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Multilingualism and the twentieth-century novel: polyglot passages

by James Reay Williams, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 202 pp., £59.99
(hardback), ISBN 978-3-030-05809-8

Jesse van Amelsvoort

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unfolding of primitivism as a project – one that is not limited to *négritude* but may in fact include all loci of human geography, centre and periphery, western or not.

The second half of the book applies this method and illustrates the primitivist project as it unfolds in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, but, interestingly, in dialogue with Frantz Fanon's reading of Césaire, as well as discussions of Sartre and Langston Hughes. This is followed by chapters in which Etherington delves into the successes and pitfalls of D.H. Lawrence's narrative primitivism and Claude McKay's primitivist narration. A conclusion on "Primitivism, Decolonization, and World Literature" rounds off this exemplary study in the sociology of literature, reminiscent of Lucien Goldmann as Adorno might have read him. It is Marxist criticism at its best.

"The *remnant*", writes Etherington, "is essential, not because it supplies a complete image of the objective but because it contains within it the sense of a lost whole." It is, in short, a synecdoche.

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Multilingualism and the twentieth-century novel: polyglot passages, by James Reay Williams, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 202 pp., £59.99 (hardback), ISBN 978-3-030-05809-8

Literary multilingualism is an expanding field of research, carrying the potential to uproot long-established practices and disciplinary norms within literary studies. The traditional nation-state-based study of literature prioritizes monolingualism, effectively connecting one language to one country only. James Williams's *Multilingualism and the Twentieth-Century Novel* does not fall into this trap and instead wants to expand the notion of what the anglophone novel is. Centrally, this book argues that "the multilingual represents a problematic point of consideration in writing throughout the century, from the heart of the modernist project through the postcolonial and into the present day" (25).

Williams's readings range from the early modernist and Polish-born Joseph Conrad, to the Caribbean writers Jean Rhys and Wilson Harris and, in the last chapter, the Dominican American Junot Díaz. Spanning the entirety of the 20th century, as well as the early 21st century, Williams argues for the capacity of the novel to imagine multilingualism broadly and realistically, in various styles and contexts. His analyses are subtle and insightful and make a strong case for considering the lingering legacies of imperial domination and division long into our postcolonial era. Despite the supposed global hegemony of English, language remains a contentious issue, creating complex patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

In the introduction, Williams frames his book in relation not only to studies on modernism and on the novel, but primarily as having to do with discussions about world literature. In recent years, many critical voices have started to nuance the work done by Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch and Franco Moretti around two decades ago. Williams's contribution lies in the insertion of empire into these debates: he reacts against the "tendency to leave behind vocabularies of the postcolonial", which ignore how "deeply interwoven" literary multilingualism is with the "political dynamics of empire" (3).

Increasingly, literary scholars have started to question the "world" of world literature. It is in this respect that *Multilingualism and the Twentieth-Century Novel* seems to unnecessarily limit itself. Williams goes a long way to decentre the supposed homogeneity and ubiquity of the English language, demonstrating how writing by prominent anglophone writers connects to other spaces and languages. Yet at the same time, the various worlds that are evoked in the fictional narratives studied emanate from and are organized around the English language. Of Aamir Mufti and his call to "forget English!" there is no trace, nor of other critical theorists such as Michael Allan and Francesca Orsini.

Ultimately, Williams contends that in the novel's encounter with multilingualism and language diversity, it remains "only notionally Anglophone" – or, stronger still, "a fiction" (196, 198). Other languages bleed into English, stretching its boundaries and pushing it beyond its traditional limits. A next step would be to bring this renewed understanding of the anglophone novel, multilingualism and empire into productive encounter with scholarship on the limits of visions of the world and the globe.

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The rise of autobiographical medical poetry and the medical humanities, by
Johanna Emeney, Stuttgart, ibidem Press, 2018, 200 pp., \$40 (paperback), ISBN
9783838211282

Joanna Emeney's academic monograph has a misleading title, but is otherwise an insightful and pertinent contribution to both poetry criticism and medical humanities. While the title of the text seems to suggest that Emeney will read internationally across autobiographical poetry, the author makes clear in the first line of the preface that her focus will be upon