett's Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988) 87.

¹¹⁶ '[...] I doubted my own existence, and even still, today, I have no faith in it, none, so that I have to say, when I speak, Who speaks, and seek, and so on and similarly for all the other things that happen to me and for which someone must be found, for things that happen must have someone to happen to [...]' (T 394).

¹¹⁷ 'But enough of this cursed first person' (T 345).

¹¹⁸ 'My voice. The voice. I hardly hear it any more. [...] Hearing this voice no more, that's what I call going silent.' (T 397)

¹¹⁹ 'Is there a single word of mine in all I say? No, I have no voice, in this matter I have none.' (T 350)

L'Innommable's world is entirely verbal: as language is not trusted to represent anything, so all that remains are words (as the English-speaking Molloy tells us: 'All I know is what the words know', T 31). Nevertheless, l'Innommable remarks upon the physicality of this verbal experience – 'Que tout ça est physique'¹²⁰ (I 117) – and even directly links language to physical action:

Mais au fait, cet écran où mon regard se bute, tout en persistant à y voir de l'air, ne serait-ce pas plutôt l'enceinte, d'une densité de plombagine? Pour tirer cette question au clair j'aurais besoin d'un bâton ainsi que des moyens de m'en servir [...] J'aurais besoin aussi, je le note en passant, de participes futurs et conditionnels. Alors je le lancerais, tel un javelot, droit devant moi [...] ¹²¹ (I 23)

The metaphorical phrase '*tirer* cette question au clair' is literalised as physical action with l'Innommable's mention of a stick; indeed, he notes, future and conditional participles are just as necessary as physical action in ascertaining the nature of the screen in front of him. L'Innommable needs physical proof for verbal elucidation, but the emphasis here is very much on the words: in calling attention to the tenses that he is using to contemplate action, l'Innommable makes that action primarily verbal, while the future and conditional tenses themselves emphasise the fact that this is mere speculation anyway. The action thus resides in words; indeed, it is precisely through the materiality of those words that they fail to signify anything other than themselves.

L'Innommable thus describes physical action to invoke a primarily linguistic endeavour, in the process emphasising the tangibility both implied in the figure of speech – *tirer cette question au clair* – and in the words themselves. Again, such materialisation of language requires a separation of words from their objects: the

¹²⁰ 'How physical this all is!' (T 360)

¹²¹ 'But may not this screen which my eyes probe in vain, and see as denser air, in reality be the enclosure wall, as compact as lead? To elucidate this point I would need a stick or pole, and the means of plying it [...] I could also do, incidentally, with future and conditional participles. Then I would dart it, like a javelin, straight before me [...]' (T 302)

process of description is foregrounded over any action that may be taken – and in *L'Innommable*, we are never allowed to fall into the safe assumption that description might reliably refer to anything. It is entirely appropriate, then, that *l'Innommable* also uses physical metaphors to describe a language that is alien to him:

Elle sort de moi, elle me remplit, elle clame contre mes murs, elle n'est pas la mienne, je ne peux pas l'arrêter, je ne peux pas l'empêcher, de me déchirer, de me secouer, de m'assiéger.¹²² (I 34)

L'Innommable's sense of externality to language is what produces this perception of language as a physical presence, but his inability to escape that language means that he is nevertheless defined by it. He is, quite literally, the linguistic subject, and therefore subject to the collective notion of individuality imposed upon him by that language. Language is thus felt as actual violence. As the passage continues, the relentlessness of *l'Innommable's* words in turn makes us perceive that physicality:

Elle n'est pas la mienne, je n'en ai pas, je n'ai pas de voix et je dois parler, c'est tout ce que je sais, c'est autour de cela qu'il faut tourner, c'est à propos de cela qu'il faut parler, avec cette voix qui n'est pas la mienne, mais qui ne peut être que la mienne, puisqu'il n'y a que moi, ou s'il est d'autres que moi, à qui cette voix pourrait appartenir, ils ne viennent pas jusqu'à moi [...] ¹²³ (I 34)

L'Innommable attempts to express a consciousness that he perceives to be external to language. Such expression of difference from language can only be enacted *within* language, however, and thus becomes apparent as a self-contradictory process: the more he attempts to escape words, the more he must use words to do so (we recall that *décomposition* can only occur verbally, through *composition*). As a result, *l'Innommable* merely emphasises his dependence on language to construct subjectivity, even to construct a subjectivity that asserts its difference from

¹²² 'It issues from me, it fills me, it clamours against my walls, it is not mine, I can't stop it, I can't prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me.' (T 309)

¹²³ 'It is not mine, I have none, I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know, it's round that I must revolve, of that I must speak, with this voice that is not mine, but can only be mine, since there is no one but me, or if there are others, to whom it might belong, they have never come near me.' (T 309)

language. This impossible process necessitates a constant process of qualification, negation and contradiction, which in turn produces repetition and an interminable chain of successive clauses. *L'Innommable* evokes the strangeness and tangibility of an alien tongue more effectively through the form – and formality – of language than through the meanings of words.

Language in *L'Innommable* consistently foregrounds its own meaninglessness through such complex manipulation of linguistic form, which appears in the guise not only of the grammatically-minded foreigner's language, but also of various 'poetic' and rhetorical forms. As *l'Innommable* tells us:

Ici tout est clair. Non, tout n'est pas clair. Mais il faut que le discours se fasse. Alors on invente des obscurités. C'est de la rhétorique.¹²⁴ (I 12)

Rhetoric neither clarifies an utterance nor intensifies its referential function; instead, it obscures meaning. Traditionally, rhetoric is a term which denotes the art of linguistic persuasion or oratory. Also common, however, is the use of 'rhetoric' to denote language that is more style than substance: rhetorical forms are associated with attempts to detract from inadequate referential content through excessive artifice and ornamentation. The very art of making an utterance more effective can also produce the opposite effect, whereby stylishness obscures semantic content. So, for *l'Innommable*, rhetoric can become the source of obscurity rather than clarification: layers of words and verbal excess cover over and even obliterate what they meant to signify. Style and linguistic embellishment can thus be indispensable tools for increasing the babble of incomprehensible words.

¹²⁴ 'Here all is clear. No, all is not clear. But the discourse must go on. So one invents obscurities. Rhetoric.' (T 296)

Rhythmic and syntactic similarity often masks semantic difference. Indeed, in the following examples, rhythmic repetition actually brings out the semantic doubleness of the third part of the phrase:

dans la cour, dans sa jarre, dans un sens.¹²⁵ (I 88)

epicentre des joies, des peines, du calme.¹²⁶ (I 100)

‘Dans un sens’ and ‘du calme’ both seem to follow from and add to the meaning of the preceding two sets of words. They both signify separately from the group of phrases, however. ‘Dans un sens’ means ‘in a way’ as well as ‘in one direction’, and in both of these possible meanings, ‘dans’ has become figurative, referring to *direction* rather than to being inside something; and ‘du calme’ is also an imperative – *be quiet!* – as well as describing a centre of joy, pain, and calm. In both examples, then, there is a tension between the rhythmic harmony of the third part of the phrase and its doubleness of meaning, which pulls it away from the rest of the phrase.

Language in *L’Innommable* is increasingly estranged: sentences get longer and longer and increasingly syntactically complex or confused. The relentlessness of repetition and sound-patterning becomes intrinsic to the linguistic degeneration experienced by l’Innommable. When he describes Worm’s trouble with language, then, Worm’s incomprehension is in part rendered through sound-patterning, repetition and rhyme, which all detract from the meanings of words:

Oui, tant pis, il sait que c’est une voix, on ne sait pas comment, on ne sait rien, il n’y comprend rien, il y comprend un peu, presque rien, c’est incompréhensible, mais il le faut, ça vaut mieux, qu’il y comprenne un peu, presque rien, comme un chien à qui on jette toujours les mêmes ordures, les mêmes ordres, les mêmes menaces, les mêmes câlineries.¹²⁷ (I 121)

¹²⁵ ‘in the yard, in his jar, in a sense.’ (T 342)

¹²⁶ ‘epicentre of joys, of griefs, of calm.’ (T 349)

¹²⁷ ‘Yes, so much the worse, he knows it is a voice, how is not known, nothing is known, he understands nothing it says, just a little, almost nothing, it’s inexplicable, but it’s necessary, it’s preferable, that he should understand just a little, almost nothing, like a dog that always gets the same filth flung to it, the same orders, the same threats, the same cajoleries.’ (T 362)

In addition to the consistent repetition of words and sounds, including internal rhymes, the rhythm of this passage is remarkably regular, with the stress of each short phrase lying on the final syllable, before the comma. Inevitably, such sounds take over, and l'Innommable's words soon start to describe the nonlexical noises of the waltz of Worm's heart:

Le coeur lui en démarrerait, c'est une valse, il entendrait valser son coeur, tra boum la la la, corunefois, tra boum la la la, ré mi ré de pan pan, qu'on n'aurait pas à s'en formaliser.¹²⁸ (I 127)

Words simply become sound-effects, and are even rendered deliberately nonsensical, as in the omission of the first syllable and juxtaposition of two words in 'corunefois'.

This verbal music develops into increasingly repetitive prose, which at its most extreme point approaches musical minimalism:

[...] comme une bête née en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes nées et mortes en cage nées et mortes en cage de bêtes nées en cage mortes en cage nées et mortes nées et mortes en cage en cage nées et puis mortes nées et puis mortes, comme une bête dis-je [...] ¹²⁹ (I 166-7)

The English translation of this passage is considerably shorter and less rhythmically insistent, and this indicates Beckett's concentration on the phonetic and rhythmic effects of the French language. In particular, the greater number of rhymes in French (proportional to the language's total vocabulary), and the greater regularity of the language in general is used by Beckett to enact this particular form of repetitive sound-patterning. The foreigner's linguistic perspective imparts to Beckett a perception of those qualities of the French language that differ from English – and, when comparing the English and French versions of the following

¹²⁸ 'And even should his start off, his heart that is, on its waltz, in his ear, tralalalay pom pom, again, tralalalay pom pom, re mi re do bang bang, who could reprehend him?' (T 366)

¹²⁹ '[...] like a caged beast born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born in a cage and dead in a cage, born and then dead, born in a cage and then dead in a cage, in a word like a beast [...]' (T 390)

passage of the Trilogy, it is clear that Beckett is using each language in different ways. In the French text, the sounds of the words are so prominent that they seem to have been chosen primarily for their phonetic resemblance:

Car en voilà un autre qui arrive, relancer son collègue, le faire sortir, revenir à lui, aux siens, à coups de menaces, de promesses, d'histoires de berceau, cerceau, puceau, pourceau, sang et eau, peau et os, tombeau [...] (I 152)

The effect is one of repetitive, almost abstract sound, and that sound precedes meaning to such an extent that it produces playful, almost nonsensical language.

The English text, however, translates this simple repetition into far more sophisticated, even lyrical, language:

For here comes another, to see what has happened to his pal, and get him out, and back to his right mind, and back to his kin, with a flow of threats and promises, and tales like this of wombs and cribs, diapers bepissed and the first long trousers, love's young dream and life's old lech, blood and tears and skin and bones and the tossing in the grave [...] (T 382)

Sound-patterning is fundamental to both passages. In the English, those sounds work *with* the meanings of the words, while in the French sounds actively detract from those meanings. Overall, the English is semantically richer, while the French estranges language far more effectively. With the lyricism of the English text, Beckett is explicitly taking on literary tradition, and in particular the tradition of verbal musicality. As with his play on 'light' and 'dark' sounds in *Malone meurt*, Beckett is ironising not only language itself, but different rhetorical uses of language. This mode of translating the more abstract linguistic estrangement of 'berceau, cerceau, puceau, pourceau, sang et eau, peau et os, tombeau', is not only evidence of Beckett's manipulation of qualities specific to each language, however: the explicitly mock-poetic mode of the English also indicates the underlying motivation of the French, which could be read as an extreme form of 'poetic' sound-patterning and as a parody of Symbolist aims to attain musicality in poetry. The

English text, like Malone's play on light and dark, fulfils a Jakobsonian paronomastic function while subtly parodying that function through explicit links to literary tradition; the French text takes paronomasia to its logical extreme of nonsense. The French passage is thus not only the product of the foreigner's more formal perception of language and of Beckett's efficient linguistic misuse; it is also a product of Beckett's deliberate misuse of poetic convention.

This intriguing relationship, between the foreigner's misuse of language and sophisticated forms of mock-poeticisation, is fundamental to Beckett's project of speaking to say nothing. The self-imposed linguistic impoverishment inherent in his choice of French produces that paradox of *efficient* linguistic misuse articulated in his letter to Axel Kaun. L'Innommable's linguistic disintegration, then, is very much dependent on what, describing those stories of 'berceau, cerceau, puceau, pourceau, sang et eau, peau et os, tombeau', he calls 'du petit nègre' (I 152). This is rather more effectively translated into English as 'pidgin bullskrit' (T 382), a sophisticated pun which indicates the complex controlled nature of Beckettian linguistic misuse in which obscenity (bullshit), linguistic skill and erudition (Sanskrit), and primitive hybridised language (pidgin) are all combined.

L'Innommable, while acknowledging the extreme difficulty of 'parler pour ne rien dire' (I 27), celebrates his incomprehension and misuse of language as fundamental to this complex linguistic endeavour. At one point he eulogises his difficulty with language:

M'avoir collé un langage dont ils s'imaginent que je ne pourrais jamais me servir sans m'avouer de leur tribu, la belle astuce. Je vais le leur arranger, leur charabia. [...] Mon incapacité d'absorption, ma faculté d'oubli, ils les ont sous-estimées. Chère incompréhension, c'est à toi que je devrai d'être moi, à la fin.¹³⁰ (I 63)

¹³⁰ 'It's a poor trick that consists in ramming a set of words down your gullet on the principle that you can't bring them up without being branded as belonging to their breed. But I'll fix their gibberish for

To resist being defined in or by that language is, ultimately, an impossible task, and one which continues endlessly. Nevertheless, it is through misuse that l'Innommable attempts to affirm his resistance to the definitions imposed by language, and it is for this reason that he must emulate the foreigner's inability to comply fully with the rules of language, whether grammatical or idiomatic. It is in this dissonance and tension between l'Innommable's (mis)use of language and how that language should be used that his alienation within language is expressed.

L'Innommable takes such misuse to its extreme: language is no longer paradoxically used to express its own inadequacy, as in *Molloy*, but enacts – performs – that inadequacy. *Malone meurt*, as I have demonstrated, sees an increase in performative language, where iconic phonetic and syntactical forms enact on a syntagmatic level what the words say on a referential level. Such techniques avoid conforming to the age-old rule of effective poetic language – to make form mime meaning – by foregrounding their material properties to such an extent that form seems to supersede meaning, thus calling that meaning into doubt. The performative function of language in *Malone meurt* is, as I have suggested, primarily lexical; though the phonetic and rhythmic manipulation of language is extremely important, Malone's narrative emphasises the process of its own composition on paper.

L'Innommable, taking these processes and techniques of linguistic estrangement even further, moves towards more phonetically-driven forms of language: the explicitly spoken narrative is notable for excessive sound-patterning, and the performative function of language becomes more closely allied to the language of spoken performance – 'Il ne faut pas oublier, quelquefois je l'oublie, que tout est une

them. [...] My inability to absorb, my genius for forgetting, are more than they reckoned with. Dear incomprehension, it's thanks to you I'll be myself, in the end.' (T 327)

question de voix.’¹³¹ (I 98) Katharine Worth notes the ‘dramatic energy’ of the Unnamable’s voice which at times seems ‘on the very point of igniting a play.’¹³² Indeed, for Worth, the novel seems to anticipate Beckett’s dramatic works:

All the plays, practically, seem to be in it, waiting to form, hovering in incidents, images and refrains (like the insistently recurring ‘Not I’).¹³³

Worth is here referring to the English text, but her words are equally relevant to *L’Innommable*. *L’Innommable* might even be seen to prompt such a reading: talking of himself in the third person, he looks forward to the end of his verbal torrent as the end of his performance – ‘son numéro accompli’¹³⁴ (I 149) – and, a little later, pondering the possibility of an audience, states that ‘c’est un spectacle’¹³⁵ (I 157).

Beckett had indeed already turned to drama by the time of writing *L’Innommable*. His first play in French, *Eleutheria*, was written between January and February 1947,¹³⁶ before he even started writing the Trilogy, and *En attendant Godot* was completed in 1949,¹³⁷ and was therefore contemporaneous to *L’Innommable*. The performative nature of *L’Innommable*’s language is no coincidence, then, and may have been directly influenced by Beckett’s own growing mastery over the language of theatre. Certainly, the steadily increasing palpability of language throughout the Trilogy seems to parallel Beckett’s move from fiction to drama. Of course, the language of the Trilogy is not dramatic in the proper sense of the word; nevertheless (and especially in *Malone meurt* and *L’Innommable*), it performs through a materiality that consistently undermines the referential function

¹³¹ ‘It must not be forgotten, sometimes I forget, that all is a question of voices.’ (T 348)

¹³² Katharine Worth, *Beckett the Shape-Changer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) 10.

¹³³ Worth 14.

¹³⁴ ‘when his act is over’ (T 380).

¹³⁵ ‘it’s a public show’ (T 385).

¹³⁶ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) 362.

¹³⁷ Knowlson 378.

of language in a way that is perhaps analogous to the relationship between words and the physical world on the stage. Fundamental to this complex verbal 'performance' are forms of linguistic estrangement that relate directly to Beckett's choice of a foreign language. The foreigner's perspective, and the representation and perpetuation of that perspective through the estrangement of language, bring out the extreme linguistic materiality necessary to language's performance of its own meaninglessness.

CHAPTER 3: VLADIMIR NABOKOV

Reflected words can only shiver
Like elongated lights that twist
In the black mirror of a river
Between the city and the mist.

– Translator’s Introduction,
Eugene Onegin

a set of coincidences slightly displaced;
the artistry of asymmetry.

– *Ada*

Multilingualism is central to Nabokov’s oeuvre: a Russian writer proficient in both English and French, he defines himself as ‘trilingual, in the proper sense of writing, and not only speaking, three languages’,¹ and this is borne out in his work as both translator and writer. Nabokov, like Beckett, changes to a different language halfway through his career and, also like Beckett, the decision to write in a foreign language precedes some of his most celebrated work. The nature of the two authors’ multilingualism is rather different, however: Beckett’s relentless processes of *décomposition* stand in stark contrast to Nabokov’s expansive, expressive and extremely playful multilingualism. Nabokov writes of Beckett that ‘[his] French is a schoolmaster’s French, a preserved French, but in English you feel the moisture of verbal association and of the spreading live roots of his prose.’ (SO 172) Insofar as Beckett’s aim, in writing in French, was to write ‘without style’,² Nabokov’s words confirm the validity of Beckett’s project: essentially, Nabokov notes the stylistic paucity of Beckett’s French and the greater expressiveness of his English. Beckett’s linguistic aim is precisely such inexpressiveness; Nabokov, however, prefers a richer

¹ Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage International, 1990) 111. (All subsequent references to *Strong Opinions* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation ‘SO’).

² As Beckett told Niklaus Gessner: ‘c’est plus facile d’écrire sans style’. Cited in Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973) 58.

and more associative form of language, and as such, his judgement of Beckett is far more appropriate to his own aesthetic aims. So, when asked of the advantages of being able to write in English, French and Russian, Nabokov's response is closer to Joycean ideals of multilingual complementarity – he celebrates '[t]he ability to render an exact nuance by shifting from the language I am now using to a brief burst of French or to a soft rustle of Russian.' (SO 184)

Though Nabokov, in the above quotation, perceives his ability to move between languages as extremely productive, his decision to write in English was not directed by aesthetic aims. Unlike Beckett, whose use of French was directly related to his linguistic project, Nabokov's switch to a foreign language was the product of his exile. Brian Boyd notes that '[t]he decision to become an English writer [...] was one of the most difficult he had ever made.' Nabokov had worked assiduously to become a great Russian writer despite his exile, deliberately isolating himself during fifteen years of life in Germany and refusing to learn German³ because it was only thus that 'he could prevent his own [language] from being diluted.'⁴ The rise of Nazism in the 1930s, and the threat of a diminishing émigré community, however, meant that he began to look for an academic post in England or America.⁵ Practical necessity thus motivated his turn to English: as Boyd notes, the prospective move to an Anglophone country threatened his ability to preserve his Russian, while to continue to write in Russian would mean an extremely limited readership.⁶

³ Nabokov, in his preface to the English translation of *King, Queen, Knave* (a novel written while he was living in Berlin), writes that 'I spoke no German, had no German friends, had not read a single German novel either in the original, or in translation.' Nabokov, *King, Queen, Knave*, trans. Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the author (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968) vi.

⁴ Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990) 494-5.

⁵ After years of searching for such a post, Nabokov eventually obtained a temporary lectureship at Wellesley College in 1941. It was only seven years later, however, that he was finally offered a permanent post – as Professor of Russian at Cornell University. See Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years, 1940-1977* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992).

⁶ Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* 495.

Nabokov's rejection of his native Russian was a very painful process, however, and he is consistently derogatory about his English, describing it, even after *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*, as 'a stiffish, artificial thing [...] which cannot conceal poverty of syntax and paucity of domestic diction when I need the shortest road between warehouse and shop.' (SO 106) In his essay 'On a Book Entitled *Lolita*,' Nabokov talks of that novel as his 'love affair' with the English language, but continues in a highly critical vein:

My private tragedy, which cannot, and indeed should not, be anybody's concern, is that I had to abandon my natural idiom, my untrammelled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian tongue for a second-rate brand of English, devoid of any of those apparatuses – the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions – which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way.⁷

If we are to believe Nabokov here, the effect of writing in a foreign language is indeed Beckettian, producing as it does an inadequate and estranged language. And yet it is precisely Nabokov's use of English which ensures his transcendence of 'the heritage' – *Lolita*, for example, a novel about America, could not and would not have been written in Russian,⁸ and the stylistic originality of this, Nabokov's 'love affair' with the English language, is precisely a product of his estrangement from that language, however painful that may have been. As Jane Grayson remarks,

⁷ Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000) 316-7. (All subsequent references to *Lolita* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'AL').

⁸ Nabokov, in his Russian translation of *Lolita* explains that 'the clumsiness of the translation offered here lies not only with the translator's loss of touch with his native speech but also with the spirit of the language into which the work is being translated.' He then goes on to detail some of his conclusions 'regarding the mutual translatability' of English and Russian: 'Gestures, grimaces, landscapes, the torpor of trees, odors, rains, the melting and iridescent hues of nature, everything tenderly human [...], but also everything coarse and crude, juicy and bawdy, comes out no worse in Russian than in English, perhaps better; but the subtle reticence so peculiar to English, the poetry of thought, the instantaneous resonance between the most abstract concepts, the swarming of monosyllabic epithets – all this, and also everything relating to technology, fashion, sports, the natural sciences, and the unnatural passions – in Russian become clumsy, prolix, and often repulsive in terms of style and rhythm'. It is clear that much of the subject matter of *Lolita* is more at home in English than in Russian, and some specifically American elements are to a certain extent untranslatable. Vladimir Nabokov, 'Postscript' to the Russian edition of *Lolita*, trans. Earl D. Sampson, *Nabokov's Fifth Arc: Nabokov and Others on his Life's Work*, ed. Julius Edwin Rivers and Charles Nicol (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982) 190-191.

'[t]he brilliance of Nabokov's later English style owes not a little to his viewpoint as a foreigner. He sees the English language through different eyes. He sees patterns of sound and potential meanings in words which the native speaker, his perception dulled through familiarity, would simply pass over.'⁹ R. Graves remarks that '[Nabokov's] one error lies in arrogating a native-born's right [...] to do what he likes with the language',¹⁰ but it is precisely his foreigner's perspective that allows him to 'do what he likes' with English, and Nabokov arrogates not the 'native-born's' right, but the foreigner's. Nabokov abandoned Russian because he could not preserve its purity; his English, on the contrary, increasingly makes active use of interlingual interference.¹¹ Much of the strangeness of Humbert Humbert's use of English, for example, is due to his foreignness as well as his intellectual linguistic playfulness. The very first sentence of his homage to Lolita¹² manifests an awareness of linguistic materiality that is symptomatic of the foreigner's perspective on language, and reflects the greater linguistic self-consciousness of Nabokov's English prose than is apparent in his Russian novels. The deautomatised perception of language that Beckett, abandoning his mother tongue, uses to estrange language, in Nabokov becomes a means of effecting a more playfully expressive form of linguistic estrangement. The multilingual's fundamental awareness of the differences between languages and of the arbitrariness of language also, in Nabokov

⁹ Jane Grayson, *Nabokov Translated: A Comparison of Nabokov's Russian and English Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 216.

¹⁰ Cited in *English: History, Diversity and Change*, ed. David Graddol, Dick Leith and Joan Swann (London: Routledge, 1996) 24.

¹¹ It must be noted, however, that Nabokov, especially at first, was anxious to write English correctly and idiomatically. After writing *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Nabokov asked his friend Lucie Léon Noel to check his manuscript. She recalls that '[h]e was most anxious that this first novel in English should sound neither "foreign" nor read as though it had been translated into English.' Cited in Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* 503.

¹² 'Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.' (AL 9)

as in Joyce, leads to the productive manipulation of various forms of interlingual complementarity, transformation and mutation.

The impact of multilingualism on Nabokov's work is thematic as well as stylistic: the novels in English consistently reflect their author's own linguistic displacement, and the problems of interlingual communication and translation often provide the context in which language in general is examined. Many of his characters are exiles, and most are multilingual, with a linguistic competence ranging from the awkwardness of Professor Pnin's Russianised English to the extreme multilingual and intertextual expression of Van and Ada Veen. Translators also feature prominently, and translation itself is a recurrent theme. Nabokov's prose-styles are extremely inventive, mingling and hybridising different languages, and this hybridisation is taken to extreme forms in the invented languages of *Bend Sinister* and *Pale Fire* and in the trilingual wordplay of the Veen family in *Ada*.

Nabokov's first novel in English directly reflects his own linguistic situation. *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is a fictitious biography of a writer, Sebastian Knight, who, though Russian, chooses English as his main language of composition. The problem of writing in *Sebastian Knight* is closely allied to Knight's foreignness: his command of English, 'though fluent and idiomatic, was decidedly that of a foreigner' and his poems still retain 'something vaguely un-English' about them.¹³ Knight's sense of the materiality of language is evident in an extract from one of his novels, which contains a prophetic hint of Humbert Humbert's alliterative obsessions:

Life with you was lovely – and when I say lovely, I mean doves and lilies,
and velvet, and that soft pink “v” in the middle and the way your tongue

¹³ Vladimir Nabokov. *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964) 40–41. (All subsequent references to *Sebastian Knight* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'SK').

curved up to the long, lingering “l”. Our life together was alliterative [...] (SK 93)

If love for Knight is expressed through wordplay, there is also a sense in the novel that the foreignness of his English matches the nature of his ideas. His biographer-brother writes of Knight’s difficulty with language, of bridging ‘the abyss lying between expression and thought.’ Two reasons are given for this difficulty: that Sebastian ‘had no use for ready-made phrases because the things he wanted to say were of an exceptional build’ (SK 70), and that his Russian was better than his English. For the biographer, had Knight written in Russian he would have been spared such linguistic anguish, and yet his writing is consistently described in terms of estrangement, as ‘a dazzling succession of gaps’ (SK 30) which belies ‘some [...] kind of chasm, breach, fissure’ (SK 55) between Knight and the world. The ‘abyss [...] between expression and thought’ that is the product of the writer’s distance from a foreign language is reflected in a more general sense of estrangement. Knight’s relationship to language is thus directly related to the nature of his ideas, and the strangeness of his English is, in turn, better suited to the expression of those ideas than his native Russian.

In his foreword to *Bend Sinister*, Nabokov highlights the fact that, in this ‘sinistral and sinister world’, language is accordingly distorted and refracted:

Paronomasia is a kind of verbal plague, a contagious sickness in the world of words; no wonder they are monstrously and ineptly distorted in Padukgrad, where everybody is merely an anagram of everybody else. The book teems with stylistic distortions, such as puns crossed with anagrams [...]; suggestive neologisms [...]; parodies of narrative clichés [...]; spoonerisms [...]; and of course the hybridization of tongues.¹⁴

Such stylistic distortions are a barrier to comprehension: figurative language can provide both embellishment and an intensification of signification, but the verbal

¹⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974) 5, 8-9. (All subsequent references to *Bend Sinister* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation ‘BS’).

play of *Bend Sinister* is a perverted mirror-image of poetic language. '[T]he hybridization of tongues,' likewise, hides no Babelian aims but instead forms a 'mongrel blend' of languages (BS 9): just as the gaps and fissures in Sebastian Knight's language mirror the oblique nature of his ideas, so also the language of *Bend Sinister* reflects the perversity of Paduk's oppressive police state.

In accordance with such linguistic confusion, processes of translation are more likely to impede than to assist communication. As Nabokov writes in the introduction:

Problems of translation, fluid transitions from one tongue to another, semantic transparencies yielding layers of receding or welling sense are as characteristic of Sinisterbad as are the monetary problems of more habitual tyrannies. (BS 9)

The issue, however, is not quite as clear as Nabokov implies here. In the 'crazy mirror-world of terror and art' of *Bend Sinister* comprehensibility is not necessarily what is sought after, and the semantic confusions inherent in word-play, mongrel languages and mistranslations are not always negative. The dictator Paduk, for example, has a linguistic ideal of total comprehensibility which is directly associated with his vision of a totalitarian state.¹⁵ Such a desire to eliminate linguistic embellishment and ambiguity is reflected in the state-friendly production of *Hamlet* which Ember is directing. The source of this peculiar interpretation, which ends up stating Fortinbras not Hamlet as the hero, is Professor Hamm's study 'The Real Plot of *Hamlet*' from which Ember quotes:

As with all decadent democracies, everybody in the Denmark of the play suffers from a plethora of words. If the state is to be saved, if the nation desires to be worthy of a new robust government, then everything must be changed; popular common sense must spit out the caviar of moonshine and poetry, and the simple word, *verbum sine ornatu*, intelligible to man and

¹⁵ Nabokov is dismissive of comparisons with Orwell in his introduction to *Bend Sinister* (BS 6), but Paduk's ideal language can be related to the extreme simplicity and intended clarity of Newspeak.

beast alike, and accompanied by fit action, must be restored to power. (BS 97-8)

The aim for common sense and intelligibility is simultaneously a rejection of 'moonshine and poetry'; it is also fundamental to state control. Linguistic ambiguity can of course produce subtlety of expression as well as confusion – it is no coincidence, then, that Krug's resistance to Paduk's regime is expressed in a misprint. When Paduk demands that Krug sign a declaration of support for the new totalitarian regime, Krug reads 'playful' instead of 'planful', a subtle subversion of the significance of that declaration. And to Paduk's metaphor 'the cream of the intelligentsia' Krug suggests an embellishment: 'the whipped cream of the intelligentsia,' adding a pun to the metaphor, and signalling his own manipulation by the regime as a member of that intelligentsia. Krug's additions to the text, both intentional and accidental, make use of the positive subversive potential of linguistic ambiguity and indicate Krug's refusal to endorse the statement he is supposed to have written.

Semantic ambiguity is thus a sign both of political and moral corruption and of resistance to that corruption; the 'problems of translation' that Nabokov highlights in the introduction also embody such positive forms of ambiguity as are concretised in Krug's linguistic resistance. On the one hand are questions of intelligibility in interlingual communication, and on the other are issues of linguistic creativity and the necessity of ambiguity in language. There is thus a profound ambivalence inherent in Nabokov's multilingualism. In interlingual as well as multilingual communication, the referential function of language is often impaired; the semantic ambiguities and strange patterns produced by such multilingualism, however, can also be extremely productive in an artistic sense: new forms of language can be created.

Nabokov's own work as translator is important in this regard, not least because of its influence, both thematic and stylistic, upon his own writing. His most famous and controversial translation is his uncompromisingly literal *Eugene Onegin* in English (1964). The dedication to semantic fidelity which is evident in this work stands, however, in stark contrast to the liberality of his 'smooth and elegant' domesticating translations of English and French works into Russian,¹⁶ and to his self-translations, which often substantially revise the original text. One translation that is particularly representative of his early translations is his rendition of *Alice in Wonderland: Anya v stranye chudes* (1923), completed while he was still a student at Cambridge. The Pushkin translation attempts to limit as far as possible the translator's creative input; Nabokov's *Anya* and self-translations, on the other hand, make explicit use of translation as a catalyst for creativity. This second function of translation is extremely important in Nabokov's fiction, not only in its capacity as a way of revising texts, but also as a means of maximising the potential of interlingual productivity.

Grayson affirms that, though it is a 'delightful, ingenious, and wholly "readable" piece of work', *Anya* is 'in no sense [...] a scholarly undertaking. [...] In rendering the puns and word-play Nabokov does not shrink from substituting his own inventions when he can find no close equivalent in Russian.' He transposes the setting from England to Russia, turns Carroll's verse parodies into parodies of Russian classics, transposes names, measurements and geographical and historical references, and even 'adds some word-play of his own "in the spirit" of the original.'¹⁷ *Anya* is thus problematic as a translation, especially in the context of

¹⁶ Jenefer Coates, 'Changing Horses: Nabokov and Translation,' *The Practices of Literary Translation: Constraints and Creativity*, ed. Jean Boase-Beier and Michael Holman (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1998) 93.

¹⁷ Grayson 19-21.

Venuti's critique of domesticating translation.¹⁸ Beverley Lyon Clark, however, makes a convincing case for the importance of *Anya* in Nabokov's stylistic development, especially with regard to his use of wordplay and his treatment of fantasy.¹⁹ And, as Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour observes, this 'diabolically difficult, virtuoso performance' 'gave strenuous exercise to his gift for linguistic inventiveness and was a foretaste of the multilingual playfulness of such novels as *Ada*.'²⁰ The translator's *creativity* has been given free reign in *Anya*, so that, though perhaps containing too much of the translator's own art to be satisfactory as anything other than what Van and Ada would call a 'transversion', *Anya* plays an important part in Nabokov's creative oeuvre.

Nabokov would later reject domesticating translations, asserting that 'we must dismiss, once and for all the conventional notion that a translation "should read smoothly," and "should not sound like a translation" [...] In point of fact, any translation that does *not* sound like a translation is bound to be inexact upon inspection'.²¹ If the earlier translation was a catalyst for creativity, in *Onegin* it is precisely the translator's own creative input that is minimised. In his foreword to *Onegin*, Nabokov writes that 'no scholar should succumb to stylishness and no reader be fooled by it', and adopts instead a method of extreme literality in order to '[render], as closely as the associative and syntactical capacities of another language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original.'²² His translation is indeed ruthlessly literal, sacrificing 'everything (elegance, euphony, clarity, good taste,

¹⁸ As I detailed in my Introduction, domesticating translation is target-oriented, creating an 'illusion of transparency' that hides the interpretative and transformative function of translation. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995) 21.

¹⁹ Beverley Lyon Clark, 'Nabokov's Assault on Wonderland,' *Nabokov's Fifth Arc* 63-74.

²⁰ Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the "First" Emigration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 87.

²¹ Nabokov, 'Translator's Foreword', *A Hero of Our Time*, by Mihail Lermontov, trans. Vladimir Nabokov in collaboration with Dmitri Nabokov (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1958) xii.

²² Aleksandr Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, trans. and commentary Vladimir Nabokov (New York: Bollingen foundation, 1964) vol. 1, 'foreword' viii.

modern usage, and even grammar) that the dainty mimic prizes higher than truth.²³ Even *Onegin*, however, transforms the original text: Nabokov, quite deliberately, made the translation as ‘unpoetic’ as possible, a quality which infuriated contemporary critics.²⁴ Jakobson, signalling the importance of paronomasia to ‘poetic art’, writes that ‘poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible’.²⁵ In what de Man has called ‘the aporia between freedom and faithfulness,’²⁶ the translation of formal and stylistic elements is a creative process that entails semantic ambiguity and the mutation of the text, while a literal translation sacrifices an aesthetic sense for semantics. In view of the fact that, especially in ‘poetic language,’ the form of the signifier plays as important a part as its signified, neither the literal nor the ‘free’ translation is in fact ‘faithful’ to the text: translation always incurs mutation.²⁷

Nabokov’s acute awareness of such untranslatability is fundamental to his *Onegin*: he intends it not as a substitution for Pushkin’s text, but as ‘a crib, a pony’, ideally to be read alongside the original (SO 38).²⁸ The translation itself, moreover, only constitutes a fraction of the four-volume work: it is accompanied by footnotes

²³ *Onegin*, ‘foreword’ x.

²⁴ Nabokov’s friend, the critic and writer Edmund Wilson, was at the forefront of criticisms of Nabokov’s *Onegin*, sparking a public dispute of singular intensity that was to cost them their friendship. In response to such criticism, however, Nabokov was defiant, declaring that he would ‘defowlerise it still more drastically’ in future editions: ‘I think I shall turn it entirely into utilitarian prose, with a still bumpier brand of English, rebarbative barricades of square brackets and tattered banners of reprobate words, in order to eliminate the last vestiges of bourgeois poesy and concession to rhythm.’ (SO 243)

²⁵ Roman Jakobson. ‘On linguistic aspects of translation,’ *Selected Writings Volume II: Word and Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971) 266.

²⁶ Paul de Man. ‘Conclusions: Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator.”’ Messenger Lecture. Cornell University, 4 Mar 1983. *Yale French Studies* 69 (1985): 44.

²⁷ Indeed, Lawrence Venuti reminds us that ‘canons of accuracy in translation, notions of “fidelity” and “freedom,” are historically determined categories. Even the notion of “linguistic error” is subject to variation, since mistranslations, especially in literary texts, can be not merely intelligible but significant in the target-language culture.’ Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility* 18.

²⁸ Jenefer Coates notes that Nabokov originally intended the translation to be ‘an interlinear version for students of Russian’, in which the Cyrillic, its roman transliteration and the English literal rendering were to run parallel with each other. Footnotes were also originally intended to be printed on the same page as the lines of the poem to which they referred. Coates 103.

which *describe* all the historical, linguistic, stylistic aspects of the text (and a few idiosyncratically Nabokovian details) that the translation is unable to include. For Nabokov, then, it is not the translation itself which challenges Babel, but the footnotes:

I want translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity.²⁹

The inevitable failure of accurate semantic transfer between languages can thus accompany other more interesting and even positive effects. Though Nabokov curbs his own translational creativity in the translation itself, this restraint finds its contrast in the excessive proliferation of footnotes which supplement the text with a strange idealism reminiscent of Benjaminian notions of interlingual complementarity.

Onegin even had direct impact upon Nabokov's fiction: *Pale Fire*, as I will demonstrate, bears a direct formal relation to Nabokov's *Onegin*, and can even be read as a by-product of that translation,³⁰ *Lolita* shares many of its characteristics,³¹ and *Ada*, Nabokov's most translational novel, is littered with unattributed lines from *Onegin*.³²

Nabokov's translations thus had a direct impact upon formal and stylistic characteristics of his work. That work is also, however, often directly translational in its mode of composition. The very process of writing in a foreign language can

²⁹ Nabokov, 'Problems of Translation: "Onegin" in English,' *Partisan Review* 22 (1955): 512.

³⁰ Nabokov himself confirmed this connection: in response to an interviewer's query regarding the relationship between his translations and *Pale Fire*, he states that '[y]es, I had finished all my notes to *Onegin* before I began *Pale Fire*. Flaubert speaks in one of his letters, in relation to a certain scene in *Madame Bovary*, about the difficulty of painting *couleur sur couleur*. This in a way is what I tried to do in revisiting my own experience when inventing Kinbote.' (SO 77)

³¹ Coates writes that 'the two texts bear striking similarities: the "fancy prose" of the one, the "novel-in-verse" of the other; the shared gallicisms and neologisms; the layered structures and intertextual references; the parody, humour and multiple registers; the loathsome hero and anti-hero, the pathetic but morally triumphant heroine; Romanticism and unrequited infatuation, the epistolary episodes and shooting scene; the topological exploration and social panorama. Humbert quotes and misquotes from French texts referred to in *Onegin*, his mistakes evincing the same authorial scorn for bad readers and poor translators as Pushkin showed.' Coates 107.

³² Where they remain unattributed in the text, 'Vivian Darkbloom's notes' indicate the citations, however, and provide references to the relevant passages in *Onegin*.

itself be perceived as analogous to translation; indeed, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, the adoption of the coloniser's language by postcolonial writers is often described by those writers as the 'translation' of their cultural and linguistic reality into that foreign language. Salman Rushdie frequently makes use of 'translation' as a way of defining the migrant's cultural as well as linguistic condition, for example when he describes British Indian writers as 'translated men'. Though much is distorted and 'lost' in translation, 'something,' Rushdie insists, 'can also be gained' (IH 17). This claim is fundamental to Rushdie's deliberately hybridised fiction; it is also, however, validated by Nabokov's oeuvre. Michaël Oustinoff notes that, unlike a writer like Conrad, who attempts to minimise any traces of interference of the mother tongue, Nabokov's writing is marked by a deliberate use of interlingual interference.³³ William Woodin Rowe, in *Nabokov's Deceptive World*, argues that Nabokov 'has adapted the English language to certain Russian modes of expression' and demonstrates how various stylistic features, such as the coining of new words, the use of prefixes and suffixes, and the placing of emphasis on the roots of words, are all related to characteristics of the Russian language.³⁴ As Rowe writes:

It is no secret that Nabokov has both sought and received help with his English. And little "mistakes" do seem occasionally to be made in Nabokov's English prose. Upon close scrutiny, however, nearly every one of these turns out to be a grammatically correct but faintly fresh, or "foreign," effect probably left on purpose, much as a painter might leave a tiny, unintended but mysteriously successful brush stroke. [...] Often, such "foreign" wordings seem to derive directly from Russian modes of expression.³⁵

This is apparent even as early as *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, where, as Grayson notes, 'Nabokov already renders the flavour of Russian and French speech,

³³ Michaël Oustinoff, *Bilinguisme d'écriture et auto-translation: Julien Green, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001) 49.

³⁴ William Woodin Rowe, 'Wordings and Meanings', *Nabokov's Deceptive World* (New York: New York University Press, 1971) 21-48.

³⁵ Rowe 29.

using foreign constructions and transliteration.’³⁶ Often the purpose of such foreignising processes is in part mimetic: Rowe reminds us that ‘exceedingly few of Nabokov’s narrators and characters have English as their first language; hence a foreign flavouring in their speech seems both natural and effective.’³⁷ The clearest example of this occurs in *Pnin*, where the Russian Professor Pnin’s foreignness is reflected in Russianised prose. Beckett, as we have seen, uses subtle hybridisations to represent the foreignness of his protagonists, and Rushdie, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, also makes use of this mimetic dimension of *hybridised* language. Beckett, Nabokov and Rushdie all, however, use subtle hybridisations not only to represent the foreigner’s speech, but also for more general stylistic effect.

Nabokov and Beckett share the extremely rare quality of being so thoroughly multilingual (Beckett in English and French; Nabokov in English, Russian and French) as to be translators of their own work. This practice of self-translation plays an important part in both stylistic and thematic aspects of their texts. Beckett sometimes accompanies translation with revision, and much of his work only appears in English through the medium of the French language, in translation from the original French text. Nabokov also, to varying degrees, accompanies translation of his own work with processes of revision. He is acutely aware of the creative possibilities of translation; indeed, it is this awareness which leads him towards such a ‘servile path’ in his translations of other people’s works: the translator’s creativity inevitably distorts the text, and must therefore be minimised. Where *self*-translation is concerned, however, he is not so bound by the need for fidelity to the original text; the creative potential unleashed in the process of transference between languages can thus take full effect.

³⁶ Grayson 175.

³⁷ Rowe 29.

In view of Nabokov's multilingual background, it is apt that his memoir, *Speak, Memory*, has a similarly multilingual past. The first part of *Speak, Memory* to be published was a piece entitled 'Mademoiselle O' (later to become Chapter 5 of the final version), a recollection of Nabokov's French tutor written, appropriately enough, in French. The other parts of what would become *Speak, Memory* were written first in English and published individually in a variety of different magazines. These were collected together, along with 'Mademoiselle O' in English (translated by Hilda Ward in collaboration with the author) in 1951 in a volume entitled *Conclusive Evidence*. Nabokov then translated the volume into Russian, using the process of translation to 'do something about the amnesic defects of the original – blank spots, blurry areas, domains of dimness'.³⁸ The text, thus transformed through translation, was again subjected to further revision when translated back into English and into its final form as *Speak, Memory*. Nabokov's comments highlight the importance of these interminable retranslations to the finished product:

For the present, final edition of *Speak, Memory* I have not only introduced basic changes and copious additions into the initial English text, but have availed myself of the corrections I made while turning it into Russian. This re-Englishing of a Russian re-version of what had been an English re-telling of Russian memories in the first place, proved to be a diabolical task, but some consolation was given me by the thought that such multiple metamorphosis, familiar to butterflies, had not been tried by any human before. (SM 9-10)

Though *Speak, Memory* provides the most extreme example, translational revision is noted by Grayson as a general feature of Nabokov's self-translations. She observes that '[t]he story of Nabokov's development as a writer is the story of a developing

³⁸ Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000) 9. (All subsequent references to *Speak, Memory* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'SM').

preoccupation with pattern and artifice.’³⁹ Though ‘artifice’ and ‘stylization’ were ‘not absent from Nabokov’s early work’,⁴⁰ these features are more apparent in the English novels; in translating his Russian novels into English, however, Nabokov increases the degree of artifice inherent in the early work: ‘a study of [Nabokov’s] revisions shows that preoccupation with artifice is both a continuing and an increasingly marked feature of his writing. This is apparent in his reworking of his autobiography, and it can be seen, too, in his translations where he imposes pattern and design upon earlier Russian works.’⁴¹ Transposition as well as composition in the foreign tongue, it would seem, affects the thematic, stylistic and linguistic characteristics of the text, and in particular leads the author to emphasise the *artificiality* of his fictional constructions – the arbitrariness of the ‘reality’ contained within the work of art as well as the arbitrariness of the foreign tongue that narrates and creates that ‘reality’. As in Beckett, self-translation thus becomes a means of perpetuating the foreigner’s perspective on language. In Nabokov, the multilingual perspective seems to emphasise not only the arbitrariness of language but also the artifice inherent in the literary creation. He thus incorporates the translational qualities of his later English style into the English versions of his early Russian novels.

What, for Nabokov translating Pushkin, would be termed a mistranslation, thus in his own work becomes a mode of creative translational revision. In my Introduction I cited Sherry Simon’s definition of a ‘poétique de la traduction’: ‘un procédé de création interlinguale qui a pour résultat la manifestation “d’effets de traduction” dans le texte’ which makes use of the relationship with a foreign

³⁹ Grayson 214.

⁴⁰ Grayson 4.

⁴¹ Grayson 215.

language 'pour nourrir la création'.⁴² Simon's definition is clearly pertinent both to Nabokov's stylistic multilingualism and to his use of translation to revise texts. Nabokov's own theory of translation, however, manifests an acute awareness of the confusing and/or destructive effects of interlingual contact and mistranslation; indeed, many of the multilingual effects of his fiction also demonstrate the distorting effects of translation and the potential for interlingual misunderstanding. In view of his ambivalence towards the confusing and/or destructive as well as productive creative effects of interlingual contact, it is perhaps more apt, therefore, to talk of the importance of a poetics of *mistranslation* to Nabokov's art.

Bend Sinister presents us with an example of the mixed effects of translational creativity. Krug's philosophical work is esoteric, difficult, and read only by a small academic minority in his own country. He achieves fame only once his work has been translated into English by his friend Ember, when it achieves bestseller status in America. Clearly, the text has undergone some kind of radical transformation in the process of translation. We can get a sense of what Ember has done to Krug's text when we compare the original title, *Komparatiwn Stuhdar en Sophistat tuen Pekrekh*, to that of the American edition: *The Philosophy of Sin*. The title, clarified and simplified, is snappier and much more commercial; it also indicates, however, that the meaning of the original text has been altered.⁴³

Paradoxically, the limitations of interlingual transfer and the evident problems inherent in translating Krug's text into English render the book more comprehensible. The semantic and linguistic mutations in the process of translation

⁴² A 'poetics of translation': 'a process of interlingual creation which results in the manifestation of "translation effects" within the text', which makes use of the foreign language 'to nourish creativity'. Sherry Simon, *Le trafic des langues: traduction et culture dans la littérature québécoise* (Montréal: Boréal, 1994) 19-20.

⁴³ The original title can of course only be approximately deciphered as it is in the invented language of Sinisterbad.

have here transformed a masterpiece of esoteric thought into a bestseller that competes with the worst kind of popular novel. The problems of translation in this case simultaneously impede and facilitate communication. The commercial success of Ember's translation is in part a jibe at the commercialism of 'readerly' but inaccurate translations that Van Veen will later dismiss as 'a paraphrast's crass counterfeit'.⁴⁴ We imagine that this translation is fairly bad in terms of its lack of fidelity to the original text; in stylistic terms, however, it is fascinating. Ember considers the possibility that the appeal of *The Philosophy of Sin* is not simply due to any semantic clarification, but to a peculiar form of stylistic hybridisation:

Ember [...] covertly wondered whether perhaps his particular brand of rich synthetic English had contained some outlandish ingredient, some dreadful additional spice that might account for the unexpected excitement (BS 35)

Nabokov is here gesturing towards some kind of alchemy in the contact between languages which produces an extremely attractive stylistic oddity – as Benjamin claims in 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', when the language of translation is affected by the source language, the practice of translation can itself become important to the development of language. This can be directly related to Nabokov's own work: the creative possibilities of translation detailed in *Bend Sinister* could perhaps explain the appeal of his own multilingual prose style.

In *Pale Fire*, Nabokov makes especially innovative use of the theme of translation. George Steiner writes that 'the multilingual, cross-linguistic situation is both the matter and form of Nabokov's work (the two are, no doubt, inseparable and *Pale Fire* is the parable of their fusion).'⁴⁵ As I have already indicated, *Pale Fire* and the *Onegin* translation bear remarkable formal similarities. *Pale Fire* consists of

⁴⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 204. (All subsequent references to *Ada* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'A').

⁴⁵ George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972) 7.

a poem, 'Pale Fire,' written by the fictional poet John Shade, and an excessive commentary on that poem by an academic and so-called friend of the author, Charles Kinbote. *Pale Fire*, like *Onegin*, is thus made up of a poem accompanied by excessive annotation. The footnotes of Nabokov's translation constitute the substance of his translation rather than the poem itself; the footnotes of *Pale Fire* also take precedence over John Shade's poem, so that the poem is subsumed by Kinbote's commentary. As Kinbote affirms in his 'foreword':

Let me state that without my notes Shade's text simply has no human reality at all since the human reality of such a poem as his (being too skittish and reticent for an autobiographical work), with the omission of many pithy lines carelessly rejected by him, has to depend entirely on the reality of its author and his surroundings, attachments and so forth, a reality that only my notes can provide. To this statement my dear poet would probably not have subscribed, but, for better or worse, it is the commentator who has the last word.⁴⁶

Kinbote's commentary, however, cannot do otherwise than proclaim its own inventiveness; even those 'pithy lines' of so-called rejected drafts are later acknowledged as probably invented anyway – in his note to line 550, Kinbote admits that the two 'variant' lines given in the note to line 12 'are distorted and tainted by wistful thinking.' (PF 180) We can perceive Kinbotian excess in Nabokov's notes to *Onegin*; indeed, *Pale Fire* is a parody of scholarship gone awry, and in this sense is a perverse mirror-world of Nabokov's own scholarship.

Onegin and *Pale Fire*, then, stand in opposition to each other: Nabokov's scrupulous literalism in translation is strangely mirrored by Kinbote's utter disrespect for Shade's poem, which allows him to produce astonishingly fanciful 'interpretations' of that poem. The comparison pits literalism against liberality; it is almost as if the extreme stylistic restraint of Nabokov's *Onegin* is unleashed in the

⁴⁶ Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) 25. (All subsequent references to *Pale Fire* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'PF').

excessive creativity of misinterpretation and mistranslation in *Pale Fire*. Though John Shade's poem is not itself a translation, the theme of translation, and especially mistranslation, constantly recurs in Kinbote's notes; the theme of scholarly misinterpretation in *Pale Fire* is, moreover, directly linked to the theme of mistranslation. For Nabokov, a bad translation is fundamentally reliant on the translator's interpretation of the source text: Ember's translation of Krug's work in *Bend Sinister* can only be a simplified interpretation of that work. In *Pale Fire*, examples of translation and mistranslation in the text accentuate Kinbote's own interpretative strangeness, and even at times form the basis of Kinbote's misreadings.

The most apparent example of such correspondence between mistranslation and misinterpretation is with regard to the title of the poem *Pale Fire*. Shade hints at the source of the title in a parenthetical aside within the poem:

(But *this* transparent thingum does require
Some moondrop title. Help me, Will! *Pale Fire*.) (PF 57)

Kinbote, in his note to these lines, unwittingly and obliquely touches upon the source of the title:

Paraphrased, this evidently means: Let me look in Shakespeare for something I might use for a title. And the find is "pale fire." But in which of the Bard's works did our poet cull it? My readers must make their own research. All I have with me is a tiny vest pocket edition of *Timon of Athens* – in Zemblan! It certainly contains nothing that could be regarded as an equivalent of "pale fire" (if it had, my luck would have been a statistical monster). (PF 223-4)

Kinbote's luck *is* a statistical monster, however, for the phrase 'pale fire' does indeed occur in *Timon of Athens*:

The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
Robs the vast sea: the moon's an arrant thief,
And her pale fire she snatches from the sun:
The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
The moon into salt tears [...] (*Timon of Athens*, Act IV, Scene III)

Kinbote, moreover, has already quoted the play in his note to lines 39-40. Not having the original Shakespeare, however, but only his uncle Conmal's Zemblan translation, Kinbote retranslates from the Zemblan back into English, in the process distorting the Shakespeare to such a ridiculous extent as to completely obliterate any reference to 'pale fire' whatsoever:

The sun is a thief: she lures the sea
and robs it. The moon is a thief:
he steals his silvery light from the sun.
The sea is a thief: it dissolves the moon. (PF 66)

Through this translation we get our first glimpse of the nature of the Zemblan language and the distortions it imposes upon English. Genders change: the sun becomes feminine and the moon masculine – presumably the genders of the respective nouns in Nabokov's invented language. The rhythmic and syntactic simplicity of the re-translated verses reflects the harsh simplicity of the Zemblan language we will later come across. But alongside the inadequacies of that language to express Shakespeare's lines are the flagrant alterations inherent in a bad translation (whether this occurs in the transition from English to Zemblan or in Kinbote's own retranslation back into English it is impossible to say). The transformation of 'pale fire' into 'silvery light' turns the phrase into a cliché. Perhaps even more apparent, however, is the obliteration of all elaboration and descriptive detail in Kinbote's version: any elements that are not necessary to a basic referential function are removed. Much of the linguistic appeal of the lines is thus lost: the pale fire is literally stolen from Shakespeare's lines.

This distortion relates thematically to the misinterpretation to which Shade's poem is subjected. The disappearance of 'pale fire' from Shakespeare itself reflects Kinbote's reductive misreading, which takes the poem as merely a reflection of Zemblan stories: the commentary removes vital elements from the poem. Kinbote,

thinking that Shade's poem is a reflection – the pale fire – of his own Zemblan tales and friendship with the poet, ends up himself being the thief, so that poem and commentary are locked in a reciprocal relationship whereby (mis)interpretation not only circumscribes our reading of the poem but steals aspects of the poem and relates them back to us in different forms. Hazel Shade's 'twisted' words from line 348 thus recur in Kinbote's request that Sybil 'dip, or redip, spider, into this book' (PF 131), and Kinbote admits that he has caught himself 'borrowing a kind of opalescent light from my poet's fiery orb, and unconsciously aping the prose style of his own critical essays.' (PF 67)

In stealing the pale fire from Shade's sun, however, Kinbote creates his own masterpiece of misguided scholarship. He writes that 'I have no desire to twist and batter an unambiguous *apparatus criticus* into the monstrous semblance of a novel' (PF 71), and yet the end result is just that: Nabokov's novel, *Pale Fire*, is even more the product of Kinbotian rambling than of the poem after which it is named. From this perspective, the transparency of Shade's poem ('*this* transparent thingum', PF 57) leads us to read Shade, not as the sun, but as the shadow or reflection suggested by his name: he is the reflection of Kinbote, whose commentary ultimately dominates the poem and makes that poem a reflection of his own story. Shade, even in the very first lines of his poem, is already the shadow, duped by the reflection of Kinbote's interpretation:

I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the windowpane; (PF 29)

The ambiguities and constant reflections and refractions between poem and commentary in *Pale Fire* have produced long-running critical debates regarding the 'authorship' (within the text) of the poem and commentary. Some critics have argued that Shade produced both poem and commentary; others that Kinbote

invented Shade and wrote 'Pale Fire' as well as his notes. In addition to these arguments are the various possibilities regarding Kinbote's sanity and powers of invention (whether he has invented his royal past, whether or not Zembla is 'real', etc.).⁴⁷ Such debates fall into the playful trap set by Nabokov, who deliberately sets up processes of mirroring that are so complex that it is impossible to locate any definite 'reality' within the text or to confirm the hierarchy of poem over commentary or vice versa. 'Pale Fire' and Kinbote's fantasy-commentary mirror each other: each becomes the 'pale fire' or shadow of the other.

Themes of misinterpretation and mistranslation are closely related throughout *Pale Fire*, and Kinbote's shameless appropriation of Shade's 'original' text is echoed in Conmal's theory of translation. We have seen how his Zemblan version of Shakespeare distorts the original; this is partly explained by the nature of the Zemblan language and by the fact that he mastered English 'mainly by learning a lexicon by heart' (PF 224). The main reason for such distortion, as I suggested above, is, however, the license which the translator allows himself. Kinbote quotes Conmal's response to criticism of his *Shakespeare*:

I am not slave! Let be my critic slave.
I cannot be. And Shakespeare would not want thus.
Let drawing students copy the acanthus,
I work with Master on the architrave! (PF 225)

Apart from being exceedingly bad poetry, which reflects Conmal's method of learning English (words like 'acanthus' and 'architrave' evidently belong to the lexicon that taught the translator), Conmal's theory of translation apparently rejects any notion of copying or reproducing the source text. It instead gives full rein to the creativity of the translator, placing him on supposedly equal terms with Shakespeare.

⁴⁷ Neil Cornwell provides a useful brief summary of these critical debates in *Vladimir Nabokov* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1999) 77-79.

The arrogance of such an assumption is emphasised by the fact that Conmal is unable to write poetry, let alone create a Zemblan equivalent of Shakespeare. Though Conmal is a comically exaggerated example, the principle reflects Nabokov's view of even competent 'free' translations: that it is sacrilegious to assume one's own creativity over that of the original author.

Misinterpretation and mistranslation in *Pale Fire* always occur in the context of Kinbote's Zembla. The meaning of the name of that mythical Northern country echoes its significance within the novel: Kinbote tells us that 'the name Zembla is a corruption not of the Russian *zemlya*, but of Semblerland, a land of reflections, of "resemblers"' (PF 208). This is in accordance with the fact that, as Kinbote often remarks, all Zemblans look alike and that the King's escape from Zembla is facilitated by a legion of impersonators dressed, like the Scarlet Pimpernel, in red. Zembla also reflects the Zenda of Anthony Hope's adventure story, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, whose main character, bearing an uncanny likeness to the king of another imaginary country ('Ruritania'), is forced to impersonate that king, and then tells the tale of his adventures in a style of which Kinbote's own fantasy is clearly reminiscent. Zembla as 'a land of reflections', however, also evokes its mirror-like relation to our and Shade's world.⁴⁸ Similarly, Zemblan is 'the tongue of the mirror', a language which Kinbote, not surprisingly, asserts is far superior to other languages for the purposes of translation. Dismissing Sybil Shade's French translations of Donne, he cannot resist providing a Zemblan version in order to demonstrate '[h]ow magnificently those two lines can be mimed and rhymed in our

⁴⁸ The Russian *zemlya*, meaning 'earth,' also, like the imaginary Terra of *Ada*, suggests the possibility that 'real' and imaginary have been reversed, so that if Antiterra is the 'real' world of *Ada*, so perhaps Shade's world is imaginary and Kinbote's *zemlya* 'real'. 'Reality' is, in any case, 'a very subjective affair' for Nabokov (SO 10), and the possible inversion of *zemlya* and the 'real' world emphasises the fact that Shade's world is no more 'real' than Kinbote's: it is simply more *realistically* represented.

magic Zemblan' (PF 191). Both Zembla and its language, therefore, serve the purpose of reflecting and translating 'real' events into Zemblan.

The metaphor of translation as reflection recurs in Nabokov's own poem on translating Pushkin:

Reflected words can only shiver
Like elongated lights that twist
In the black mirror of a river
Between the city and the mist.⁴⁹

Translation cannot provide a clear mirror, but only a distorted and refracted image. Kinbote's peculiarly Zemblan interpretation of Shade's poem and Conmal's misappropriation of Shakespeare into his own guttural and simplistic tongue parody this process through their exaggerated forms of mistranslation and misinterpretation. Such linguistic and semantic distortion, though extremely detrimental to processes of translation and interpretation is, however, fundamental to art. Ember's translations in *Bend Sinister* demonstrate that a semantically distorting mistranslation can nevertheless produce a certain aesthetic appeal by affecting and altering the language of translation. The positive distortions are not only stylistic, however: Kinbote's annotations exemplify the creativity inherent in misinterpretation – in abandoning any notion of fidelity to the source text, the annotator (or translator) is free to invent. Mistranslation and misinterpretation are synonymous with creativity: it is Kinbote's storytelling which converts an annotated poem into 'the monstrous semblance of a novel.' (PF 71)

Error does not need to be *crafted* to play its part in art, however. Shade recounts a near-death experience in which he has a vision of 'a tall white fountain' (PF 50). He subsequently reads an article about a woman who purportedly experienced a similar vision during an operation and resolves to meet her, only to

⁴⁹ *Onegin*, 'Translator's Introduction' 9.

find that her vision had been transformed by a misprint from a 'mountain' into a 'fountain'. The experience prompts one of the most important passages of *Pale*

Fire:

Life Everlasting – based on a misprint!
I mused as I drove homeward: take the hint,
And stop investigating my abyss?
But all at once it dawned on me that *this*
Was the real point, the contrapuntal theme;
Just this: not text, but texture; not the dream
But topsy-turvical coincidence,
Not flimsy nonsense, but a web of sense.
Yes! It sufficed that I in life could find
Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind
Of correlated pattern in the game,
Plexed artistry, and something of the same
Pleasure in it as they who played it found. (PF 53)

Ambiguity, error and coincidence can form the pattern of life and art, its 'plexed artistry' – or, in Van Veen's words, 'the artistry of asymmetry' (A 221). 'Plexed artistry' is also, however, the 'web of sense' that the artist imposes upon the chaos of experience and 'topsy-turvical coincidence'. The misprint thus becomes the substance of art: it is reconfigured by Shade into the 'web of sense' of the poem 'Pale Fire' (in Kinbote's note to line 802, Shade asks to return home early in order to 'plunge back into his chaos and drag out of it, with all its wet stars, his cosmos', PF 204). That Kinbote devotes an entire note to the problems of translating 'the transformation, at one stroke, of "mountain" into "fountain"' (PF 204) is no coincidence, however, and reminds us that the shifting meaning caused by the misprint is akin to the semantic shift of the mistranslation (which in turn makes it extremely difficult to translate). Semantic ambiguity – linguistic chaos – both produces the need for the artist's imposition of order and the material with which to create that order. Nabokov's fictional practice itself mirrors *Pale Fire*: it makes full use of the strange allure of hybrid tongues, the complexities of multilingual puns,

misprints and bizarre accidents of translation which nevertheless produce fascinating linguistic oddities and strange coincidences. Such linguistic accidents are, in Nabokov, reconfigured into complex patterns and systems of correspondence that proclaim their own artifice.

Ada is Nabokov's most multilingual novel, and manifests extremely high levels of both semantic ambiguity and 'plexed artistry'. Nabokov's treatment of translation within the novel clearly illustrates the ambivalence inherent in his attitude to the distortions produced by translation. He brutally parodies the practice of liberal or 'readerly' translation, thus reinforcing the defence of literality in his *Onegin*. *Ada* is also, however, the apotheosis of Nabokov's multilingual aesthetic: the clever mistranslations of Van and Ada are not merely parodies, but reflect the language of the novel, and indeed *Ada* has itself been described as 'a gigantic translation'.⁵⁰ As in *Pale Fire*, accidents of translation and semantic ambiguity form 'plexed artistry,' and the creativity of mistranslation proves extremely productive for fictional purposes. The main protagonists of *Ada*, the lovers and siblings Van and Ada Veen, are, like Nabokov, proficient in Russian, English and French; they are also as interested in translation as their author. They parody bad translations and play with language to such an extent that they bring the creativity of bad translation into their very mode of expression – and even at times express themselves directly through translation, engaging in particularly complex forms of intertextual and multilingual reference.

The very first sentence of the novel is a mistranslation. As Nabokov writes, under the guise of the anagrammatic 'Vivian Darkbloom' in the 'Notes to *Ada*,'

⁵⁰ Annapaola Cancogni. *The Mirage in the Mirror: Nabokov's Ada and its French Pre-Texts* (New York: Garland, 1985) 251.

this deliberate distortion of the opening line of *Anna Karenin* is a direct attack on ‘mistranslations of Russian classics’:

The opening sentence of Tolstoy’s novel is turned inside out and Anna Arkadievna’s patronymic given an absurd masculine ending, while an incorrect feminine one is added to her surname. ‘Mount Tabor’ and ‘Pontius’ allude to the transfigurations (Mr G. Steiner’s term, I believe) and betrayals to which great texts are subjected by pretentious and ignorant versionists. (A 463)⁵¹

Ada’s understanding of translation is accompanied by a similar severity towards inaccurate translations. Early on in Van and Ada’s acquaintance, she discourses fluently on Fowlie’s mistranslations of Rimbaud’s *Mémoire*. Fowlie’s botanical ignorance – another unforgivable offence for his young critic – is manifest in his mistranslations: in particular, the plant *souci d’eau* ‘has been traduced or shall we say transfigured’ into ‘the asinine “care of the water”’, while *ciel de lit* has become ‘bed ceiler.’ ‘Flowers,’ as Van punningly remarks, have been transformed ‘into bloomers’ (A 55-6). The translator, rather than finding appropriate botanical terms for ‘*ciel de lit*’ or ‘*souci d’eau*’, misses the fact that they are plants at all, translating instead the literal meanings of their names. Ada’s disdain for such ‘English-speaking transmongrelizers’ (A 56) as Fowlie leads her to compose a parodic translation of the first two lines of Marvell’s ‘The Garden’. Marvell’s lines (How vainly men themselves amaze / To win the palm, the oak, or bays⁵²), are transformed by Ada’s French ‘transversion’, into:

*En vain on s’amuse à gagner
L’Oka, la Baie du Palmier...* (A 57)⁵³

⁵¹ The fictional translator of Tolstoy in *Ada*, ‘R.G. Stonelower’, is both George Steiner and Robert Lowell. As Boyd notes, both were involved in the debate surrounding Nabokov’s translation of *Eugene Onegin* and both were against the literality of Nabokov’s translation. See Brian Boyd, ‘Annotations to *Ada*: Part 1, Chapter 1,’ *The Nabokovian* 30 (1993): 17-18. For Nabokov’s comment on Steiner, see SO 288; for his blistering critique of Lowell’s translation of Mandelstam, see ‘On Adaptation,’ SO 280-3.

⁵² Andrew Marvell, ‘The Garden,’ *The Complete Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 100.

⁵³ Vivian Darkbloom’s notes (accurately) translate Ada’s translation back into English as ‘In vain, one gains in play / The Oka river and Palm Bay...’ (A 465).

Ada has turned herself into a French-speaking transmongreliser, transforming Marvell's lines in translation. Her mistranslation is phonetically rather than semantically directed: 'to amaze oneself' becomes 's'amuser à', a false friend which actually means 'to play at' or 'to amuse oneself at' rather than 'to amaze'.

Similarly, the transition from 'Oak' to 'Oka' turns a tree into a river, and the conjunction of 'palm' and 'bays' in '*la Baie du Palmier*' makes use of the false friend *bay/baie* (the French word for 'bay tree' is *laurier*) to bring out the wrong meaning from the English homonym, turning the bay tree into another kind of bay: an indentation in the shoreline. Marvell's trees, then, are lost in translation.

Ada's phonetic translation is extremely skilful: for most of Marvell's substantive words, she finds a false friend in French. The play of the false friends, where phonetic congruence masks semantic difference, produces a collection of potentially divergent meanings. Ada, however, makes this series of semantic accidents cohere in a newly-formed overall meaning; this, moreover, is carried out without marring the phonetic similarity to the original which was the original aim. She thus not only criticises the tendency of certain translators to misunderstand the vocabulary of the original, but succinctly demonstrates the more general semantic distortions inherent in any translation which makes use of paraphrase and adaptation in order to retain the formal and phonetic qualities of the source text. As I have already intimated, such 'free' translations inevitably involve varying degrees of semantic inaccuracy: Ada's 'transversion' of Marvell completes her critique of Fowlie's 'bloomers'.

Ada's talent for mistranslation is also apparent in her revised version of King Lear's lament at Cordelia's death. Shakespeare's words –

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,

Never, never, never, never, never! (*Lear* V, III, 305-7)

become, in Ada's version:

*Ce beau jardin fleurit en mai,
Mais en hiver
Jamais, jamais, jamais, jamais, jamais
N'est vert, n'est vert, n'est vert, n'est vert, n'est vert.* (A 76)

This particular transversion, with its suitably Arcadian theme, has more semantic congruence with Marvell's 'Garden' than the lines of Shakespeare's mad king. The only line which is translated is 'Never, never, never, never, never!' and it is actually 'translated' twice: once literally, and once phonetically. In turning 'never' into 'n'est vert' Ada not only evokes the comical distortions that a French accent would lend to Lear's lines, but emphasises the semantic possibilities of the foreigner's incorrect pronunciation. It is this particularly inventive false friend which then directs the rest of Ada's version, which makes no claim whatsoever to semantic fidelity, but is extremely successful as a terrible translation.

Ada's Shakespeare and Marvell thus play, to comic effect, on phonetic translations which emphasise the false friend. Marvell's trees and Lear's lines are lost in translation. Another of her translations, however, not only manages to keep the trees, but also demonstrates the kind of linguistic inventiveness that can occur in the process of interlingual transfer. She translates the following lines of Coppée on a couple of occasions. The original French reads as follows:

Leur chute est lente. On peut les suivre
Du regard en reconnaissant
Le chêne à sa feuille de cuivre,
L'érable à sa feuille de sang.⁵⁴

Ada's first attempt to render this passage in English is rather free:

Their fall is gentle. The woodchopper
Can tell, before they reach the mud,

⁵⁴ François Coppée. "Matin d'octobre" (*Le Cahier Rouge*, 1874). This stanza appears in *Ada* (A 194).

The oak tree by its leaf of copper,
The maple by its leaf of blood. (A 103)

Ada's concern has clearly been to maintain the rhythm and rhyme-scheme of the original: the French eight-syllable lines find their English equivalent in iambic tetrameters, and the ABAB rhyme-scheme is faithfully maintained. For the sake of poetic form, however, Ada has made significant changes to the meaning of the original: the inclusion of a 'woodchopper' and 'mud', neither of which is even hinted at in *Coppée*, transforms falling leaves into falling trees. Van disdainfully dismisses such a 'paraphrastic touch':

Betraying the first half of the stanza to save the second is rather like that Russian nobleman who chucked his coachman to the wolves, and then fell out of his sleigh. (A 103)

Van does indeed have a point: though Ada's translation makes pretty verse, its alterations to the original are no less significant than her liberal treatment of Marvell, and make the poem more Ada's than *Coppée*'s.

A later attempt, at which the 'versionist' herself expresses disdain (and which may even have been written by Van as a parody of Ada's earlier attempt) stays a little closer to the original:

Their fall is gentle. The leavesdropper
Can follow each of them and know
The oak tree by its leaf of copper,
The maple by its blood-red glow. (A 195)

Rhythmic effects and rhyme-scheme are still evidently a priority, and this incurs some semantic mutation, though less than her earlier version. The most striking element of this translation, however, is the 'splendid trouvaille', as Demon calls it, of an invented word: 'leavesdropper.' Again, this is a semantic imposition upon the original text, and again, Ada has made *Coppée* her own. And yet this is an example of the potential productivity of translation, however troubled the transfer of meaning

may be. Ada, dismissing her own ability as a translator, proclaims that ‘[a] paraphrase, even my paraphrase, is like the corruption of “snakeroot” into “snagrel” – all that remains of a delicate little birthwort.’ (A 194) The context of this comment is, as usual for Ada, botanical: a ‘snakeroot’ is a plant whose roots are used as a remedy for snakebite; ‘birthwort’ is a climbing plant of the same family which, as Van notices, in uncharacteristic concern for propriety, is used to ease childbirth. ‘Birthwort’ also, however, hides a multilingual pun: if we read in it the German *wort* (‘word’), this delicate plant also signifies *birthword*. Just as the plant is transformed by paraphrase, so also the original word – the birthword – is distorted. However, ‘birthwort’ can also signify the birth of words: Ada, in her critique of paraphrase, indicates not only the negative aspects of translation, but, through a multilingual pun, actually demonstrates the power of interlingual contact to *create* words. And this is precisely what she does when she brings a ‘leavesdropper’ into Coppée.

The linguistic inventiveness of *Ada* is bound up with such strange processes of interlingual contact: mistranslations – ‘bloomers’ – are fundamental to the garden of Ada. The text itself, and not just Van and Ada’s clever conversation, is consistently characterised by linguistic and intertextual miscegenation. Ada, ‘who liked crossing orchids,’ produces the following cross-breed poem:

*Mon enfant, ma soeur,
 Songe à l'épaisseur
 Du grand chêne à Tagne;
 Songe à la montagne,
 Songe à la douceur – (A 86)*

Ada here takes lines from Baudelaire’s ‘L’Invitation au voyage’⁵⁵ and from the *romance* sung by Lautrec in Chateaubriand’s *Les aventures du dernier*

⁵⁵ The poem begins: ‘Mon enfant, ma soeur, / Songe à la douceur / D’aller là-bas vivre ensemble! / Aimer à loisir, / Aimer et mourir / Au pays qui te ressemble!’ Charles Baudelaire, ‘L’Invitation au voyage,’ *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1961) 58.

*Abencérage*⁵⁶; mixing them together, she translates both poems into the context of her own childhood memories. Such free adaptation mirrors Ada's considerable talent for mistranslation: the product, though openly based upon other authors' works, is twisted into a highly individual hybrid form. The above poem is thus closely linked to translation as it occurs in *Ada*: adaptation, whether into one's own language or into one's own personal context, is fundamentally creative, hence signalling, not only its reliance on the original source-text(s), but also its transformation of those texts in a way that affirms its independence. The autonomous creativity apparent in translation, therefore, makes any claims of fidelity highly questionable; in *Ada*, however, such productivity is harnessed for expressive purposes.

Ada is both memoir and homage to Van and Ada's love affair: composed by Van Veen in old age, with occasional interjections and alterations by Ada, the novel attempts to recapture the past in prose. *Ada*'s function as nostalgic reconstruction brings further significance to Ada's use, mentioned above, of Chateaubriand. The *romance* is also a nostalgic evocation of childhood memories, addressed to a beloved sister. Two lines of the *romance* – 'Oh! qui me rendra mon Hélène / Et ma montagne, et le grand chêne?' – are, as Vivian Darkbloom remarks, 'one of the leitmotifs of the present novel' (A 467). The theme of nostalgic recollection and longing is relevant, not only to Van Veen's but to Nabokov's own condition of exile. It is noteworthy, then, that we also encounter this particular line from Chateaubriand in Nabokov's own memoir, *Speak, Memory*:

Tamara, Russia, the wildwood grading into old gardens, my northern birches and firs, the sight of my mother getting down on her hands and knees to kiss the earth every time we came back to the country from town for the summer,

⁵⁶ The only line explicitly taken from this poem is from the last stanza, which begins: 'Oh! qui me rendra mon Hélène. / Et ma montagne, et le grand chêne?' François-René Chateaubriand, *Atala*, René, *Les aventures du dernier Abencérage* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996) 236.

et la montagne et le grand chêne – these are things that fate one day bundled up pell-mell and tossed into the sea, completely severing me from my boyhood. I wonder, however, whether there is really much to be said for more anesthetic destinies, for, let us say, a smooth, safe, small-town continuity of time, with its primitive absence of perspective [...]

The break in my own destiny affords me in retrospect a syncopal kick that I would not have missed for worlds. (SM 193)

Rivers and Walkers note that ‘anesthetic’ here denotes not only the numbness of plainer, home-bound destinies, but also ‘an-aesthetic’: a kind of *aesthetic* numbness which accompanies this lack of perspective.⁵⁷ The ‘syncopal kick’ imparted by exile has a direct aesthetic effect, then, one which, fundamental to Nabokov’s art, consistently implies the punning presence of ‘worlds’ in words. The outsider’s perspective is indeed a valuable one, providing both an awareness of different ‘worlds’ (hence also perhaps Nabokov’s own preoccupation with that theme), but also a different perspective on language. The knowledge and use of different languages in different cultural contexts produces a complex linguistic awareness which, in foregrounding linguistic materiality and problematising any stable semantic function, is precisely the kind of perspective to produce paronomasia.

The perspective imparted by exile and the desire to recapture the past in language are apparent in all the recurring forms of Chateaubriand’s lines in *Ada*, culminating in Van’s poem at the beginning of Part 1, Chapter 22. This poem manages to combine elements of mistranslation *and* intertextual adaptation in English, French and Russian. The main source of Van’s poem is the same *romance* which appears in Ada’s cross-breed poem. By placing Van Veen next to Chateaubriand we can see how the two poems interrelate:

My sister, do you still recall

Combien j’ai douce souvenance

⁵⁷ J.E. Rivers and William Walker. ‘Notes to Vivian Darkbloom’s Notes to *Ada*.’ *Nabokov’s Fifth Arc* 278.

⁵⁸ Vivian Darkbloom translates this as: ‘my sister, do you remember the mountain, and the tall oak, and the Ladore?’ (A 467)

⁵⁹ Vivian Darkbloom: ‘oh who will give me back my Aline, and the big oak, and my hill?’ (A 467)

The blue Ladore and Ardis Hall?

Don't you remember any more
That castle bathed by the Ladore?

*Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore
Du château que baignait la Dore?*

My sister, do you still recall
The Ladore-washed old castle wall?

*Sestra moya, ti pomnish' goru,
I dub visokiy, i Ladoru?*⁵⁸

My sister, you remember still
The spreading oak tree and my hill?

*Oh! qui me rendra mon Aline
Et le grand chêne et ma colline?*⁵⁹

Oh, who will give me back my Jill
And the big oak tree and my hill?

*Oh! qui me rendra, mon Adèle,
Et ma montagne et l'hirondelle?*

*Oh! qui me rendra ma Lucile,
La Dore et l'hirondelle agile?*

Oh, who will render in our tongue
The tender things he loved and sung?

(A 111-2)

Du joli lieu de ma naissance!
Ma soeur, qu'ils étaient beaux les jours
De France!

O mon pays, sois mes amours
Toujours!

Te souvient-il que notre mère,
Au foyer de notre chaumière,
Nous pressait sur son coeur joyeux,
Ma chère;
Et nous baisions ses blancs cheveux
Tous deux.

Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore
Du château que baignait la Dore,
Et de cette tant vieille tour
Du Maure,
Où l'airain sonnait le retour
Du jour?

Te souvient-il du lac tranquille
Qu'effleurait l'hirondelle agile,
Du vent qui courbait le roseau
Mobile,
Et du soleil couchant sur l'eau,
Si beau?

Oh! qui me rendra mon Hélène,
Et ma montagne, et le grand chêne?
Leur souvenir fait tous les jours
Ma peine:
Mon pays sera mes amours
Toujours!⁶⁰

Van's poem is clearly a match for his sister Ada's creative transversions.⁶¹

Structured around a system of pastiche and mistranslation, it centres on and reworks two main refrains from Chateaubriand's *romance*: 'Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore / Du château que baignait la Dore', and 'Oh! qui me rendra mon Hélène, / Et ma montagne, et le grand chêne?' (which we have already encountered in Ada's cross-breed poem). The first two stanzas of Van's poem are adaptive transversions of the first of these refrains. Chateaubriand's 'La Dore' becomes the Ladore of Van and

⁶⁰ Chateaubriand 236-7. The *romance* itself does not appear in full in *Ada*, but only in various mistranslated and decontextualised forms.

⁶¹ Indeed, it is unclear whether or not Ada has played an active part in the composition.

Ada's experience, and in the first stanza, the 'château' is again converted into a specific place: Ardis Hall. Van's concern for rhyme means that neither of these two transversions accurately translates the meaning of Chateaubriand's lines: stanza one nicely translates 'Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore' into 'My sister, do you still recall', while stanza two even keeps the basic word order of the original in rendering 'Du château que baignait la Dore' as 'That castle bathed by the Ladore'. Yet each of these accurate lines is accompanied by another which, in its fidelity to Chateaubriand's rhyming couplets, is rather less faithful to the meaning of the original. The appearance of 'Ardis Hall' is partly due to its consonance with 'recall,' while the 'Ladore' leads to the semantically divergent 'any more.'

Nabokov, in his disdain for rhymed and 'readerly' translations, declares that "[r]hyme" rhymes with "crime," when Homer or *Hamlet* are rhymed.⁶² Van's versions of Chateaubriand, like Ada's versions of Coppée, confirm this fact: the semantic inaccuracies of his 'translated' lines parody the popular translator's divergence from the original text in the desire to retain a rhyme-scheme.

Van's poem is not explicitly a parody of mistranslation, however. Indeed, the poem's debt to Chateaubriand is deliberately disguised. The first two stanzas, though they are 'transversions' of Chateaubriand, are not credited as such. Indeed, Van only includes the original French lines in the third stanza, *after* the two English versions, and does not indicate that they are not his own words. As Cancogni notes in her comparative analysis of the two poems, the reader ignorant of Chateaubriand could well read this third stanza as simply a translation into French of the previous lines.⁶³ Stanza four provides yet another version of Chateaubriand, so that the effect of the first four stanzas altogether is one of repetition with slight difference,

⁶² Nabokov, 'Problems of Translation' 496.

⁶³ Annapaola Cancogni, "'My Sister, Do You Still Recall?': Chateaubriand/Nabokov,' *Comparative Literature* 35.2 (Spring 1983): 152.

producing slow semantic variation and mutation. The original lines are thus hidden amongst a variety of different English versions, each of which appropriates Chateaubriand to Van's own experience. Even to the reader well versed in French literature, this privileges the transversion over the original; we thus read Chateaubriand in the light of the poem's (mis)translation and recontextualisation into Van's own story.

This reversed hierarchy of translation and original is sustained throughout the poem. Stanzas five and six continue the process of slow mutation through mistranslation in order to move towards the second refrain, '*Oh! qui me rendra mon Hélène, / Et ma montagne, et le grand chêne?*' Stanza five, in Russian, incorporates a mountain and an oak tree into the refrain of the preceding lines, and is followed in stanza six by what initially appears to be an English translation from the Russian, but which, in omitting any mention of the 'Ladore,' moves closer to the second refrain. The rhymes of this stanza (still / hill) echo Chateaubriand's rhymes from a different part of the *romance* (tranquille / agile) and form the dominant rhymes for the rest of Van's poem (recurring in Stanzas eight and ten). By stanza seven, Van has mutated his lines completely into the second refrain (*Oh! qui me rendra...*), which, like the first (*Ma soeur...*), is repeated four times in slightly adapted forms. Van's French lines in the second half of the poem are not directly quoted from Chateaubriand, but read as pastiches of the earlier writer. They are in fact produced by the process of mistranslation from French to English or Russian and back into French again. Stanza seven, for example, is entirely produced by mistranslation. Its second line – *Et le grand chêne et ma colline* – can be traced as follows:

Chateaubriand's line –

Et ma montagne, et le grand chêne

becomes, in stanza six

The spreading oak tree and my hill

which, re-translated into French, becomes

Et le grand chêne et ma colline

The alteration of names, from Chateaubriand's *Hélène* to Van's *Aline* is also in keeping with the transversion: Van is again parodying the translator's desire to retain rhyme at any cost, so that a name is changed in order to remain 'faithful' to the rhyme-scheme of the original lines even though those lines have already been mutated by mistranslation.

The poem is in fact structured around such processes of mistranslation. Each stanza reads as a transversion of the previous stanza, except for five and seven which only translate one of the preceding lines. Overall, the effect is of substantial semantic mutation (the only word shared by stanzas one and ten is 'Ladore') and yet every change can be traced back to individual and relatively minor examples of adaptation or mistranslation. The poem thus demonstrates how interlingual transformations can be exploited for creative purposes: each retranslation brings the lines of the poem closer to Van's own nostalgic recollections.

The final mistranslation is the most telling:

Oh, who will render in our tongue
The tender things he loved and sung?

Again, this is phonetically-derived: 'Oh! qui me rendra' is 'translated' into English to produce, not the semantically accurate 'Oh, who will give back to me' but the *phonetically* similar 'Oh, who will render'. The mutation of *rendra* into 'render' itself encapsulates the central themes of Van's poem: to express (render) and to give back (*rendre*), brought together in a mistranslation, both evoke the aim to recapture the past through language.

The multilingual Van and Ada have not one ‘tongue’ but many, however, so that when Van asks ‘who will render in our tongue’ he is answering his own question: the very phrase is constructed through interlingual and intertextual mutation. ‘Our tongue’, then, should really be plural. That Van uses the word ‘tongue’ rather than the word ‘language’ is, again, a product of translation. Just as Ada’s earlier poem crosses Chateaubriand with Baudelaire, so the following lines of Baudelaire’s ‘L’Invitation au voyage’ also make their presence felt here:

Tout y parlerait
A l’âme en secret
Sa *douce langue natale*.⁶⁴

Baudelaire’s *langue natale* is present in Van’s reference to ‘our tongue’, and *douce* is evoked in ‘the *tender* things he loved and sung’. The reference to Van and Ada’s *langue natale* is, tellingly, derived from two different intertexts and a mistranslation. This is precisely the nature of their language; these lines also reflect the excessively multilingual and intertextual nature of language throughout *Ada*. In Van’s poem, the past is expressed via the distorted words of another poet, repeatedly mistranslated so that those words are rhythmically repeated in three different languages and adapted to Van and Ada’s own memories. This creative process, so reliant upon multilingualism and intertextuality, nevertheless manages to be an expression of the siblings’ own particular form of nostalgia: not only a parasitic perversion of Chateaubriand and a clever pastiche of mistranslation, Van’s poem both makes use of and evokes the literary erudition and multilingualism of the Veens.

The poem, though ostensibly a sentimental evocation of an idyllic past, is rendered in highly controlled language. Such explicit artifice would not ordinarily be a natural signifier for emotional intensity; in *Ada*, however, it is precisely in the

⁶⁴ Charles Baudelaire. ‘L’Invitation au voyage’, my emphasis.

Veens' most emotional moments that the strangest linguistic effects are produced. On the whole, the degree of multilingualism and verbal play in *Ada* is different in different contexts, and different languages dominate at different times. Van tells us, in a parenthetical aside, that 'the talk – as so often happened at emotional moments in the Veen-Zemski branch of that strange family, the noblest in Estotiland, the grandest on Antiterra – was speckled with Russian, an effect not too consistently reproduced in this chapter – the readers are restless tonight.' (A 298-9) Despite Van's disclaimer and the restlessness of Nabokov's readers, the language of *Ada* nevertheless does represent the multilingual speech of its protagonists: Russian words are either incorporated into the text (often followed by an English translation) or in parentheses after the English. The importance of the mother tongue at emotional moments is evident. As Antonina Filinov Gove explains, for the upper social strata in prerevolutionary Russia, 'Russian was an intimate, familiar, or private language and French was a distancing, impersonalizing, or public language.'⁶⁵ Oustinoff notes that Russian words in parentheses in *Sebastian Knight* do not merely serve the purposes of verisimilitude (the representation of a Russian context) or of indicating the author's nostalgia for the mother tongue, but indicate idiomatic uses of the Russian language that are extremely difficult to translate.⁶⁶ In the context of the distancing effect of foreign languages, raw emotion in *Ada* is inexpressible in (and is untranslatable into) a foreign language; a reversion to Russian thus seems to suggest a more direct form of emotional expression. In the context of the mainly Anglophone, non-Russian-speaking audience of *Ada*, however, the communicative and expressive dimensions of Russian words are of course problematised. Indeed, Christine Raguet-Bouvard, writing about the difficulty of

⁶⁵ Antonina Filinov Gove. 'Multilingualism and Ranges of Tone in *Bend Sinister*,' *Slavic Review* 32 (1973): 82.

⁶⁶ Oustinoff 151.

understanding the complex multilingual play of *Ada*, remarks that '[t]he polyglot author ambiguously behaves as if he were a poor translator.'⁶⁷ Even within the context of the Veen family, such interlingual shifts are rarely accompanied by any *clarity* of emotional expression: Russian words are either consciously incorporated into stylised multilingual play or contribute to a scrambled code and interlingual disorder that reflects the speaker or writer's emotional disorder.

The Veens' proficiency in English and French as well as their mother tongue gives them a particular perspective on language. Their inevitable distance from these foreign languages incurs a distance from the illusion of automatic signification (a specifically linguistic effect of the 'syncopal kick' of exile), so that language is *already* defamiliarised for them. Their language deliberately plays upon that defamiliarisation and is extremely stylised: an awareness of the materiality of language leads to an obsession with anagrams, homonyms, alliteration, assonance and other forms of linguistic patterning. This is a product of their multilingualism, but multilingualism also in turn gives them the tools for productive, or simply playful, forms of defamiliarisation. The potential for semantic confusion and distortion between languages is thus playfully and creatively exploited in multilingual puns and mistranslations, as in, for example, Van and Ada's gleeful misuse of the false friend. If language is consciously constructed, it is also consciously controlled, however: a foreign language has the potential to distance emotion from the expression of that emotion, and perhaps give the illusion of control over it. Gove remarks that, in *Bend Sinister*, French is frequently used in '[a]n effort to decrease intimacy or emotional intensity.'⁶⁸ In *Ada*, this function of language as

⁶⁷ Christine Raguette-Bouvard. 'Vladimir Nabokov: The Translator's Perplexity in a Maze of Languages.' *CROSS-WORDS: Issues and Debates in Literary and Non-Literary Translation*, ed. Ian Mason and Christine Pagnouille (Liège: University of Liège, 1995) 135.

⁶⁸ Gove 83.

emotional control is not only apparent in their use of French, but in their combined use of all their languages, including the mother tongue. Some of the most extreme emotional events and conversations are therefore recounted in or occur in a language which is remarkable for its multilingualism.

Aqua's suicide note is a case in point here: though she is insane by the time she takes her life, her final words, Van remarks, 'might have come from the sanest person in this or that earth.' (A 30) The note, though mainly in English, incorporates French, German and Russian; it is also characterised by a high level of comic wordplay, punning and the kind of linguistic cleverness typical of the Veens:

*Aujourd'hui (heute-toity!) I, this eye-rolling toy, have earned the psykitsch right to enjoy a landparty with Herr Doktor Sig, Nurse Joan the Terrible, and several 'patients,' in the neighboring bor (piney wood) [...] The hands of a clock, even when out of order, must know and let the dumbest little watch know where they stand, otherwise neither is a dial but only a white face with a trick mustache. Similarly, *chelovek* (human being) must know where he stands and let others know, otherwise he is not even a *klok* (piece) of a *chelovek*, neither a he, nor she, but 'a tit of it' as poor Ruby, my little Van, used to say of her scanty right breast. I, poor *Princesse Lointaine*, *très lointaine* by now, do not know where I stand. Hence I must fall. So adieu, my dear, dear son, and farewell, poor Demon, I do not know the date or the season, but it is a reasonably, and no doubt seasonably, fair day, with a lot of cute little ants queuing to get at my pretty pills.*

[Signed] My sister's sister, who *teper' iz ada* ('now is out of hell')
(A 30)

It is difficult to agree with Van over the apparent 'sanity' of such a note; the degree of linguistic control we can perceive here, however, is considerable. Presumably, for Van, the ability to pun in German necessitates a certain presence of mind; in this case, however (and as is also the case in much of *Ada*), such excess of multilingual paronomasia seems also to signal emotional excess: the more language is controlled by wordplay, the more desperate the need for that control.

The passage begins with the French *aujourd'hui*, which, once translated into the German *heute* is then transformed into an echo of 'hoity-toity' – a reference to

the haughtiness inherent in a Russian's use of French. The punning immediately encompasses three languages: English, French and German, while also commenting on the nature of that multilingualism. The letter is not only directed by semantic play, however, but also by the formal patterning made possible by the repetition of homonyms. For example, '(*heute-toity!*) I, this eye-rolling toy' forms a chiasmic structure, surrounding the I/eye pun with the phonetic repetition of *toity/toy*. In the context of Aqua's troubled stay in the mental hospital, it makes sense that the 'Herr Doktor Sig' Freudian theme should bring German into play with the Veens' other, more habitual, languages (English, French, Russian). 'Psykitsch' is a fully bilingual (and Joycean) creation: its resemblance to both the English 'psychic' and the German *psychisch* (meaning 'emotional,' 'psychological' or 'psychic') is joined by another word which also belongs both to German and English: 'kitsch.' This slur on the doctor's dubious practices⁶⁹ is cleverly completed in a pun which, though thoroughly bilingual, is nevertheless comprehensible to the reader ignorant of German. Amidst Aqua's insanely clever wordplay, even the Russian language fails to signify any real emotion: the presence of both *chelovek* and *klok* seem merely to serve the purpose of punning *klok* with 'clock.' The entire section comparing the purpose of a clock to that of a human being revolves around this particular pun, bringing together, by analogy, not so much the direct objects of that analogy (people and clocks) but the two disparate meanings of the *klok*/clock homonym. The content of Aqua's letter is thus subordinated to wordplay – even her reference to the weather

⁶⁹ Nabokov's comments on Freud. 'the Viennese Quack' (BS 11), are consistently scathing. In response to a question on Freud in an interview, Nabokov replies that 'I am not up to discussing again that figure of fun. [...] Let the credulous and the vulgar continue to believe that all mental woes can be cured by a daily application of old Greek myths to their private parts. I really do not care.' (SO 66) Aqua's letter, however, manifests a more sophisticated and playful engagement with Freud than is indicated by such dismissive comments. Whereas for Freud the joke, dream or parapraxis unwittingly releases or expresses an unconscious desire, Aqua's wordplay makes very *conscious* and active use of those elements of her language that could be seen to refer to such desires. Her language thus seems to demand a Freudian reading, but then undermines that reading by already manifesting an awareness of what such a reading would purport to reveal.

seems to be there only so that she can play on ‘reasonably’ and ‘seasonably.’ The final reference to ‘*cute little ants queuing to get at my pretty pills*’ alliteratively exemplifies Aqua’s concern with the aesthetic surface of words (and pills) rather than their unpleasant actual significance. Aqua’s words are themselves merely a ‘trick mustache’ then: they relate primarily to their own abstract play. A focus on linguistic materiality, as we have seen, reduces the referential force of language. In such a way, Aqua’s complex verbal play becomes a means, not of signifying her emotional distress, but of avoiding such signification: the words themselves, caught up in phonetic and semantic trickery, do not directly signify Aqua’s turmoil, but only her desire to contain it. As a result, the excessive stylisation of language itself becomes a signifier for emotional distress.

Aqua’s last note, with its virtuoso verbal performance, demonstrates how the multilingual paronomasia of the Veens, by maintaining excessive control over the phonetic dimension of language, can actually destabilise the referential function of language and cause semantic confusion. Puns are not only used here to mask the author’s emotions; constant overdetermination also produces a strangely fragmented language where divergent meanings, though held together in the patterns of the text, still threaten to pull that text apart. A tension is thus created, between the centripetal effects of overt linguistic control and the centrifugal effects of proliferating meanings produced by multilingual play, which mirrors Aqua’s attempt to control her own psychic disorder.

In *Ada*, high levels of controlled multilingual complexity generally indicate correspondingly high levels of emotional distress or intensity. This correlation is literalised in the encoded communication between Van and Ada. Forced into clandestine correspondence for a while, they construct their own coded language,

and just as the complexity of Aqua's wordplay signifies the extent of her distress, so also Van and Ada's code becomes more and more convoluted as their letters become more passionate. The initial code, described in Chapter 26, Part 1, is further developed when the lovers make it bilingual and incorporate both ciphered French and English into its rules. Dissatisfied with this system, they then decide to base their code upon two poems very close to their hearts (and which we have already come across in their playful appropriations): Marvell's 'The Garden' and Rimbaud's 'Mémoire.' For a time, then, their code reflects their usual mode of communication, but in intensified form: they write, not only multilingually, but also through intertextuality. As the content of the letters becomes more questionable, it becomes increasingly necessary to disguise it; passion itself, however, begins to play an even greater part than design in the difficulty of the code:

Owing to these improvements the messages became even harder to read than to write, especially as both correspondents, in the exasperation of tender passion, inserted afterthoughts, deleted phrases, rephrased insertions and reinstated deletions with mis-spellings and miscodings owing as much to their struggle with inexpressible distress as to their overcomplicating its cryptogram. (A 129)

Aqua's wordplay contains the potential for semantic confusion; Van and Ada's multilingual, intertextual and encrypted secret language actually begins to fragment. There is, evidently, a fine line between cleverly controlled language and a total breakdown of communication. At this stage, however, it is not communication that breaks down, but the code itself. The excessive control over language manifest in the complexity of the code is lost once the writer loses control over their feelings. So, in one of Ada's notes to Van, 'such passion had burned that the cryptogram's bubble had burst in her poor little message of promise and hope, baring a defiant, divine line of uncoded love.' (A 134) At times language unscrambles itself and becomes explicit.

For the most part, however, the Veens' language is to some extent encoded. Emotional intensity in *Ada* is signified by a temporary reversion to the mother tongue, and/or by excessive concentration on the surface of language. It is often in an amorous context that the line is crossed between clever linguistic control and uncontrolled complexity. We learn that '[m]ixed metaphors and double-talk became all three Veens, the children of Venus' (A 323): the Veen-Venus link underscores the connection between language and sex for Van, Ada and Lucette. Returning to Van's phonetically-derived mistranslation of Chateaubriand – 'Oh, who will render in our tongue / The tender things he loved and sung? – this link can be elucidated. I remarked earlier upon Van's choice of 'tongue' rather than 'language', which was derived from a literal translation of Baudelaire's 'langue natale'. There is a further translational effect in evidence in this passage, however: the dominant meaning of 'langue' in French is 'language', but 'tongue' in English is more commonly used to denote the *organ* of speech and taste. So, though Van's use of the word 'tongue' can be perceived as a literal translation from the French, its effect in English shifts the semantic balance, and the word hints at a material, physical, even sensual, aspect of language. And, with a little leap of Nabokovian semantic faith, this very physical word for language – *tongue* – also reminds us of the very sexual nature of Van and Ada's relationship and reminiscences. The semantic duality of this translated word thus brings home the direct relationship between language and sex for the Veen siblings.

The multilingual nature of Van and Ada's love leads them to express their happiness in Babelian terms:

'Tower,' she murmured in reply to his questioning glance, just as she used to do on those honeyed mornings in the past, when checking up on happiness: 'And you?'

'A regular ziggurat.' (A 333)

Their sexual banter is also especially prone to multilingual wordplay; and ‘double-talk’ or *double-entendre* is facilitated by the semantic doubleness inherent in multilingualism. In Part 2, Chapter 5, Van and Lucette meet again after a period of separation, and this sexually charged reunion is characterised by some of the most consistent wordplay, especially *double-entendre*, of the novel. The link between semantics and sex is most tellingly revealed where sex is described, not only through wordplay, but in verbal metaphors. Van, in referring to ‘the flame of [Lucette’s] Little Larousse’ (A 288), constructs a euphemism through the play on *rousse* (red-haired) and *Petit Larousse* (a well-known French dictionary). Lucette, describing her incestuous relationship with Ada, tells Van that ‘[w]e were Mongolian tumblers, monograms, anagrams, adalucindas.’ (A 294-5) ‘Assistant lecher’ Van’s response to this confession of incest with Ada is merely to torment her further:

‘[...] shall I reward you with a kiss on your *krestik* – whatever that is?’

Wincing and rearranging his legs, our young Vandemonian cursed under his breath the condition in which the image of the four embers of a vixen’s cross had now solidly put him. One of the synonyms of ‘condition’ is ‘state,’ and the adjective ‘human’ may be construed as ‘manly’ (since L’Humanité means ‘Mankind’!), and that’s how, my dears, Lowden recently translated the title of the *malheureux* Pompier’s cheap novel *La Condition Humaine*, wherein, incidentally, the term ‘Vandemonian’ is hilariously glossed as ‘*Koulak tasmanien d’origine hollandaise.*’ Kick her out before it is too late. (A 296)

Van’s arousal is thus described through an account of a mistranslation: Lowden gives a sexually explicit title to an otherwise innocent work, and this accident of mistranslation is recontextualised into Van’s story. In any other context, this reference to sex via mistranslation would be extremely strange, but in *Ada* it is entirely appropriate: it reflects the multilingual nature of *double-entendre* throughout the novel, while also illustrating a certain similarity between the semantic

doubleness incurred by mistranslation and that created by Van and Lucette's sexual wordplay.

Van and Lucette's use of wordplay rather than direct expression can be related to the excessive control of Aqua's suicide note: the avoidance of direct expression itself becomes an effective indication of the intense and uncontrollable nature of their emotions and impulses. The multilingual evocation of emotional and sexual intensity is not only effective for this reason, however. Nabokov is acutely aware of the differences between languages, and hence of the potential for interlingual complementarity. Where the Veens are concerned, the reversion to Russian indicates that the mother tongue is the only effective medium for expressing certain intense emotions. The subsequent intermingling of Russian with other languages also suggests that at times one language is not enough: the expressive effects of different languages are thus combined. Of course, as I have indicated, the effect of such multilingual complexity can also be to counter expressive intent and risk incomprehensibility. In the sexual context, however, the function of multilingualism to *conceal* meaning is entirely apt: different languages are combined in order to unleash different levels of meaning, while also and simultaneously acting as a mode of concealing those emotions and impulses. Such is the nature of *double-entendre*, a mode of expression that simultaneously reveals and conceals the sexual reference, utters obscenity and veils or neutralises that obscenity through its expression in words that also hold banal, polite and acceptable significance. The expression of desire finds its most apt incarnation in the coupling of languages; indeed, it seems at times that the Veens are seduced as much by linguistic promiscuity as by each other.

For the multilingual, language itself is a sensual and material entity. In *Ada* this play takes the form of sound-patterning and wordgames which often serve the purpose of complicating and confusing the semantic function of language. If the Veens' multilingual paronomasia derives from a sense of language as a material substance that can be played with, altered and deformed, this linguistic sensuality is often directly related to the sensuality of its subject-matter. *Double-entendre* as a particular form of paronomasia thus exemplifies the linguistic materiality inherent in *Ada*. Multilingual punning works on similar principles as deliberate mistranslation: it plays on semantic ambiguity and the potential for misunderstanding between languages, so that a word or phrase can be read in at least two different ways. In Nabokovian *double-entendre*, the linguistic materiality and semantic ambiguity of multilingual play combine in an iconic expression of sensuality.

The insistent multilingual wordplay throughout *Ada* contributes to a language high in artifice; indeed, as I have argued, artifice is always to some degree the product of a multilingual perspective. Van and Ada's translational play both draws upon their awareness of the incommensurability of different national languages and enhances this awareness. They turn the negative by-products of interlingual communication – mistranslation, misinterpretation and confusion – into translational creativity, and use their own multilingual and intertextual artificial linguistic constructions as a means of expression. The arbitrariness of language, the relativity of different national languages, and untranslatability are all therefore turned to positive expressive effect. As in Joyce, the resultant language of the text is often extremely difficult for the reader to decipher (*Ada* has been compared to *Finnegans Wake* in this respect). The reader's difficulty is, however, an important aspect of linguistic estrangement in Nabokov: as in Joyce, the estranging effects of

the text's language(s) leads us to focus on the phonetic and rhythmic qualities of the prose and to experience that language as a sensual entity.⁷⁰ The materiality and semantic ambiguity of language(s) are thus foregrounded. In *Ada*, this multilingual estrangement is directly related to the deviant sexuality of the Veen family: the miscegenation of different languages relates to the sexual promiscuity of the main characters, linguistic materiality is literalised in an iconic linguistic sensuality, and the multilingual family's play on semantic ambiguity functions in general as *double-entendre*.

From the failures of interlingual communication, Nabokov thus creates expressive, and at times even iconic, multilingual forms. The language of *Ada* thus illustrates Steiner's claim, cited in my Introduction, that the apparently negative symptoms of Babel can be viewed in positive terms: 'Ambiguity, polysemy, opaqueness, the violation of grammatical and logical sequences, reciprocal incomprehensions, the capacity to lie – these are not pathologies of language but the roots of its genius'.⁷¹ In *Ada*, as in *Bend Sinister* and *Pale Fire*, linguistic ambiguity forms the basis of 'plexed artistry' as well as distortion and confusion. In addition to interlingual creativity, however, semantic ambiguity also contributes to the general ontological ambiguity of Nabokov's texts. Writing that makes deliberate use of the 'teeming plurality of tongues' can also demonstrate that '[t]he world [...] can be other'. Multilingualism in Joyce brings out the alterity inherent in language, demonstrating the presence of "the stranger in language".⁷² In Nabokov, linguistic

⁷⁰ The difficulty of the text is also an important function of Beckett's prose, but where Beckett is concerned, the materialisation of language is a means of reducing the expressive function of *familiar* words. Beckett's language is thus less marked by the overt incomprehensibility of foreign words within the text; instead, he makes words that should be familiar and easily comprehensible seem foreign.

⁷¹ George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) 234-5.

⁷² Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli, 'Joyce Slipping Across the Borders of English: the Stranger in Language,' *James Joyce Quarterly* 38.3/4 (Spring/Summer 2001): 396.

plurality literalises this alterity, and relates to the fictional construction of different worlds.

Christian Lagarde, in a study of bilingualism in literature, writes that '[é]crire est avant tout *représenter*, c'est à dire transposer le réel. Cependant, il ne s'agit pas là de *réfléter* ou *réfléchir* la réalité, mais bien plutôt de la *réfracter*, en ce sens que *l'image du réel* donnée à travers le langage suppose nécessairement une altération de l'objet représenté, comme s'il se trouvait plongé [...] dans un milieu différent.'⁷³

The image of refraction recalls Nabokov's own comparison of the translator's 'reflected' words with the distorted reflections of lights in a river. Lagarde's analysis relies, however, upon the notion of a 'reality' outside language that precedes the distortions to which it is subjected in linguistic representation. In Nabokov, on the other hand, 'reality' is always in question – it would seem that his multilingual consciousness has contributed to an acute awareness of the extent to which language *constructs* 'reality' by defining it. The linguistic construction of 'reality' is of course literalised in fiction: the fictional work is by definition unreal; despite its frequent claims to represent 'reality,' it is nonetheless an imaginative construction that may or may not seem 'realistic.' Nabokov's fiction explicitly inverts the hierarchy of 'reality' and language implied by Lagarde: 'reality' becomes a linguistic construct, and Nabokov's fictional worlds parade their own artifice – their *fictionality*. And, if different languages reflect different 'realities,' then transposition between languages creates complex processes of interlingual refraction.

⁷³ 'to write is, above all, to represent, that is, to transpose reality. It is, nevertheless, not a question of *mirroring* or *reflecting* that reality, but rather of *refracting* it, in the sense that the *image of reality* given through language necessarily presupposes an alteration of the object represented, as if it had been plunged [...] into a different environment.' Christian Lagarde, *Des écritures "bilingues": sociolinguistique et littérature* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001) 23.

Grayson, in her analysis of Nabokov's self-translations, concludes that the process of interlingual transfer contributes to increased levels of artifice in the translated texts.⁷⁴ In Nabokov's fiction, multilingualism is also closely related to the textual construction of explicitly artificial 'realities' and 'worlds'. In *Ada*, semantic doubleness relates not only to sexuality, but also to the uncertain 'reality' of Van and Ada's fictional universe – 'Antiterra' – in relation to the apparently imaginary 'Terra' (which bears a strong resemblance to the 'real' world recognised by the reader). By presenting the more realistic world, 'Terra', as a fantasy, Nabokov inverts 'reality' and 'fantasy', thus bringing the multilingualism of the text to its logical ontological conclusion: the relativity of different languages is reflected in the relativity of different 'realities'. Such ontological juxtapositions are also apparent in Nabokov's other novels – the contrapuntal 'realities' of Kinbote's Zembla and New Wye suburbia in *Pale Fire*, and the 'sinistral and sinister world' (BS 5) of *Bend Sinister* are two notable examples. Indeed, in both cases, the relationship between language and 'reality' is literalised in Nabokov's invention of the languages of Zembla and Padukgrad. Nabokov's Antiterranean world, however, also reflects his particular experience of linguistic and cultural relativity. In Terra, Russia and America are different countries; in Antiterra, however, where Russia is a province of America, such a separation of 'the political, rather than poetical, notions of "America" and "Russia"' seems preposterous (A 21). Nabokov's own bilingual competence and bicultural existence as a Russian exile in America is thus literalised in a hybrid fictional 'America'. Antiterra may be a fictional construction, but its cultural and linguistic norms relate to Nabokov's own exilic experience and cannot therefore be dismissed as merely fantastical.

⁷⁴ Grayson 215.

On a more general level, ‘reality’ is often translated (and refracted) through the mind and voice of the narrator. The strangeness of Nabokov’s insane characters and invented worlds corresponds to the strangeness of their language. So in *Bend Sinister*, the degeneration and distortion of society under Paduk’s oppressive dictatorship is reflected in a ‘verbal plague’ of multilingual paronomasia, mistranslations and misinterpretations. In *Pale Fire* also, the mad Kinbote’s Zemblan is as much a ‘mongrel blend’ (BS 9) as the language of Padukgrad, and its hybridity seems to contribute to the distortions inherent in Zemblan renditions of Shakespeare. Likewise, in *Ada*, the levels of distorting multilingualism increase with characters’ increasing levels of madness or emotional intensity. As Humbert Humbert writes, ‘[y]ou can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style’ (AL 9); the sinistral insanity and dubious morality of most of Nabokov’s characters seems inevitably linked to their linguistic idiosyncracies – idiosyncracies which in turn seem to play a large part in constructing the textual ‘reality’ that they narrate.

The correspondence of ontological and semantic ambiguity is thus central to Nabokov’s fiction: language is estranged in order to construct and to represent estranged worlds. Though Nabokov celebrates the expressive possibilities of multilingualism, its power is not merely mimetic or representational, however. If for Benjamin the interaction of languages somehow redeems Babel, Nabokov’s work seems to seek a perpetuation of Babelian plurality, and consistently foregrounds *artifice* rather than mimesis. As Michael Wood writes, ‘[w]hat Nabokov’s practice suggests [...] is that languages can meet up and do need each other, but the encounters are contingent and magical, rather than necessary and metaphysical.’⁷⁵

Nabokov takes the chaos of ‘topsy-turvical coincidence’ and of Babelian interlingual

⁷⁵ Wood 143–4.

distortion, and draws that chaos together into a patterned form of ordered multiplicity. The resultant formliness or 'plexed artistry' both imposes order upon semantic and ontological chaos, and draws upon that chaos, so that the text manifests a tension between the centrifugal forces of ontological and linguistic diversity, and the centripetal forces of imposed artistic control. Hence the apparent contradictions inherent in his attitude to translation, where the absolute fidelity required in translating the work of others is matched by a deliberate recourse to interlingual distortion in his fiction. The miscegenation of languages, misinterpretation and mistranslation might be associated with the crazy inversions of a dystopian state, a Kinbotian disrespect for art, or the amoral incestuous sexuality of the Veens, but those very distortions are fundamental to *Pale Fire*'s 'monstrous semblance of a novel', the subversive potential of *Bend Sinister* and the 'magnificent acrobatics' of *Ada*. Nabokov's English fiction brings to the fore the incommensurability of different languages, and from those irrevocable differences constructs fictional worlds that are in turn mirrored in correspondingly strange styles.

CHAPTER 4: SALMAN RUSHDIE

I write rigmorole English, staining
your goodly, godly tongue

– G.V. Desani, *All About H. Hatterr*

Salman Rushdie, in ‘Step Across This Line’, describes Nabokov as ‘[t]he greatest writer ever to make a successful journey across the language frontier’, and applies his theory of translation to the question of ‘how to “translate” the great subject of India into English, how to allow India itself to perform the act of “verbal transmigration”’ (SAL 434-5). Rushdie, like Nabokov, is acutely aware of what is ‘lost’ in translation, and, in the same essay, catalogues the various ways that India has been distorted in English representations. As a young writer, Rushdie’s conclusion was that India ‘needed a literary “translation” in keeping with its true nature’ (SAL 435). It was with *Midnight’s Children* that he put into practice such an ambition. The novel is the partly historical, partly fantastical tale of Saleem Sinai, a child born ‘at the precise instant of India’s arrival at independence’ who is as a result ‘hand-cuffed to history’, his ‘destinies indissolubly chained to those of [his] country’.¹ Rushdie chooses to write the story of Indian Independence from Britain in the language of the former coloniser, however, and English, though the language of his education, is not his mother tongue. India is therefore not the only aspect of his writing that is subject to ‘translation’:

Born into one language, Urdu, I’ve made my life and work in another. Anyone who has crossed a language frontier will readily understand that such a journey involves a form of shape-shifting or self-translation. The change of language changes us. All languages permit slightly varying forms of thought, imagination and play. I find my tongue doing slightly different things with Urdu than I do ‘with’, to borrow the title of a story by Hanif Kureishi, ‘your tongue down my throat’. (SAL 434)

¹ Salman Rushdie. *Midnight’s Children* (London: Vintage, 1995) 9. (All subsequent references to *Midnight’s Children* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation ‘MC’).

This 'translation' into the coloniser's tongue is inevitably politicised and thus particularly acutely felt; the discomfort implied by Rushdie's punning distortion of Kureishi's phrase also recalls Nabokov's description of his switch from Russian to English as 'exceedingly painful – like learning anew to handle things after losing seven or eight fingers in an explosion.' (SO 54) Discomfort with the foreign language is not only negative, however. Rushdie's above statement indicates that the strangeness of the foreign language induces a transformation of the writer's relationship to language. In Rushdie's fiction, transformations and metamorphoses are not only the inevitable products of cultural and linguistic hybridisation: the chimera is presented as a positive force, and, as Rushdie insists, 'something can also be gained' in translation (IH 17).

One of the apparent gains is political. To choose to adopt the coloniser's language is problematic and controversial from a socio-political perspective; Stephen Dedalus talks of English as a language 'so familiar and so foreign' – though his mother tongue, it is historically and politically a foreign language, and will therefore always be for him 'an acquired speech' (P 159). Rushdie, however, links Indian English writing to Joyce's multilingualism and argues that 'a part of the reason for Joycean English was precisely anti-imperialist; Joyce was trying to construct an English that didn't belong to the English by deliberate use of a lot of European words, a lot of European borrowings.' (SRI 233) The Indian writer's relationship to English is rather different from that of the Irish writer: though Indian English is now a recognised and legitimate form of English, it is almost always learnt as a second language; as a result, the deviations inherent in Indian English are often directly related to the language-user's mother tongue. And whereas Joyce makes use of a range of languages that are foreign to him, Rushdie's writing

reverses the process, imbuing the *foreign* language, English, with the lexical, rhythmic and syntactic characteristics of certain Indian languages (mainly Hindi and Urdu). Nevertheless, and despite their very different multilingual techniques, both Joyce and Rushdie are engaged in deforming and distorting the coloniser's language.

Engaging in debates that are crucial to the multilingual postcolonial writer, Rushdie tells us that English must be altered for the purposes of the Indian writer: 'you can't actually write about India in classical English [...] You have to find another thing to do with English in order to come close to echoing the place that you write about.' (SRI 13) And so he wants 'to make a new noise' with English, to find a way of 'misbehaving with the language' (SRI 162, 245). The impetus to defamiliarise English is a direct product of the writer's foreignness from the language. This is in some ways very practical: the issue for any writer using a language to describe a cultural and linguistic reality that is alien to that language is to adapt that language to the new cultural context – Nabokov, for example, cites the 'English re-telling of Russian memories' as a significant aspect of the 'multiple metamorphoses' of the language of his memoir, *Speak, Memory* (SM 10). Raja Rao, in 1938, wrote that the difficulty of writing in English is 'to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own' and that this issue becomes a question of style: '[t]he tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression'.² Some writers would claim that to write in the coloniser's language is inevitably to be controlled by the ideologies embedded in that language; Rushdie argues, on the contrary, that English *can* be adapted for the purposes of expressing an Indian reality.³ This process of adaptation can also be politically subversive:

² Raja Rao, 'Author's Foreword' *Kanthapura* (Bombay: New Directions, 1963) v.

³ It is important to note here that for the later Indian English writer such as Rushdie, English has already been adapted to express Indian 'reality': the widespread use of English in India has led to the development of a variation of the language, 'Indian English' (a topic to which I will return later in

Rushdie asserts that Indian English writers are ‘in a position to conquer English literature’ (SRI 13) and that, even more emphatically, ‘[t]o conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free’ (IH 17). The Indianisation of English is both a semantic necessity and anti-imperial.

The appropriation of English is thus an important political act. It is also necessary to note, however, that Rushdie’s prominent and controversial political status, especially after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, mean that his nonfictional writing and his interviews are often directed by his need to defend himself politically and to assert the positive socio-political importance of his fiction. Critical analyses have tended to follow suit, focusing primarily on the political implications of Rushdie’s choice of English. My analyses of Joyce, Beckett and Nabokov demonstrate, however, that an estrangement from language is fundamental to the textual effects of their prose, and this is also the case for Rushdie. Indeed, embedded in his political arguments are also some important artistic claims. Tellingly, it is not just the English language that can be ‘conquered’ but ‘English literature’: Rushdie implies that the Indian English writer is in a position to produce aesthetic forms that can challenge the canonical literary standards of English literature. To link Indian English literature with Joyce, for example, is to imply that the Indian writer’s relationship to the English language produces forms of defamiliarisation that are closely related to – and as aesthetically important as – modernism. Elsewhere, he reinforces this perspective when he claims that ‘those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us.’ (IH 12) The

this chapter). Indeed, Rushdie, unlike Rao, would argue that English now belongs to the Indian writer.

migrant's perspective – or indeed the perspective produced by any experience of cultural hybridity – can produce forms of linguistic and artistic innovation.

Repeating one of the leitmotifs of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie asserts that 'Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world.*' (IH 394) He is particularly preoccupied with newness, and uses a similar argument to affirm the importance of the novel form:

"Novel" itself is a word that means new, and the purpose of art has always been thought to make things new, so you don't see things through the same old, tired eyes. The novel has suggestions to make about how newness comes into the world, which are mainly to do with joinings and co-joinings and hybridisations and fusings. (SRI 106)

By highlighting the linguistic and cultural hybridity to which he, as a migrant writer from a postcolonial country, has privileged access, Rushdie is also demonstrating that he is in an ideal position to create such forms of newness. This insistence on the aesthetic productivity of the postcolonial and/or migrant writer is based upon a literalisation of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism in the novel, whereby 'heteroglossia' is read in the context of different national languages as well as discourses.

Certainly, Rushdie seems to draw directly from Bakhtin when he argues that 'the novel has always been *about* the way in which different languages, values and narratives quarrel, and about the shifting relations between them' (IH 420). His emphasis on the novel's ability to 'make things new' also has affinities with Shklovsky's notion of enstrangement, which states that the purpose of art is to make things strange in order to make us see them anew. Shklovsky, as we have seen, refers to the use of foreign languages as a means of enstrangement, and this is yet again literalised in Rushdie's work, where the hybridisation of language is not only significant as a politically motivated attempt to create an English that does not 'belong' to the English, but is crucial to aspects of form and style. In particular,

Rushdie makes use of hybridisation in order to estrange English, mixing it with Indian languages, translating Indian idioms into English, and disrupting the rhythms of English by incorporating the syntactic and rhythmic effects of other languages.

This hybridisation of language, though it has been extremely influential, is not as close to Joycean linguistic newness as Rushdie might like us to think, however. Whereas Joyce defamiliarises English by Babelising it, Rushdie's linguistic project is in part mimetic: the hybridised Indo-Anglian prose of his fiction is based on English as it is spoken in India. Rushdie himself, when asked about the language of *Midnight's Children*, admits that 'I don't think I invented anything much, really' (SRI 41). Though the English response to the novel is that 'they've never heard writing like that before', Indian readers 'may never have seen it in print before but [...] have probably heard it quite a lot – the rhythms of the book are not a million miles away from the rhythms of Indian speech and thought' (SRI 14). Multilingualism in Rushdie is therefore grounded in a cultural and linguistic reality. In *Midnight's Children* in particular, multilingualism is apparent not only on a stylistic but also a thematic level. Rushdie's characters speak in Indian English, but this novel is also concerned with the general cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of India, so aptly described in *The Satanic Verses* as 'India's Babel'.⁴ Rushdie's hybrid language, though based on recognised forms of Indian English, is a highly stylised *literary* form of Indian English, however: he makes use of certain characteristics of Indian English to develop various forms of defamiliarisation. Hybrid language becomes the basis, not only of a mimetic representation of Indian English, but also

⁴ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (Dover, USA: The Consortium, Inc., 1992) 58. (All subsequent references to *The Satanic Verses* will appear in parentheses, using the abbreviation 'SV'). India has thousands of different languages and dialects (the vast majority of which do not appear in *Midnight's Children*). Whereas Joyce's multilingualism is exceptional and unusual, to speak more than one language is thus far more common in the Indian context: much of the Indian educated élite are English-speaking, and even outside of that élite, a significant proportion of the population has knowledge of at least two Indian languages and/or a basic knowledge of English.

of style. Focusing primarily on *Midnight's Children*, this chapter will examine the themes of hybridity, translation, multilingualism and heterogeneity that are central to the novel, and, transposing Rushdie's assertion that 'mongrelization' is 'how newness comes into the world' into a specifically linguistic context, will examine the forms of defamiliarisation produced by his adaptation of Indian English for literary purposes.

Saleem Sinai, self-appointed avatar of his nation, and the narrator of a very personal account of India's history since 1915, is anxious to contain India's excessive cultural and linguistic heterogeneity in his tale. Rushdie told Alastair Niven that his novels were 'attempts to be everything books' (SRI 234), and *Midnight's Children* attempts to include within its pages the entirety of Indian experience. Of course, this is an impossible task – as Saleem observes, India's excessive cultural diversity makes it a kind of 'mass fantasy' whose unity (and hence existence) as a nation is only held together by 'the efforts of a phenomenal collective will' (MC 112). It is the effort of an *individual* will that holds the book together, however: Saleem's 'lust-for-centrality' (MC 356) leads him to claim his place at the centre of Indian history since Independence, thus providing a focus for his highly subjective account of that history. In effect, Saleem translates events into the context of his own life. Things are inevitably distorted in this process of translation; nevertheless, Saleem still attempts to represent the multitudinousness of India – and so he, as avatar of that country, is equally multitudinous:

And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me [...] (MC 9)

The combination of Saleem's 'lust-for-centrality' with the conviction that he can actually represent and embody the multitudes leads him to suffer from what, in *Midnight's Children*, is presented as an 'Indian disease': an 'urge to encapsulate the whole of reality' (MC 75) – or, to take the term used by Nadir Khan's painter friend: 'elephantiasis' (MC 48). Like Lifafa Das with his 'Dilli-dekho machine', Saleem's encyclopaedic impulses urge us to 'See the whole world, come see everything!' (MC 75). The 'teeming' nature of the text itself confirms its elephantiac ambitions.

Rushdie told Alistair Niven that '[t]here are simply so many stories going on that it would be absurd, I thought, to tell just one' (SRI 234), and indeed the overall impression imparted by *Midnight's Children* is of an apparently disorderly excess of stories, characters and events: India's heterogeneity is not merely described, but is iconically reflected in the very form of the novel. But this sense of multitudinousness, of too-many-stories, works both to embody Saleem's description of India's heterogeneity and to undermine his representation of the multitudes: like the fare-dodgers hanging outside the newlywed Amina and Ahmed Sinai's train compartment, knocking on the doors to be let in (MC 67), all the extra undeveloped stories and characters of the novel evoke a world excluded from Saleem's narrative.

One of the illusions most crucial to the chronic elephantiasis of *Midnight's Children* is that of stories and characters existing independently of Saleem's narration. Padma, Saleem's pickle-factory companion, for example, is present at the time of narration; a lively, critical and intrusive listener, she appears to have a direct influence on the course of the narrative. Though Saleem often resists her complaints and advice, 'the ineluctable Padma-pressures of what-happened-nextism' (MC 39) are nevertheless vividly represented as a force external to the story. Similarly, Mary Pereira at one point 'speaks anxiously, trying to force her way into my story ahead

of time' (MC 209), and Saleem's general difficulty controlling characters and events gives them a life that seems independent of his narrative. They seem to control

Saleem rather than vice versa:

Interruptions, nothing but interruptions! The different parts of my somewhat complicated life refuse, with a wholly unreasonable obstinacy, to stay neatly in their separate compartments. Voices spill out of their clocktower to invade the circus-ring, which is supposed to be Evie's domain ... and now, at the very moment when I should be describing the fabulous children of ticktock, I'm being whisked away by Frontier Mail – spirited off to the decaying world of my grandparents, so that Aadam Aziz is getting in the way of the natural unfolding of my tale. (MC 187)

The controlling consciousness of the artist never seems to succeed in bringing all the elements of the story into line, and we are constantly reminded of the arbitrary nature of Saleem's narrative. But his 'obsession with correspondences', his constant assertion of links, patterns and form bringing the multitudes together into a meaningful whole is a necessary counterpoint to his desire to write about those multitudes. His control over the stories is forced and unconvincing, but it is only thus that the text remains comprehensible.

As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, the way Saleem attempts to represent heterogeneity is itself symptomatic of his polylingual – and of course polycultural – consciousness; a consciousness which is also Rushdie's own. But first I want to consider Saleem's representation of the specifically linguistic aspects of India's heterogeneity. In view of the fact that India contains 'as many as 1,652 languages and dialects,'⁵ the representation of such heterogeneity becomes very problematic. In order to represent India *comprehensibly* it is necessary to translate all the different languages into the dominant language of the novel, English. But just as Saleem's centrality threatens to undermine the heterogeneity he purports to

⁵ Braj B. Kachru, 'South Asian English,' *English as a World Language*, ed. Richard Bailey and Manfred Görlach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 357.

describe, so the translation of linguistic heterogeneity into one language is accompanied by the risk of assimilating and homogenising linguistic difference.

Thematically, India's multilingualism is itself translated into the context of Saleem's own experience. An accident with a pajama-cord in the washing chest unleashes his telepathic ability (MC 162). At first, he compares himself to Muhammad (MC 163) and thinks that Archangels have chosen him 'to preside over the end of the world.' But the 'voices, far from being scared [*sic*], turned out to be as profane, and as multitudinous, as dust.' (MC 168) As language marchers demand the partition of Bombay along linguistic boundaries in 1956, Saleem acquires 'a headful of gabbling tongues' (MC 163). Later, after having been catapulted on a bike into the midst of these marchers, he claims responsibility 'for triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay' (MC 192). Saleem, by embodying the linguistic politics of India at the time, is exposed to the 'polyglot frenzy' (MC 168) of the nation's multilingual inhabitants:

Telepathy, then: the inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions, of masses and classes alike, jostled for space within my head. In the beginning, when I was content to be an audience – before I began to *act* – there was a language problem. The voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the Southern slurrings of Tamil. (MC 168)

He thus acquires an extreme multilingual consciousness. But only initially does he truly acknowledge linguistic heterogeneity, when he admits that he understands 'only a fraction of the things being said within the walls of my skull' (MC 168). Within a short time, however, and despite the profanity of the voices in his head, Saleem assumes a form of universal comprehension. If 'India's Babel' (SV 58) stands in the way of national unity, Saleem's God-like centrality and organising consciousness depends upon overcoming linguistic difference. His omniscience

transcends Babel:

Only later, when I began to probe, did I learn that below the surface transmissions – the front-of-mind stuff which is what I'd originally been picking up – language faded away, and was replaced by universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words ... (MC 168)

To claim such transcendence is to claim a form of divinity: claims of 'perfect' translation occur most notably in a theological context. In Islam, the Arabic Koran is the *only* Koran: it is Muhammad's direct transcription of the word of God. Muhammad is thus the only authoritative 'translator' of the text, and any subsequent translation necessarily alters God's word and can thus only be read as an interpretation.⁶ The translators of the King James Bible, on the other hand, claim that God's word remains intact despite the transformations inherent in translation, and despite the individual influence of the translator, by asserting James I as 'the principall Moouer and Author of the Worke'⁷: the King, as God's representative on earth, has authoritative access to the word of God. 'Perfect' translation thus implies a divine pre-Babelian mode of communication whose universality transcends the confused multiplicity of human languages and that can attain the extra-linguistic purity of what Derrida calls the transcendental signified.⁸

Saleem's claim to perceive 'universally intelligible thought-forms' that not only precede language but communicate more effectively than language, implies that

⁶ Rushdie's treatment of the episode of the 'satanic verses' (the verses in which Muhammad purportedly requested the intercession of the goddesses Lat, Uzza and Manat, and which he subsequently repudiated as being the words of Satan) in *The Satanic Verses* (see SV 114-5, 123-4) indicates a fascination with the arbitrariness, not only of God's 'truth', but also of Muhammad's transmission and representation of that 'truth'. Indeed, 'God's word' in *The Satanic Verses*, is not dictated and transcribed, but is produced through a process of distortion, interpretation and even invention in a dialogic relationship between Mahound and the Angel Gibreel.

⁷ 'The Translators to the Reader,' *King James's Bible: A Selection*, ed. W.H. Stevenson (London: Longman, 1994) 21.

⁸ Derrida of course rejects the ideal of the transcendental signified, and hence of 'perfect' translation: '[n]ous n'aurons et n'avons en fait jamais eu affaire à quelque "transport" de signifiés purs que l'instrument – ou le "véhicule" – signifiant laisserait vierge et inentamé, d'une langue à l'autre, ou à l'intérieur d'une seule et même langue.' ('[w]e will never have, and in fact have never had, to do with some "transport" of pure signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched.') Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Paris: Minuit, 1972) 31; *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Athlone Press, 1981) 20.

he has such divine linguistic authority. This access to a divine *Ur*-language supposedly lends him unquestioning authority as a translator, while enabling him to read the minds of all men. His attempt to hold India's heterogeneity together is thus based on his conception of himself as a central, controlling, god-like presence:

India's cultural heterogeneity and polytheism are contained by a monotheistic ideal.

Omniscience in turn leads to an illusion of omnipotence:

the feeling had come upon me that I was somehow creating a world; that the thoughts I jumped inside were *mine*, that the bodies I occupied acted at my command; that, as current affairs, arts, sports, the whole rich variety of a first-class radio station poured into me, I was somehow *making them happen...* (MC 174)

And, anticipating Rushdie's own inclusion of himself in *The Satanic Verses* as a slightly balding God, Saleem admits that this feeling of god-like power is really 'the illusion of the artist' (MC 174). Though he admits his sense of controlled telepathy to be illusory, he nevertheless continues to claim his starring role in India's fate – though it is only through accidents and unwitting acts that he manifests any such omnipotence.

Just as his unreliable narration makes us doubt Saleem's centrality and omniscience, so we should also doubt his claims to be an authoritative translator. To understand all of India's languages and to translate them into a universal, pre-Babelian, 'purer language of thought' (MC 256) requires divine powers. And indeed, when Saleem summarises the questions and discussions of the *Midnight's Children*, he translates them into his language without any awareness of the distorting effects of translation, or of the differences between languages. Unless we do accept that Saleem possesses such powers, the words and thoughts that he hears in his telepathic tourism are inevitably distorted, even mistranslated, by his language and his controlling consciousness. So when he claims to 'record, faithfully, the

views of a typical selection of the Conference members' (MC 228), we cannot take him at his word, knowing that the other Children's words are mediated by his process of translating them and incorporating them into the narrative. In addition to this, Saleem refuses to distinguish the different voices from each other. This is partly '[f]or the sake of privacy' but privacy is the least of his concerns. The other reasons he gives seem far more important:

For one thing, my narrative could not cope with five hundred and eighty-one fully-rounded personalities; for another, the children, despite their wondrously discrete and varied gifts, remained, to my mind, a sort of many-headed monster, speaking in the myriad tongues of Babel; they were the very essence of multiplicity, and I see no point in dividing them now. (MC 229)

His refusal to distinguish between individuals is also a refusal to distinguish between the languages from which he is translating: the 'myriad tongues' of this 'many-headed monster' would inevitably pull the narrative apart and make it incomprehensible. Compared to this description of the Children, their words, as 'translated' by Saleem, have been easily integrated into the narrative.

Saleem's translation of the different languages of India into his narrative is as problematic as his translation of events into the context of his own life. He appropriates and distorts anything that is foreign to him, thus producing what could, in translational terms, be called a domesticating translation. Rushdie's treatment of the theme of translation forestalls any directly negative judgement of Saleem as a mistranslator, however. Nabokov, as I demonstrated in Chapter 3, makes full use in his fiction of the ambiguities produced in interlingual communication and translation. The potential productivity of translation is also central to Rushdie's work but, in a postcolonial context, acquires directly political significance. The narrator of *Shame*, echoing Rushdie's own words in the earlier essay 'Imaginary

Homelands,'⁹ uses translation as a metaphor for migrancy. He describes the verses of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam (a name shared by the central character of *Shame*), which were never very popular in Persia, but which achieved great popularity in England in Edward Fitzgerald's translation, and then asserts that:

I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion – and use, in evidence, the success of Fitzgerald-Khayyam – that something can also be gained. (S 29)

Fitzgerald's attitude to translating Persian poetry was one of irreverence and disrespect – he famously wrote that '[i]t is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians, who [...] are not Poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little art to shape them.'¹⁰ He thus reveals his translations to be orientalist rewritings rather than any attempt to understand and recreate Persian poetry in English, and indeed *Shame*'s narrator admits that the Fitzgerald translation 'is really a complete reworking' of Khayyam's verses, 'in many cases very different from the spirit (to say nothing of the content) of the original.' (S 29) Rushdie's claim that something can be gained in such a process of assimilation and exoticisation of difference is thus particularly audacious; it is, however, nevertheless accompanied by an acute awareness, throughout *Shame*, of linguistic and cultural difference, and hence also of what is lost in translation.

The very title of *Shame* is, the narrator tells us, a bad translation which fails to indicate the full significance of the word *sharam*:

This word: shame. No, I must write it in its original form, not in this peculiar language tainted by wrong concepts and the accumulated detritus of its

⁹ Rushdie, in 'Imaginary Homelands', writes that '[t]he word "translation" comes, etymologically, from the Latin for "bearing across". Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.' (IH 17)

¹⁰ Edward Fitzgerald, letter to Cowell, March 20 1851, cited in Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 58-9.

owner's unrepented past, this Angrezi in which I am forced to write, and so for ever alter what is written ...

Sharam, that's the word. For which this paltry 'shame' is a wholly inadequate translation. Three letters, *shin rè mim* (written, naturally, from right to left); plus *zabar* accents indicating the short vowel sounds. A short word, but one containing encyclopaedias of nuance. (S 38-9)

The problem with *sharam*, however, is its apparent *translatability*. Faced with the English word, we assume that we know what it means, but in fact are taking it to signify a culturally-specific (i.e. Anglo-American) notion of 'shame', thus domesticating the Urdu term, and turning it into something English. Rushdie is careful, therefore, to indicate the full connotative range of the word – it means, not merely 'shame', but 'embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world, and other dialects of emotion for which English has no counterparts' (S 39).

Less ambiguously untranslatable is the term *takallouf*. The narrator tells us: '[t]o unlock a society, look at its untranslatable words.' (S 104). Such words name concepts that are so alien to the cultural development of the English language that we do not even have a linguistic means of recognising and naming them – unlike the *sharam* / shame translation, we are not permitted the illusion of translatability. An untranslatable word thus highlights fundamental cultural difference. *Takallouf*, for example, is so culturally specific as to be untranslatable not only into English, but into any other languages:

Takallouf is a member of that opaque, world-wide sect of concepts which refuse to travel across linguistic frontiers: it refers to a form of tongue-tying formality, a social restraint so extreme as to make it impossible for the victim to express what he or she really means, a species of compulsory irony which insists, for the sake of good form, on being taken literally. (S 104)

Takallouf expresses an inability to express; it thus signifies a form of silence. The word epitomises the untranslatability of unspoken nuance, and as a result reminds us of the specifically untranslatable (because unspoken) aspects of any utterance. This

sense of the untranslatability of culturally-specific words and sensitivity to the nuances of language, are both facets of the postcolonial writer's relationship to language; both are also produced by the experience of writing in a foreign language. The problem, for a writer like Rushdie, is how to translate the untranslatable – how to bring words and concepts like *takallouf* and *sharam* into the English language.

One solution to the problem of untranslatability is the retention of the foreign word. Different languages are thus present within the text, and the overall effect is one of linguistic hybridisation. In *Shame*, especially where the words *sharam* and *takallouf* are concerned, the words are accompanied by an explanation which highlights their untranslatability. This method does not properly hybridise English, however: the Urdu word is set apart from the English language, and English is declared unable to express its meaning. This would appear to highlight what is *lost* in translation, hence apparently contradicting Rushdie's conviction that translation is a productive process. Indeed, the narrator of *Shame* complains of 'this Angrezi in which I am forced to write, and so for ever alter what is written': the English language distorts foreign concepts. Though Rushdie claims that, in Fitzgerald's domesticating translations for example, such distortions can nevertheless be productive, they are of course highly problematic. If English is left intact, it is the foreign subject-matter that is twisted and distorted. This process can also be reversed, however: Rushdie, instead of allowing English to assimilate and domesticate Indian experience, allows the untranslatable elements of Indian languages and cultures to distort the English language. A process akin to

foreignizing translation¹¹ is thus combined with the retention of explicitly foreign elements (such as vocabulary) within the text.

What is gained in translation, then, is produced as a direct result of untranslatability, of the incommensurability of different languages: it is precisely the distortions produced by translation that hybridise language and that produce new linguistic forms. As a result, Rushdie's prose-style is characterised by the kinds of hybridisations and distortions that indicate an Indian appropriation of the English language. As he argues, 'you can't actually write about India in classical English [...] You have to find another thing to do with English in order to come close to echoing the place that you write about.' (SRI 13) Elsewhere, he expounds further on what he actually needs to do with – or to – English. In an interview, he repeats the above linguistic perspective, telling Jeremy Isaacs that 'I felt, I could not set down the music in my head, the noise in my head, in standard English. [...] It didn't sound on the page the way it would sound in my head.' (SRI 162) Just as Nabokov, writing his memoirs, needs to translate his Russian memories into English, so also Rushdie, in *Midnight's Children*, must translate his Indian memories into English. But the process of translation is not only semantically oriented: Rushdie must also transfer into English the 'music', 'the noise' in his head – he wants 'to make a new noise' with English (SRI 162). Rushdie's language is thus defamiliarised by incorporating into English some of the phonetic and rhythmic characteristics of Indian languages.

¹¹ I have made reference to Venuti's term throughout the thesis (see my Introduction for a definition of 'foreignizing' and 'domesticating' forms of translation). In Chapter 1 I cited Rosa Maria Bosinelli's term 'foreignization' which she adapts from Venuti in order to denote defamiliarisation in Joyce in the context of his multilingualism (Rosa Maria Bosinelli, 'Joyce Slipping Across the Borders of English: The Stranger in Language,' *James Joyce Quarterly* 38.3/4 [Spring/Summer 2001] 397). In the context of more general forms of defamiliarisation (including multilingual forms), I prefer the term 'linguistic estrangement': I find, however, that the term 'foreignization' becomes especially apt in the context of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, where the effect of Indian languages on Rushdie's English prose is in direct relation to his professed aim to 'translate' India into English.

Rushdie's Indian English results from the expression of Indian themes in English, and from the transference of the properties of Indian languages into English. This phenomenon is extremely common in the postcolonial context: writers who choose to use the coloniser's language often speak of the difficulty of expressing culturally-specific aspects of their work in the foreign language. The term 'translation' is often used in this context, but rather than denoting the actual translation of one text into another language, it becomes a metaphor to denote the more abstract process of transferring aspects of the writer's native subject-matter and mother tongue into the foreign language. G.J.V. Prasad asserts that texts created by Indian English writers are 'translated', even where they do not derive from a source text in another language, because 'the very act of their writing [is] one of translation'. Prasad goes so far as to claim that writers such as Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Khushwant Singh and Rushdie 'are [...] not so much translating Indian-language texts into English as using various strategies to make their works read like translations.'¹² The direct influence of the mother tongue upon the foreign language is usually apparent and indeed is often deliberate, but Prasad's statement is potentially misleading, due to the standard meaning of 'translation' which indicates a source-text and implies the secondary, derivative nature of the translation itself. I would also argue that the translational effect remarked upon by Prasad is not the main objective of such authors. Instead, the process of 'translating' cultural and linguistic experience from the mother tongue into another language becomes a means of producing further aesthetic and semantic effects.

Loreto Todd's term 'relexification' refers more precisely to this process, and allows for a greater specificity of reference to the post-colonial context of writing in

¹² G.J.V. Prasad, 'Writing Translation: the strange case of the Indian English novel,' *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London: Routledge, 1999) 54.

a foreign language. Todd describes the process whereby West African writers ‘relexify [their] mother tongue, using English vocabulary but indigenous structures and rhythms.’¹³ This concept is further developed by Chantal Zabus as ‘the making of a new register of communication out of an alien lexicon.’¹⁴ Zabus writes that ‘the “Third World” has become the site of the “third code”’: a ‘new register of communication, which is neither the European target language nor the indigenous source language, [which] functions as an “interlanguage” or as a “third register.”’¹⁵ This ‘third code’ is, for Zabus, a literary language which ‘relexifies’ the indigenous language into the European language, resulting not in “metropolitan” English or French’, but in ‘an unfamiliar European language that constantly suggests another tongue.’¹⁶ The African writers cited by Zabus describe writing in English as a process of ‘translating,’ ‘paraphrasing’ or ‘approximating’ their mother tongues in English. Through the concept of relexification, however, Zabus provides a more accurate definition of this process:

Unlike interpretive translation or the ‘lesser’ activity of *transcodage* which both take place between two texts – the original and the translated version – relexification is characterized by the absence of an original. It therefore does not operate from the language of one text to another but from one language to the other within the same text. Such texts are [...] palimpsests for, behind the scriptural authority of the target European language, the earlier, imperfectly erased remnants of the source language are still visible.¹⁷

Relexification, though developed by Todd and Zabus to apply to West African literature in English, also clearly bears relevance to Indian literature in English, and seems particularly apt in the context of Rushdie’s professed desire to ‘make a new noise’ with English.

¹³ Loreto Todd. ‘The English Language in West Africa.’ *English as a World Language* 298.

¹⁴ Chantal Zabus. *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* (Amsterdam: Rodopi. 1991) 102.

¹⁵ Zabus 102.

¹⁶ Zabus 103.

¹⁷ Zabus 106.

Relexification as the source of linguistic newness is not only a literary phenomenon, however. As I have indicated, Rushdie's Indianisation of English is not merely his own invention, but is based on forms of English which have developed in India. Indian English, according to *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, is regularly used by 'an estimated 30m people (4% of the population) [...] making India the third largest English-speaking country in the world.'¹⁸ Braj B. Kachru writes that, as a result of the full integration of English into so many areas of Indian society, a variety of different Englishes have developed, 'from Pidgin English or broken English on the one hand to educated (or standard) South Asian English.'¹⁹ The 'linguistic and cultural nativization' of the language 'is the result of the new "unEnglish" linguistic and cultural setting in which English is used as a tool of communication.'²⁰ Each variant of Indianized English constitutes an adaptation of the language for the purposes of expressing Indian experience: a 'transplanted language' such as English in India 'is cut off from its traditional roots and begins to function in new surroundings, in new roles, and new contexts. This newness initiates changes in language.'²¹ The new cultural setting thus produces various forms of 'linguistic innovations'. These 'deviations' from Standard English are, Kachru argues, distinct from 'mistakes' because they are the product of the language's adaptation to the new environment: '[t]here is an explanation for each deviation within the context of situation.'²²

¹⁸ Tom McArthur, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 504.

¹⁹ Kachru, 'South Asian English' 356.

²⁰ Kachru, *The Indianization of English: The English Language in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) 2.

²¹ Kachru, *The Alchemy of English: The Spread, Functions and Models of Non-Native Englishes* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1986) 130.

²² Kachru's full explanation of the difference between 'mistakes' and 'deviations' is as follows: 'A "mistake" may be unacceptable by a native speaker since it does not belong to the linguistic "norm" of the English language; it cannot be justified with reference to the sociocultural context of a non-native variety; and it is not the result of the productive processes used in an institutionalized non-

Rushdie, like Kachru, argues that English has been adapted to express Indian reality²³ and makes use of Indian English to represent the speech of characters regardless of whether they are speaking in English or in Indian languages. Indian English in *Midnight's Children* is not merely mimetic, however, but is developed into a highly stylised literary language. In response to an interviewer's query as to whether he has 'invented a language' in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie makes it clear that he writes in a form of English which is part mimetic and part invented, and which does not seek to distinguish between the different languages spoken by the characters:

there are coinages, yes [...] But I don't think I invented anything much, really, I think most of what is said in the book, you could hear said around anywhere. It's just a matter of using your ear. And, of course, in many of the cases, you'd have to invent, because some of the characters wouldn't even be speaking English to each other – or they'd be speaking a mixture of English and something else. And I wanted to override that problem, so that people would not be constantly asking themselves: what language are the characters talking in? So, from that point of view, it's an invented idiom. (SRI 41)

Rushdie makes use of Indian English, not only to represent Indian characters speaking in English, but also to relexify other Indian languages – one particularly clear example of this would be the 'vendor of notions' whose 'bad, stilted Hindi' is represented by Rushdie in a recognisably uneducated form of Indian English (MC

native variety of English. On the other hand, a "deviation" has the following characteristics: it is different from the norm in the sense that it is the result of the new "un-English" linguistic and cultural setting in which the English language is used; it is the result of a productive process which marks the typical variety-specific features; and it is systemic within a variety, and not idiosyncratic. There is thus an explanation for each deviation within the context of situation.' Kachru, ed., *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures*, 2nd edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) 45. This apparently clear opposition between 'deviations' and 'mistakes' is, however, rather more ambiguous in reality. Kachru admits that it is often difficult, if not impossible, to justify Indianisms as functional 'deviations': the common Indian misuse of the English article or of plural forms, for example, though recognised characteristics of Indian English, 'cannot clearly be categorized' as 'deviations' rather than 'mistakes' (Kachru, *Indianization* 3). It is probable that, in order to present Indian English as a legitimate form of English, Kachru needs to overstate the functionality of 'deviations' in order to combat assumptions that the foreign variation of English is inferior to Standard English.

²³ In his Introduction to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, for example, Rushdie writes that English has 'become an Indian language'. *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing, 1947-1997*, ed. Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West (London: Vintage, 1997) xiii.

371-2). The language of *Midnight's Children*, though hybridised, thus aims to homogenise different languages by blurring the boundaries between 'invented' and 'natural' idioms in the text. This is not only a practical necessity for the purposes of maintaining comprehensibility, however: the combination of invented and mimetic forms of hybrid language in *Midnight's Children* is central to Rushdie's style. Indeed, many of Rushdie's defamiliarising devices are directly related to forms of Indian English.

The surface distortions of Rushdie's prose in *Midnight's Children* are immediately apparent. Foreign words and the explicit hybridisation of English, an excess of ellipses and parentheses, an idiosyncratic use – and misuse – of punctuation, and constant exclamations, interjections and digressions, all confirm the success of Rushdie's intention to 'make a new noise' with English. Talking about what he learned from G.V. Desani, Rushdie explains the importance of changing the rhythms of the language:

I found I had to punctuate it in a very peculiar way, to destroy the natural rhythms of the English language; I had to use dashes too much, keep exclaiming, putting in three dots followed by semi-colons followed by three dashes. [...] That sort of thing just seemed to dislocate the English and let other things into it.²⁴

Harish Trivedi is extremely critical of Rushdie's prose-style, and describes the above quotation as an indication of how his (mis)use of language is 'so superficial as to be comic.' For Trivedi, Rushdie's bilingualism, 'while exuberantly playful on the surface, [...] lacks deeper down any complex meditative or mediative engagement between two languages and cultures.'²⁵ But the superficiality of Rushdie's linguistic techniques is precisely the *point*: it is entirely characteristic of the foreigner's

²⁴ Salman Rushdie, cited in Harish Trivedi, 'Salman the Funtoosh: Magic Bilingualism in *Midnight's Children*,' *Rushdie's Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings*, ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee (Delhi: Pencraft International, 1999) 89.

²⁵ Trivedi, 'Salman the Funtoosh' 89, 86.

material perception of language which I described in my Introduction. It is also fundamental to Rushdie's processes of foreignising defamiliarisation: he breaks the surface of language in order to re-form it in different, more expressive, ways. The surface perception of language and the subsequent distortion of that surface can both be read in terms of Bakhtin's claim that polyglossia leads to a re-evaluation of language whereby 'completely new relationships are established between language and its object (that is, the real world).'²⁶ In the absence of a sense of any stable, authoritative signifying system, the polylingual writer finds different ways of making language signify – ways which are often based on the manipulation of the surface and form of language.

The syntactical distortions that characterise Rushdie's style in *Midnight's Children* are not merely a way of 'letting in' foreign elements: they are usually produced as a result of the influence of those foreign elements. Graddol, Leith and Swann observe that '[w]hen a language is imposed on a community as part of a colonial process, speakers tend to incorporate many linguistic features from their first language when speaking the new, imposed one.'²⁷ Likewise, Kachru writes that many deviant characteristics of South Asian English are the result of 'transfer (or "interference") from the first languages'²⁸ – grammatical, syntactical, idiomatic and lexical aspects of Indian languages are carried over into English, often through processes of translation (as is the case with the translation of Indian idioms into English). Literary 'relexification' is thus a literary adaptation of natural processes of 'interference'. So the rhythms of Rushdie's language, as well as many other features of his style, are the effects produced by letting foreign languages into English, rather

²⁶ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 12.

²⁷ David Graddol, Dick Leith and Joan Swann, *English: History, Diversity and Change* (London: Routledge, 1996) 185.

²⁸ Kachru, 'South Asian English' 360.

than merely a means of making English sound foreign. Ketaki Kushari Dyson, distinguishing between the 'creatively bilingual' and the 'creatively monolingual' writer is, like Trivedi, extremely critical of Rushdie's hybridisation of English. Trivedi focuses on the surface playfulness of Rushdie's style as evidence of the superficiality of his Indianisation of English. Dyson similarly argues that Rushdie's English is not truly Indianised, this time using as evidence the apparent superficiality of his code-switching:

Salman Rushdie interlards his English with Urdu words and phrases as a naughty teenager interweaves his speech with swearwords, but he cannot write a book in Urdu. [...] He may be a cosmopolitan, but he is a monolingual writer. His use of Urdu adds colour to his texts, but does not lead us to an Indian intellectual world. Had he been an artist in Urdu, I doubt if he would have used the language to pepper his English in the facetious way he now does.²⁹

Both Trivedi and Dyson affirm that Rushdie fails to truly Indianise his English. Their objections are motivated by political concerns, however, and in particular to the fraught debate as to whether or not Indian writers should write in English at all. Their argument – that Rushdie's language is not Indian enough – is partly justified by the fact that *Midnight's Children* is designed to appeal to an Anglo-American as well as an Indian audience. Indeed some would argue that Rushdie prioritises his Anglo-American readers; Trivedi, for example, complains that the constant explanation of aspects of Indian history and the translation of Indian words becomes repetitive and thus problematic for the Indian reader.³⁰ Rushdie's dedication to the English language at the expense of Indian languages is reflected in the perhaps excessive importance he assigns to 'Indo-Anglian' literature in *The Vintage Book of*

²⁹ Ketaki Kushari Dyson. 'Forging a Bilingual Identity: A Writer's Testimony,' in *Bilingual Women: Anthropological Approaches to Second-Language Use*, eds. Pauline Burton, Ketaki Kushari Dyson and Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg, 1994): 178-9.

³⁰ Trivedi, 'Salman the Funtoosh' 77-9.

Indian Writing.³¹ Nevertheless, his Indian English is not merely a playful fabrication, but is closely based on recognised forms of English as used in India. Khushwant Singh recognises Rushdie's use of Indian vocabulary as 'natural and sophisticated', and observes that he 'uses the kind of Indish that the jet-set of Bombay do today.'³² This statement reminds us that Rushdie is unable to represent the full linguistic range of 'India's Babel' and that his renditions of Indian English are likely to be strongly affected by his own experience of particular aspects of India (he was brought up in Bombay).³³ Rushdie makes use of a wider range of forms of Indian English than Singh suggests, however. Where Indian English is used to represent Indian English-speaking characters or to relexify dialogue in Indian languages, the extent of Indianization of characters' speech in *Midnight's Children* is related to class, education and social-status: the foreign-educated Aadam Sinai's dialogue, for example, is far closer to Standard English than the dialogue of the boatman Tai, the factory worker Padma or Saleem's ayah, Mary.

Most of Rushdie's Indianisms conform to characteristics of Indian English as defined by Kachru. Kachru writes that common products of 'interference' in Indian

³¹ The vast majority of writing selected for the anthology was written in English. The reason for this, Rushdie claims, is that 'the prose writing – both fiction and non-fiction – created in this period by Indian writers *working in English*, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 "official languages" of India, the so-called "vernacular languages", during the same time; and, indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, "Indo-Anglian" literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books.' Introduction to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing* x.

³² Khushwant Singh, 'Indish,' *Seminar* 321 (May 1986): 37.

³³ As Meenakshi Mukherjee reminds us: "'Indian" is a vague word, because even though the Indo-Anglian novelist is writing in English, which is a language prevalent all over India, generally speaking, his area of intimate experience is limited to a small geographical area. The quality that marks his writing is often the quality of that particular area, the characteristics of its speech, its typical responses and its distinctive spirit.' Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi: Heinemann, 1971) 174. Mukherjee and Singh's observations indicate that Indian English is subject to regional variation. As Kachru notes, terms used to define non-native varieties of English often 'mask the linguistic heterogeneity within a region', and this is also the case for Indian English, which contains many subvarieties in addition to the "'standard" or "educated" variety'. Kachru, *Alchemy* 89. Rushdie's attempt to represent India as a whole is limited by his own experience of India as well as his linguistic range. He mainly uses Hindi and Urdu words, though Trivedi complains that Rushdie's command of Hindi is imperfect, and that he even uses certain Hindi words (such as 'funtoosh') incorrectly. Trivedi, 'Salman the Funtoosh' 90.

English are ‘deviant constructions in [...] interrogative sentences and the formation of tag questions.’³⁴ A tendency, for example, ‘to form interrogative constructions without changing the position of subject and auxiliary items’³⁵ is shared by both Mary Pereira and Padma:

‘what is happening, baba, why these old things can’t stay dead and not plague honest folk?’ (MC 245)

‘and why you haven’t told me all these days, weeks, months ...?’ (MC 404)

Another common deviation, the incorrect use of progressive tenses,³⁶ is apparent in, for example, Ghani the landowner’s English:

That woman, always sick these days, too old, I am thinking (MC 20)

The misuse or omission of articles is also a prominent feature of Indian English³⁷ and is a feature of Rushdie’s prose in phrases such as ‘I am good Christian woman, baba’ (MC 245), ‘I am not any ... bad word woman’ (MC 34), and ‘Come, cousinji, lady is waiting!’ (MC 86). This is also a result of ‘interference’: South Asian languages do not tend to have the equivalent of the English definite and indefinite article.³⁸

One of the most prominent features of Indian English in Rushdie’s prose, however, is a tendency to reduplicate words and phrases. Kachru notes that reduplication, ‘a typological feature which all S[outh] A[sian] L[anguage]s share’, is often transferred into the English of Hindi, Telugu or Kashmiri speakers.³⁹ Rushdie makes frequent use of this feature throughout *Midnight’s Children*:

what-what (MC 20)

Let me help, let me help (MC 35)

³⁴ Kachru, *Alchemy* 40.

³⁵ Kachru, *Alchemy* 40.

³⁶ Dick Leith, *A Social History of English*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1997) 207; Kachru, *Alchemy* 40.

³⁷ Kachru, *Alchemy* 40.

³⁸ Kachru, *Indianization* 186.

³⁹ Kachru, *Indianization* 41.

the Monkey yelled Daddydaddy (MC 204)
Who are these multi-multis? (MC 311)
Make it big big (MC 328)
All day I'm sitting sitting (MC 98)

South Asian English collocations are often derived from the translation of words or phrases from a South Asian Language into South Asian English.⁴⁰ In *Midnight's Children* this is apparent in a phrase such as 'hit-the-spittoon' (MC 39) or in idiomatic expressions such as 'Piece-of-the-Moon' (MC 9) (which is a translation of 'chand-ka-tukra') and 'sister-sleeper' (MC 320) (a translation of 'bhaenchud'). Kachru also notes that some collocations 'are extensions or analogies derived from English'.⁴¹ 'Black money', one of Kachru's examples of this process (a phrase formed 'on the analogy of *black market*'⁴²), also occurs in *Midnight's Children* ('black-money' MC 317). More unusual examples of this would be Aadam Sinai's mother's insistence on calling his doctor's case a 'doctori-attaché' (MC 19) on the analogy of 'attaché case' or Saleem's phrase 'eager as mustard' (MC 401) which derives from 'keen as mustard.' Such collocations are closely related to what Goffin has called 'phrase-mongering', a process in which, as Kachru explains:

a unit of higher rank is reduced to a lower rank. Thus, where a native speaker of English might use a clause or a nominal group, a South Asian English user prefers a formation with *modifier + head + (qualifier)* structure. Consider, for example, a preference for *welcome address* as opposed to *an address of welcome*, or for *England-returned* instead of *one who has been to England*⁴³

'Rank-reduction' 'involves first the process of deletion and then permutation of the lexical items.'⁴⁴ This is one of the most distinctive features of Rushdie's style in *Midnight's Children*; indeed, 'Europe-returned' is a phrase used by Naseem to describe her husband (MC 34). 'Rank-reduction' is also apparent when Tai

⁴⁰ Kachru, *Alchemy* 41.

⁴¹ Kachru, *Alchemy* 41

⁴² Kachru, *Alchemy* 41

⁴³ Kachru, *Alchemy* 41.

⁴⁴ Kachru, *Indianization* 136.

proclaims that Aadam's foreign education 'is a too-bad thing' (MC 20), and when Saleem states that he has been 'only the humblest of jugglers-with-facts' (MC 326), refers to his predilection for 'cheatery-in-class' (MC 304), and describes the 'glass-kissery' indulged in by Amina Sinai and Nadir Khan (MC 218). This process is possibly the product of translation from Indian languages: Kachru notes Whitworth's observation that rank-reduced formations 'are following the process of analogy of Sanskrit *tatpuruṣa* compounds, like *deva-putra* "a son of god", and transfer such formations into I[ndian] E[nglish] (say, for example, *deva-putra* as "god-son").'⁴⁵ So this summarising process is often derived from a form of literal translation which retains the word-order of the original language.

An important aspect of Rushdie's style in *Midnight's Children* is thus produced by the transference of the characteristics of Indian languages into English and the translation of Indian words and idioms. Through such processes of relexification, English is deformed and distorted in order to accommodate its foreign subject-matter. But even such deliberately distorting translation is inadequate to express Indian experience: Rushdie therefore also retains a significant amount of vocabulary in Indian languages. His incorporation of mainly Hindi-Urdu words and phrases into English produces an overtly multilingual prose-style. Again, this is also characteristic of Indian English, and Kachru notes various different kinds of lexical hybridisation. Single lexical items 'are essentially register-dependent and therefore are normally used when referring to contexts which are typically South Asian.'⁴⁶ Indeed, much of the Indianness of Rushdie's English is imparted by his frequent use of Indian names (of people, places and gods, etc.) and culturally-specific words related to religion, food, Indian traditions and cultural practices. Such names and

⁴⁵ Kachru, *Indianization* 137.

⁴⁶ Kachru, *Alchemy* 42.

words are often untranslatable, and sometimes do not exist in translation (place-names, for example). However, many of the foreign words used by Rushdie are interjections, colloquialisms, terms of endearment, curses, oaths and so on. Words such as ‘baba’, ‘yaar’, ‘sahib’, ‘sahiba’, ‘janum’ and ‘bhai’ are so frequent as to become extremely familiar to – if not necessarily understood by – the non-Hindi-Urdu speaking reader. Exclamations and interjections such as ‘baap-re-baap’, ‘arré’, ‘Chhi-chhi!’ and ‘Hai!’ are also common, and are central to the rhythms of Rushdie’s language as well as emphasising its Indianness. The hybridisation of language that ensues is itself a feature of Indian English: as Kachru notes, lexical items from South Asian languages are often hybridised with English words,⁴⁷ a process that is apparent in *Midnight’s Children* in phrases such as ‘feringhee women’ (MC 17), ‘purdah-veils’ (MC 34), ‘the betel-chewers at the paan-shop’ (MC 39) and ‘lathi-charges’ (MC 413).

The density of Indian words in the novel often appears to affect the comprehensibility of the text for the non-Hindi-Urdu speaking reader. Rukmini Bhaya Nair observes that ‘the elaborate semantic labyrinth that Rushdie constructs has as its special feature multi- or, at least, bi-lingual proficiency in English, Hindustani and/or Urdu.’ She comments that Rushdie makes few concessions to the monolingual reader, and observes the exclusivity of his discourse, which is ‘oriented towards a multilingual consciousness such as that possessed by an immigrant.’⁴⁸ But in fact Rushdie’s prose is eminently comprehensible: one of his predominant stylistic features is the translation of Indian vocabulary into English. Often, the process of translation is explicit. In, for example Saleem’s reference to ‘the mader-i-millat or mother of the nation’ (MC 322); and in ‘Godown, gudam, warehouse, call

⁴⁷ Kachru, *Alchemy* 42.

⁴⁸ Rukmini Bhaya Nair, ‘History as Gossip in *Midnight’s Children*,’ *Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children*, ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee 65-6.

it what you like' (MC 71) we are presented with what Trivedi terms 'an embarrassment of riches': Indian English followed by Hindi followed by proper English.⁴⁹ Most of the time, however, the Hindi-Urdu word or phrase and its English translation are simply placed side by side, creating semantic repetition:

There do not seem to be any goondas, any trouble-makers (MC 35)

Hey, bhaenchud! Hey, little sister-sleeper (MC 320)

At times this process of translation not only renders foreign words comprehensible, but exploits interlingual ambiguity for punning effect. Saleem's grandfather is described by Tai as 'nakkoo', which Saleem the narrator translates for us as 'the nakkoo, the nosey one' (MC 16). 'Nakkoo', however, idiomatically means 'nose in the air' – Tai is referring to the higher class status of the future Doctor Aziz as well as the size of his nose and his inquisitive nature. The English word 'nosey', rather than providing an accurate idiomatic translation of the word instead supplements the punning potential inherent in 'nakkoo' by adding an English idiom (nosey) and highlighting the phrase's literal reference to Aadam's huge nose.

Where words remain untranslated, this is usually because they are not semantically crucial to the context. Rushdie takes care to make his work fully comprehensible to monolingual readers, though of course for the Indian Hindi-Urdu speaking reader, he risks being repetitive.⁵⁰ The effect for the non-Indian reader is curious: we are often unaware that foreign words are being translated for us, and thus experience incomprehension of and estrangement from the foreign words on the page. And yet we are not semantically disadvantaged by this incomprehension – we actually understand far more than we think we do. Such juxtaposition of English and Indian words allows the language of *Midnight's Children* to retain the

⁴⁹ Trivedi, 'Salman the Funtoosh' 78-9.

⁵⁰ Trivedi, 'Salman the Funtoosh' 78-9.

untranslatable phonetic effects of the Indian languages without sacrificing semantics. And because we are often unaware that we are provided with translations at all, we do not assume any transparent accuracy of translation. Instead, the text makes us accept, and even feel comfortable with, a certain amount of incomprehension. This process leads the Anglophone reader into an awareness and acceptance not only of the incommensurability of different linguistic systems but also of the untranslatable cultural realities to which those systems refer, thus providing a more directly socio-political form of the ontological and linguistic relativity that, as I indicated in Chapter 3, is an important feature of Nabokov's fiction.

Semantic reduplication thus ensures that, even without the kind of disclaimers that we find in *Shame* that overtly cast doubt upon the accuracy of translated words, Rushdie implicitly acknowledges the limitations of translation – translations are supplements to rather than replacements of foreign words and concepts. Rushdie thus resists the domestication and assimilation of Indian languages and cultures into English; indeed, while ostensibly serving the interests of the non-Indian reader, this process of translation as reduplication is actually derived from an Indianisation of English. I have already noted the tendency to reduplicate words and phrases which is a common feature of Indian English and Rushdie's prose – reduplication is common in South Asian Languages, and its transference into English is an example of the interference of the English user's mother tongue. But one particular form of reduplication in Indian English makes direct use of translation between languages, using the hybrid linguistic context to repeat the same word in different languages. A phrase such as 'lathi stick', for example, combines Hindustani and English words with identical meanings.⁵¹ When Rushdie translates

⁵¹ Kachru, *Alchemy* 43.

words, then, he is exploiting a characteristic of Indian English in order to make his prose comprehensible to the non-Indian reader: reduplication serves both to foreignise English and to ensure its comprehensibility.

This process of incorporating translation into the text also means that Rushdie's hybrid prose does not reach the extreme difficulty of Nabokovian or Joycean multilingualism. Without any knowledge of Russian or French, for example, many of the puns and jokes of *Ada* are incomprehensible (a problem that is only partly remedied by Nabokov's addition to the 1969 Penguin edition of 'Vivian Darkbloom's' notes which translate many of the passages and jokes). And Joyce's prose, especially in *Finnegans Wake*, often seems to demand an extraordinary amount of multilingual erudition. For both Joyce and Nabokov, such difficulty is at times a device in itself, redirecting the reader's attention to the formal, material qualities of language (a process that can also be related to Beckett's emphasis on the foreignness of language, whereby the reader, like Molloy, begins to sense words 'comme des sons purs, libres de toute signification' [M 66]⁵²). Any clarity, including clarity of translation, would also work against the fluidity and indeterminacy of their language.

Rushdie's multilingualism, on the other hand, is essentially *centred* by the broadly mimetic aim of his fiction: the representation of India (however imagined or fantastic that representation may be) is based upon the history of a 'real' country (though Saleem's description of India as 'a mass fantasy' seems to indicate the need for Nabokovian quotation marks around the notion of 'reality' here). Indeed, Rushdie claims that, 'when *Midnight's Children* came out, people in Britain reacted to it as if it were a fabulous story, an invention, while in India it was read as a

⁵² 'as pure sounds, free of all meaning' (T 50).

history book' (SRI 211). Likewise, the representation of 'India's Babel' is enacted through a literary reworking of Indian English, and while the English reader is struck by the apparent innovation of such language, the Indian reader, Rushdie claims, will recognise in that language 'the rhythms of Indian speech and thought' (SRI 14). As I have already indicated, Rushdie's 'mongrelization' of English is not as 'new', as radical or as destabilising as the more extreme multilingual forms of Joyce or Nabokov.⁵³ Instead, his language is an innovative literary reworking of forms of English that have developed in a specific cultural context. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, many of the more abstract 'literary' forms of defamiliarisation favoured by Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* can be traced back to characteristics of Indian English.

Not limited to any single form of Standard English or Indian English, Saleem Sinai flaunts his mastery over the language, and his style makes use of standard, literary forms of English as well as incorporating the uneducated Indianisms of a character such as Mary. An examination of his more complex and self-consciously literary use of language demonstrates that he also manipulates Indian English to produce certain linguistic and narrative effects: Saleem's language thus provides an insight into some of the more sophisticated aspects of Rushdie's literary Indianisation. Where Saleem is not representing the speech of a character less educated in English than himself, certain features of Indian English become more prominent than others. He is less prone to the kinds of Indianisation that abound in Mary or Padma's speech, and that, as far as standard English is concerned, could be seen as grammatical or syntactical errors: the misuse or omission of the article, deviant constructions in questions or tag questions, or the misuse of tenses. His

⁵³ Though Nabokov's use of Russianised English to represent the speech of the Russian Professor Pnin, for example, is less destabilising and more mimetic than Van and Ada's wordplay, and bears closer relation to Rushdie's Indian English.

ability to use English ‘correctly’ is displayed, for example, when he describes his aunt Pia:

We had all noticed that my mumani was behaving unusually. There was an unspoken feeling that an actress of her standing should have risen to the challenge of widowhood in high style; we had unconsciously been eager to see her grieving, looking forward to watching an accomplished tragedienne orchestrate her own calamity, anticipating a forty-day raga in which bravura and gentleness, howling pain and soft despond would all be blended in the exact proportions of art; but Pia remained still, dry-eyed, and anticlimactically composed. (MC 272)

Any notion of the ‘exact proportions of art’ is reflected here in balanced prose and finely constructed sentences, while the sparse code-switching of ‘mumani’ and ‘raga’ is balanced by the erudite, showy and self-consciously ‘poetic’ lexical range – ‘tragedienne’, ‘bravura’, ‘soft despond’. The influence of Indian languages is kept to a minimum, and the Indian English speech of Pia and Naseem which follows is as a result held in strong contrast to the narrator’s English.

Where Saleem’s language manifests characteristics of Indian English, these characteristics are turned into stylistic devices and forms of defamiliarisation. He uses Indian words not only for referential purposes (to express something that is culturally-specific or untranslatable), but also as stylistic or figurative embellishments. When, for example, he writes about ‘the birianis of dissension and the nargisi koftas of discord’ (MC 330), his aim is not primarily to describe Indian food, but to create metaphorical associations between food and emotions and to illustrate his culinary metaphor for hybridisation: that ‘[t]hings – even people – have a way of leaking into each other [...] like flavours when you cook.’ (MC 38). Some of Saleem’s most characteristic linguistic and literary devices are the product of hybridisation. Reduplication, for example, serves a range of purposes: in Book

Three, the iconic proliferation of words and names in sets of threes⁵⁴ is mirrored in the emphatic reduplication of ‘south south south’ (MC 359), ‘down down down’ (MC 412), ‘north north north’ (MC 369). Elsewhere, reduplication creates a sense of speed or urgency, for example when Saleem remembers his life-changing accident in the washing chest, and ‘how nasal fluid had been sniffed upupup into somewhere-that-nosefluid-shouldn’t-go’ (MC 303), or when he describes the seer Ramram ‘circling fasterfaster’ (MC 87). Repetition is thus also used for more abstract stylistic concerns: ‘fasterfaster’ balances the repetition in ‘Ramram’, much as the repeated triplication of words in Book Three is fundamental to the rhythm of the prose.

‘Phrase-mongering’ or ‘rank-reduction’⁵⁵ is perhaps Saleem’s favourite device, however. He takes the Indian English tendency to summarise phrases by deleting and then reordering words, and then uses it stylistically. Rank-reduced constructions such as ‘spittoon-hittery’ (MC 45), ‘glass-kissery’ (MC 218) and ‘electoral-jiggery-pokery’ (MC 326) indicate his own idiosyncratic personalisation of Indian English. Often the effect is simply descriptive, as in the description of Amina Sinai’s ‘rabbit-startled’ face (MC 87) or Saleem’s ‘boot-rumpled’ hair (MC 216). At other times, the summarising effect of ‘phrase-mongering’ serves to remind us of stories and characters that we might have forgotten. Thus Saleem is able to make quick reference to the ‘midnight-given qualities’ (MC 197) of the novel’s magical children, to the ‘ineluctable Padma-pressures’ (MC 39) that affect the narrative or to Amina’s ‘long-ago underworld husband’ (MC 342) Nadir Khan. Or, rather than having to explain his accident with the silver spittoon again, he can

⁵⁴ To give a few examples: ‘Ayooba Shaheed Farooq’ (repeated throughout the chapter), ‘memories families histories’ (MC 351), ‘hungry unslept exhausted’ (MC 358), ‘chills fevers diarrhoea’ (MC 363) etc.

⁵⁵ Kachru, *Alchemy*: 41.

simply refer to himself as ‘Spittoon-brained’ (MC 345). The concision of such phrases means that Rushdie’s narrator can refer to or describe more things at once, hence speeding the narrative up and helping to produce that sense of ‘too many stories’ (SRI 234) that characterises the novel. If this concision makes the narrative seem more multitudinous, it also helps us to keep track of the stories, however: Saleem uses this technique to summarise aspects of stories that we may have lost amidst the novel’s excess of characters and events.

One feature of rank-reduction – hyphenation – is a distinctive feature throughout *Midnight’s Children*. Saleem’s tendency to join words together is produced, not only in the process of ‘phrase-mongering’, however, but also where he translates into English from other languages. When he translates ‘bhaenchud’ as ‘sister-sleeper’ (MC 320), the two English words are brought together in imitation of the single word in Hindi-Urdu. In another, more extreme case, ‘Buddha’ is translated as ‘he-who-achieved-enlightenment-under-the-bodhi-tree’ (MC 349). Here, where several English words are used to translate a single word, they are hyphenated in order to bring them into some semblance of inseparable verbal unity – an imitation of the compactness of the single word ‘buddha’. Hyphenation is also at times simply transferred from the Indian language to English, such as the translation of ‘Bulbul-e-Din’ into ‘nightingale-of-the-faith’ (MC 313). Hyphenation helps to estrange the English, so that even when phrases such as ‘nightingale-of-the-faith’ or ‘piece-of-the-moon’ appear apart from the original idioms from which they were translated, the influence of the foreign tongue upon the English is apparent. And when Saleem imagines the oaths of a busload of stranded passengers – ‘son-of-a-pig, brother-of-a-jackass’ (MC 126) – the hyphenation emphasises our sense that they are translated from an Indian language.

Though Saleem's tendency to join words together is a product of relexification, excessive hyphenation has also seeped into Rushdie's rhythmic distortions of English when he is not translating, becoming one of the most common characteristics of the prose of *Midnight's Children*. Phrases such as 'the-once-and-for-all-clearing' (MC 304) and 'government-by-military-say-so' (MC 330) illustrate Rushdie's intention to disrupt the rhythms of English and to produce an effect of narrative speed. As with 'phrase-mongering', however, the effect is also referential: hyphenation is a means of including descriptive detail quickly and concisely, so that rather than having to remind us of the holy man who arrived for Saleem's birth and remained, meditating under an outside tap, ever since, Saleem refers to such proofs of his importance in abbreviated form, as 'framed letters from Delhi and sadhu-under-the-tap' (MC 152). In the context of his use of hyphenation as a technique of translation, such phrases also seem to imitate the rhythms of foreign languages and speech-rhythms. Excessive hyphenation also develops into a tendency to put words together. That this is a typically Joycean technique is of course significant, Joyce being an obvious and important influence on Rushdie. But whereas in Joyce words are conjoined often for punning effect or to disrupt the words semantically, in Rushdie, the technique is a facet of the Indianization of English, and is used more for rhythmic effect than semantic disruption – as when Saleem complains that the doctor 'cast doubts on my reliability as a witness, and Godknowswhatelse' (MC 65), or when, riding a bike that he is about to crash, he circles 'roundaroundaroundaroundand ...' (MC 190).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ In *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie uses this technique much more frequently, often in place of hyphenation and/or to emphasise other features of Indian English such as reduplication. For example: 'Downdown they hurtled' (SV 6). 'Butbut. Babaji ... 'But me no buts. Already I have informed my goodwife.' (SV 20)

Many of the stylistic and figurative devices of Rushdie's language, even when they are not directly related to the Indianized or relexified speech of a character, can thus be traced to characteristics of Indian English. Indeed, polylingualism is crucial to figurative language in the novel. Shklovsky writes that the reason for using foreign languages in literature 'is that this sort of semi-comprehensible language seems to the reader, by reason of its unfamiliarity, more figurative.'⁵⁷ In Rushdie, the unfamiliarity of foreign words for the reader (especially words in Indian languages for the non-Indian reader) does indeed turn those words into material rather than signifying entities. In addition to this, he deliberately makes language more material – through excessive and idiosyncratic punctuation, and by mixing languages.

But the effects of hybridisation in *Midnight's Children* are not only felt as surface distortions and surface patterning. Saleem's multilingual perspective also leads him to emphasise the forms of semantic ambiguity produced in translation and transliteration:

O fortunate ambiguity of transliteration! The Urdu word 'buddha', meaning old man, is pronounced with the Ds hard and plosive. But there is also Buddha, with soft-tongued Ds, meaning he-who-achieved-enlightenment-under-the-bodhi-tree ... (MC 349)

Transliteration into Roman script makes the 'd' sound ambiguous: because the alphabet is unable to differentiate between the two different 'd' sounds in Urdu, transliteration produces a homonym, thereby enriching the semantic associations of the word 'buddha'. Such overdetermination, though indicative of semantic ambiguity, is nevertheless semantically productive: it allows the nickname, given to Saleem by the soldiers of his military unit, to refer not only to his habit of sitting

⁵⁷ Viktor Shklovsky, 'The Resurrection of the Word,' trans. Richard Sherwood, *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, ed. Stephen Bann and John E. Boulton (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973) 47.

cross-legged beneath a chinar (rather than a bodhi) tree but also to his 'air of great antiquity' (MC 349). Saleem's anxiety to make all the possible meanings of words and names semantically relevant is also aided by an 'accident of transliteration' where his real name is concerned:

Our names contain our fates; living as we do in a place where names have not acquired the meaninglessness of the West, and are still more than mere sounds, we are also the victims of our titles. *Sinai* contains Ibn Sina, master magician, Sufi adept; and also Sin the moon, the ancient god of Hadhramaut, with his own mode of connection, his powers of action-at-a-distance upon the tides of the world. But Sin is also the letter S, as sinuous as a snake; serpents lie coiled within the name. And there is also the accident of transliteration – Sinai, when in Roman script, though not in Nastaliq, is also the name of the place-of-revelation, of put-off-thy-shoes, of commandments and golden calves; but when all that is said and done; when Ibn Sina is forgotten and the moon has set; when snakes lie hidden and revelations end, it is the name of the desert – of barrenness, infertility, dust; the name of the end. (MC 304-5)

Saleem's name, interpreted multilingually, unleashes an excess of meanings; his considerable interpretative faculty then emphasises the relevance of every one of them, so that his name does indeed contain his fate. This process of constructing a composite meaning from different words that sound similar is in accordance with Jakobson's analysis of the 'paronomastic function' of 'poetic' language.⁵⁸

Homonyms produce phonetic correspondences. They also, as Saleem's analysis of his name demonstrates, produce divergent meanings which can be semantically disruptive. For Jakobson, the patterned manipulation of phonetic similarity in 'poetic language' brings such semantic divergence into a semblance of similarity: connections are established between words that have different meanings but sound similar. Saleem tries to make use of this function of poetic language as a way of bringing together the divergent meanings produced by the multilingual homonyms contained within his name: he focuses on the sounds of words and names in order to

⁵⁸ Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,' *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Robert E. Innis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 167.

draw the divergent meanings of homonyms together into a poetic system of correspondences.

The foreigner's perspective materialises language; it also, however, renders language more arbitrary. Saleem's obsession with meaning is symptomatic of his exposure to 'India's Babel': his multilingual awareness forces him to acknowledge the arbitrariness of language and meaning-systems, leading him in turn to attempt to construct more effective signifying systems that could combat that collective confusion. Just as he tries to tie together all the divergent meanings of his name into a coherent, even fated, identity, so he attempts to pull together all the strands and anarchic forms of his multitudinous narrative into a tightly constructed system of correspondences. Saleem's aim throughout *Midnight's Children* is to force some kind of order and significance upon a heterogeneous reality which constantly resists any such unity:

[...] at the end of 1947, life in Bombay was as teeming, as manifold, as multitudinously shapeless as ever ... except that I had arrived; I was already beginning to take my place at the centre of the universe; and by the time I had finished, I would give meaning to it all. (MC 126-7)

Figurative language is central to this attempt to create meaning from form, not only on a syntagmatic level – in schemes – but also through tropes. Saleem's manipulation of the 'paronomastic function' of language is closely related to his construction of metaphorical 'modes of connection':

'... Your life, which will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own,' the Prime Minister wrote, obliging me scientifically to face the question: *In what sense?* How, in what terms, may the career of a single individual be said to impinge on the fate of a nation? I must answer in adverbs and hyphens: I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our [...] scientists might term 'modes of connection' composed of 'dualistically-combined configurations' of the two pairs of opposed adverbs given above. This is why hyphens are necessary: actively-literally, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically and passively-literally, I was inextricably entwined with my world. (MC 238)

The above passage illustrates Saleem's use of linguistic devices to give his world meaning. Hyphenation, already apparent in the prose as a rhythmic device produced in the process of translation and relexification, here becomes a means of joining concepts together. Again, the superficiality of a hyphenated conjunction of words is indicative of the arbitrariness of Saleem's correspondences, but the hyphens themselves bring in a less superficial mode of connecting disparate things: metaphor.

For Aristotle, 'to make metaphors well is to observe what is like [something else].'⁵⁹ Jakobson also asserts that '[s]imilarity connects a metaphoric term with the term for which it is substituted.'⁶⁰ However, metaphor needs to be constructed from *difference* as well as similarity; indeed, once a metaphorical comparison becomes over-familiar, it becomes a dead metaphor. Umberto Eco specifies the necessarily disjunctive nature of this figure of speech:

The problem of the creativity of language emerges, not only in the privileged domain of poetic discourse, but each time that language – in order to designate something that culture has not yet assimilated [...] – must *invent* combinatory possibilities or semantic couplings not anticipated by the code.

Metaphor, in this sense, appears as a new semantic coupling not preceded by any stipulation of the code (but which generates a new stipulation of the code).⁶¹

Metaphor, then, directs us to perceive similarity rather than making us respond to an already established or naturally apparent similarity. It thus constitutes both a deviation from the code and its own addition to that code: it provides the means of its own comprehensibility. In addition, it finds a way of expressing that which is foreign – perhaps even that which is incomprehensible. We can also relate Eco's definition of metaphor to the forms of linguistic innovation produced in the hybridisation of language. As Kachru's analysis demonstrates, what Eco calls 'new

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987) 32.

⁶⁰ Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances,' *On Language*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) 133.

⁶¹ Umberto Eco, 'The Semantics of Metaphor,' *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology* 252.

semantic coupling[s]' are also produced by the appropriation of the English language for Indian cultural concerns. Where Indian idioms are relexified, for example, semantic associations are produced that are alien to the English language (*the confusion of caste* or *twice-born*, for example, which are translated from Sanskrit⁶²). Though not innovative in the South Asian language from which they are derived, once transposed into English, Indianisms constitute semantic innovations in English. Of course, such Indianisms are not necessarily metaphors or even figures of speech (though they may *appear* as such to the non-Indian reader as a result of their unfamiliarity); nevertheless, they do fit Eco's definition of 'creativity' in language: they 'designate something that [English] culture has not yet assimilated' and they '*invent* combinatory possibilities or semantic couplings not anticipated' by the English language.

Metaphor can produce not only linguistic innovation, but is also a means of constructing new meanings from disparate elements. As Paul Ricoeur writes, '[t]he metaphor is not the enigma but the solution of the enigma'⁶³: 'metaphorical meaning' consists not only of 'a semantic clash', but also 'the *new* predicative meaning which emerges from the collapse of the literal meaning, that is, from the collapse of the meaning which obtains if we rely only on the common or usual lexical values of our words.'⁶⁴ The function of metaphor as 'the solution of the enigma', its ability to construct new meanings from unfamiliar associations, is a quality that Saleem uses on a *thematic* level: his metaphorical 'modes-of-connection' attempt to centre a heterogeneous world. The 'too-many stories' and

⁶² Kachru, *Alchemy* 41.

⁶³ Paul Ricoeur, 'The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling,' *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 144.

⁶⁴ Ricoeur 144.

characters of *Midnight's Children* and the excess of cultures and languages in India, are subjected to the narrator's obsessive attempt to link them all together.

Saleem's desperate need to construct similarity from difference and correspondences from chaos manifests itself as an extremely strong sense of fatality. His stories constantly run ahead of themselves, and the effect of this is that most of the events of the novel are linked to their future consequences – and, as a result, past and future events are inextricably linked. So, when we are told that two men who are with Ahmed Sinai are 'doomed men', their fate is related not only to the imminent failure of their attempt to pay off the anti-Muslim Ravana Gang, but to far more serious future tragedies that Saleem foretells:

here he [Ahmed] is, alongside S.P. Butt who will die in a train to Pakistan, and Mustapha Kemal who will be murdered by goondas in his grand Flagstaff Road house and have the words 'mother-sleeping hoarder' written on his chest in his own blood ... (MC 83)

We do not yet know that their current venture will fail, but the presence of such ominous future events in the narrative provides an anachronistic warning to the reader that success is very unlikely. Such links are not only temporal, however. Throughout the narrative, the smallest details are brought into a complex formal system whereby everything is connected to everything else:

Our boat was the S.S. *Sabarmati*; its sister, which passed us just before we reached the Karachi harbour, was the *Sarasvati*. We steamed into exile aboard the Commander's namesake-ship, proving once again that there was no escape from recurrence. (MC 285)

The Widow's Hand had rolling hips and once owned a jewellery boutique. I began among jewels: in Kashmir, in 1915, there were rubies and diamonds. My great-grandparents ran a gemstone store. Form – once again, recurrence and shape! – no escape from it. (MC 440)

Saleem's constant claim that there is no escape from form is highly questionable: coincidences are clearly manipulated to appear as irrevocable proof of 'recurrence'. But just as metaphor is generally recognised as a literary trope, so his metaphorical

modes-of-connection are *artfully* constructed and are produced by a range of sophisticated narrative devices.

The relationship between metaphor and translation in *Midnight's Children* is apparent in the way leitmotifs connect different episodes. John McLeod demonstrates how, in *Shame*, the untranslatable word *sharam* 'acquires several mobile meanings that do not result in a stable, final definition.' The narrator's refusal to fix that word in a single translation serves two purposes: 'the maintenance of the multiple signifying possibilities of *sharam* that opposes an attempt to fix a stable, authoritative language' and 'the unmasking of a different structure of meaning behind the official religious rhetoric of the state'.⁶⁵ The pursuit of plurality and resistance of any single discourse is also a key feature of *Midnight's Children*. McLeod notes how the leitmotifs of the earlier novel 'acquire a multiplicity of meanings that are mutable and mobile', and demonstrates this through an explication of the variant meanings acquired by the image of a pointing finger.⁶⁶ Such shifting meanings bear a close resemblance to the process of translation: each leitmotif is repeatedly translated into different contexts and invested with new meaning. It thus acquires the quality of a multiple signifier while at the same time becoming one of Saleem's metaphorical 'modes-of-connection': it contributes to both the centripetal and the centrifugal forces within the text.

One leitmotif in particular embodies this narrative process: Aadam's decision 'never again to kiss earth for any god or man' leaves a 'hole in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history.' (MC 10) This metaphorical 'hole' is literalised when he falls in love with Naseem through the

⁶⁵ John McLeod, 'Rewriting History: Postmodern and Postcolonial Negotiations in the Fiction of J.G. Farrell, Timothy Mo, Kazuo Ishiguro and Salman Rushdie.' PhD Dissertation, University of Leeds, 1995: 193.

⁶⁶ McLeod 178.

perforated sheet, and is inherited by Amina, who ‘fell under the spell of the perforated sheet of her own parents, because she resolved to fall in love with her husband bit by bit.’ (MC 68) And the hole becomes Saleem’s inheritance too: he is haunted by ‘the ghostly essence of that perforated sheet, which doomed my mother to learn to love a man in segments, and which condemned me to see my own life – its meanings, its structures – in fragments also’ (MC107). So the symbol of Aadam’s atheism is assigned a range of other meanings, extending even to the fragmentary nature of the narrative itself. The motif itself risks fragmentation, but rather than being pulled apart by all its different contextual meanings, its semantic plurality is drawn by Saleem into a complex system of connections: the partial nature of each meaning becomes a fragment of a whole.

Saleem’s narrative is characterised throughout by the careful piecing together of fragments. Anything that constitutes a threat to unity or identity is reconfigured as a connective force in an artfully reconstructed narrative. So, even though Saleem’s revelation that he is not the child of his parents, but the illegitimate half-English child of Wee Willie Winkie’s wife Vanita and William Methwold casts doubt upon the previously asserted solidity and continuity of heredity and blood-ties, the theme of blood itself is turned into a powerful connective force:

Blood, then, was spilled in the circus-ring. [...] the loyalties of blood motivated the Brass Monkey; and in the streets of the city, rioters spilled each other’s blood. There were bloody murders, and perhaps it is not appropriate to end this sanguinary catalogue by mentioning, once again, the rushes of blood to my mother’s cheeks. Twelve million votes were coloured red that year, and red is the colour of blood. More blood will flow soon: the types of blood, A and O, Alpha and Omega – and another, a third possibility – must be kept in mind. Also other factors: zygoty, and Kell antibodies, and that most mysterious of sanguinary attributes, known as rhesus, which is also a type of monkey.

Everything has shape, if you look for it. There is no escape from form. (MC 226)

Not content with validating his own mixed blood, Saleem develops an impressive system of connections which serves to emphasise the importance to Indian history of his future loss of a fingertip, and which in turn relates to yet another system of metaphorical modes-of-connection around the image of a 'pointing finger'. These metaphorical correspondences are Saleem's proof of the inevitability of form; they are, however, produced by the same impulse that turns a chain of events into a fated system of cause-and-effect, leading straight to India's prime minister:

If I hadn't wanted to be a hero, Mr Zagallo would never have pulled out my hair. If my hair had remained intact, Glandy Keith and Fat Perce wouldn't have taunted me; Masha Miovic wouldn't have goaded me into losing my finger. And from my finger flowed blood which was neither-Alpha-nor-Omega, and sent me into exile; and in exile I was filled with the lust for revenge which led to the murder of Homi Catrack; and if Homi hadn't died, perhaps my uncle would not have strolled off a roof into the sea-breezes; and then my grandfather would not have gone to Kashmir and been broken by the effort of climbing the Sankara Acharya hill. And my grandfather was the founder of my family, and my fate was linked by my birthday to that of the nation, and the father of the nation was Nehru. Nehru's death; can I avoid the conclusion that that, too, was all my fault? (MC 278-9)

The artfulness (and artificiality) of Saleem's correspondences is rendered explicit by the ever-increasing arbitrariness of the connections: the above sequence begins with a simple chain of causes and effects, develops into more speculative areas ('and if Homi hadn't died, *perhaps* my uncle would not have strolled off a roof'), and ends in gratuitous fantasy whereby Saleem imagines that he has caused Nehru's death.

Correspondences are thus an important facet of the content and development of Saleem's stories; they are also fundamental to the form of those stories and the *mode* of narration, as in, for example, the aforementioned translational leitmotifs of the pointing finger and the perforated sheet. Connective devices can also be perceived in Saleem's construction of textual patterns: in the repetition of words, figures of speech and themes on a local level. An especially clear instance of such patterning is Saleem's narration of the events surrounding one particularly fated

episode preceding his birth: Ramram the seer's prophecy of his destiny. This – the most important manifestation of fate in Saleem's story, and hence the greatest 'proof' of his central role in India's history – is itself brought into close correspondence with simultaneous events. Amina makes a journey through the city to see Ramram, while her husband Ahmed and his associates set off to attempt to pay off the anti-Muslim extortionists, the Ravana Gang. The two stories, apart from their simultaneity, are not apparently related to each other. Saleem, however, carefully weaves them together in his narrative, highlighting correspondences between them so that they appear to be inextricably intertwined:

One journey began at a fort; one should have ended at a fort, and did not. One foretold the future; the other settled its geographical location. During one journey, monkeys danced entertainingly; while, in the other place, a monkey was also dancing, but with disastrous results. In both adventures, a part was played by vultures. And many-headed monsters lurked at the end of both roads. (MC 80)

These correspondences are emphasised by various formal devices. The simultaneity of the events is iconically imitated in the telling of both stories at once: Saleem switches from one scene to another from paragraph to paragraph. The illusion of simultaneity produced by this technique is also heightened by a system of formal correspondence between the stories: words and themes are repeated so that each story echoes the other. The linking process is most apparent where Saleem uses repetition to ensure the smooth transition from one story to another. The end of one paragraph telling Ahmed's story, for example, slots neatly into the beginning of the next paragraph, which turns to Amina:

Defying orders, they hide in the ruined room; somewhere above them, on the topmost landing of the turret tower, three grey bags wait in the gathering dark.

... In the gathering dark of an airless stairwell, Amina Sinai is climbing towards a prophecy. (MC 83)

And the same technique occurs in reverse, in the switch back from Amina to Ahmed:

I must admit it: to her shame, my mother screamed ...
... While, at the Old Fort, monkeys scream among ramparts. (MC 84)

The monkey correspondence is carried further. As monkeys throw Ahmed's ransom money away, Saleem turns the monkeys into the mythological opponents of the god Ravana, after which the Ravana gang are named:

... and here is one monkey, scurrying along the ramparts – I shall call him Hanuman, after the monkey god who helped Prince Rama defeat the original Ravana, Hanuman of the flying chariots... (MC 85)

The extended range of correspondence thus assigns mythical significance to the events running up to the burning of the Old Fort. Meanwhile, Amina encounters one of Lifafa Das's cousins, a 'monkey-dancer' (MC 84), and, in a metaphor which, transposed into the context of Ahmed's story, would be tellingly literal, 'her face bursts into flames.' (MC 82). Correspondences thus create associative patterns within the text – they link stories to each other, as well as extending the range of intertextual reference.

Most of the formal and stylistic features of *Midnight's Children* are directly related to Saleem's obsession with correspondences. Connectives – between stories, characters, events – are created by Saleem in response to the chaos produced by cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. The attempt to bring partial perspectives and the smallest details together into a unified whole is thus akin to an attempt to unify 'India's Babel'. This attempt to impose order is also inextricably linked to an artist's control over created characters and events – Saleem's metaphorical 'modes of connection' are poetic devices which direct the form of the text. Rushdie's Indianisation of English is therefore not the only formal manifestation of linguistic estrangement: the careful formal construction of the narrative also becomes an

important mode of signification in *Midnight's Children*, so that the simultaneity of Amina and Ahmed's stories are represented in textual simultaneity, while the apparently 'fated' links between the stories are reflected in the repetition of vocabulary and descriptive elements in both. Where Amina's face 'bursts into flames' this process is particularly complex: the burning of Ahmed's warehouses is transferred into the context of Amina's experiences. The flames acquire a double yet simultaneous signification – metaphorical in one story but literal in the other.

Saleem's obsessive construction of formal and thematic correspondences can be related to Nabokovian 'plexed artistry' – what John Shade in *Pale Fire* calls the construction of a 'web of sense' from 'topsy-turvical coincidence' (PF 53). In Nabokov, the chaos of experience leads the artist to construct forms that lend order to that chaos. Semantic ambiguity, especially that which is produced by interlingual communication and transfer, plays an important part in Nabokovian structures and patterns: the potential for error, distortion and transformation inherent in interlingual contact is transformed into complex patterning that plays the centrifugal forces of language against the centripetal ordering of the artist. Saleem's complex ordering of the divergent meanings produced by multilingual interpretations of his name recalls such 'plexed artistry', and bears relation to, for example, Van and Ada's construction of clever poems from interlingual distortion and mistranslation. In Nabokov, however, the pattern itself is the goal: Van and Ada's translational poems are playful and revel in their authors' multilingual skill, but do not attempt to construct a stable meaning. *Pale Fire* represents the critic Kinbote's attempt to impose his own narrative order upon Shade's poem, but Shade's poem provides complex resistance to Kinbote's Zemblan reading. As a result, the narratives, world-views, and even worlds of Shade and Kinbote are locked in a reciprocal process of

mirroring – neither narrative gains ascendancy over the other. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem, like Kinbote, is engaged in an act of appropriation and misinterpretation. Saleem's monumental attempt to centre a heterogeneous world and multiplicitous history around his own life is, however, directed by a desperate desire for *meaning*: unlike Van and Ada, Saleem's patterning is not an end in itself. And whereas Shade's voice, in the unmediated form of his poem 'Pale Fire', resists and ironises Kinbote's commentary, Saleem's egocentric narration in *Midnight's Children* meets less explicit resistance: Saleem dominates the novel, distorts events and domesticates the multiplicitous and multilingual voices of the *Midnight Children* in translation. Even the direct interjections of characters such as Padma seem to be partly mediated and ordered by his narrative aims.

Saleem's creator may be a 'translated man', but Saleem himself is assigned a role analogous to that of the 'translator'. Faced with the polycultural and polylingual chaos of India, he sets out to attempt to 'translate' that chaos into the context of his own life without homogenising it – a paradoxical and impossible task. Of course, the real 'translator' of 'India' into fiction is Rushdie himself. But Rushdie's explicit choice of the more passive position of *translated* man (to whom migrancy has happened) is facilitated by assigning the active and arbitrary process of 'translation' and homogenization to his central character. The imperfections in Saleem's 'translation' are, moreover, highly significant: his version of events is constantly called into question by the unreliability of his narration. His translation of everything into the context of his own life also involves the distortion of events – and the more he insists upon correspondences, the more we feel he needs to in order to combat the arbitrariness of those supposedly 'fated' and meaningful events. He

also makes significant errors in recounting events and in maintaining chronology.⁶⁷ In addition to this is the illusion, artfully constructed by Rushdie, of an excess of stories, languages, characters and events trying to impinge upon Saleem's narrative. Saleem's authority is called into question, not only by his arbitrary imposition of control over (and subsequent distortion of) India's heterogeneity, but also by the implied presence of what his story leaves out. The narrator's unreliability is thus an important device in *Midnight's Children*: it allows Rushdie to contain heterogeneity within the text, while ironising the very process of containment. 'India's Babel', if represented untranslated, would pull the text apart; by emphasising the distortions inherent in Saleem's translation and appropriation, Rushdie is able to impart some sense of that heterogeneity. And by representing himself as a 'translated man', Rushdie cleverly pre-empts any charges of mistranslation or misrepresentation, instead directing any such charges to his narrator.

In 1972, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, addressing the first conference ever held on Indian English literature, made claims for the importance of the English language which are uncannily relevant to *Midnight's Children*:

I would like to think that it is the unique role of Indo-Anglian literature both to derive from and to promote an all-India consciousness. To put it in another way, we should expect Indian writing in English – rather than any of the regional literatures – to project a total vision of India, interpreting her aspirations and hopes, and recording her arduous and defeats and partial realisations, not before the outside world alone but even before the diverse linguistic regions within the country, thereby insinuating a sense of 'national identity', of oneness with the Mother, Mother India. The Indian writer in English has necessarily to keep in mind a scattered national audience, and what his language lacks in vigorous local idiom and the nuances of regional sentiment and emotion has to be made up in spatial extension and wide human appeal.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ For Rushdie's defence of Saleem's unreliable narration, see 'Errata': or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight's Children*, IH 22-25.

⁶⁸ K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, 'Indian Writing in English: Prospect and Retrospect,' *Indian Writing in English*, ed. Ramesh Mohan (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1978) 8.

Saleem's desire to represent the multitudes corresponds exactly to Iyengar's ideal, but fails to fulfil that dream – instead of an 'all-India consciousness' he presents us with a distorting, imperfect and unreliable 'All-India Radio'. The English language, for Iyengar as for Rushdie, is crucial to the representation of a multilingual and multicultural India: its status as a *lingua franca*, its inevitable externality from Indian culture and consciousness, and its flexibility as a language all suggest its potential for containing multiplicity. But as Rushdie realises, translation also entails metamorphosis. In *Midnight's Children* his representation of the attempt to translate India into English allows him both to engage in that attempt and to ironise it. Saleem's ultimate failure to unify 'India's Babel' and the inevitable inaccuracies and unreliabilities of his representation mean that Rushdie demonstrates the distorting effects of translation as well as the ultimate impossibility of representing India. *Midnight's Children* disallows any faith in its own claims to universality by constantly reminding the reader of what is left out of Saleem's version of events. But if much is lost in translation, something, Rushdie tells us, is always gained: though he cannot lay full claim to linguistic 'newness', having based many aspects of his prose on recognised characteristics of Indian English, he makes artful and stylistically original use of that hybrid language. And if, like Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*, Saleem's 'lust-for-centrality' leads him to distort and transform his subject-matter, it is just those distortions that produce his stylistic exuberance and expansive storytelling.

CONCLUSION

Joyce once remarked that 'I'd like a language which is above all languages, a language to which all will do service. I cannot express myself in English without enclosing myself in a tradition.'¹ His Babelian aims led him, not only to use many languages other than English, but also to supersede English 'tradition' to such an extent that he created his own. Beckett's decision to abandon the English language, as I demonstrated in Chapter 2, was founded upon a desire to write 'without style',² to move away from the aesthetic traditions in which English is steeped, and to counter what he calls 'estheticized automatism'.³ One of those traditions is of course that created by Joyce: Beckett's move to French also enabled him to move away from the clearly Joycean influence of his early work. Nabokov's aim was rather different – he complains that in English he *cannot* 'transcend the heritage' in the way that the 'native illusionist' can (AL 317). Nevertheless, as I have argued, it is precisely Nabokov's foreignness that enables him to create a style that undeniably moves beyond the heritage of Anglo-American literature. Rushdie's need to reconfigure English is directed by a desire to distance that language from its imperial heritage as well as to make it contain and express that which is foreign to it. Though Rushdie has been charged with being merely 'sub-Joycean',⁴ *Midnight's Children* alone bears the marks of a truly international heritage, including writers such as Günter Grass, Gabriel García Márquez, Charles Dickens and Ovid as well as G.V.

¹ Cited in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, new and revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 397.

² As Beckett once stated: 'c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style'. Cited in Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973) 58.

³ Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: Calder, 1983) 145.

⁴ Harish Trivedi writes that, 'though Rushdie's use of English is hugely lively and comic and playful and punful, it has nothing to show for itself which could not be termed, in Rushdie's own self-description, as "sub-Joyce".' Trivedi, 'Salman the Funtoosh: Magic Bilingualism in *Midnight's Children*,' *Rushdie's Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings*, ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee (Delhi: Pencraft International, 1999) 73.

Desani, the great Indian epics (the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*) and Bollywood.⁵ And Rushdie himself has been so influential to Indian English writing in particular, that one less sympathetic critic complained of an outbreak of ‘Rushdie-itis’.⁶

Multilingual writers are of course not *inherently* innovative or radical, but multilingualism can no longer be seen to be marginal or unproductive in a literary context. Rushdie, as we have seen, relates hybridisation to the creation of artistic as well as linguistic and cultural ‘newness’, and Shklovsky asserts the importance of ‘foreignness’ to *ostranenie* or ‘estrangement’. Of course, a writer’s multilingualism does not necessarily lead him/her to estrange language in such ways, and many multilingual authors – Conrad, for example – seek to minimise the effects of interlingual interference in their prose. But a strong link between multilingualism and defamiliarisation is confirmed in the work of the authors examined here: Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov and Rushdie all share a tendency to make use of particularly extreme forms of defamiliarisation, a tendency that is closely related to their polylingual perspective and/or sense of estrangement from the mother tongue, and which I have therefore called ‘linguistic estrangement’. They make productive use of semantic ambiguity and linguistic materiality to create various forms of estranged language and a range of effects – puns, plays on words and overdetermination, as well as various forms of textual patterning. Such linguistic estrangement bears relation to more general (and monolingual) forms of defamiliarisation; indeed the analysis of linguistic estrangement that this study provides can also be seen to address a central dynamic within modernist literary production generally – as well as

⁵ Rushdie himself wrote that Indian English writers ‘are inescapably international writers at a time when the novel has never been a more international form [...] and it is perhaps one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents.’ (IH 20-21)

⁶ The commentator Pankaj Mishra’s term is remarked upon by Rushdie in an essay on Indian English writing, ‘Damme, This Is the Oriental Scene for You!’ (SAL 164).

within subsequent late-modernist and postmodernist stylistic developments, and those forms of 'postcolonial' literature, such as Rushdie's, which carry strong influences of European and American modernism.⁷

This is of course not to undermine the specific roles played by translational processes and interlingual contact in the work of the writers under scrutiny here. Indeed, as this study has shown, linguistic estrangement appears in a wide variety of different forms, and serves very different aesthetic aims in different works. In Joyce, multilingualism and a sense of alienation from the mother tongue form the basis of monolingual as well as multilingual textual effects. The proliferation of different Joycean 'languages' also corresponds to a general juxtaposition of different languages, discourses and styles which interact in complex processes of disjunctive complementarity. Beckett's use of a foreign language and subsequent processes of self-translation are fundamental to his radical estrangement of language: he uses subtle processes of interlingual interference and 'transtextual confluence'⁸ in order to develop a language that can enact its own *décomposition*. Nabokov's prose is often explicitly marked by the effects of interlingual interference and, thematically, is preoccupied with (mis)translation and (mis)interpretation. Multilingualism is also related to the ontological play that characterises his texts, and the distortions and transformations of languages and 'realities' in Nabokov are reconfigured to form 'plexed artistry'. Whereas Nabokov creates hybrid worlds and languages to explore

⁷ Beckett, for example, develops a primarily modernist foreigner's perspective into a form of linguistic estrangement that attempts to express a *dissolution* of subjectivity that could be termed 'postmodern'. And Rushdie's translation of a modernist desire for 'newness' into a specific linguistic and culturally hybrid postcolonial context indicates not only the productivity of literary hybridisation, but can also, reciprocally, be seen to confirm the importance of cultural shifts and translational processes to modernist literature.

⁸ This term, as I indicated in Chapter 2, was developed by Charles Krance in order to denote the effect of translational processes of composition in Beckett's work. See Charles Krance's Introduction to *Samuel Beckett's 'Company/Compagnie' and 'A Piece of Monologue/Solo': A Bilingual Variorum Edition* (New York: Garland, 1993) and 'Traces of transtextual confluence and bilingual genesis: *A Piece of Monologue* and *Solo* for Openers,' *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 2 (1993): 133-145.

the abstract ontological and linguistic effects of intercultural contact, in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, multilingualism is centred by broadly mimetic aims: India is represented in a form of English that bears the marks of a foreignizing translation and relexification of 'India's Babel'. And while Saleem's 'translation' of everything into the context of his own life is problematised, Rushdie makes explicit use of the creative possibilities of translational chimeras.

One of the most immediately apparent features of these authors' styles is, of course, the presence of different languages within the text. Estrangement from language is characterised by a sense of the inadequacy of any single language; the multilingual writer can, however, draw upon the resources of a range of different languages. The use of languages in complementarity with each other is thus one feature of linguistic estrangement – we recall Nabokov's celebration of his ability to 'render an exact nuance by shifting from the language I am now using to a brief burst of French or to a soft rustle of Russian.' (SO 184) Joyce also makes use of interlingual complementarity, for example in Stephen's multilingual epiphany in *Portrait* or in the metamorphoses between languages in the 'Proteus' chapter of *Ulysses*.

Such techniques are based upon a profound awareness of the differences between languages and hence of untranslatability. Indeed, Rushdie at times makes explicit use of multilingual supplementarity to *overcome* untranslatability: by placing a Hindi-Urdu word alongside its English translation, for example, he retains the phonetic and material characteristics of the word in both languages. Thus to juxtapose languages can seem, initially, to serve the purpose of redeeming language: the nuances and phonetic characteristics of the word in each language appear to add to and hence increase the referential, phonetic and material range and power of the

text. And yet, by providing more languages and hence a greater range of phonetic and semantic effects, the multilingual author also destabilises those languages, incorporating linguistic relativity into the text and impressing upon the reader an awareness of that relativity. Derrida notes that the story of Babel reminds us of ‘la tâche nécessaire et impossible de la traduction, sa nécessité *comme* impossibilité.’⁹ Interlingual complementarity relies upon both the necessity and the impossibility of translation: by representing a referent in more than one language, the text makes explicit the differences between the referential and phonetic effects of those languages, but it is those very differences that produce the need to supplement one language with another. Language is thus simultaneously supplemented and destabilised.

The impossibility of equivalence between languages is therefore fundamental to the multilingual text: there would be no need for complementarity if perfect translation were possible. Translation incurs the distortion, not only of the original signified, but also of the target language. In the hands of the multilingual author, the transformative power of translation becomes an important tool: even the most basic interference of a foreign language *defamiliarises* language. Of course, this does not necessarily induce any form of ‘poeticisation’ of language, but such interlingual distortion can be manipulated for powerful stylistic effect. Each of the authors studied here thus makes use, not only of the apparently ‘positive’ or ‘expressive’ effects of multilingualism (such as the linguistic flexibility and interlingual complementarity described above), but of those aspects of translation, interlingual confusion and distortion that are usually deemed ‘negative’. Aspects of language that emphasise the arbitrariness of the sign are not only foregrounded, but are

⁹ ‘the necessary and impossible task of translation, its necessity *as* impossibility.’ Jacques Derrida, ‘Des Tours de Babel,’ *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 215; ‘Des Tours de Babel,’ trans. Joseph F. Graham, *Difference in Translation* 171.

manipulated to positive effect: linguistic relativity, referential inadequacy and interlingual ambiguity are used to create various forms of defamiliarisation, figurative language and formal and phonetic patterning. Thus Joyce and Nabokov revel in the possibilities of multilingual punning, overdetermination and *double-entendre* (both created from the ambiguity of homonyms and false friends), Beckett makes use of Anglicisms and Gallicisms, Rushdie Indianises English, and translation is used by all four authors as a distorting force as well as a means of furthering the text's effectiveness and/or comprehensibility.

As I have been keen to emphasise, however, their writing is not only exceptional or 'new' as a result of the presence of different languages within the text. Their estrangement from language(s) affords them a metalinguistic perspective towards their 'own' language¹⁰ as well as their adopted tongue(s). Derrida notes that a metalinguistic perspective is inherently translational¹¹; it also, as my analysis of these authors has demonstrated, leads the author to make use of translational processes *within* any single language. Hence, for example, Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov, and, to a lesser extent Rushdie's obsession with the pun, defined by Walter Redfern as 'a translation within a language'.¹² Hence also an implied or explicit relationship between interpretation and translation in Joyce, Nabokov and Rushdie, whereby the individual's world-view constitutes a 'translation' of events into a particular context and/or idiom. Saleem's 'translation' of events into his own life thus corresponds to his translation of 'India's Babel' into English, and Kinbote's appropriation of Shade's poem 'Pale Fire' is reflected in Conmal's Zemblan transformation of

¹⁰ Quotation marks are necessary here, in view of the Irish writer's estrangement from English.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l'autre: ou la prothèse d'origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996) 43-44; *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 22.

¹² Walter Redfern, 'Traduction, Puns, Clichés, Plagiat,' *Traductio: Essays on Punning and Translation*, ed. Dirk Delabastita (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997) 265.

Shakespeare (and obliteration of the phrase ‘pale fire’). Intralingual translation plays an important role in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, especially in the ‘Oxen of the Sun’ and ‘Cyclops’ chapters, while the labyrinthine technique of ‘Wandering Rocks’ provides an analogous ‘translation’ of Dublin into the perspectives of a range of different characters (which is also a microcosm of the multiple perspectives provided by the novel as a whole). The difference of idioms and world-views is explored less explicitly in Beckett’s Trilogy, but nevertheless finds its analogy in the radical differences between, for example, Molloy, Moran and Yvonne’s relationships to and uses of language.

The deliberate *misuse* of language is also a defining feature of the work of all four authors. This is perhaps most explicit in the context of the foreigner’s misuse of language (which is often caused by the interference of the mother tongue), but is nevertheless important in monolingual contexts. Nabokov, for example, deliberately Russianises English, not only in order to represent the Russian Professor Pnin’s imperfect command of the language, but also for more general stylistic effect. Joyce, Ferenc Takács claims, learnt much about the possibilities of misusing language from his students at the Berlitz School¹³; certainly, *Ulysses* maximises the possibilities of the foreigner’s linguistic distortions. The ‘Eumaeus’ chapter in particular provides a direct correlation between the deceptions of a foreign language and a more general misuse of language, whereby Bloom’s faulty understanding and use of Italian finds its correspondence in the general inelegance and misuse (of both foreign languages and English) that characterises the chapter’s style overall. As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, however, such misuse is not only productive for comic effect; if ‘sounds [...] are impostures’ (U 16.362), they are also fundamental to the music of ‘Sirens’.

¹³ Ferenc Takács, ‘“impulsory irelitz”: James Joyce, the Berlitz School and the Unlearning of the English Language.’ paper presented at the 18th International Joyce Symposium, Trieste, June 2002.

Beckett's efficient misuse of foreign languages is, as we saw in Chapter 2, one of the most important features of his prose; he tells Axel Kaun of '[der] Trost, mich so gegen eine fremde Sprache unwillkürlich vergehen zu dürfen, wie ich es mit Wissen und Willen gegen meine eigene machen möchte'.¹⁴ And Rushdie's style depends upon the development of various Indian 'deviations' from Standard English into general stylistic features. The foreigner's linguistic perspective thus proves to be valuable and productive in the hands of these authors.

In my Introduction, I cited Kristeva's description of the absolute formalism and excessive sophistication of the foreigner's speech, but noted the paradox inherent in her claims that the foreigner's distance from the referential function of language could be accompanied by sophisticated linguistic forms usually associated with literary language. The foreigner's linguistic perspective (and tendency to misuse language) is of course rarely characterised by such sophistication; it can, however, as I have demonstrated, be used to positive effect. Stephen Dedalus's sense of alienation from English, for example, finds its positive counterpart in Joyce's manipulation of the foreigner's privileged externality from the rules and codes of language, his/her ability to unlearn English and hence also to remake it. Misused language can thus express and contain difference. In Nabokov each individual character's idiosyncratic style usually involves various forms of multilingual deformation – murderers and madmen can not only be counted upon for, but *require* fancy multilingual prose-styles to express themselves. And Rushdie 'misbehav[es]' with English in order to make the language express cultural 'realities' that are alien to it (SRI 245). Beckett's work, however, demonstrates that the expression of subjectivity in language is by definition impossible: the word 'I' serves

¹⁴ 'the consolation [...] of sinning willy-nilly against a foreign language, as I should love to with full knowledge and intent against my own'. Samuel Beckett, 'letter to Axel Kaun,' *Disjecta* 54; trans. Martin Esslin. *Disjecta* 173.

as a collective signifier of subjectivity, whose efficacy is thus cancelled out as soon as it is spoken. The struggle of his characters with a foreign language makes this difficulty more explicit, but Beckett's subtly hybridised language evokes the *struggle* between the speaker and language. Beckett's work demonstrates that it is only through misuse of language that the speaker can attempt to express a sense of difference from that language. But language, however misused and deformed, cannot express such difference, because subjectivity itself is merely a linguistic construct.

Beckett, however, indicates that something (or *nothing*) can be expressed by misusing language *efficiently*.¹⁵ Indeed, the artful manipulation of linguistic misuse is a consistent feature of the work of all the authors examined in this study – they impose sophistication and order upon the potential anarchy of linguistic difference. Kristeva's paradox is thus resolved in the context of the literary text: the ordinary 'foreigner's speech' is not necessarily any more formal or sophisticated than 'correct speech'; excessive formality is, however, necessary to contain multilingualism within the text. These authors carefully manipulate the effects of linguistic misuse, and especially the kinds of linguistic distortions that are produced from interlingual contact and transfer. They take precisely those aspects of language that are threatened by Babel (the referential function, and a certain *stability* of meaning) and turn them to creative advantage, using them to create particularly extreme forms of defamiliarisation.

For Mallarmé, as I indicated in Chapter 1, it is the inadequacy of language, post-Babel, that provides the poet's impetus to redeem language. On a less idealistic level, linguistic estrangement is characterised by a manipulation of semantic

¹⁵ Beckett, *Disjecta* 52; trans. Martin Esslin 171-2.

ambiguity and linguistic materiality to create language that is more *effective*, not referentially, but for more general expressive and/or affective purposes. One particular feature of this tendency to (attempt to) remake language that is common to all four writers is the supplementation of the destabilised referential function with iconic linguistic characteristics. Leech and Short note ‘an exceptional development of the iconic, imitative resources of language’¹⁶ in literature in general, and describe the ability of iconicity to ‘[bring] realistic illusion to life’,¹⁷ thus locating it as a facet of realist representation. The authors examined here work more to destabilise the referential function than to create ‘realistic illusion’; nevertheless, iconicity plays an extremely important role in their fiction, even to the extent that Beckett, for example, can claim that Joyce’s writing ‘is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*.’¹⁸ This can be seen, for example, in Joyce’s use of onomatopoeic effects and linguistic distortions to create a verbal performance of music in ‘Sirens’, in Rushdie’s use of an excess of stories to represent heterogeneity, or in the iconic sensuality of *double-entendre* in Nabokov. Beckett also makes use of textual iconicity: in *Malone meurt*, for example, a break in the text corresponds to a break in Malone’s narrative and, more generally, Beckett represents the failure of language by making language perform that failure. In all of these examples, the iconic effects are in part produced by and rely upon semantic ambiguity, but can nevertheless produce an illusion of intensified referentiality (though in Beckett it is of course language’s referential failure that is intensified – a paradox that I dealt with in greater length in Chapter 2). It is in such iconicity that the two central characteristics of linguistic estrangement coincide most clearly: the material function of language supplements or even

¹⁶ Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (London: Longman, 1981) 254.

¹⁷ Leech and Short 236.

¹⁸ Samuel Beckett, ‘Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce,’ *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, ed. Samuel Beckett *et al* (London: Faber & Faber, 1929) 14.

replaces the already destabilised referential function. Iconicity, an artificially constructed symbolic function of language, performs a pseudo-semantic function.

This attention to, and reworking of, the formal and material properties of language is also matched by the overall form of the novels – a formliness which is most extreme in the complex architecture of *Ulysses*, *Midnight's Children*, *Pale Fire* and *Ada*, but which is also found in the other works of these authors and in the absolute syntactical and lexical precision that characterises Beckett's prose, especially where it appears to disintegrate into nonsense. Indeed, throughout this study, we have seen how the potentially anarchic effects of multilingualism, interlingual translation, distortion and hybridisation, are countered by each author's excessive attention to form. These multilingual works are all marked by a *tension* between the centrifugal forces of interlingual distortion and semantic disruption and the centripetal force of the artist's ordering impulse. Where a word is deliberately overdetermined it unleashes an excess of meanings, often in more than one language, but each of those meanings will be *relevant* to the text. In *Ulysses*, for example, where both literal and figurative meanings of a phrase such as 'proof of the pudding' (U 8.42-3) are brought out, they do not only work disjunctively, but are brought together in complementarity with each other: the figurative expression is literalised by an explicitly culinary context, while remaining relevant to Homeric references to the Lestrygonians episode. In Beckett, on the other hand, the different meanings produced by overdetermined words tend to contradict each other. Such semantic conflict is essential to the careful system of affirmation and negation that characterises Beckett's prose. Nabokov's artful manipulation of mistranslation is another way of re-ordering errors in language, for example where *Ada* uses phonetically-derived mistranslation such that her 'transversion', though completely

different in meaning from its 'original', nevertheless makes sense. This ordering also occurs on a broader structural level in all the works under scrutiny in this study – in the systems of repetition, mirroring, correspondences, refrains and/or intertextual references that hold the texts together.

Such precise ordering can threaten to *centre* the text, thus cancelling out its heterogeneity and its ability to contain and/or express difference; the paradox remains, however, that it is only through such ordering that the text can contain heterogeneity. The ordering impulse is not left unproblematised by these authors; indeed, the tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces appears explicitly and thematically in Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. As I argued in Chapter 4, the narrators of both novels are driven by an overbearing desire to impose meaning – Kinbote on Shade's poem, and Saleem on the chaos of Indian heterogeneity. The texts, however, resist their narrators' control: the clearly idiosyncratic and often fantastic nature of both Kinbote and Saleem's versions of events means that their authority is undermined; moreover, the texts themselves retain heterogeneous elements that highlight the arbitrariness and fictionality of the narrator's attempt to impose homogeneous meaning.

The extent to which the *author's* organising control is destabilised by the text is a matter of some debate, however. *Midnight's Children*, for example, is often described as a 'postmodern' novel¹⁹; as my analysis in Chapter 4 has demonstrated, however, it is to a certain extent centred by its mimetic and socio-political aims.

¹⁹ It is Rushdie's treatment of 'history' that is usually deemed to be postmodern. Brian McHale, using *Midnight's Children* as one of his examples, asserts that '[t]he postmodernists fictionalize history, but by doing so they imply that history itself is a form of fiction.' (Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* [London: Methuen, 1987] 96). Linda Hutcheon consistently refers to Rushdie's fiction as 'postmodern' and as what she terms 'historiographic metafiction' (Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* [New York: Routledge, 1988] 108, 161-5). Goonetilleke echoes both Hutcheon and McHale when he writes that '[h]istory in *Midnight's Children* is, in a postmodern way, fragmented, provisional, openly subjective, plural, unrepressive, a construct, a reading.' (D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, *Salman Rushdie* [Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998] 43).

Though the novel deliberately and explicitly destabilises authorial control, that control is nevertheless retained, and is fundamental to the depiction of a heterogeneous country that is ‘fantastic’ only in the sense that it is not held together by any stable cultural and linguistic identity. Various aspects of Indian ‘reality’ are nevertheless recognisable, and Rushdie himself is untroubled by, and indeed seems proud of, the fact that Indian readers have tended to treat it as ‘a history book’ (SRI 211). Nabokov once described himself as ‘the perfect dictator’ in his absolute control over the ‘private world’ of his fiction (SO 69). Within that fiction, as we have seen, the artist’s ability to construct ‘plexed artistry’ is essential thematically, and reminds us that the, at times, apparently anarchic patterns of the text are nonetheless fashioned by their inventor. Indeed, Nabokovian scholarship is still engaged in solving riddles, puzzles and puns placed by the author in his texts. The fact that critics are still locked in intense (and often irresolvable) debates about issues such as whether Shade ‘invented’ Kinbote or vice versa, seems to indicate that to engage in exegesis of Nabokov’s work is to risk playing a game predetermined by the author: he may have died, but not in the Barthesian sense. The greater influence of poststructuralist critiques upon Joyce scholarship, on the other hand, means that Joyce criticism has been in part freed from the constraints of exegesis and the notions of authorial intention – though it is significant that the thriving ‘Joyce Industry’ nevertheless fulfils Joyce’s own mischievous intention to ‘keep the professors busy for centuries’.²⁰ The ability of Beckett’s texts to attain their desired ‘failure’ depends upon the absolute precision of (and hence authorial control over) consistently self-contradictory language: every nuance of his language works

²⁰ Cited in Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *‘Ulysses’ Annotated: Notes for James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’*, 2nd edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) v.

towards his anti-aesthetic goal, and part of the difficulty of our work as readers is to curb our instinct to construct our own meaning from these texts.²¹

However, these authors have also created some of the most radically indeterminate, heterogeneous and, in the case of Beckett, *decomposed* language in twentieth-century literature. Just as multilingual complementarity destabilises its own pretensions to universality, the artist's ordering impulse is constantly countered by the centrifugal energy of the text's languages. The excessive formliness of these texts does not induce stasis or homogeneity, and a palpable tension remains, between the complex overdetermination of meaning and Babel confusion, between the heterogeneity of the text and the artist's careful ordering and correspondences. Language is both supplemented and destabilised, in a circular movement that precludes any stability of signification, but which also ensures a fluidity to language than can enable the text to contain heterogeneity and alterity, both within and between languages.

It is in this tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces that multilingual writers such as Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov and Rushdie seem to crystallise the crisis of representation characteristic of modernism and of much subsequent literature. Language is referentially inadequate, especially for the purposes of expressing heterogeneity; their texts therefore create radically new forms of defamiliarisation in order to make that language more effective (or, in Beckett, efficiently *ineffective*). The polylingual perspective both intensifies this sense of linguistic inadequacy and provides the means with which to defamiliarise language:

²¹ Beckett's desire for absolute authorial control is perhaps most explicit in the increasingly prescriptive stage directions of his plays, which greatly limit the interpretative freedom of actors and directors. As Mark Batty notes, Beckett even took legal action against performances whose interpretation strayed too far from his own intention – a prescriptiveness that, since his death, has been continued by the Beckett Estate. Mark Batty, 'Acts with Words: Beckett, Translation, *Mise en Scène* and Authorship,' *Moving Target: Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation*, ed. Carole-Anne Upton (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2000) 63.

different languages can be combined such that the language of composition not only *seems* strange, but quite literally contains foreign elements. The promise of interlingual complementarity further increases the expressive potential of defamiliarised language. But linguistic estrangement itself stems from a sense of linguistic inadequacy, and can only work by further destabilising language. Hence the very techniques that seem to make language more effective also undermine that effectiveness, and the presence of different languages within the text perpetuates this destabilising process. Where the text reaches extreme levels of multilingualism, this is further intensified, and the reader is faced with language that is only semi-comprehensible. But at such points, the material functions of language take precedence, and the formliness of the text takes over, playing with rhythmic and phonetic effects so that sounds are not longer merely ‘impostures’ (U 16.362), but can, for example, play out ‘the seductions of music’.²²

These authors are each directed by their own particular artistic aims: to invent a language ‘above all languages’ that can redeem Babel (Joyce); to fashion ‘plexed artistry’ from the chaos of experience and of languages (Nabokov); to create a kind of literary *lingua franca* for India’s Babel, a language that can mimetically represent the chaos of cultural and linguistic heterogeneity (Rushdie); and the meticulous construction of self-deconstructing language to the point of *décomposition* (Beckett). My aim in this study has not been to homogenise the very different manifestations of multilingualism in these authors’ works; rather, my intention has been to demonstrate how each author celebrates and makes use of those apparently ‘pathological’ properties of language that are highlighted in the polylingual context and which, Steiner asserts are, in fact, ‘the roots of its genius’: ‘[a]mbiguity,

²² Joyce, letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) 242.

polysemy, opaqueness, the violation of grammatical and logical sequences, reciprocal incomprehensions, the capacity to lie'.²³ The predominance of explicitly deceptive and ambiguous aspects of language and the deliberate manipulation of various forms of linguistic misuse mean that these texts also highlight their own arbitrariness. The potential efficacy of each author's project is thus implicitly undermined by the very language that is necessary to fulfil those aims.

It is precisely in this manipulation of the failures of language(s) that the energy of their prose lies, however – in the tension between the centrifugal and centripetal forces of their texts. Linguistic estrangement works not only to make language more expressive or effective; it also perpetuates the estrangement of language, rendering language foreign for the reader, and in its most extreme forms, risks disintegration into incomprehensibility, into 'des sons purs, libres de toute signification' (M 66).²⁴ But this risk is intrinsic to the productive textual effects of linguistic estrangement: it is not only Beckett who seeks semantic ambiguity, but also Joyce, Nabokov and Rushdie. As the work of these authors demonstrates, the potential anarchy of effects and meanings produced by the post-Babelian inadequacy of languages can become the basis of astonishing stylistic inventiveness and originality.

²³ George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) 234-5.

²⁴ 'as pure sounds, free of all meaning' (T 50).

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