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Tides of Voice:

Nation Language as Political Resistance in the Work of Kamau Brathwaite and Bill Griffiths

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Birkbeck, University of London, 2022

I, Matthew James Martin, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Abstract

This thesis connects two poets, Barbadian Kamau Brathwaite (1930–2020) and Englishman Bill Griffiths (1948–2007), both noted for use of subaltern speech. Brathwaite is a celebrated practitioner and theorist of 'nation language', his term for Caribbean speech-forms. Griffiths' poetry and research explore voices of numerous marginalised communities, particularly North East English dialect. Both poets employ nation language or dialect to subvert centralised, metropolitan politics associated with standard English, and both experiment with performance techniques, visual layout, and community formation. However, there was virtually no contact between the two during their lifetimes, and little between their respective milieus as poets. By bringing these bodies of work into conversation, new routes can open for English dialect poetry to learn from Caribbean innovations.

'Tidalectics', Brathwaite's theory of cultural interchange that allows communities to share ideas without colonialist hierarchies emerging, offers a framework for such learning. Indeed, Caribbean nation language's historical development was a tidalectic process. Brathwaite himself identifies tidalectic features in North East England's history and culture, licensing a view of North East dialect as nation language, with the subversive politics that this entails. Griffiths' work is well-suited to be read in this light, given his own interest in Black and Caribbean cultures.

I survey and compare the two poets' experiments with nation language: live performance, alternative lexicons and syntax, innovative wordplay, richly visual text formats, documentary poetics, and responses to new technologies. Throughout, Brathwaite's example highlights underappreciated innovations in Griffiths, and suggests new directions for English dialect writing. Through increased awareness of each other's shared difference from standard English and the political orthodoxy that it furthers, Caribbean and English communities (poetic and otherwise), as well as similar groups worldwide, will be better able to support one another's political and aesthetic struggles.

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The thesis is dedicated to the memory of Alan Halsey (1949–2022), whose editorial work on Bill Griffiths has been foundational for my research, and whose own poetry and art remain a constant inspiration.

Introduction: 'cuttin de tongue a de backra-man bell'

```
     turnin malitia on to itself
wrappin dem up in de hickey like hell
cuttin de tongue a de backra-man bell

was dis short stoutish fella who come
      penny hole in sin philip
wid a big bushy beard duh call bussa[1]
```

Barbadian poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite (1930–2020) is acclaimed for bold innovations in poetry, particularly regarding 'nation language'. A rescuing of Caribbean speech from the derogatory label of 'dialect', this term frees poems to represent the region through local idioms.[2] The category includes speech-forms known as 'patois' or 'creole'. It involves non-standard vocabulary and pronunciation, grammatical substitutions, and distinctive syntax. Brathwaite deploys these features extensively, creating texts that diverge from literary English, representing Caribbean utterance through alternative spellings, inventive punctuation, and the fragmentation of words. This approach is inherently political. Nation language originated during slavery as a way for enslaved African and African-Caribbean sugar plantation workers to retain, recuperate, or generate new elements of, their cultural heritage. It thus encodes resistance to imperialist assumptions implicit in standard

---

[1] Kamau Brathwaite, 'Hereroes', *Ancestors* (New York: New Directions, 2001), p. 273. Throughout this thesis, quotes from Brathwaite reproduce his spelling, punctuation, italics, bolding and justification, and for compositions from 1986 onwards, approximate the fonts that become increasingly important to his work. This includes preserving line breaks from visual texts resembling prose, since these sometimes achieve effects akin to enjambed verse. I occasionally use this approach for other writers too, where a particular visual affect is created.

[2] Kamau Brathwaite was formerly Edward Brathwaite, publishing early works under that name. He received the Kikuyu name Kamau during a 1971 residency in Kenya, in a ceremony led by the grandmother of his friend, novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. He then published as Edward Kamau Brathwaite until 1987, thereafter writing as Kamau Brathwaite. This thesis uses 'Kamau' throughout (unless quoting writers who do otherwise), honouring his belief that 'not only was the ceremony itself important & significant & | took place for me as an adult rather than as a child carried to the bap- | tismal font/ but it is also an important statement of cultural position' – Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* (Kingston and New York: Savacou North, 1994), p. 237. He describes Kikuyu women at the ritual 'searching for my **nam** so they cd find my name', 'nam' being his term for an irreducible core of self '*out of which the strength comes, where the heart of the culture resides in its uttarness | where it cannot any longer be destroyed*' – Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, p. 236, p. 96. So, the name 'Kamau' resided within him all along. My naming of Brathwaite is consistent with treatment of my other focus, Bill Griffiths, who rarely used his birth-name, Brian.

English. Brathwaite sees these elements of resistance and recovery as crucial to distinctions between dialect and nation language:

> Dialect has a long history coming from the plantation where people's dignity is distorted through their language and the descriptions which the dialect gave to them. Nation language, on the other hand, is the *submerged* area of that dialect which is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean. It may be in English: but often it is in an English which is like a howl, or a shout or a machine-gun or the wind or a wave. And sometimes it is English and African at the same time.[3]

Nation language is not necessarily tied to the nation-state. Brathwaite derives the term from how 'Africans in the New World always referred to themselves as belonging to certain *nations* (Kongo, Kromantee, etc.).'[4] 'Nation' here is a sense of origin, of historical rootedness, of communal story or heritage, not of affiliation with the polity where one was born or lives. If this sounds ambiguous, think of nation language not as a distinct category, but as a quality present to varying degrees in different utterances. In J. Edward Chamberlin's words, 'Nation language does not exist, any more than beauty and grandeur and vastness do.'[5]

Brathwaite is not the first poet to write in Caribbean nation language. Jamaican authors Louise Bennett and Una Marson pioneered its literary use from the 1940s onward, facing sustained opposition; for example, in 1979, Jamaican journalist Evon Blake complained that Bennett had miseducated audiences so that 'Jamaicans of all ages and classes have forsaken good English for dialect'.[6]

However, Brathwaite is uniquely placed as a historian, theorist, and innovator of this poetic mode. His *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820* (1971) establishes a

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[3] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1984), p. 13. Acknowledging Brathwaite's objections, this thesis avoids describing Caribbean nation language as 'dialect'. I still use the word for subaltern speech-forms in England, as the thesis deals with English dialect-speakers and dialect poets who self-apply the term.

[4] Brathwaite, 'The African Presence in Caribbean Literature', *Roots* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 219.

[5] J. Edward Chamberlin, 'Keeping Your Word: Contracts, Covenants and Canticles', in *Caribbean Culture: Soundings on Kamau Brathwaite*, ed. by Annie Paul (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2007), pp. 76–93: p. 84.

[6] Evon Blake, 'Opinions', *Daily Gleaner* (Jamaica), 27 January 1979, p. 8, cited by Mervyn Morris, 'Introduction' to Louise Bennett, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Mervyn Morris (Kingston: Sangster's Book Stores, 1982, 1983), p. xiii.

tradition for nation language poetry by collecting transcripts of oral poems of the enslaved.[7] *History of the Voice* (1984) is arguably the most influential articulation of how nation language 'makes sense (or non-senseness) of politics demanding of it life not death, community not aardvark, new world to make new words and we to overstand how modern ancient is'.[8] To articulate resistance, he develops in nation language a range of poetic techniques unequalled among Anglophone Caribbean writers until M. NourbeSe Philip's *ZONG!* (2008), which owes much to Brathwaite in how its sonically and visually spectacular rearrangements of found verbal elements honour the drowned of the transatlantic slave trade.[9]

This Introduction's opening quotation uses many of Brathwaite's tactics to celebrate Bussa, leader of an 1816 anti-slavery rebellion on Barbados. The island's enslaved, Black population was by then 'so rooted and creolized that already they called themselves Barbadians. […] believing that the island belonged to them, the mass of the population, at least as much as to the white minority.'[10] Brathwaite's language enacts this incipient identity; his unorthodox spelling creates puns as it mirrors Bajan (nation language for Barbadian) pronunciation, so the island's militia, suppressing the uprising, becomes 'malitia' to reflect its malice. The rebellion's epicentre 'in the south-eastern parish of St. Philip' is renamed to reflect slavery's evils.[11] 'Backra' is nation language for a White person.[12] Owing to White domination of Caribbean plantocracy, though, it implies 'a position of great authority; an

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[7] Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820* (Kingston and Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005), pp. 212–239; a version of the relevant chapter also appears as Brathwaite, *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1974).

[8] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 50. 'Aardvark' is cryptic, perhaps alluding to these creatures' solitary lifestyles. 'Overstand' is a Rastafarian verb indicating transcendent comprehension of a subject – *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, ed. by Richard Allsop (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2003), p. 421.

[9] M. NourbeSe Philip, *ZONG!* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).

[10] Michael Cracton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 49.

[11] Hilary Beckles, *Black Rebellion in Barbados: The Struggle against Slavery, 1627–1838* (Bridgetown: Antilles Publications, 1984), p. 87.

[12] There is ongoing debate about capitalising 'Black' and 'White' as regards race. Academic style guides disagree with one another: Chicago Style advocates lower case for both words, while A.P.A. Style capitalises both. M.H.R.A. Style, used for this thesis, remains noncommittal. I capitalise both words. While honouring Black affirmations of identity, this recognises that Whiteness is not a non-racial 'default setting', but is historically and politically constructed, like other racial categories. Capitalisation does not indicate that racial groups have fixed boundaries, exclude other identities, or are 'real' in any absolute sense. Exceptions occur when quoting writers who use lower case; this is often true for Brathwaite and Griffiths, both of whose capitalisation is eccentric.

important person who is feared.'[13] The words '`backra-man bell`' introduce alliteration on 'b', which resurfaces in the quotation's last line, '`wid a big bushy beard duh call bussa`'. The term also combines with nation language pronunciation to create a latent pun. Depending on context, 'a' can mean 'at' as well as 'of'. The line '`cuttin de tongue a de backra-man bell`' has the primary meaning that the White man's bell's tongue is cut (already a powerful image), but the words subliminally suggest a tongue cut 'at the back', at the root, an even gorier representation of nation language avenging itself on planters' speech. Enslavers commonly mutilated the enslaved for perceived infractions: 'slitting the Nose, branding in the Forehead with a hot Iron, cutting off the Ears, and [...] taking off a Limb.'[14] Nation language returns such violence upon colonial culture at the figurative level, re-enacting Bussa's rebellion through poetry, and compromising the notionally pure, standard English that conveyed oppressive commands.

Brathwaite's fellow poet-historian Bill Griffiths (1948–2007) emerged from different social, political, and linguistic contexts. He was a White Englishman, born and raised in Middlesex, within a nation that historically exploited Brathwaite's own through slavery and colonial rule; he grew up amid the standard English that Brathwaite's poem, above, resists. An Old English scholar, anarchist, archivist, biker, activist and classical pianist, Griffiths stands out among British avant-garde poets of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries for his diversity of social contacts. Many peers engaged with class issues through textual research and political theory; Griffiths takes a folkic approach instead, developing friendships with marginalised communities and letting their voices inform his writing. There are other innovative English poets who draw on dialects and accents; one thinks of North Eastern voices in Tom Pickard and Barry MacSweeney, or Lancashire speech in Geraldine Monk's poetry.[15]

However, Griffiths is distinguished by the sheer variety of voices in his poetry. Even his earliest work incorporates idioms from biker gangs, Roma, and prisoners. His friend the

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[13] *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, p. 61; 'Backra' is the commonest pronunciation, while 'Buckra' is sometimes heard.

[14] John Reeves, cited in James Walvin, *Black Ivory: Slavery in the British Empire* (Oxford and Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 211.

[15] For example, see Tom Pickard, *High on the Walls* (London: Fulcrum Press, 1968); Barry MacSweeney, *Black Torch* (London: New London Pride, 1978); and Geraldine Monk, *Interregnum* (London: Creation Books, 1994).

poet Eric Mottram describes the impact: 'tensions between literary scholarship and working-class and outcast life among the formally diseducated – the vulnerable – are […] a voice opening up from suppression, breaking out and making new'. For Mottram, Griffiths' use of Romani terms shows how 'the bland language of Establishment poetics is in fact a language of rule which deliberately excludes the possibility of cultural renewal from any source except the controlling classes.'[16] Griffiths' interest in Romani culture and language was a constant throughout his writing, dating back to his 1973 translations from Romani poetry.[17]

Reflected in his poems' non-normative syntax, spelling and punctuation, Griffiths' resistance against standard English's political dominion bears comparison with Brathwaite, as does the depth of research that Griffiths brings to dialect. The latter similarity grew from 1990 onwards, when Griffiths moved to Seaham, a County Durham fishing and mining town. His reasons, partly economic, were also motivated by esteem for North Eastern values:

> I was increasingly unhappy living in London in the sense of Central London, Metropolitan London, even cultural London – and notably in Thatcherite London. […] Also I'd known the North, Newcastle especially, since the mid-60s and always admired it so I thought that was the move to make.[18]

In Seaham, Griffiths joined or founded a wide range of local causes, from environmentalist organisations to the 'Story of Seaham' local history group. In particular, he applied his medievalist expertise to researching North East dialect. He republished historic dialect texts, and in 1998 co-founded the Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group, a community initiative collating dictionaries and glossaries of the region's speech. Griffiths' dialectological rigour is comparable with Brathwaite's historicising and theorising of Caribbean nation language.

However, the historical pressures shaping North East dialect differ from those influencing Caribbean nation language. Despite abundant examples of marginalisation and oppression, Northern England has been spared atrocities on the scale of transatlantic slavery. Even the Harrying of the North, King William I's arguably genocidal campaign against Northern uprisings in 1069–70 ('the roads and huts of the North were littered with decaying

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[16] Eric Mottram, ''Every New Book Hacking on Barz': The Poetry of Bill Griffiths', *Reality Studios*, no. 5, 1983, 45–54: 45.

[17] 'Romany Poems', trans. by Bill Griffiths, *Poetry Review*, vol. 64 no. 1, 1973, 16–21.

[18] Griffiths, 'Interview with Will Rowe', *The Salt Companion to Bill Griffiths* (Cambridge: Salt, 2007), ed. by Will Rowe, pp. 171–96: pp. 186–87.

bodies that spread disease among the living'), was dwarfed by the transatlantic slave trade in terms of numbers affected.[19] Nevertheless, Griffiths finds political dimensions to the dialect. For example, he argues that, when large numbers of workers moved into Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the nineteenth-century:

> This new urban population had little access to education and no reason to identify themselves with the speech of the Metropolis or the Ruling Class. Rather, the need for local identity and the growing strength of regionalism […] helped affirm the role of dialect. But there is another factor, in that the 'ruling class' may have preferred the lower orders to retain a different type of speech – not unlike the feudal dichotomy. […] Dialect, then, was a useful social marker, a matter to be regretted or to be proud of, according to one's viewpoint.[20]

This is an important distinction between Brathwaite's approach to language, and Griffiths'. Brathwaite sees 'dialect' as an inevitably term, denigrating subaltern groups, while 'nation language' reclaims one's culture and history. For Griffiths, 'dialect' is a bivalent word, recapturable from pejorative usage, and used by him with pride. His anarchistic and localist politics entail contempt for 'the modern office worker' who 'adopts smart dress and smart speech, preferring to think of him or herself as part of the standard English ambit, communicating with their own national fraternity along many a motorway and down many a fax.'[21] Against such systemic conformity, he pitches the seventeenth century, 'when Northern dialect was reasserted as a general symbol of ancient rights or regional identity against the presumption of the South (typified by the new 'national' language).[22] In the background of this difference between the poets are the contrasting histories of their regions: in the Caribbean, 'dialect' was a racialised category, applied to people whose 'ancient rights' had been submerged by the archipelago's history of slavery.

What these two concepts of speech share is their focus on language as political resistance. Among Griffiths' many poems drawing on his dialect studies and his conversations with neighbours, North East dialect's speakers turn their language against

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[19] William E. Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North: The Region and Its Transformation, 1000–1135* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 119, citing Symeon of Durham.

[20] Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Northumbria University Press, 2004, rep. 2005), p. xix.

[21] Griffiths, 'Retaking the Language: The need for dialect initiatives', *Northern Review*, vol. 8, 1999, 126–32: 126–27.

[22] Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, p. xiv.

forces that marginalise them. This passage describes the 1992 closure of Vane Tempest, a colliery and major employer in Seaham:

> While the bishop that tawks to the pollis that bray'd the miners
> woz marchin',
> wiv a thrang, weel-hair-comb'd mob,
> tiv address a petishun
> til their Lord
> whe lives mony a sunny mile frev here,
> Satan, wiv a singular bat
> o' his gristly neeve
> tew'd Vane Tempest sarely,
> aal but drav it
> clean belaw ti the sea.[23]

This is, Doug Jones notes, 'allusive, complex poetry taken from the rhythms and talk of the individuals [Griffiths] heard around him'.[24] The march to mourn the pit closure was real; newspapers from the time depict a non-violent gathering, including children and a brass band.[25] The mention of police brutality recollects an incident from the 1984–85 miners' strike. As with Brathwaite's nation language, dialect enables closely worked sound patterns. The third and fourth lines offer sonic parallelism ('wiv' / 'tiv'), echoed by a later pararhyme, 'frev'. This structure would vanish with standard English 'with', 'to' and 'from'. Likewise, dialect introduces puns that accentuate meaning. With 'pollis', pronunciation of 'police' approaches its root, the Greek πόλις ('polis') or 'city', aligning law enforcement with the distant city of the poem's 'Lord', not with local needs. 'Bray' is dialect for 'to beat, smash', but gains power through homophony with standard English 'bray', conveying cacophonous combat between miners and riot police.[26] Often, musical and semantic effects of dialect combine, so 'mony' ('many') is closer in sound to the following 'sunny', but also resembles

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[23] Griffiths, 'On Vane Tempest Provisionally Shut, 23 October, in the Afternoon, 1992', *Collected Poems Volume 3 (1992-96)*, ed. by Alan Halsey (Hastings: Reality Street, 2016), p. 144. A 'neeve' is a fist – Griffiths, *North East Dialect: Survey and Word List* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Centre for Northern Studies, 2002), p. 102.

[24] Doug Jones, '"I ain't anyone but you": On Bill Griffiths', *Chicago Review*, vol. 64, no. 1–3, 2022, 296–307: 306.

[25] Steve Hilton (with photography by Michael Peckett), 'Community united in final farewell', *Northern Echo*, 5 June 1995, 5.

[26] Bill Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, p. 19.

'money', stressing capitalist motives for the mine's closure. 'Petishun' incorporates shunning and antagonism between the parties in the dispute.

Bussa's followers faced graver stakes than the Seaham miners: 'Martial law was declared and about 400 slaves were rounded up and executed; others were flogged and transported to Sierra Leone'.[27] However, there are parallels between the above passages from Brathwaite and Griffiths. Both depict manual labourers rebelling against armed oppressors (Barbadian militia or the riot police) and failing heroically. Similarly, both use speech of the oppressed to articulate resistance. Such scenes of violent uprising recur throughout both poets' work. This thesis explores different ways for nation language techniques in the Caribbean, exemplified by Brathwaite, and dialect in England, represented by Griffiths, to articulate political resistance.

Putting Brathwaite and Griffiths into conversation, I open hitherto discrete British and Caribbean avant-gardes to one another. Much recent thought about British poetry laments lack of openness to alternative traditions, even among cutting-edge poets. Andrea Brady writes:

> And yet poems [by writers of colour] which dare to claim subject and voice, challenging the obsession with technique which characterises much avant-garde writing, are often regarded as naive expressions of "identity politics". Such responses fail to recognise that the black lyric "I" is a radical invention, whose history belongs with the avant-garde traditions it also corrodes.[28]

Given historical denial of selfhood to Black people, it is understandable that Brady identifies the 'black lyric "I"' as inherently radical. This realisation, though, must not obscure achievements of Black poets like Brathwaite who exceed Brady's criteria and experiment more widely. Indeed, Brathwaite's 'I' is often dramatic, not lyric, working through personae (at least until the late 1980s, when he turns strongly towards self-expression). Furthermore, the Blackness of Brathwaite's 'I' leads directly to use of nation language for articulating this selfhood's history, and from nation language his other innovations develop organically. English poetry could gain much through listening to and learning from this work. Bill

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[27] Walvin, *Black Ivory*, p. 236.

[28] Andrea Brady, 'The white privilege of British poetry is getting worse', *The Conversation* (8 October 2015) <http://theconversation.com/the-white-privilege-of-british-poetry-is-getting-worse-48516> [accessed 16 March 2022].

Griffiths' own dialect writing, internationalism, and openness to folk cultures make him an excellent medium for exploring how radical poets in the Caribbean and England can share techniques, themes, values, and political goals. This approach avoids dangers of 'cultural appropriation', since it is not Caribbean cultural materials that are emulated, but strategies for bringing England's own, submerged folk cultures to literary realisation.

Another critique of British poetry comes from Sandeep Parmar, who condemns how publishers 'only stage a poet's racial identity when that poet is not white'.[29] In other words, poets of colour find their race foregrounded at the expense of their poetic achievements, while White poets' racial positioning is ignored. Reading Bill Griffiths' poetry, such elision of embodied identity is impossible. His use of subaltern speech draws attention to histories that underpin these ways of speaking; for instance, his Durham dialect poetry emphasises the region's medieval population movements, the specialist vocabularies of local industries, and a working-class ethos of mutual care.[30] Such texts highlight the Whiteness that usually accompanies these voices, but without pandering to English nationalism's exclusionary attitudes. Rather, Griffiths' dialect critiques the histories that generated it, and suggests sharing of common interests with speakers of other non-standard Englishes.

This awareness of fractures within Englishness could counteract oppressive views of monolithic, centralised nationhood, in line with Stuart Hall's realisation about nations:

> […] they are without exception ethnically hybrid – the product of conquests, absorptions of one people by another. It has been the main function of national cultures, which are systems of representation, to represent what is in fact the ethnic hotch-potch of modern nationality as the primordial unity of 'one people'; while that of their invented traditions has been to project the ruptures and conquests, which are their real history, backwards in an apparently seamless and unbroken continuity towards pure, mythic time.[31]

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[29] Sandeep Parmar, 'Not a British Subject: Race and Poetry in the U.K.', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 6 December 2015 <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/not-a-british-subject-race-and-poetry-in-the-uk> [accessed 16 March 2022].

[30] I choose the word 'care' rather than, say, 'solidarity' (here and elsewhere), because the latter implies the teleology of an ulterior, though shared, motive. Meanwhile, relationships of care involve the other's wellbeing as an aim in itself.

[31] Stuart Hall, 'Our Mongrel Selves', *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*, ed. by Sally Davison *et al.* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 277.

Hall is a recurrent presence in this thesis. A Jamaican-British scholar often advocating on behalf of marginalised communities, he sits at the intersection of Brathwaite's and Griffiths' interests, and his understanding of colonial relations within the U.K. shows how Griffiths' work can be as decolonial as Brathwaite's (see Chapter 2.4). Dialects, as voices of communities submerged within totalised nationhood, seem perfect for asserting cultural difference or 'hotch-potch' within poetry. By expanding the range of dialect poetries within England, poets can aid community-based resistance against the hegemonic identity incarnated in standard English. Such work would intervene in the power structures enacted through languages, as advocated by Martinican poet Edouard Glissant:

> I can no longer write in a monolingual manner. That is to say that I return and force my language not into syntheses but toward linguistic openings which permit me to conceive of the relations between today's languages on the surface of the earth – relations of domination, connivance, absorption, oppression, erosion, tangency, etc. – as the fact of an immense drama, an immense tragedy from which my own language cannot be exempt and safe.'[32]

I focus on England, rather than elsewhere in the U.K., because England seems in greater need of awakening to this 'immense drama'. The country's role in the British Empire is crucial: although Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish people participated in imperialism, many in these nations still identify as colonised by England, a basis for empathy with the Caribbean. As the Empire's metropolitan nation, England's role is less ambivalent. Innovative poets in the other nations often resist English hegemony by writing in their own languages, as in the Scots poems of Hugh MacDiarmid, Tom Leonard and Alison Flett, or the bilingual poetry of Wales's Rhys Trimble. Despite innovations by Griffiths and his allies, English dialects receive less celebration from the avant-garde, and have not been poetically theorised to the extent that Brathwaite has undertaken for Caribbean speech; English dialect poetry thus remains associated with predictable forms. For example, the critical volume *No Dialect Please, You're a Poet: English Dialects in Poetry in the 20th and 21st Centuries* (2020) features Mathilde Pinson on Scottish experimentalist Tom Leonard, and David Bousquet on Caribbean-British dub poets Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah, but the White

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[32] Edouard Glissant, 'From Introduction to the Poetics of the Diverse', trans. by Pierre Joris, *boundary 2*, vol. 26 no. 1, 1999, 119–121: 119. While this translation of excerpts from Glissant is not the most widely circulated one, it seems apt: Griffiths' essay 'The Poetry Escape' appears in the same issue (pp. 125–27), so Griffiths knew Joris' translation.

English poets discussed are the comparatively restrained Ted Hughes, Tony Harrison and Ian McMillan.[33] Whatever that trio's merits, more thinking is needed regarding how dialect and the avant-garde can strengthen one another.

This thesis allows Brathwaite's daring techniques to activate possibilities for further experimentation, formal and political, within English speech. Bill Griffiths offers models for how such innovations could energise English voices. It is true that any pairing of poets from the Caribbean and England could produce insights, as would broader comparisons of Caribbean and English methodologies. I pair Brathwaite and Griffiths to explore how individual poets can develop their techniques and politics across their careers. This is especially useful when both men employ such varied tactics, which nevertheless suggest parallels with one another's work. At differing points, both use nation language or dialect to experiment with: incorporating audiences into live performances; articulating communities' political concerns; juggling multiple discourses in one utterance; using documentary resources; and employing avant-garde visuality of text. Each poet brings a historian's rigour to studies of language, contextualising their poetry with prose writings. There are political similarities too: both reject not only the capitalist nation-state's centralised power, but the equally centralised Marxist alternatives, with each preferring collective decision-making within a local community. There are even parallels in their biographies. Both emerged from middle-class environments before conducting research in areas perceived as more working-class, with the Barbadian Brathwaite residing in Jamaica, while Griffiths decamped from Middlesex to Northern England. Both therefore had an element of 'outsiderness' within the communities they engaged.

This juxtaposition, though, raises a quandary afflicting reception of Caribbean poetry in England, particularly for White readers. Brathwaite's importance for African-Caribbean people in England is evident in what Jamaican-British poet James Berry calls Brathwaite's 'active communion with freshly exposed symbols and images of a people's culture that was considered empty.'[34] People from other heritages may feel Brathwaite articulates their own decolonial will. However, if White English enthusiasts wish to incorporate Brathwaite's

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[33] *No Dialect Please, You're a Poet: English Dialects in Poetry in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, ed. by Claire Hélie, Elise Brault-Dreux and Emilie Loriaux (New York and London: Routledge, 2020).
[34] James Berry, 'Introduction', *News for Babylon: The Chatto Book of Westindian-British Poetry*, ed. Berry (London: Chatto & Windus / The Hogarth Press, 1984), p. xxi.

insights into their writing and lives, straightforward imitation (sufficient for honouring many poets) proves inadequate. Brathwaite's poetics are so interlaced with Caribbean nation language that mimicry risks becoming verbal 'blackface'. Even performing Brathwaite's poems aloud presents challenges for White readers, who must constantly negotiate whether to follow pronunciations suggested by the text (potentially causing offence), or to enunciate normatively (diluting his vision). However, this embodiment of poet in text is one innovation that makes Brathwaite so worthy of attention. His influence rightly matters to many who feel demographic kinship with him, but deserves to widen. Part of Griffiths' value here is in offering ways for equivalent poetics to emerge from folkic resources of England's own marginalised populations.

Categories like 'folk' or 'the working class' risk culturally or racially essentialist assumptions about who is included. Griffiths, however, loathes monoculture. He sees people from other backgrounds beset by the same hegemony as England's predominantly White working-class communities, and wants these diverse groups to cooperate against common foes. His understanding of 'folk' is international, interracial, and transcultural. This makes him invaluable for understanding how English poets could learn from Caribbean nation language; indeed, he sometimes invokes Caribbean and Black British communities as inspirations for wider activism.

Such entanglement is pertinent to nation language, which is often associated with place, but can also emerge from geographical upheaval, and may co-exist alongside other speech-groups. Enslaved Africans in the Caribbean had different relationships to English from White planters, while North East England's history of migration created its distinctive speech. Close attention to Brathwaite and Griffiths therefore pushes readers away from texts, towards bodies of movement, communities in flux, and histories of oppression, which then require further charting. The voice does not merely describe, but expresses, its history through pronunciation and syntax. Poet Katrina Porteous, in a statement published by Griffiths, suggests a reciprocal relationship between language and environment, where North East dialect's mimetic relationship to the North Sea can produce a more immediate, visceral understanding of marine spaces:

> […] the sounds of the words and their rhythm give you a feeling for what they are about. It is easy, for example, to distinguish between the swift, light 'pickie' and the darker, less agile

> 'gormer' simply by sound. Similarly, between a 'hobbly' and a 'gurrelly' sea, it is not difficult to tell which is a light, surface roll and which a deeper, more powerful swell.[35]

By rooting nation languages and dialects in histories and geographies that shape speech, disparate poetries can respond to interrelated systems of tyranny. This goes beyond superficial parallels between Brathwaite's and Griffiths' work, suggesting shared repertoires of techniques for articulating resistance. Close reading can therefore only take this research so far. Textual details in both Brathwaite and Griffiths continually refer readers to wider histories. The microcosm of puns, punctuation marks and sound values cannot be understood without knowing the macrocosm of empire, nor can the poets' views of the latter be appreciated without study of the former. The same caveats apply to putting Brathwaite and Griffiths into conversation. When there is little personal interaction between two poets, their poems must be the ground for establishing shared goals, but that basis can only be understood with reference to larger timescales in which the poets live, and to which they respond. Movement back and forth between history and textual detail is necessary for full comprehension, each perspective informing the other. Attention to sound and video recordings is therefore essential to this research, not only to hear nation language pronunciations, but to observe poems interacting with the fluid contexts of time and place.

As well as confluences between these poets, divergences are important. The duo shared no sustained interactions (though Chapter 1.3 discusses a 1975 conference which both attended, and where Griffiths heard Brathwaite's ideas). Brathwaite's only prolonged residences in England coincided with undergraduate studies at Cambridge in the 1950s (when Griffiths was a child), and a PhD at the University of Sussex, which concluded with a move to Jamaica in 1968. Brathwaite mostly lived in London as a postgraduate, but Griffiths did not engage with the city's poetry scene until 1970, after Brathwaite had left.[36]

During his PhD, Brathwaite received rapid recognition from Oxford University Press, who issued his early books beginning with *Rights of Passage* (1967). During this period, he joined forces with Trinidadian poet John La Rose and Jamaican novelist Andrew Salkey to

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[35] Katrina Porteous, 'Words Used by Northumbrian Fishermen and Their Families', *Fishing and Folk: Life and Dialect on the North Sea Coast*, ed. by Griffiths (Newcastle upon Tyne: Northumbria University Press, 2008), pp. 217–246, p. 218. A 'gormer' is a cormorant, a 'pickie' is a tern (Porteous, p. 228, p. 235).

[36] Bill Griffiths, 'Interview with Will Rowe', pp. 171–72.

co-found the Caribbean Artists Movement (C.A.M.), an initiative connecting Caribbean artists and writers with audiences and colleagues. Griffiths' poetry, in contrast, was initially self-published or disseminated through *samizdat* presses of the U.K. avant-garde; only much later did (relatively) mainstream concerns like Paladin and Salt publish him. As well as publication arrangements, the poets' critical and social placement differ. Griffiths participated in the British Poetry Revival, an amorphous, nationwide vanguard. The name was coined in 1965 by poets Tina Morris and Dave Cunliffe, but popularised by Griffiths' friend Eric Mottram in a 1974 essay.[37] I follow recent scholarship in shortening 'British Poetry Revival' to 'B.P.R.', though that abbreviation was not used at the time.[38]

The substantial, growing body of critical writing about Brathwaite tends to contextualise him in the Anglophone Caribbean – understandably, given his consistent focus on the region. Multitudinous studies compare him at length with Derek Walcott. Sometimes the two are directly paired, as in June D. Bobb's *Beating a Restless Drum* (1998), or PhD theses by Pamela Claire Mordecai and Stephen E. Criswell (both 1997).[39] Sometimes a third figure is introduced: T.S. Eliot for Charles Pollard's *New World Modernisms* (2004), or V.S. Naipaul in Rhonda Cobham-Sander's *I & I: Epitaphs for the Self* (2016).[40] Contrasting Brathwaite's experimentalism with Walcott's more normative poetics, these researchers explore different ways of poetically representing Caribbean identity and history. However, as Kei Miller notes of the two poets, 'Brathwaite has been the poet-critic much more invested in challenging the

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[37] Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents, 1950–2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p. 35; Eric Mottram, 'The British Poetry Revival 1960–1974', programme book for *Modern British Poetry Conference 1974* (London: The Polytechnic of Central London, 1974), pp. 85–117. A revised version of the latter is 'The British Poetry Revival 1960–1975', *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible*, ed. by Peter Barry and Robert Hampson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 15–50.

[38] For scholarly use of the 'B.P.R.' abbreviation, see Barry, *Poetry Wars: British Poetry of the 1970s and the Battle of Earls Court* (Cambridge: Salt, 2006, 2007), p. 7.

[39] June D. Bobb, *Beating a Restless Drum: The Poetics of Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott* (Trenton NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, 1998); Pamela Claire Mordecai, *Prismatic Vision: Aspects of Imagery, Language and Structure in the Poetry of Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott*, PhD Thesis, University of the West Indies, 1997; Stephen E. Criswell, *Folklore and the Folk in Derek Walcott's Omeros and Edward Kamau Brathwaite's The Arrivants*, PhD thesis, University of the West Indies, 1997.

[40] Charles Pollard, *New World Modernisms: T.S. Eliot, Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); Rhonda Cobham-Sander, *I & I: Epitaphs for the Self in the Work of V.S. Naipaul, Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2016).

very culture of taste and aesthetics that favoured poets such as Walcott.'[41] Perhaps readers could gain more by comparing Brathwaite not to a conservative Caribbean writer, but to avant-gardes further afield.

Some efforts have placed Brathwaite in such contexts. Silvio Torres-Saillant locates him alongside Caribbean, non-Anglophone poets: Haitian René Depestre, and Pedro Mir from the Dominican Republic.[42] A.R. Yesufu and Curwen Best both compare Brathwaite to Anglophone Igbo poet Christopher Okigbo, worthwhile interventions considering Brathwaite's love of African cultures.[43] Brathwaite lived in Ghana for eight years, 'coming to an awareness and understanding of community, of cultural wholeness, of the place of the individual within the tribe, in society. Slowly … I came to a sense of identification of myself with these people, my living diviners.'[44]

Meanwhile, several scholars compare Brathwaite's innovations with those of U.S. poets: Nathaniel Mackey's *Discrepant Engagement* (1993) considers Brathwaite and Wilson Harris alongside Charles Olson and Robert Duncan, while Paul Naylor's *Singing the Holes in History* (1999) compares the historical approaches of Brathwaite and M. NourbeSe Philip with those of Mackey, Susan Howe, and Lyn Hejinian.[45] There is a lacuna, though, in considering Brathwaite's significance for the U.K. avant-garde. Keith Tuma's *Fishing by Intimate Isles* has a chapter discussing Brathwaite's influence on Black British poets, but seeks no connections to the wider experimental scene described elsewhere in the book.[46] C.A.M.'s London activities feature in Stephen Voyce's *Poetic Community* (2013), a survey of innovative poetry groupings during the Cold War, but Voyce ignores the city's B.P.R. scene.[47] Matthew Hart's *Nations of Nothing but Poetry* (2010) comes closer to this thesis' project: overviewing

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[41] Kei Miller, 'In Praise of the Fat Black Woman & Volume', *P.N. Review*, no. 241, 2018, 15–20: 18.
[42] Silvio Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[43] A.R. Yesufu, **'**Ritual and the Quest for Selfhood in Okigbo's *Labyrinths* and Brathwaite's *Masks***'**, *Neohelicon*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2001, 235–46; Curwen Best, *Kamau Brathwaite and Christopher Okigbo: Art, Politics, and the Music of Ritual* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009).
[44] Kamau Brathwaite, 'Timehri', *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader*, ed. by Kwesi Owusu (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 43–48, p. 45.
[45] Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Paul Naylor, *Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999).
[46] Keith Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998).
[47] Stephen Voyce, *Poetic Community: Avant-Garde Activism and Cold War Culture* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

innovative poets who use dialects and nation languages, he includes Brathwaite in an intercontinental selection that also features Northumbrian modernist Basil Bunting, a major influence on Griffiths.[48] Hart notes Brathwaite's identification of Bunting's long poem 'Briggflatts' (1966) as a 'nation language (*jordie*) long poem', a connection which licenses thinking about English regional dialects with the infrastructure developed by Brathwaite for Caribbean nation language.[49] However, Hart approaches vernacular poetries as parallel developments, rarely considering how they might learn from and influence one another.

Bill Griffiths has been less thoroughly studied than Brathwaite, but is nevertheless among the more discussed figures in the B.P.R.[50] The field, despite a thriving culture of reviews and essays in journals run by poets, has only in the twenty-first century benefitted from large-scale academic study. Two essay collections focus on Griffiths: *The Salt Companion to Bill Griffiths* (2007), and a special issue of the *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* (2014).[51] Most contributors are Griffiths' friends from the B.P.R., keen to site him within that context of writing and performance. These bodies of criticism are essential, not least in consolidating memories of Griffiths as groundwork for further thinking. Griffiths also appears in wider studies, like Robert Sheppard's *The Poetry of Saying* (2005) and *The Meaning of Form in Contemporary Innovative Poetry* (2016); the latter segues from Brathwaite to Griffiths while discussing experimental publishing formats.[52] Among PhD theses, Griffiths recurs in the poetic mapping of Britain's coasts and forests in Amy Cutler's *Language Disembarked* (2014), while Joanne Ashcroft's *Sound-Rich Poetry* (2019) considers the performance poetics of Griffiths, Monk and Maggie O'Sullivan.[53] Luke Roberts has researched Griffiths' prisoners'

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[48] Matthew Hart, *Nations of Nothing but Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism and Synthetic Vernacular Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). On Griffiths' fondness for Bunting, see Griffiths, 'Interview with Will Rowe', p. 173.
[49] Hart, p. 211, citing Brathwaite, *X/Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 128.
[50] B.P.R. participants with equal or greater scholarly representation include J.H. Prynne, Bob Cobbing, Maggie O'Sullivan, Tom Raworth, and Allen Fisher, but dozens of excellent poets still receive insufficient critical attention.
[51] *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, vol. 6 no. 1, 2014.
[52] Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and Its Discontents*, 1950–2000 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), pp. 55–58; Sheppard, *The Meaning of Form in Contemporary Innovative Poetry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 174–75.
[53] Amy Cutler, *Language Disembarked: The Coast and the Forest in Modern British Poetry*, PhD thesis, Royal Holloway University of London, 2014; Joanne Ashcroft, *Sound-Rich Poetry: Maggie O'Sullivan, Bill Griffiths and Geraldine Monk*, PhD thesis, Edge Hill University, 2019.

rights activism, including Griffiths' support for Black and mixed-race inmates.[54] Griffiths sometimes collaborated with these prisoners on literary projects; such openness to Black experience suggests potential for developing further connections between his poetics and those of African-Caribbean writers.

There has, then, been little evaluation of Brathwaite's relevance for English poetry beyond the Black diaspora. To juxtapose Caribbean and experimental White British poets at all is rare. Carla Harryman compares how Jamaican-British poet Linton Kwesi Johnson and English avant-gardist cris cheek share 'vivid politics in which openness to history and change reinvent the postmodern avant-garde within the social conditions of displacement.'[55] Meanwhile, Will Montgomery explores responses to the 1981 Brixton Riots by Johnson and Allen Fisher, both of whom lived in Brixton at the time; Montgomery emphasises 'Brixton as a *sounded* space to both poets'.[56] Harryman and Montgomery's essays are ambitious, but are based on cheek and Fisher's activities within the same London geography as Johnson. Can similarly fruitful comparisons occur between poets on opposite sides of the Atlantic? Mandy Bloomfield considers how B.P.R. poet Maggie O'Sullivan's 'investigates states of voicelessness with respect to a specific Anglo-Irish heritage, but also in relation to wider social insecurities and cultural restrictions', alongside 'Brathwaite's poetics of noise that seeks to body forth "submerged" dimensions of Caribbean cultural history'.[57] This approach, identifying the poets' parallel methodologies for drawing on their respective heritages, is a promising avenue through which to explore nation languages poetics.

Complicating matters how C.A.M. and the B.P.R., even within London, remained seemingly separate during the 1960s and 1970s. Mark Harris' paper 'A great chaos of sound' (2020) explores themes of mental health in 1960s British counterculture. Three B.P.R. poets' psychiatric interests – Jeff Nuttall's links to R.D. Laing's Anti-Psychiatry, and concerns with

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[54] Luke Roberts, 'Grave Police Music: On Bill Griffiths', *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, vol. 10 no. 1, 1–18 <https://poetry.openlibhums.org/article/id/729/#!> [accessed 16 March 2022].
[55] Carla Harryman, 'Something Nation: Performance in Linton Kwesi Johnson and cris cheek', *Diasporic Avant-Gardes: Experimental Cultures and Cultural Displacement*, ed. Carrie Noland and Barrett Watten (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 206–24, p. 222. cheek avoids capitalising his name.
[56] Will Montgomery, 'Fractalising the Front Line: Brixton in the Poetry of Allen Fisher and Linton Kwesi Johnson', *The Allen Fisher Companion*, ed. by Robert Hampson and cris cheek (Swindon: Shearsman Books, 2020), pp. 98–111, p. 101. Montgomery's italics.
[57] Mandy Bloomfield, *Archaeopoetics: Word, Image, History* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016), p. 36.

women's trauma in the work of Tina Morris and Veronica Forrest-Thompson – are compared with C.A.M.'s interest in decolonial psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. Harris notes: 'The decades-long West Indian experience of opposing white institutions might have encouraged British countercultural activists to turn first to black writers for tactics of cultural militancy, but instead this was usually a last recourse.'[58] The paucity of cross-cultural learning prompts Harris to ask, 'How might future histories identify where cultural paths intersect that now only seem divergent?'[59]

Thankfully, such 'future histories' are now underway. B.P.R. circles remained overwhelmingly White for decades, but in recent years encountered sustained questioning about lack of diversity (Brady and Parmar, above, being prominent voices). At the same time, more poets of colour have become engaged with B.P.R. institutions and aesthetics, fusing that group's strategies with those of other, international avant-gardes (including Brathwaite's poetics) to create exciting new work. The poets include Sarona Abuaker, Sascha Akhtar, Azad Ashim Sharma, Elizabeth-Jane Burnett, James Goodwin, Edmund Hardy, Will Harris, Ghazal Mosadeq, Nat Raha, Nisha Ramayya, Karenjit Sandhu, Kashif Sharma-Patel Juliet Troy and Michael Zand. It is hoped that this thesis may contribute towards this burgeoning, transcultural experimentation, opening new routes for U.K. poets to explore.

To learn more about what Griffiths and Brathwaite share, and about opportunities already lost through the lack of mutual recognition that Andrea Brady diagnoses, I adopt an unusual structure. Rather than completing discussion of one poet, then comparing the other, my research moves back and forth between them, wavelike, constantly seeking ways to connect one poem, one regional history, one experimental tradition to its counterpart. The aim is to emulate Brathwaite's philosophy of 'tidalectics'. Inspired by the Caribbean's archipelagic geography, this theory of cultural interchange allows communities to share ideas without colonialist hierarchies emerging; it is further defined in Chapter 2.1.

Some juxtapositions between the poets will take the discussion out of chronological sequence, as Brathwaite's and Griffiths' poetics do not share one trajectory: for example, Griffiths' most strikingly visual work is from his earlier years, while Brathwaite starts with

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[58] Mark Harris, 'A great chaos of sound: alternative practices of working through madness, alienation, and the aesthetics of catastrophe in 60s Britain', *Counterculture Studies*, vol. 3 no. 1, 2020, 41 <https://ro.uow.edu.au/ccs/vol3/iss1/2/> [accessed 16 March 2022].
[59] Mark Harris, 'A great chaos of sound', 53.

relatively normative layout, then continually pushes visual innovation further. When examining the poets' formal strategies, I accordingly follow Brathwaite's career path, matching his poetry with works by Griffiths that make fruitful comparisons. This gives the thesis a narrative of consistently escalating experiment.

First, though, I investigate whether Brathwaite's and Griffiths' milieus were as separate as is conventionally thought. Chapter 1 considers Brathwaite's brief time in London, seeking intersections between C.A.M. and that of Griffiths' friends in the B.P.R. I identify a particular event, the *Poetry of the Americas* conference in 1975, which Brathwaite and Griffiths both attended. While there is no evidence for or against them speaking to one another at this gathering, Griffiths heard an account of Brathwaite's ideas, and related this to his own practice of translation.

Chapter 2 then explores Brathwaite's tidalectics as a model for exchanging ideas between the Caribbean and the English regions, building a concept of mutual care that permits nation language techniques to be shared between seemingly different peoples. An understanding of Caribbean nation language's tidalectic origins elucidates how similar creativity might recuperate cultural legacies in the English regions. Brathwaite's identification of Basil Bunting's 'Briggflatts' as a nation language poem, as well as Brathwaite's own writings about North East England, suggest structural parallels with Caribbean culture. The relationship of such regions to the postcolonial binary of colony and metropole is complex, with Stuart Hall's thought showing how many English communities experience exploitation and brutality from the same forces that implement colonialism globally. Griffiths' poem *Mr. Tapscott* (1998) engages with the history of such an internal colony, showing how diverse peoples can find common cause against shared foes.

Chapter 3 investigates Brathwaite's poetics in more detail, discovering how his textual practice relates to nation language speech. I consider Brathwaite's major innovations in turn, then compared to work by Griffiths with related concerns. I contrast recordings of Brathwaite's poetry performances to his printed texts, to aid understanding of how nation language is represented on the page. In some cases, Brathwaite's approaches resemble Griffiths'; in others, Griffiths' methods have equivalents in Brathwaite's work, but operate differently due to origins in the North East's distinct linguistics.

Chapter 4 explores how different forms of textuality and technology let nation language explore new territory. From 1986 onwards, Brathwaite developed a mode of visual writing that he called 'Sycorax Video-style', using word-processing software's fonts and layout to register performance dynamics more fully on the page; this has parallels with Griffiths' concrete poetry and hand-lettered booklets. Both poets experimented with documentary poetics, while Brathwaite's magical thinking about book form, and Griffiths' use of democratic structures and digital technology to research North East dialect, each open new directions for marginalised voices to flourish.

The thesis concludes with ideas for how future practitioners might develop these practices further, bringing more innovations from the Caribbean into a body of English poetry that joins Brathwaite's nation language in critiquing imperialist assumptions for which standard English has so frequently stood. To echo Brathwaite at *Poetry of the Americas*, the project is one of inventing new ancestors, of imagining traditions from which fresh innovations could emerge. Such genealogies spring not from the place where one happens to be, but out of sympathies and shared concerns.

This work feels urgent, considering the ongoing crisis about how Englishness itself is constituted. Resurgent nationalism is felt in developments like the U.K.'s 2020 departure from the European Union, the Home Office policy of a 'hostile environment' towards refugees and migrants, and the 'Windrush scandal' which saw Black British citizens deported to Caribbean nations with which they had little personal connection. Such events attest to restricted definitions of nationhood with little room for overlapping identities and diverse heritage. Griffiths' poem 'Englishness' parodies such attitudes:

> A Lion arrogant
> upon two Quarts of Bible.
> distilled alien to white
> all-grain to snows of bread
> profiled crusades
> to manage counties
> produce relic nations of us.[60]

[60] Griffiths, *The Lion Man & Others* (London: Veer Books, 2008), p. 54.

Englishness here is a mania to eliminate difference, whether that be the distinctiveness of migrant populations ('distilled alien to white'), or the regional cultures of counties turned into 'relic nations of us.' One opportunity in bringing poets together, as in this thesis, is to imagine how poetic strategies such as nation language can counteract such politics – advancing understanding of the relationship between poetry and political resistance. Anti-Psychiatrist David Cooper, whose organisational activities figure in the first chapter, sums up the task facing the English mind: 'What we have to do beyond the monumental task of perceiving the Third World as it is, in itself, is perceive the more obscure reality of the presence of the Third World in us.'[61]

[61] David Cooper, 'Beyond Words', in *The Dialectic of Liberation*, ed. by David Cooper (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 193–202, p. 196. 'Third World' is now an outdated term, but the sentiment should stand.

Chapter 1: Inventing New Ancestors

1.1. 'Eric Jealous and E.K. Resentment': Missed Connections between the Caribbean Artists Movement and the British Poetry Revival

Juxtaposing Brathwaite and Griffiths, one must consider the contrasting U.K. milieus in which they operated. Since there was so little contact between the two men, comparing the groups in which they participated – the Caribbean Artists Movement and the British Poetry Revival respectively – may highlight poetics and organisational strategies that constitute points of connection. Any intersections between the two movements might suggest opportunities for further learning and collaboration across cultural boundaries.

This chapter therefore assesses the extent and nature of links between C.A.M. and the B.P.R. during the 1960s and 1970s. The two groups were the most exciting poetic communities in London during that period. They shared much aesthetically and politically, yet prominent histories of the movements – Anne Walmsley's *The Caribbean Artists Movement* (1992), or accounts of the B.P.R. by Eric Mottram and Peter Barry – mention scarcely any interaction between them.[62] The present section evaluates the truth of this image, considers gains that could have been made through deeper connections, and suggests how poets might avoid missing such opportunities in future. A crucial resource is C.A.M.'s archive, available at London's George Padmore Institute. Its collection of correspondence and ephemera, as well as transcripts of Walmsley's interviews with C.A.M. members, richly detail how C.A.M.'s networks were socially constituted. The conclusions are important for putting Brathwaite's and Griffiths' poetries into conversation. The chapter's second half examines a particular event in London in 1975, the *Poetry of the Americas* conference, which brought together Caribbean and B.P.R. poets on an unprecedented scale. Griffiths heard Brathwaite's ideas at this conference. A discussion among the Revival poets touched on Caribbean poetics, and Griffiths described his own strategies of composition and resistance in related terms. The comparison opens ways for thinking about Griffiths' poetry in the context of Brathwaite's nation language theories.

There is no evidence that Brathwaite was even conscious of Griffiths' work. Griffiths knew of Brathwaite, but did not consider him a strong influence; he names Brathwaite only

[62] Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966–1972: A Literary & Cultural History* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1992); Mottram, 'The British Poetry Revival' (both versions); Barry, *Poetry Wars*.

in a single interview, from 2005. However, the passage suggests fellowship, as well as experiences shared between Caribbean and White English avant-garde poets:

> […] Sean O'Brien used Poetry Review to publish a review of Keith Tuma's UK anthology of 2001 and made unkind references to "Eric Jealous and E.K. Resentment" – widely assumed to mean Eric Mottram and E.K. Brathwaite. Was anyone seriously objecting to the 'pollution' of English poetry by American or Caribbean voices? My feeling is that this elite, exclusive version of 'England' is a mythical spot somewhere in the South only mentioned when it is necessary to have something to cudgel peasants and provincials with.[63]

O'Brien's review indeed depicts Tuma taking advice from 'dear old Eric Jealous and E.K. Resentment, who normally can't get into the phone book, never mind an anthology'.[64] The reviewer's spite makes allies of disparate poets, so O'Brien's 'elite, exclusive version of 'England'' marginalises both Brathwaite's Caribbean poetics and Mottram's American-influenced experimentation. Griffiths' evaluation echoes Stuart Hall's rejection, cited in the Introduction, of the English nationalist 'primordial unity of 'one people''.[65] Tuma also sees this national debate manifesting within the poetry circuit, noting contrasting responses to his anthology: 'This is one lesson of the book's reception: that it makes less and less sense to speak of one center of power in British poetry.'[66]

In the 1960s, C.A.M. and the B.P.R shared this concern with resistance to centres of literary power. At the time, U.K. poetry was dominated by The Movement, a coterie including Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, and Robert Conquest. They mostly wrote in traditional forms, depicting everyday scenarios in conventional English. They and their successors enjoyed hegemony, with privileged access to publishers, broadcasters, and critics. Polemics against this tendency are a staple of B.P.R. writing. Iain Sinclair, for example, decries The Movement as 'the real iconoclasts, diverting, with their petty discriminations, currents of subversive energy (American open-field poetics and European surrealism), as

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[63] Jane Marsh, 'Interview with Bill Griffiths by Jane Marsh', *Neon Highway*, no. 10, July 2005, 26–32: 27–28.
[64] Sean O'Brien, 'Bizarro's Bounty', *Poetry Review*, vol. 91 no. 2, 2001, 109–110. Neither Brathwaite nor Mottram appear in the anthology, or in the lists of scholars thanked – Keith Tuma, 'Preface', *Anthology of Twentieth Century British and Irish Poetry*, ed. by Tuma (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. xxvi–xxvii.
[65] Hall, 'Our Mongrel Selves', p. 277.
[66] Tuma, 'Interlopers Aren't Funny', *Quid*, no. 10 part i, n.d. (probably 2002), 2–17: 6.

well as ruthlessly marginalising the wearied survivors of classical modernism'.[67] One could add African-Caribbean influences to Sinclair's list of subversive currents. Rhetoric of margins and centres was key to the self-definition of Caribbean and British avant-gardes. Multiple networks of outsider poets emerged in response to The Movement, co-operating with various degrees of success to convert, infiltrate or circumvent the establishment.

One such group formed London in December 1966, when Brathwaite allied with John La Rose and Andrew Salkey to found the Caribbean Artists Movement.[68] With the West Indian Students Centre in Earls Court as their base, C.A.M. organised performances, talks, discussions, exhibitions, and conferences. Brathwaite justifiably felt that 'Caribbean writers and artists were too marginalised in Britain.'[69] Interviewed by Anne Walmsley, he explains that the founders wanted Caribbean creatives 'to meet each other, to meet in public with Caribbean people who were interested in Caribbean development; and to meet with the British establishment, so that we could begin to talk about why is it that Caribbean literature was not being seen'.[70] They therefore had three audiences in mind: Caribbean writers and artists, the wider Caribbean diaspora, and predominantly White, British gatekeepers. As I will show, these priorities sometimes conflicted.

While C.A.M. gathered steam, the B.P.R. thrived. This vanguard's London nexus toted wide-ranging influences from American and European modernism, plus interests in performance and multimedia. In 1970, Revivalist poets took over key positions in the Poetry Society, the Arts-Council-funded body supporting poetry in Britain, enrolling *en masse* to ensure their representatives were elected to the Society's General Council.[71] Their goal was to make the Society's resources, funding, and connections serve poetries that had hitherto lacked much institutional support. Of particular interest was the possibility of a National Poetry Centre, with performance space and printing facilities. In 1970, the Society was

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[67] Iain Sinclair, 'Introduction: Infamous and Invisible: A Manifesto for Those Who Do Not Believe in Such Things', *Conductors of Chaos: A Poetry Anthology*, ed. by Sinclair (London and Basingstoke: Picador, 1996), pp. xiii–xx: p. xix.
[68] Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, pp. 46–51.
[69] Walmsley, 'Interview on C.A.M. with Edward Kamau Brathwaite: 15 March 1986, at Irish Town, Jamaica', London, George Padmore Institute, CAM/6/9, p. 7.
[70] Walmsley, 'Interview on C.A.M. with Edward Kamau Brathwaite', pp. 7–8.
[71] Barry, p. 19.

seeking funds for such a venue, which was eventually established in Earls Court.[72] In 1971, Mottram became editor of the Society's journal, *Poetry Review*, and transformed it into an internationalist, experimental journal. His adventurous tastes excited some readers while outraging others.[73]

Only three poets seemed well-acquainted with both groups in the 1960s, with a fourth being a C.A.M. poet who contacted B.P.R. personalities earlier on. The first aisle-crossing writer was White, Jamaica-born poet Edward Lucie-Smith. He participated in C.A.M., advising Brathwaite on its founding in 1966, chairing a symposium in 1967, and attending C.A.M.'s Second Conference in 1968.[74] During the same period, he collaborated with B.P.R. poets; for example, he and Bob Cobbing co-organised an exhibition of little press books at the Birmingham and Midland Institute in 1968.[75] His anthology *British Poetry since 1945* (1970) included B.P.R. poets like Roy Fisher, Lee Harwood, Barry MacSweeney, and Tom Raworth.[76]

The second figure, Black Power activist Michael X (previously Michael de Freitas, later Michael Abdul Malik), taught at the London Free School, a community education project in Notting Hill, alongside B.P.R. poets Neil Oram and Harry Fainlight.[77] X also contributed to the anthology *Children of Albion* (1969), a foundational publication for the B.P.R.[78] X attended some C.A.M. events; Brathwaite recalls him 'standing around, and not getting involved' because C.A.M. was 'far too middle of the road.'[79]

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[72] Barry, pp. 16–19. The National Poetry Centre at 21 Earls Court Square was a few minutes' walk from C.A.M.'s erstwhile venue, the West Indian Students Centre at 1 Collingham Gardens. However, the former site only opened after C.A.M. ceased officially frequenting the latter. There was no period when the neighbourhood thronged with both groups simultaneously.
[73] Contrasting reactions are explored in Barry, pp. 20–25.
[74] Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 49, p. 63, p. 159.
[75] *A.L.P. The First 22½ Years: A P.A.L.P.I. Supplement*, ed. by Griffiths and Bob Cobbing (London: Association of Little Presses, 1988), p. 6. These relationships were uneven: Lucie-Smith and Cobbing had only recently reconciled after arguing over Lucie-Smith's curatorial choices in a different exhibition of little presses – *A.L.P. The First 22½ Years*, pp. 5–6.
[76] *British Poetry since 1945*, ed. by Edward Lucie-Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970). However, poets of colour are unrepresented – a surprise, considering Lucie-Smith's role in C.A.M.
[77] Barry Miles, *London Calling: A Countercultural History of London since 1945* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), pp. 187–89.
[78] Michael X, 'One Flower', *Children of Albion: Poetry of the Underground in Britain*, ed. by Michael Horovitz (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 315. X was the only Black poet among 63 contributors, and one of just two poets of colour (Philip O'Connor had Burmese heritage).
[79] Walmsley, 'Interview on C.A.M. with Edward Kamau Brathwaite', p. 15.

The third poet, Eric Walter White, was Director of Literature at the Arts Council during the late 1960s. His daughter Sarah White's partner was John La Rose; in 1966, shortly before C.A.M.'s foundation, the couple founded New Beacon Books, a ground-breaking publisher of Black and Caribbean authors. Eric Walter White was supportive of New Beacon and C.A.M., attended C.A.M.'s Second Conference in 1968, and later wrote to Brathwaite that he 'found the lectures and discussion most stimulating.'[80] He also assisted B.P.R. initiatives, helping poets Stuart Montgomery and Bob Cobbing obtain funding for the Association of Little Presses (A.L.P.), a small publishers' network of which Griffiths later became Secretary.[81]

A case could be made for a fourth writer connecting the movements: in the 1950s, James Berry, later a C.A.M. participant, enjoyed his first date with Mary Levien, his future wife. She took him to Bob Cobbing's Hendon Writers Circle, a forerunner of Cobbing's Writers Forum workshops, a long-running series of meetings where innovative poets would share their experiments. The Writers Circle read T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943). Interviewed by Brian Merrick, Berry recalls, 'I was never more moved! And it was most strange, because I'd never studied poetry. That was how I started.'[82] Here is a Caribbean poet discovering his path (which would include much nation language writing) at an event of the embryonic B.P.R. This channel of communication did not stay consistently open during the 1960s, but the workshop's outcome for Berry still exemplifies what can be achieved when poetic cultures meet. Berry would renew contact with the B.P.R. in the 1970s.

There are hints of other encounters. A flyer for the launch reading of Brathwaite's debut collection *Rights of Passage* (1967) lists Better Books on Charing Cross Road among the ticket vendors.[83] Cobbing managed this shop at the time, so sold tickets for Brathwaite's performance.[84] Also, John La Rose and Sarah White's New Beacon Books was a member of

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[80] Eric Walter White, letter to Kamau Brathwaite, 1 September 1968, London, George Padmore Institute, CAM/3/471.
[81] Barry, pp. 15–16.
[82] Brian Merrick, 'An Impulse to Write: An Interview with James Berry', *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 27 no. 4, 1996, pp. 195–208: p. 200.
[83] 'Reading at the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre: London Traverse Theatre Company and New Beacon Publications present Edward Brathwaite reading his poem 'Rights of Passage'. 3 Mar 1967', London, George Padmore Institute, CAM/2/2.
[84] Andrew Wilson, 'This is not an Advertisement: Notes on a Bookshop Manager at an Uncertain Period in Time', *Boooook: The Life and Work of Bob Cobbing*, ed. by William Cobbing and Rosie Cooper (London: Occasional Papers, 2017), pp. 89–102: p. 91.

A.L.P., the only Black publisher to appear in the Association's 1970 catalogue alongside B.P.R. ventures like Ferry Press, Grosseteste Press, Second Aeon, and Cobbing's Writers Forum.[85] New Beacon thus had ongoing contact with Cobbing and Montgomery during this period. Brathwaite appeared in *Penguin Modern Poets 15* (1969), in a trio with Scottish B.P.R. poet Edwin Morgan and Morgan's fellow Scot, Alan Bold.[86] Brathwaite had left the U.K. by then, but the juxtaposition implies that Caribbean and Scottish poetries might share a peripheral relationship to English literary power.

There were two more substantial intersections. July 1967 saw the countercultural conference *Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation*. Speakers included American Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, a hero for the B.P.R. As Juha Virtanen relates, at 1965's First International Poetry Incarnation – a poetry jamboree at the Royal Albert Hall, foundational for the Revival – 'Ginsberg was the evening's headline performer and […] his presence in London was a catalyst for the event's initial organisation.'[87] Other speakers at *Dialectics of Liberation* included writer C.L.R. James, a participant in and inspirational figure for C.A.M., plus Trinidadian-American Black Power spokesman Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture). John La Rose helped to organise Carmichael's visit to London, and La Rose and Brathwaite read their poetry during the proceedings (alongside African-American jazz poet Ted Joans).[88] Michael X gave Carmichael a tour of London. In Ashley Dawson's words:

> Carmichael was surprised to find that British Asians were just as galvanized by the Black Power movement as members of the African diaspora. Increasingly subject to violent attacks by members of the neo-fascist National Front, second-generation Asian youths, Michael X explained, were highly receptive to the Black Power message of self-defense. […] As Michael X explained to Stokely Carmichael, British racism was at no pains to distinguish between different immigrant groups, and, consequently, antiracism was developing along lines of multicultural solidarity rather than reactive ethnic specificity, as it tended to do in the United States.[89]

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[85] *Catalogue of Little Press Books in Print* (London: Association of Little Presses, 1970), p. 29.
[86] Alan Bold, Kamau Brathwaite and Edwin Morgan, *Penguin Modern Poets 15* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).
[87] Juha Virtanen, *Poetry and Performance During the British Poetry Revival 1960–1980: Event and Effect* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 28.
[88] Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, pp. 92–93; David Rudder and John La Rose, *Kaiso Calypso Music* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1990), p. 12.
[89] Ashley Dawson, *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), pp. 52–53.

If British anti-racism rests on intercultural solidarity, such as between Black British and British Asian youth, can White British people to join such alliances too? An obvious problem is that 'the Black Power message of self-defense' advocates that Black people (and, X argues, other people of colour) should extricate themselves from White supremacist structures that White allies might risk re-imposing. A solution could be that simply listening to, learning from, following, or removing oneself from the way of, people of colour can also be supportive acts. Whether this occurred among poetry communities at *Dialectics of Liberation* is debatable. The two factions' American heroes clashed, as Ginsberg's pacifism collided with Carmichael's insistence on Black communities' right to self-defence; their debate symbolises how the two men's London allies sometimes worked at cross-purposes to one another.[90] Nevertheless, the event brought C.A.M., B.P.R., and their respective audiences together under one roof. The audience members, and the event's informal aspects, are sparsely documented; David Cooper's collection of papers from the conference does not mention the poetry readings.[91] However, these performances were spontaneous:

> One afternoon, when a large audience was sitting waiting for Herbert Marcuse to arrive for a lecture, the kids settled themselves on the platform; one urchin took the microphone and announced that he would now recite some of his own verses. […] Meanwhile, the grown-ups also played. A pedal organ in one corner was in constant use. Impromptu poetry recitals were held.[92]

These factors make it difficult to list B.P.R. poets who may have attended, but some were there: Tom Pickard was in the audience, and Iain Sinclair was present filming *Oh, Sunflower*, a documentary on Ginsberg.[93] Cobbing probably had an unofficial hand in proceedings, as

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[90] Excerpts from the disagreement are filmed in Davies, *Anatomy of Violence*, 8:15–13:12 and 18:00–20:55.

[91] *The Dialectics of Liberation* (1968), ed. by David Cooper (London and New York: Verso Books, 2015).

[92] A.M. Fearon, *Freedom*, 25 August 1967, cited by Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (London: Paladin, 1970, rep. 1972), p. 57.

[93] Chris McCabe, 'No Need for Permission: Tom Pickard talks to Chris McCabe about poetry and political activism', *Poetry London* website, 2016 <https://poetrylondon.co.uk/no-need-for-permission-tom-pickard-talks-to-chris-mccabe-about-poetry-and-political-activism/> [accessed 16 March 2022]; Sinclair and Robert Klinkert (film-makers), *Allen Ginsberg – Ah! Sunflower – Live at the Roundhouse* [D.V.D.] (London: The Picture Press, 2007).

he was thanked in the event's programme.[94] One might desire even more diversity at the event, especially of gender (the only woman presenter scheduled was performance artist Carolee Schneemann), but this was at least an opportunity for White activists and poets to encounter Black revolutionary ideas.

Dialectics of Liberation's lead organiser was Joseph Berke, an Anti-Psychiatrist from R.D. Laing's Institute of Phenomenological Research. In 1968, Berke, Laing, Cooper and colleagues initiated another project that brought together B.P.R. and C.A.M. members: the Antiuniversity of London, which offered classes 'to examine artistic expression beyond the scope of the usual academy and to promote a position of social integrity and commitment from which scholars now stand aloof.'[95] It operated from premises on Rivington Place in Shoreditch, East London. B.P.R. poets like Cobbing, Montgomery, Nuttall, Harwood, Asa Benveniste, and Alex Trocchi joined the faculty; Cobbing was Co-ordinator. Other tutors included African-Caribbean intellectuals and C.A.M. participants C.L.R. James and Stuart Hall, plus African-American poet and sociologist Calvin C. Hernton, who was billed to speak at C.A.M.'s 1968 conference but didn't show up.[96] There were also classes on Black Power with Nigerian-British writer Obi Egbuna, and sessions with Laing, Berke, Cooper, and other Anti-Psychiatrists.

The Antiuniversity was short-lived, opening in February 1968 before losing its rented premises due to lack of funds in July of that year. Cobbing resigned at this point. Some faculty continued their courses at other venues; the project finally ebbed away in 1971.[97] The institution did not involve any C.A.M. poets, and there may not have been extensive contact among the staff; Hall, for example, lived in Birmingham at the time. There is substantial achievement, though, in bringing together so many major figures from different fields of counterculture, even for just a few months.

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[94] Neil Hornick, 'Dialectics of Liberation Redialled', *Dialectics of Liberation* web archive, April 2011 <http://www.dialecticsofliberation.com/1967-dialectics/the-dialectics-of-liberation-redialled/> [accessed 16 March 2022].
[95] *Antiuniversity of London: Catalogue* (London: Antiuniversity of London, 1968), duplicated in *Antiuniversity of London – Antihistory Tabloid*, ed. Jakob Jakobson (London: MayDay Rooms and Flat Time House, 2013), p. 25; see p. 26 and p. 29 for details of the faculty.
[96] Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 158.
[97] Jakob Jakobsen, 'Antiuniversity of London – An Introduction to Deinstitutionalisation', *Antiuniversity of London – Antihistory Tabloid*, pp. 9–12: p. 12.

This section of the chapter assembles evidence for a network of previously underappreciated connections. Projects like *Dialectics of Liberation* and the Antiuniversity, plus links via Lucie-Smith, X, Berry, and Eric Walter White, demonstrate that C.A.M. and the B.P.R. were not adversaries. The groups' poets seemed well-disposed to one another as individuals, and were happy to collaborate. However, this only happened on a large scale when they were mustered by a third party like the Anti-Psychiatrists; even then, it was mutual allies or non-poet participants who made contact. Also, it is notable that so many interactions involved Bob Cobbing's roles in community groups, businesses, and institutions. His mania for developing such projects provided spaces where cross-cultural co-operation was at least possible. Cobbing's role highlights the importance of venues for bringing communities together: without his involvement in Hendon Writers Circle, Better Books, or the Antiuniversity, the list of encounters here would be much briefer. The knowledge that an event or facility will be regularly available is crucial for making a scene available to newcomers and alternative connections. Any unique centre for an arts scene is vulnerable to closure; larger, more durable, and more flexible networks are needed.

1.2. 'in huge hiatus, unaware': Shared Methodologies of the Caribbean Artists Movement and the British Poetry Revival

The low level of interaction between the Caribbean Artists Movement and the British Poetry Revival shows that it can be misleading to consider poetic communities and histories primarily in terms of place. The B.P.R.'s London nexus and C.A.M. had mutual friends, frequented the same urban spaces, and occasionally even collaborated: any material barrier was circumventable by a telephone call, a letter, or just attending each other's events. The situation becomes more striking when one considers parallels between the groups' methods. Even before the Poetry Society takeover, the B.P.R. was building communities via journals and presses, and (in London) Cobbing's Writers Forum Workshop, as well as events Cobbing organised at Better Books.[98] These practices mirror the readings, exhibitions, and conferences of C.A.M., which (Stephen Voyce notes) 'resisted the idea of itself as a central organization, instead choosing to function as a constituent element within a network of movements and projects, a literary organ in this network of emancipatory struggles.'[99] Other Black presses like Bogle-L'Ouverture and Brookside followed New Beacon, creating an equivalent industry to A.L.P.'s scene. Methodological kinships extend to shared modernist influences in participants' poetry. This is from La Rose's long poem 'Song to an Imperishable Sunlight' (1966):

> Our Jacob was not coatless;
> our Jacob Thomas wrote a grammar
> in patois
> to remove the scales from justice's eyes
> for peasants
> who spoke no word of English
> in milord's court.
>
> And Jacob answered proud England's Froude
> for his 'froudacity'
> in challenging our right in revolt
> to rule our land.
>
> Still each generation lives its present,

[98] Barry, pp. 14–18.
[99] Voyce, p. 160.

in huge hiatus,
unaware.[100]

The poem tells Caribbean history through a montage of episodes, here celebrating Trinidadian writer John Jacob Thomas, author of *Froudacity* (1889), which rebuts imperialist historian James Anthony Froude (pronounced 'Frood').[101] The 'grammar | in patois' is Thomas' *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (1869). This early study of nation language argues that Trinidadian Creole is no 'mere jumble of French words, uncouthly pronounced, and, at best, pervertedly understood'; rather, it 'exhibits one of the vital characteristics of living tongues in its capability of generating new terms from radicals within itself.'[102] Creole passages occur in some of La Rose's other poems from the same collection. Also, reissues of Thomas' books were among the first volumes New Beacon published. La Rose thus engages with Thomas at three levels: discursive poetry celebrating Thomas' achievements, Creole poems enacting Thomas's ideas about nation language, and republishing the books themselves to reveal Thomas' work in a postcolonial context. This range of approaches foreshadows how republication of historic material, creation of new research, writing of poetry, and political pamphleteering would become integrated in Griffiths' North East dialect studies.

La Rose's long poem's structure, layout, epic scale, and historical synthesis recall Ezra Pound, an important influence for the B.P.R. Meanwhile, La Rose's use of sound – 'proud', through proximity, muddying pronunciation of 'froudacity', drawing out the pun on 'fraudacity' — suggests another great montagist, Langston Hughes. Formally, the poem shares more with American modernists than with younger Caribbean-British poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson or Benjamin Zephaniah; however, La Rose's modernism is utterly rooted in Trinidadian culture and concerns.

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[100] John La Rose (as Anthony La Rose), *Foundations* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1966), pp. 45–46.

[101] Julia Markus, *J. Anthony Froude: The Last Undiscovered Great Victorian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), front matter.

[102] John Jacob Thomas, *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (London: New Beacon Books, 1969), p. 73. Trinidadian Creole in Thomas' day had French, not English, as its main European reference point, due to then-recent periods of French settlement on the island (French is still a major influence). However, Thomas' points about Creole's generative power also apply to its modern, more Anglophone form.

Modernist tendencies also abound in Brathwaite's work. When Brathwaite submitted *Rights of Passage* (1967) to Oxford University Press, poetry editor Jon Stallworthy enjoyed the collection's formal invention: 'short little lines running into each other, which was very unlike what the Movement Poets were doing then. And I could hear through it a clear spoken voice.'[103] Stallworthy meant passages like this:

> Helpless like this
> leader-
> less like this,
> heroless,
> we met you: lover,
> warrior, hater,
> coming through the files
> of the forest
> soft foot
> to soft soil
> of silence:
> we met in the soiled
> tunnel of leaves.
>
> Click lock
> your fire-
> lock fore-
> arm fire-
> arm flashed
> fire and our firm
> fleshed, flame
> warm, fly
> bitten warriors
> fell.[104]

In Nigeria with the British Army in 1952, Stallworthy experienced forest treks with local troops. These journeys were more convivial than the scene in Brathwaite, but Stallworthy later evoked African scenery with similar images: 'we turned into the green tunnel that would bring us [...] to our first camp.'[105] Stallworthy is aligned with conservative tendencies

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[103] Walmsley, 'Interview with Jon Stallworthy in his study at Wolfson College, Oxford, on Wednesday, 30th September 1987', London, George Padmore Institute, CAM/6/74, p. 2.
[104] Brathwaite, 'New World A-Comin'', *Rights of Passage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 8.
[105] Jon Stallworthy, *Singing School: The Making of a Poet* (London: John Murray, 1998), p. 130.

in poetry, writing dismissively about the 1965 International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall ('all your cartridges were blanks').[106] Even some Caribbean poets criticised *Rights of Passage* from a Movement perspective, such as Jamaica's Mervyn Morris (who later recanted): 'If one expects of poets constant verbal energy, *Rights* will disappoint. Its frequent plainness is not the so-called plainness of a poet like, say, Philip Larkin, beneath whose simplest phrase there is often a disciplined cunning'.[107] Perhaps Stallworthy's African experience helped him appreciate Brathwaite's innovations. The sound density in the above stanzas is certainly rich. Urgent rhythm, intensified by short lines and mid-word enjambments, propels repetitions, alliteration and especially pararhymes: 'click' / 'lock', 'fire' / 'fore', 'flashed' / 'fleshed', 'arm' / 'firm' / 'flame' / 'warm'. It is indeed unlike the Movement's poetry, but resembles some B.P.R. writing, like this early Bill Griffiths poem:

Morning s'blue
early, edgy, special
lay like a gun
in await
some sort sun's exploding

castellated
a shitting hole, shat in
(solitary)
holy spirit!
unmother, diseasting
gotten to rolling, bowling
live, wide, wind
loops aerial bear

slipping all out
my dog-brain,
cancer-snouted to
the zagg'd teeth of the sky.[108]

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[106] Stallworthy, 'A Poem about Poems about Vietnam', *Root and Branch* (London and Toronto: Chatto & Windus / The Hogarth Press, 1969), p. 50. For documentation of the Incarnation, see *Wholly Communion*, editor uncredited (London: Lorrimer Films Ltd., 1966).
[107] Mervyn Morris, review of Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite's *Rights of Passage*, *New World Quarterly*, vol. 3 no. 4, 1967, 64.
[108] Bill Griffiths, 'Cycle Two (Dover Borstal)', *Cycles 1–7* (London: Pirate Press and Writers Forum, 1975), n.p. The thirteenth line reads 'loops, an aerial bear' in reprintings.

Griffiths' syntax is looser than Brathwaite's, and he uses some different techniques (like cryptic neologisms), but many features are shared: dense alliteration, assonance, and internal rhyme ('shit' / 'spirit', 'rolling' / 'bowling', 'aerial bear'). The passage contrasts Dover's enclosed borstal with the sky above, framed by the walls' castellations ('zagg'd teeth'), seen from a smoking ('cancer-snouted') inmate's perspective. Jeff Nuttall finds here 'a repeated theme with Griffiths, weather and light and the movement of the planets lifting the disgraced senses'.[109] Without drawing direct equivalence, one detects thematic parallels to Brathwaite's passage, which describes Africans kidnapped into slavery. In both poems, obedience is enforced through violence in the form of a gun and an explosion.

Given such overlaps of technique, it is odd that neither C.A.M. nor the B.P.R. sought wider collaborations with one another during the late '60s and early '70s. There was no artistic reason for modernist-influenced, Caribbean poets to be unwelcome among the B.P.R.; the latter often espoused anti-racist positions.[110] Jonathan Raban observes how U.K. poetry of the late 1960s was fragmented into disparate scenes:

> For just as the centre has congealed in Anglo-American culture, so the right and the left have moved farther apart, defining themselves not against each other but against the consensus in the middle. And certainly the most spectacular energies in recent verse have been devoted to kicking against the common, middle class language of the cultural centre. The pluralism of modern poetics […] is not explicable in terms of either dialogues or dualisms; for it is the expression of radical extremes and alternatives, posed against a centre which, by definition, is shifting, amorphous, vague, able to assimilate all but the most tendentious arguments and attitudes. The soggy grip of centralism has forced the poet who is not prepared to work within it […] to adopt a revolutionary, or arch-conservative style.[111]

C.A.M. and the B.P.R. both self-defined as radical alternatives to a mainstream centre, but took different approaches. Brathwaite wanted C.A.M. to connect Caribbean writers and artists with Britain's existing elite of publishers, critics, and editors. The B.P.R. was outside that hegemony, and later temporarily displaced part of it. Both groups practised strategies of

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[109] Jeff Nuttall, 'Bill Griffiths: An Appreciation', *Poetry Information*, no. 15, 1976, 13–17: 15.
[110] For example, Allen Fisher laments 'fire bombs thrown in Brixton | the Black Panther Unity Bookshop burnt out'; the incident leaves him 'shaking with anger'. Allen Fisher, 'Caenozoic', *Poetry for Schools* (London: Aloes Books, 1980), p. 63; poem dated 1972, revised 1973.
[111] Jonathan Raban, *The Society of the Poem* (London: Harrap, 1971), p. 74.

assimilation, but their plans were not complementary; C.A.M. sought to persuade gatekeepers whom B.P.R. poets wanted to dethrone.

C.A.M.'s aspects that now seem successful and important – collaborations between Caribbean artists and writers – were sometimes by-products of Brathwaite's overtures to the establishment. Trinidadian-British poet Faustin Charles describes the inception of Brookside Press, which published his first collection: 'these Brookside people, […] one of the reasons they came around C.A.M., I think they learnt a lot from the publishers like Heinemann and Longmans and Cape and all those people. They wanted to see, they wanted to learn the methods of publishing, marketing and so on.'[112] Such members attended C.A.M. for talks by mainstream publishers, but instead of then submitting work, studied the professionals' methods and launched Black presses.

C.A.M.'s First Conference at the University of Kent (1967) showed similar contrasts between Brathwaite's plans and the actual result. The academic venue was chosen because '[White] people were not coming over to the [West Indian Students] Centre, because I suspect they were thinking of it as a West Indian enclave.'[113] Even Brathwaite's friend Louis James, a White Caribbeanist, was cautious about visiting the Centre: 'Want to go but with Black Power and ting and ting I don't want to embarrass anyone. […] I don't want someone like you or Andrew [Salkey] getting kicked out for sticking up for me'.[114] The hope was that the university would prove a less intimidating space for White literati. However, the outcome surprised Brathwaite:

> We had dreams of a summit conference between the West Indians and everybody else interested in literature at that time in Britain. [...] I don't think we got many critics, in fact I cannot think of any major British critics turning up. [...] But again it didn't matter. Because what happened at that Conference was that West Indians themselves discovered that they had so much to say to each other at this time of crossroads, that we realised that it might not really have been such a good idea to have attempted both things at the same time. We had no idea that we had so much to say to each other, it was an enormous Conference, you know.[115]

[112] Anne Walmsley, 'Interview with Faustin Charles for C.A.M. in London, 27 January 1987', London, George Padmore Institute, CAM/6/11, p. 5.
[113] Walmsley, 'Interview on C.A.M. with Edward Kamau Brathwaite', p. 8.
[114] Louis James, letter to 'Eddie X' [i.e., Kamau Brathwaite], undated but evidently from summer 1968, London, George Padmore Institute, CAM/3/409.
[115] Walmsley, 'Interview on C.A.M. with Edward Kamau Brathwaite', p. 8.

Brathwaite rejoiced that the attendees gained so much, but these developments undermined the rationale for holding the Conference at a university. In contrast, some members complained that the academic venue might discourage Black working-class audiences. During C.A.M.'s Second Conference (1968), also at Kent, audience member Locksley Comrie (a Black Power advocate) made a proposal:

> Now if you are really the Caribbean Artists Movement – I could tell you a lovely joint we could get, I'm very serious about this. The Caribbean Artists Movement could probably get Brixton Town Hall, and really go down to the people. It's good that we can have old friends taking part in these things, but until we can really make our art functional and collective and committed we are not artists at all.[116]

Radicals like Comrie were preoccupied with organising among the African-Caribbean community. Again, though for different reasons to Brathwaite, they would see no benefit in networking with B.P.R. poets.

Personal relationships also affected access to the establishment. Brathwaite's African connection to Stallworthy, who rarely supported the avant-garde, is one example. John La Rose's relationship to Arts Council Director of Literature Eric Walter White is another. White's deputy, Charles Osborne, advised Brathwaite on applying for Arts Council funds, though Brathwaite never completed the application.[117] Osborne succeeded White as Literature Director, and his conservatism made him divisive; Griffiths' allies came to see Osborne as exercising 'narrow and personally-biased policy, to the exclusion of vast areas of literature not approved of by the director himself.'[118]

Disagreements with Mottram and other Revivalists precipitated Osborne's closer oversight of the Poetry Society's General Council in 1977, triggering mass resignation of Council members. Mottram's contract at *Poetry Review* expired soon after, bringing the B.P.R.'s establishment sojourn to a close.[119] (The poets remained active and are now more influential than ever.) Such networks of friendship and antagonism affected the two groups' contrasting strategies of assimilation.

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[116] *Second CAM Conference – University of Kent*, conference transcript by Anne Walmsley, London, George Padmore Institute, CAM/4/2/2, p. 34.
[117] Charles Osborne, Letter to Kamau Brathwaite (as Edward Brathwaite), 20 September and 6 October 1967, London, George Padmore Institute, CAM/3/198 and CAM/3/227.
[118] Griffiths *et al.*, 'Poets and the Arts Council of Great Britain', *Lobby Press*, no. 6, 1979, 2–5: 2.
[119] Barry, pp. 96–103.

C.A.M. in London petered out around 1972. Shortly after the Second Conference, Brathwaite returned to his teaching post at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. James Berry and fellow Jamaican writer Donald Hinds stepped in, but it proved difficult to balance C.A.M.'s role as an informal forum with the structure required for successful events; without regular programming, momentum dissipated.[120] However, members' projects, many inspired by C.A.M., continued. Notably, the journal (and later press) *Savacou*, originally an organ of the movement, was maintained by Brathwaite for many years. During a 1972 interview, Andrew Salkey described C.A.M.'s ethos: 'The only thing we've ever planned is that we always look as if we're disappearing. You know why? Our history has been full of authoritarians. But the work gets done.'[121]

This also speaks to the B.P.R.'s experiences. C.A.M. began in reaction to Caribbean writers being side-lined through institutional racism, while aesthetic conservatism suppressed the B.P.R. Sadly, in the 1960s, the two groups' invisibility was mutual. Neither movement distinguished the other's participants from a notional 'mainstream', certainly not to the point of developing alliances.

The lack of interaction diminished both. B.P.R. inroads could have brought Caribbean poets' work to wider audiences, for example within universities, where figures like Mottram had teaching positions; as it was, U.K. academia proved slow to recognise Black and Caribbean authors. Meanwhile, the Revival's frequently difficult writing could intimidate readers; C.A.M. poets' more vernacular style would have combatted this. The two groups worked at cross-purposes when they could have done much together to further progressive poetics and politics.

This is not simply a question of co-operating against an amorphous mainstream. Dismantling the centre is insufficient for establishing care between disparate groups; poets also need to engage each other without relying on a centre to either mediate conversations through itself, or to unite resistance against it. Chapter 2 of this thesis considers how Brathwaite's philosophy of 'tidalectics' could help English poets listen to and learn from Brathwaite's poetry, not to mention other forms of creativity from different cultures.

[120] Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, pp. 283–300.

[121] Adrian Mitchell, 'Adrian Mitchell talks to Jamaican novelist Andrew Salkey and Trinidadian Poet John La Rose', *The Guardian*, 4 April 1972, cited in Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, p. 299.

The poetry scene's diversity improved marginally during the 1970s. Michael Horovitz, co-organiser of the International Poetry Incarnation, broadened his inclusivity and was dubbed 'Herovitz Horovitz' by Brathwaite for occasions 'where he invites West Indians to take part in readings in Westminster Abbey, in the Poets' Corner.'[122] Montserratian poet E.A. Markham (then operating as Paul St. Vincent) performed in 1972 at the reading series *Future Events*, organised by B.P.R. poets Allen Fisher and Ulli Freer.[123] Markham also appeared on a panel with Allen Fisher and Roy Fisher at the 1979 Cambridge Poetry Festival.[124] Salkey published work alongside Cobbing and Mottram in *Poetry Information*, a review journal based at the National Poetry Centre.[125] If we also consider Black poets from non-Caribbean backgrounds, there is London-based, African-American poet Alfred Celestine, whose debut pamphlet *Confessions of Nat Turner* (1978) was issued by B.P.R. poet John Welch's The Many Press.[126] Brathwaite and Edwin Morgan had a reunion of sorts, after their remote collaboration on *Penguin Modern Poets 15*, as they read together on a 1978 T.V. programme.[127] James Berry reconnected with the Revival, and was encouraged by Mottram, who published Berry's nation language poetry twice in *Poetry Review*.[128] Mottram also offered to write an introduction for Berry's collection *Chain of Days*, which Berry had submitted to Secker and Warburg (this came to nothing, as the publisher apparently declined the book).[129]

Such moments were exceptional; the (White) experimental and Black poetry scenes remained parallel but separate for many more years. However, the moments of successful

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[122] Walmsley, 'Interview on C.A.M. with Edward Kamau Brathwaite', p. 13.

[123] Hampson, 'King's College and the PCL Poetry Conferences', *Clasp: Late Modernist Poetry in London in the 1970s*, ed. by Hampson and Ken Edwards (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2016), pp. 70–74, p. 74.

[124] Richard Tabor, '£9 – all in – the Cambridge Poetry Festival', *Lobby Press*, no. 8, 1979, p. 2. The two Fishers are not related.

[125] Andrew Salkey, 'Meeting Lawrence Ferlinghetti, San Francisco, December, 1974', *Poetry Information*, no. 14, 1975–76, 57–59.

[126] Alfred Celestine, *Weightless Word: Selected Poems*, ed. David Miller and Richard Leigh (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2017), pp. 9–26. Health issues restricted Celestine's participation in poetry: his follow-up, *Passing Eliot on the Street*, did not emerge until 2003.

[127] Kamau Brathwaite and Edwin Morgan, untitled audio recording from T.V., 9 July 1978, King's College London, MOTTRAM: 14/1/211 Side B.

[128] James Berry, poems in *Poetry Review*, vol. 63 no. 3, 1972, 253–61, and *Poetry Review,* vol. 66 no. 2, 1976, 92–96.

[129] James Berry, letter to Eric Mottram, 23 October 1975, King's College London, MOTTRAM 4/2/52. The collection finally appeared ten years later, with no introduction. See James Berry, *Chain of Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

collaboration that enlivened the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s still embody what the avant-garde can accomplish when it defines itself not as a societal network, but as a plurality of experimental poetics, and as a set of transformative goals: method and ethos, not ethnicity. Sometimes this recognition could be as simple as Mary Levien inviting James Berry to Hendon Writers Circle, or Bob Cobbing selling tickets for a Brathwaite reading. To genuinely challenge U.K. poetry's limitations, though, requires poets, publishers, and organisers to maintain an ongoing state of self-questioning and discovery, not allowing social or poetic 'comfort zones' to ossify into exclusionary habits.

In this chapter's second half, I consider an early example of what this might look like, examining in detail an event that occurred in 1975, and that did enable significant conversations between Caribbean poets and the British Poetry Revival. As this section's investigation has shown, the occasion did not immediately translate into flourishing collaboration between these groups. It did, however, allow White British poets to reflect on Caribbean poetics, and studying this juncture enables rich connections to be made between the poetries of Kamau Brathwaite and Bill Griffiths.

1.3. 'syncopation of the archipelago': Kamau Brathwaite and Bill Griffiths at the *Poetry of the Americas* Conference

In the letter where he thanks Eric Mottram for offering to introduce one of his poetry collections, James Berry adds, 'I look forward to seeing you at Poetry of the Americas.'[130] He refers to a conference that ran from Monday 27 October to Saturday 1 November 1975 at the Polytechnic of Central London (now the University of Westminster). Poets from North America, Latin America and the Caribbean convened for six days of talks, readings, and discussion. American Studies academic Chris Brookeman masterminded proceedings, aided by Eric Mottram, who introduced some presentations. Brathwaite gave the opening paper, and Bill Griffiths was among many B.P.R. poets attending. Mottram's archive at King's College, London, holds digitised recordings of the conference, which highlight commonalities between Brathwaite's and Griffiths' attitudes to resistance in language. This verifies the shared priorities identified in Griffiths' 2005 response to Sean O'Brien.

This thematic confluence is striking, considering that Mottram and Brathwaite both studied at Pembroke College, Cambridge, in the early 1950s. Their times there overlapped, and they shared at least one undergraduate friend, poet Ted Hughes.[131] Brathwaite recalls how Hughes 'spent much of my last day in Cambridge chatting in | my room'.[132] Mottram was Hughes' second-year supervisor: 'Supervisions were heated, argumentative, energising, extending well beyond the appointed hour's length.'[133] Later, Mottram praised Hughes' poems: 'I think your view of poetry in England a shade pessimistic; Ted Hughes has just had a new volume out'.[134] (Hughes' and Mottram's tastes diverged soon after.) It seems improbable that Brathwaite and Mottram did not meet at Pembroke, but neither mentions the other when listing Cambridge acquaintances.[135] Furthermore, Mottram's documentation

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[130] James Berry, letter to Eric Mottram, 23 October 1975. Berry's underlining.
[131] Mottram was an undergraduate 1947–50, received an M.A. in 1951, and 'went back to Cambridge briefly' in 1952, when he supervised Hughes – Mottram, *Live All You Can*, ed. by Peterjon Skelt (Twickenham: Solaris, 1992), p. 20. Brathwaite was an undergraduate 1950–53, then got his Diploma of Education in 1954. Hughes was an undergraduate 1951–54.
[132] Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, p. 59.
[133] Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: An Unauthorised Life* (London: William Collins, 2015, rep. 2016), p. 73.
[134] Eric Mottram, letter to T. Wignesan, 19 March 1960, *Alive in Parts of This Century: Eric Mottram at 70*, ed. by Peterjon Skelt and Yasmin Skelt (Twickenham and Wakefield: North and South, 1994), p. 19.
[135] Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, p. 59; Mottram, *Live All You Can*, pp. 16–20.

or recordings of the conference give no hint of previously meeting Brathwaite. If their paths crossed at Pembroke, they made little impression on each other. This is an early example of missed opportunities that later marked relationships between C.A.M. and the B.P.R. That Mottram and Brathwaite could frequent the same college for over a year without becoming acquainted, shows how easily potential connections can be bypassed. *Poetry of the Americas* was a chance to remedy such losses.

The conference proved a major moment of conversation between poetic avant-gardes in the Caribbean and the U.K., after years of not registering one another's work. Brathwaite brought his nation language ideas to wider attention, stimulating discussion so that Griffiths could articulate his own thoughts on linguistic resistance. However, the conference has not previously been historicised, as recordings have only recently become available. The new accessibility of Brathwaite's 1975 presentation enables the twin methods of close reading and social history to reconcile. Close reading sometimes misses societal and performative contexts that determine meaning, while historical analysis can neglect poetic minutiae. In contrast, a fine-grained reading of this event's archive, including questions and asides, accomplishes both goals. The process discovers not only what was said, but the impact on the community of listeners, repercussions for conversations later in the conference, and unforeseen connections between attendees. Of course, what the archive does not record, or merely intimates, may be as important as the verifiable history.

Monday to Friday featured evening sessions only, followed by a day of talks and readings on Saturday. Contributors included Homero Aridjis from Mexico, Rodolfo Hinostroza from Peru, and Jerome Rothenberg and Michael McClure from the U.S.A. Caribbean poets were well-represented: Brathwaite gave his talk, Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén provided a recorded presentation for Wednesday, and on Friday, Linton Kwesi Johnson and Guyanese poet Martin Carter joined Brathwaite to perform. Other Caribbean writers attended: there is Berry's likely presence, and Brathwaite was recorded greeting Bajan author George Lamming; there may have been others.[136] The conference was the most

[136] Brathwaite, 'The Literature of the Caribbean' [audio recording], King's College London, MOTTRAM 14-3-1A/2A, side 1, 07:20. All quotes from the conference recordings are my transcriptions.

substantial intersection so far between British and Caribbean innovative poets, and was ground-breaking in platforming Black poets within U.K. academia.

Brathwaite's talk, 'The Literature of the Caribbean', lasted over an hour, and was extemporised: 'I've given myself two pages only of notes.'[137] He schooled his audience in the history of Caribbean society and poetry, from pre-Columbian times, through slavery and colonialism to the then-recent independence of nations like Jamaica and Barbados. The content overlaps with prose works on Caribbean culture that he composed during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly his monograph *Contradictory Omens* (1974), but is remixed for audience members lacking Caribbean experience. Three points from the talk are particularly important, as they played into later discussion among the B.P.R. poets. Firstly, Brathwaite argued that Caribbean poetics differ fundamentally from those of the American mainland:

> You have present in the Caribbean the notion of fragmentation, the archipelago as the broken tops of a mountain range [...] And therefore the people who live alongside these great continents have this counterpointal kind of sensibility. There instead of the continental concept, the hum of the mass, the movement, we have the syncopation of the archipelago.[138]

The continental mindset's 'hum of the mass, the movement' recalls Charles Olson's belief that epic narrative's thrust through space is fundamental to American identity: 'caravel, prairie schooner, national road, railway, plane. Now in the Pacific THE CARRIER. Trajectory. We must go over space, or we wither.'[139] For Brathwaite, in contrast, Caribbean poetics demands ecological balance between elements of a work, a network of relations as though between archipelagic isles. This accords with Edouard Glissant's view of the Caribbean as 'A multiple series of relationships. […] Ordinarily, insularity is treated as a form of isolation, a neurotic reaction to place. However, in the Caribbean each island embodies openness.'[140] Brathwaite's trilogy-length sequences of interconnected poems from the 1960s to 1980s exemplify this approach in writing. *Contradictory Omens* develops the idea that archipelagic and continental geographies might nurture radically different poetics,

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137 Brathwaite, 'The Literature of the Caribbean, Side A, 01:07.

138 Brathwaite, 'The Literature of the Caribbean', Side A, 09:45.

139 Charles Olson, 'Call Me Ishmael', *Collected Prose*, ed. by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 101. Olson's capitals.

140 Glissant, 'Cross-Cultural Poetics', *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. 139.

suggesting that 'the Caribbean environment demands its own style, vocab, its own norms; […] and that this creole aesthetic cannot be adequately developed outside the Caribbean'.[141]

A second point is that, for most Caribbean people, ancestry is elsewhere. There is a physical distance from it, and for enslaved Africans' descendants, the planters' attempted suppression of African culture and language. Consequently:

> [...] we the people of the Caribbean have had to nativise what we have received or what we brought with us. We have created ancestors in alien soil. That is a new creative process. We have done this, but at the same time that we were doing it, it was submerged. This creation of the native ancestor [...] was not a visible, official creation, but was a subdominant, submerged, even invisible creation.[142]

Brathwaite here draws on Jamaican writer Sylvia Wynter's concept of 'indigenization', a 'secretive process by which the dominated culture survives; and resists', which Brathwaite has paraphrased as 'the process of spiritual possession of the landscape'.[143] In other words, Caribbean people drew on retained aspects of African culture, and their own creativity, to repair historical damage and generate new heritage that asserted Caribbean belonging. This creativity has hitherto been submerged, because during slavery and colonial rule, imperial establishments dismissed it in favour of European aesthetics. The new ancestors' emergence into visibility has been a slow process accompanying erosion of colonialism.

Thirdly, Brathwaite emphasises tension between two cultural energies. One is creolisation, the way different bodies of heritage from Africa, Europe, Asia and persisting Indigenous presence interact in the Caribbean, sharing their cultural elements. As Brathwaite had previously noted, creolisation occurs 'where a colonial polity reacts, as a whole, to external metropolitan pressures, and at the same time to internal adjustments made necessary by the juxtaposition of master and slave, élite and labourer, in a culturally heterogenous relationship.'[144] Participating cultures may fructify each other, spurring new creativity, but instead, one culture might gain hegemony and submerge other heritages. The

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[141] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona: Savacou Publications, 1974), p. 5.
[142] Brathwaite, 'The Literature of the Caribbean', side 1, 13:25.
[143] Sylvia Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica', *Jamaica Journal*, vol. 4 no. 2, 1970, 34–48: 39; Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 62.
[144] Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820*, p. xxxi.

danger is counteracted by what Brathwaite calls 'the Maroon element', or maronage.[145] Maroons are Africans (or their descendants) who escaped slavery and established free settlements away from plantations; such communities persist on several islands and the American mainland. Maroons, Brathwaite says, 'are the reservoirs of the culture […] Not contaminated to any significant degree by the plantation'.[146] They retain African culture to a greater extent than their neighbours:

> And what we have here is the recognition [...] by the writer, by the creative person, that there is a reservoir within the area. There are people who, because they had cut themselves off, retain ancestral knowledges which become increasingly important. And so you have a movement back towards the Maroon, the Maroon who lives in the mountain, who lives in the swampland, begins to be recognised, begins to be encouraged to come forward.[147]

Wider definitions of maronage have historically applied; the French 'distinguished true maroons from […] *petit marronage* – running away by an individual or for only a short term.'[148] However, the broadness of Brathwaite's usage exceeds this precedent: elsewhere, he describes a 'partial/ambiguous separateness' developed when resistances conclude in 'disengagement of the subordinate from the confrontational relationship either completely, or through treaty'.[149] For example, he regards Rastafari as a 'modern Maroon movement' whose members realise that 'to be themselves, they could not afford to be contaminated by colonial materialism. And they set out to create for themselves a Maroon personality.'[150] In Brathwaite's view, Rastafarians have (at least partially) withdrawn from creolisation to consolidate a distinctive culture. The faith distrusts the Caribbean's Europeanised governments, seeing them as extensions of the imperial 'Babylon System', and seeks neo-African ways of self-sufficient living.

Given historical and economic power imbalances between African and Euro-American cultures, the seemingly contradictory impulses of creolisation and maronage complement each other. Complete openness to all influences, including hegemonic ones,

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[145] 'Maronage' has variant spellings, even within Brathwaite's work. I use his spelling from *Contradictory Omens*, p. 62.
[146] Brathwaite, 'The Literature of the Caribbean', side 2, 09:53.
[147] Brathwaite, 'The Literature of the Caribbean', side 2, 10:15.
[148] Cracton, p. 61.
[149] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 62.
[150] Brathwaite, 'The Literature of the Caribbean', side 2, 13:10.

would allow hegemony to overwhelm Caribbean creativity; new colonialisms would emerge. Maronage resists that outcome. Chapter 2.1 further discusses the two forces, examining their relationship to the Caribbean's archipelagic geography, how they underlie Brathwaite's 'tidalectic' philosophy of cultural exchange, and how these concepts might apply to dialect poetics in England.

A response to Brathwaite's talk occurred during the conference's concluding Saturday. This day was better attended than preceding evenings, and Mottram summarised papers that some had missed. He spent much longer on Brathwaite than any other content, encapsulating the Bajan's arguments accurately and enthusiastically:

> It is an Antillean or island culture, off the great landmasses of the politically massed continents, off the Atlantic. That is, it's an island archipelago culture, and it has what he called, so interesting this for me, a counterpointed sensibility. […] Then he said that, for the Caribbean, ancestors have to be imported, they're not residential. And that new ancestors, which is a nice phrase, new ancestors are to be created in native soil, partly out of the invisible non-peoples of the past – that is, the slaves and their submerged culture, which is now being reinvigorated to see where the vestiges are […] So the result, he says, is an African and Indian infrastructure within the European, which includes local language and local forms in songs, writings, ritual. It's partly inherited, partly experimental, and deeply related […][151]

This faithfully represents Brathwaite's key ideas about creole creativity in the Caribbean: 'syncopation of the archipelago', overlapping of cultural influences, and recuperation of submerged heritage. Later that day, Mottram paid Brathwaite more compliments. During a panel on translation, discussion turned to the notion of a 'false centre' in culture, from which establishment forces might dictate aesthetics to other zones on a notional periphery. Mottram noted, 'this is something that Mr. Brathwaite was very strong on'.[152] That the imperial metropole is a false or undeserving centre is vital for Brathwaite and other postcolonial thinkers. However, the B.P.R. might appreciate it too, considering their self-definition against mainstream hegemony.

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[151] 'Panel on Translation' [audio recording], King's College London, MOTTRAM 14-1-120, Side A, 04:20. Admittedly, Mottram missed some sessions. On Wednesday, for example, he stayed home and watched the film *Carry On Cleo* (1964) on T.V. – Mottram, diary entry for 29 October 1975, King's College London, MOTTRAM 1/1/21. However, his attendance pattern itself signals his enthusiasms.
[152] 'Panel on Translation', Side A, 23:48. Despite the compliment, Mottram mistitles Dr. Brathwaite.

However, Mottram's perspective is more complex than his public statements suggest. In fact, his diary entry for the conference's opening Monday dismisses 'Edward Brathwaite on "The Literature of the Caribbean" – a rather appalling display of cocky black "scholarship" + utterly conservative politics. No wonder the West Indies is in such a shocking condition.'[153] While Mottram may not have uttered these thoughts outside the diary, the racism here is obvious, notably in the dismissal of Black scholarship and the word 'cocky', which implies that an acclaimed poet, doctor of history, and experienced university lecturer, only six years younger than Mottram, was an upstart. However, the real surprise is that Mottram dismisses Brathwaite's politics as 'utterly conservative', when Brathwaite's anti-colonial agenda seems radical.

One could speculate on what prompted Mottram's misinterpretation. Was his avant-gardism revolted by Brathwaite's discourse on how creole poetics is exemplified by Barbadian poet H.A. Vaughan's formally conservative sonnet 'Revelation' (1945)?[154] Did Brathwaite's argument that Caribbean Christianity fused 'African and primitive Christian elements', and that 'it is out of these churches that the political movements have come', provoke the secularist Mottram?[155] Was Brathwaite's maronage, insisting on marginalised communities' need to guard against hegemony, at odds with the conference's ethos of absolute cultural openness (which makes sense as a strategy for counteracting imperialism within a hegemonic culture)?[156]

Complicating matters further is how diary entries may be contingent efforts at defining one's views or oneself, rather than concretised statements of opinion. In Irina Paperno's words, 'the time told continuously, in private, allows the diarist to attain knowledge (and hence possession and control) of the self: the narrative template of such a diary allows a continuous self-construction'.[157] Since Mottram's diaries mainly record

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[153] Mottram, diary entry for 27 October 1975, King's College, London, MOTTRAM 1/1/21.
[154] Brathwaite, 'Literature of the Caribbean', Side 1, 35:02.
[155] Brathwaite, 'Literature of the Caribbean', Side 2, 26:02.
[156] In the conference booklet, Mottram argues: '"Men of one country must show love for each other", but that unifying ability cannot today be national. Translation crosses boundaries – the effort itself transgresses global competition, and it requires understanding, scholarship and empathic penetration.' – Mottram, 'Entrances to the Americas: Poetry, Ecology, Translation', *Poetry of the Americas* conference booklet (London: Polytechnic of Central London, 1975), n.p., citing 'The Red Cloth', *Vietnamese Folk Poetry*, trans. by John Balaban (Greensboro: Unicorn Press, 1974), p. 22.
[157] Irina Paperno, 'What Can Be Done with Diaries?', *The Russian Review*, vol. 63 no. 4, 2004. 561–573: 566.

responses to books, music, films and meals, his diaristic project seems of this nature, with a focus on defining his personal aesthetics.

The provisional quality of diarised thought may manifest in the difference between Mottram's denigration of Brathwaite and his later, public enthusiasm. Perhaps conversations or further reflection helped Mottram see how Brathwaite's poetics complemented his own. Alternatively, Mottram might just have acted professionally by masking antipathy. Another possibility is dissonance between Mottram's rationalised politics and his ingrained instincts. Intellectually, he understood the moral imperative to fight racism. His essays on Malcolm X and poet Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones), plus his poems celebrating Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus and Jimi Hendrix, show appreciation of Black thinkers, writers and musicians.[158] His publication in *Poetry Review* of Black poets James Berry, Clarence Major and David Henderson was part of a wider, multicultural, internationalist agenda. These principles incurred hate mail from reactionary readers; the conversation at *Poetry of the Americas* reveals that Mottram found the letters distressing.[159] Comparing his issues of *Poetry Review* to other British journals in the 1970s – *P.N. Review*, say – illustrates how much further he was pushing cross-cultural content. He could have done more to support writers of colour, but his allyship, and his sacrifice of mental health, were not trivial. Likewise, while his intellectual engagement with Black culture predominantly involved African-Americans rather than the Caribbean and Black British communities near his South London home, this bias might reflect his job as an American Studies academic. One of Mottram's proudest moments was when, at a club in 1965 Chicago, Muddy Waters dedicated a song to him ('Can you imagine? It was beautiful. I felt so good.'), and he writes contemptuously of White racists encountered in Mississippi during the same trip to the U.S.[160]

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[158] Mottram, 'The Black Overreacher: Malcolm X' [unpublished essay typescript, 1965], King's College London, MOTTRAM 9/2/53; Mottram, 'Towards the Alternative: The Prose of LeRoi Jones', *Black Fiction: New Studies in the Afro-American Novel since 1945*, ed. by A. Robert Lee (London: Vision, 1980), pp. 97–135; Mottram, *Elegies* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Galloping Dog Press, 1981), pp. 69–74 and p. 81.

[159] Before summarising the conference, Mottram describes 'an enormous amount of opposition that seems to think that I'm the kind of man that pokes my nose in all the time, and where he's not invited, and I'm over-exposed and generally should be much quieter. […] Well, I've had it just about enough'. An audience member, presumably a friend aware of hostile correspondence, calls out, 'They weren't even typed very well, don't worry.' Mottram replies, 'But it's been going on for the last month, you see.' – 'Panel on Translation', Side A, 00:24.

[160] Mottram, *Live All You Can*, p. 32.

Despite all this, Mottram grew up while racism was (even more) rife within British culture. It would be surprising if this atmosphere had not infiltrated his thoughts. His case demonstrates a dichotomy: intellectual engagement with Black, anti-racist literature, in tension with internalised prejudices of his time. His shift in attitude towards Brathwaite could be read generously as this struggle's outcome, with the diary externalising Mottram's initial, emotional responses for revaluation into the more considered opinions shared at the conference's Saturday session. Alternatively, he may have intellectually grasped the excitement of Brathwaite's poetics, but due to non-rational factors (perhaps including prejudice), could not feel this at an emotional level. In any case, it would be simplistic to assume that Mottram's private writings 'more truly' reflect his views than do his public statements or scholarly labours. Nor does his public praise of Brathwaite depend for its value upon his interior thoughts. Rather, its merit lies in conversations that it stimulated at *Poetry of the Americas*, and in connections that it might suggest to perusers of Mottram's archive, decades later.

The archived conversation continues as B.P.R. participant Paige Mitchell volunteers that 'English has a kind of quality of seepage, it's a span of languages in the first place. I mean, if you wanted to describe it as a centre, all you could say is that the centre's continually transformed by [...] accommodating or assimilating these other things.'[161] This relates to Brathwaite's nation language subversion of standard English, but also to the event's form as recorded on Mottram's cassettes, which include uncertainties, self-corrections, sentences trailing away, overlapping voices, unidentifiable questioners, and one person speaking on behalf of another. This differs from the static, authoritative documentation considered in the previous section. The recordings sustain Brathwaite's tension between creolisation and maronage, as overlapping and interweaving voices are fixed for posterity on tape.

Shortly after Mitchell's contribution, Bill Griffiths spoke up. While no evidence proves or disproves his presence during Brathwaite's paper, he certainly heard Mottram's summary. Griffiths outlined his own ideas on translation:

[161] 'Panel on Translation', Side A, 28:00. Thanks to Paige Mitchell and Allen Fisher for confirming, via personal correspondence, that this speaker was Mitchell.

> So what I'm looking for in a translation, or a work presented from somewhere else, is the contrast and the difference [...] not how I can make it assimilatable, how I can bring it into English or reduce it into English, but looking specifically for those differences. And those differences have not necessarily got to be the product of a national government forcing separate culture, but can also grow out naturally in different, sort of, folk cultures, and even just from the different ideas that people have.[162]

Griffiths alludes to a method he had developed in collaboration with medievalist John Porter, a speaker on the panel. In an essay published earlier that year, Griffiths explains the approach with reference to Porter's then-unpublished version of *Beowulf*: 'leave in the original language what cannot be translated, the sound, the rhythm; bring into English what cannot be got from the original text; the meaning; print in parallel columns. And trust to a public surfeited with translations, to take the opportunity of reading the only version of the poem that will never be out of date: the original version.'[163] The translations preserve word order and syntax from the originals, while using modern English lexicon. The effects are complex, surprisingly political, and relate strongly to Brathwaite's ideas about culture and resistance, as explored at *Poetry of the Americas*.

[162] 'Panel on Translation', Side A, 13:30. The speaker is clearly Griffiths. Mottram calls him 'Bill', and identifies him as co-translator of *Gisli's Saga: The Verses*, trans. by Griffiths and John Porter (London: Consortium of Little Presses / Pirate Press, 1974).

[163] Griffiths, 'Approaches to Translation – 1', *Modern Poetry in Translation*, no. 25, 1975, 19–22: 21. Porter's translation was published as *Beowulf*, trans. by Porter (London: Pirate Press, 1975).

1.4. 'a-rain of-riches/annihilating-force': Bill Griffiths' Translations as Artificial Nation Language

By retaining syntax from their sources, and hence resisting assimilation by totalising norms, Bill Griffiths' 1970s translations share the maronage inherent in Kamau Brathwaite's emphasis on nation language's difference from standard English. Bob Cobbing notes the decolonial potential of Griffiths' translation techniques, asserting that 'The attempt to reduce all foreign literature to a digestible English form is pure imperialism', and that Griffiths avoids this.[164] There is a methodological lesson here: when drawing Griffiths and Brathwaite into conversation, divergences are as important as similarities, because difference is essential to the maronage that incubates these seeds of possible culture. For both poets, folk creativity produces thriving cultures and linguistic forms without permission from political elites. The key difference is that, whereas Griffiths sees cultural distinctiveness 'grow out naturally in different […] folk cultures', flourishing in authoritarianism's absence, Brathwaite's nation language emerges from beneath the atrocious imposition of slavery.[165]

Structural similarities endure, despite the different stakes. When Griffiths brings into English the distinctive features of a text's original tongue, resisting immediate comprehension, this resembles how Caribbean nation language, in preserving structures of West African sound and syntax, creates difference between non-local audiences' linguistic expectations and the history embedded in its own voice.

Griffiths and Porter applied their process to translating Old English together and individually, and collaborated on Old Icelandic; Griffiths also translated Old Welsh poetry. However, the technique's impact is even clearer in a translation whose source is farther still from modern English: Griffiths' *The Story of the Flood from Gilgamesh*, published in the year of *Poetry of the Americas*, translates the Akkadian of a seventh-century-B.C.E. tablet from the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal's library.[166] Here Utnapishtim, the 'Babylonian Noah', recounts how his ark helped him survive a globally devastating flood. Verso pages transliterate Akkadian, while the recto has Griffiths' translation:

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[164] Bob Cobbing, 'Bill Griffiths', *Poetry Information*, no. 12/13, 1975, 73–74: 74.
[165] 'Panel on Translation', Side A, 13:30.
[166] Griffiths, 'Introduction', *The Story of the Flood from Gilgamesh*, trans. by Griffiths (London: Consortium of Little Presses / Pirate Press, 1975), n.p.

89 stated-time the arrived
90 when he-who-orders unease at evening showers-down a-rain of-riches/annihilating-force
91 the-day/weather I-watched development-its
92 the-weather to see fear I-had
93 I-went on board of-the-ship, battened-up the-entrance
94 for sealing the ship to Puzur-Amurri (the) boatman
95 the-vessel I-handed-over with contents-its[167]

Brackets enclose words which, needed in English, are redundant in Akkadian, while hyphens show where a cluster of English terms represents one Akkadian word. Clive Bush argues that this gives 'access to an unfamiliar poetic form'; he stresses 'the oral quality of poetry which in turn reminds us of its origins in inter-active public theatre'.[168] This echoes the importance that Brathwaite ascribes to interactive performance in nation language poetry (explored in Chapter 3.1), but the translation also emphasises differences between Akkadian and English, not only in poetic form, but regarding epistemes encoded in each language. Alien nomenclature is obvious (who is Puzur-Amurri?), as are some concepts (how are 'riches' and 'annihilating force' interchangeable?). However, Griffiths' conservation of the original's verbal structure is more disorienting. The translation resembles how ancient Assyrians might speak if magically bequeathed English vocabulary but no English syntax. One thinks of Wittgenstein's dictum that 'If a lion could talk, we could not understand him.'[169] The translation alters English to accommodate the Assyrian *Weltanschauung*, highlighting the arbitrariness of thought-structures embedded in standard English. Griffiths lets the poetry stand as a product of its source culture rather than appropriating it outright. The text remains separated from modern readers by linguistic difference. Like Utnapishtim on his ark, it is safely sealed away, but poetry drifts across to us aboard Griffiths' translation. In this sense, the boatman Puzur-Amurri is Griffiths himself.

As an example of preserved difference, consider Griffiths' 'development-its' and 'contents-its'. When Western European languages like Latin or English convey ownership by

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[167] *The Story of the Flood from Gilgamesh*, n.p. Griffiths' presentation includes line numbers.
[168] Clive Bush, *Out of Dissent: A Study of Five Contemporary British Poets* (London: Talus Editions, 1997), p. 216.
[169] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott, Ltd., 1974), p. 223.

declining a noun, an affix typically modifies the possessor, not the item possessed. In contrast, many Semitic languages – including Akkadian, Arabic, Hebrew, and Neo-Aramaic – show ownership by applying an affix to the possessed item, as seen in Griffiths' text.[170] To those unversed in such languages, the idea that correct declension of a noun can indicate that it is 'its' requires revaluation of how words operate. If language represents possession as a property of the owned thing, not a status of the owner, this might communicate a different attitude to the accumulation of goods. It could suggest that ownership does not valorise the owner, but is done by, not to, possessions. This has implications for hierarchies of class: why esteem the wealthy, if their wealth is irrelevant to any quality of their persons?

When close-reading grammar in this way, one must beware treating it as an information source on actual societies: the Assyrian Empire, far from an egalitarian, anarchist utopia, was a stratified culture where 'criteria for class division were power and wealth' and 'At the top of the scale was the king and at the bottom were the slaves'.[171] This reinforces a point from the thesis' Introduction: close reading demands attention to not just the textual microcosm, but the societal macrocosm. However, we can instead read Griffiths' translation as a poetic intervention into modern culture. In that context, the possessive affixes are a choice with specific meaning, not a naturalised part of discourse (as in Akkadian). The grammatical feature thereby carries stronger meaning in the translation than in the original. It also complements the translation's other idiosyncrasies, like the equation between 'riches' and 'annihilating-force', since in Griffiths' anarchistic, anti-capitalist worldview (implied by the affixes' locations), these phenomena are identical. Nor does this contradict his insistence on his translations providing access to the original: in encountering Utnapishtim, the hero-king Gilgamesh learns that wealth and power cannot overcome mortality, so Griffiths' version highlights a theme of the original.[172]

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[170] John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian (Third Edition)* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), pp. 84–89; David Cowan, *An Introduction to Modern Literary Arabic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958); pp. 49–51; Lewis Glinert, *The Grammar of Modern Hebrew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 30–31; Geoffrey Khan, *A Grammar of Neo-Aramaic: The Dialect of the Jews of Arbel* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 84.

[171] A.K. Grayson, 'Assyrian Civilisation', *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. III Part 2: The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, ed. by John Boardman et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, rep. 2003), pp. 194–228: p. 206.

[172] Expanding on Griffiths' engagement with power relations in *Gilgamesh*, Philip Terry's *Dictator* translates the epic into the 1,500-word vocabulary of the artificial business dialect Globish. For Terry, 'it is entirely appropriate to use this to translate a text originally written in cuneiform which itself, as a

Griffiths thus manufactures a creole English whose relationship to Akkadian reflects that of nation language to African speech. The Akkadian-English's impact resembles how Brathwaite's poems affect non-Caribbean readers, recalling Caribbean nation language's movement 'from a purely African form to a form which was African but which was adapted to the new environment and adapted to the cultural imperative of the European languages.'[173] Brathwaite's non-standard syntax conveys distinctive culture and alternative thought-modes, informed by African legacies, creolisation, and folk creativity. Bajan and Jamaican voices are accessed via the poetry, but their enisled independence survives.

Differences remain. The translation is not actual nation language, since there has been no real, historical community where English became mediated through Akkadian syntax.[174] The translation's distinctive features result from Griffiths' labour, not from organic development of speech among a group. Owing to this artificial genesis, the translation is less politically subversive than Caribbean nation language, since its means of expression were never used by subaltern populations to conserve heritage during struggles for agency.

However, these nation languages – one artificial, one organic – both use linguistic difference to resist the standardised speech of an inherently oppressive, political centre. As advocated earlier and further explored in Chapter 2, Brathwaite and Griffiths both prefer decentred culture in which diverse communities interact without metropolitan imposition – the 'syncopation of the archipelago' that Brathwaite celebrated at *Poetry of the Americas*. Stuart Hall elaborates on translation's role in this decentring. Alluding to the etymology of 'translation' as 'bringing across', he uses the term to denote wider processes of cultural

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script, emerged from the need to record business transactions'. Emphasising the theme of trade, he 'links this epic to more recent wars in and around Iraq, where the commodity in question has not been wood, but oil' – Philip Terry, *Dictator: A New Version of the Epic of Gilgamesh* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2018), p. 170.

[173] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 7.

[174] Assyrian communities survive in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and an extensive diaspora. However, modern Assyrians speak Neo-Aramaic, a complex of West Semitic languages or dialects. Neo-Aramaic was influenced by Akkadian (an East Semitic language), but its structures differ. Interculturation with English occurs, especially among the diaspora, but largely brings English-derived vocabulary into Neo-Aramaic. The result is nation language, but represents the reverse of Griffiths' approach, which renders another language's syntax using English lexicon. See Alan Millard, 'Early Aramaic' (pp. 85–94: p. 85); Khan, 'Aramaic, Medieval and Modern' (pp. 95–114: p. 110); and Eleanor Coghill, 'Fieldwork in Neo-Aramaic' (pp. 115–122: pp. 115–117) – all from *Languages of Iraq: Ancient and Modern*, ed. by J.N. Postgate (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2007).

preservation, reinvention and exchange among diasporas. It is illuminating, though, to apply his ideas to literary translation:

> For there is another possibility: that of 'Translation'. This describes those identity formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and which are composed of people who have been *dispersed* forever from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely. They bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped. The difference is that they are not and they never will be *unified* in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several 'homes' (and no one particular 'home'). People belonging to such *cultures of hybridity* have had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of 'lost' cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism. They are irrevocably *translated*.[175]

Hall's 'Translation' again recalls Puzur-Amurri's safeguarding of a diluvial diaspora. However, Hall refers to other acts of transportation: the Middle Passage via which Europeans shipped enslaved Africans to the Caribbean, and 'Windrush' migration from the Caribbean to the U.K. after World War II. Both movements, in different ways, challenged communities to honour their heritage in the face of dispersion and extreme pressures; this is where the Maroon impulse intervenes, in Brathwaite's account. Caribbean nation language responds to the earlier displacement, and to the later transfer into the twentieth-century metropole. Both these 'translations' arose from a colonialist attitude that African and Caribbean people were peripheral, a resource to be 'brought across' oceans to serve hegemonic power. Slavery's atrocities, and the racism that often greeted 'Windrush' migrants, are tied up with assumptions that racialised people should assimilate into hegemonic economies, culture, and language. If literary translation processes were mapped onto such assumptions about diaspora, the result would be texts that originate in vastly different cultures, but that all read as naturalised, unresistant products of the language of power. Far from suggesting 'the sovereignty of all the world's languages', as Edouard Glissant envisages translation should do, this process subjugates them.[176]

[175] Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', *Modernity and Its Futures*, ed. by Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 273–316: p. 310. Hall's italics.
[176] Glissant, 'From Introduction to the Poetics of the Diverse', p. 121.

Griffiths' essay on translation advocates undoing such hierarchies, referring to his 1974 version of the Old Welsh long poem *Y Gododdin*: 'this whole approach to translation is *to translate the reader to the original text* – still a translation, a 'bringing across', but it operates in the opposite direction from those versions which set out to reduce the Welsh text into English.'[177] Rather than place English readers at the privileged centre of discourse, and force poems to accommodate this audience's expectations of syntax, Griffiths draws the reader towards the poem. The readership thereby becomes diasporic; in Hall's words, 'They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely.' They thereby enter Hall's '*cultures of hybridity*' and must 'renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of 'lost' cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism.' Hybridity, resulting from creolisation in Hall's account of diaspora, is represented in the artificial nation language that Griffiths manufactures. The political dimension is evident. As Cobbing notes, Griffiths resists the imperialism of assuming that one's own language is the natural centre to which other argots gravitate. Effectively, Griffiths' 1970s translations train readers to respect diverse epistemes.

By the time he uprooted to Seaham, Griffiths was pluralising his translation methods.[178] However, his engagement with North East dialect develops from his earlier approach. His move rejected London as a centre of culture and politics; and he translated, or 'brought across', himself to his new linguistic environment, rather than expecting his new home to adjust to his needs. One could generalise that, in the process, his work moved from hybridity to creolisation: rather than combining linguistic elements to foreground the differentness between cultures, he turned towards exploring how cultures could inform each other. At the same time, his appreciation of North Eastern traditions acknowledges, in line with Hall, that England's communities 'never will be *unified* in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures'. An essay written in Seaham widens Griffiths' thinking about translation to societal levels:

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[177] Griffiths, 'Approaches to Translation – 1', 20. Griffiths' italics.
[178] Compare *The Epic of Gilgamesh: Episode 1*, trans. Griffiths, illus. by Nicholas Parry (Market Drayton: Tern Press, 1992), a more idiomatic translation; Ælfric, *St. Cuthbert: Ælfric's Life of the Saint in Old English with Modern English Parallel*, trans. by Griffiths (Seaham: Amra, 1992), which maintains Griffiths' 1970s method; and *The Battle of Maldon: Text and Translation*, ed. and trans. by Griffiths (Pinner: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1991), which presents translations alongside the Old English original: a syntactic/literal gloss, and an idiomatic, modern English version.

> The ability to use thought (logic?) to learn and so define oneself could be a huge evolutionary advantage, as follows.
> It would permit and encourage identification with animal, plant, hero, abstract (good?), natural forces (god?), to adapt and transform, and provide the basis of unlimited flexibility – much more quickly than if no such tendency/need to/for affinity and translation existed. (Examples are the simple animal icons common among non-city societies.)
> So systems of thought underly [sic] personal flexibility in one sense; but can be used beyond that to assert human fixity; and beyond that to invent a fixedness for society or the universe.
> […]
> These apparent stabilities are in fact put in place with the help of existent power-bases. Political Society assumes that it is possible and right to manipulate the images that prevail; it encourages a fixed and standard definition of the 'human' as an item for mass consumption.[179]

For Griffiths, translation is basal to human thought, enabling affinity with other beings and things. Like Hall's, Griffiths' sense of 'translation' exceeds the purely literary. Translation becomes a mechanism for empathy and care, allowing imaginative identification with everything that is other than oneself. The ramifications for human relationships with 'animal, plant, […] natural forces' suggest ecological relevance, but there are societal applications too. Translation also has negative potential, risking 'a fixed and standard definition of the 'human' as an item for mass consumption.' Such reduction of the human to a capitalist product sounds analogous to the hegemonic assimilation that can accompany the 'bringing across' of diasporic labour in Hall's concept of translation. It threatens to submerge the differentness of communities or texts by subordinating them to the dominant culture's society or language. Against this tendency, Griffiths' syntactic preservation of epistemes is, in Brathwaite's words, a 'Maroon element' within literary translation. C.A.M. and the B.P.R. can both be considered in light of the translation theories of Hall and Griffiths. C.A.M.'s identity as a diasporic movement is obvious, and tension between maronage and assimilation appears in the group's internal conflict over whether to seek audiences among the Caribbean diaspora or in wider U.K. culture. London's B.P.R. nexus, meanwhile, translated poetics from America, Europe and elsewhere to revivify English poetry, and celebrated this aesthetic variety in the face of an oppressive mainstream. However, there was

[179] Griffiths, *Now We Are Twenty: A Sequel Essay on Reality* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1995), n.p. (section TWO).

a contradiction between their principled opposition to hegemony, and their desire to gain hegemony so that they could more generously deploy institutional power.

Griffiths' translations ground deeper engagements with peripheral communities in his later poetry, de-imperialising and decolonising habits of writing and thinking, and discovering folk-based sources of renewal. He and Brathwaite share much poetically. However, considering Brathwaite's view of maronage as essential for conserving Caribbean culture, more thought must go into the ethics and aesthetics of bringing his ideas into English contexts. Thankfully, Brathwaite's own theories of language and culture contain concepts to expedite this. His ideas about interculturation and maronage, developed during the 1960s and 1970s, and articulated at *Poetry of the Americas*, developed during subsequent decades, becoming the philosophy he dubbed 'tidalectics', a framework allowing cultural concepts and practices to spread between peoples without precipitating hegemony, discovering new ancestors in each other. Tidalectics proves essential for English readers to learn from Brathwaite without re-instituting imperialist dynamics.

Chapter 2: Transatlantic Tidalectics

2.1. 'she walk on water and in light': Defining Kamau Brathwaite's Tidalectics

Adopting poetic ancestors from distant locales and divergent traditions is potentially perilous. For Kamau Brathwaite, reared in the Anglophone Caribbean, saturated in English literature as a legacy of the British Empire, the challenge is to identify what parts of that tradition should form part of one's heritage, and what might obstruct a distinctively Caribbean poetics. For example, Brathwaite argues: '*The Tempest* belongs to we & […] Shakespeare if not a Caliban is a Caribbean writer – appropriation being a k- | ey element of cultural nationalism.'[180] Considering power dynamics between England and the Caribbean, it feels unproblematic for Brathwaite to rethink Shakespeare's meaning as part of the Caribbean's recovery from what Brathwaite calls a 'cultural disaster area', and to use *The Tempest*'s characters in poems addressing this history.[181]

However, the balance of power would be different for English poets appropriating cultural materials from the 'disaster area'. If Caribbean poetics arose in response to a specific history, can such tactics really apply within a nation which profited by exploiting that region? Even dialects from Northern England seem contentious parallels, considering how that region's people participated in Caribbean plantocracy. Recently enslaved Africans, in James Berry's words, 'soon accommodated the new language heard, called English, spoken by North of England voices'.[182] What common experiences could relate Caribbean terms like 'nation language' to speech and poetry arising from positions that seem utterly different?

This chapter addresses the problem through Brathwaite's own ideas about cultural exchange, finding concepts that permit English poets to learn from Caribbean poetics without indulging in neo-imperialist appropriation. This lays groundwork for subsequent chapters that consider Brathwaite's nation language techniques, how Griffiths applies related ideas to English contexts, and how the two poets' strategies suggest fresh advances in English dialect poetry.

Brathwaite's concept of tidalectics underwrites this endeavour. This model for intercultural exchange is a pun on 'dialectics'; in his words, it designates 'the rejection of the

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[180] Brathwaite, *Golokwati 2000* (Mona and New York: Savacou North, 2002), p. 24.
[181] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 8. See Chapter 3.5 of this thesis for more on Brathwaite's role in the Caribbean tradition of reinterpreting *The Tempest*.
[182] Berry, 'Introduction', *News for Babylon: The Chatto Book of Westindian-British Poetry*, ed. by Berry (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984), p. xiii.

notion of dialectic, which is three – the resolution of the third. Now I go for a concept I call the "tide-alectic" which is the ripple and the two tide movement.' [183] The chapter's present section shows how Brathwaite's tidalectics offers a philosophy of ideas, a history of language and a poetics of liberation. Tidalectics combines creolisation and maronage, both briefly addressed in Chapter 1.3; it enables communities to share ideas without hegemonic imposition, and proves essential for the formation of nation language.

In the second section, tidalectics offers a framework for understanding how enslaved people in the Caribbean developed nation language to defy oppressors and preserve ancestral heritage. Historical particulars underlying Caribbean speech help to identify how this history inspires Brathwaite's poetics, and thus to recognise what may transfer successfully to poetry from other traditions.

These discoveries are then applied to poetry from North East England. As per the Introduction, Brathwaite licenses such extension, identifying Northumbrian poet Basil Bunting's masterpiece 'Briggflatts' as nation language poetry. Bunting was important for Bill Griffiths and operated in the region where Griffiths later lived. By investigating how Bunting's use of Northumbrian speech and history prompt Brathwaite to claim him as an ancestor, common factors can be found linking North East England and the Caribbean. The chapter's concluding section returns Griffiths to the conversation, exploring how his poetry embodies tidalectic principles in accommodating Black and Caribbean perspectives: an act of cross-cultural learning that influences his own politics of resistance.

Maritime imagery saturates Brathwaite's thinking about cultural exchange. He first names tidalectics in a 1983 paper, contrasting it to thinking where 'dialectics is another gun: a missile: a way of making progress'; tidalectics, meanwhile, is when 'the culture of the circle 'success' moves outward from the centre to circumference and back again: a tidal dialectic: an ital dialectic: continuum across the peristyle'.[184] This decentring of cultural power recalls the discussion among B.P.R. poets at *Poetry of the Americas*, and remained a concern for Brathwaite throughout the 1980s. However, it was not until the 1990s that he revisited the

[183] Unpublished interview at the University of Memphis, 1995, cited by Naylor, p. 145.
[184] Brathwaite, 'Caribbean Culture: Two Paradigms', *Missile and Capsule*, ed. by Jürgen Martini (Bremen: Universität Bremen, 1983), pp. 9–54: p. 42. 'Ital' is a Rastafarian adjective for lifestyles embodying Rasta values. 'Peristyle' suggests a porch or veranda, a liminal space between home and outdoors, like that occupied by the Jamaican woman in the anecdote cited later.

term in depth, exploring how 'sea influences the nature of [Caribbean] poetry — the pauses between the words, the tidalectic nature of the sea.'[185] At this point, Brathwaite no longer calls tidalectics a Caribbean dialectics, but describes it as a distinct phenomenon. Simultaneously, forms usually rendered as straightforward prose – diary, essay, short story – cross-fertilise even more with his poetry. Combined with his visual shift to Sycorax Video-style, this engenders the interdisciplinary volumes which Anna Reckin calls 'tidalectic lectures': *Barabajan Poems* (1994), *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* (1999), the two-volume *M.R.: Magical Realism* (2001), and *Golokwati 2000* (2002). In their cross-genre form, Reckin argues, the tomes embody tidalectics as 'trans-oceanic movement-in-stasis, a to-and-fro and back again that is idealized and mythologized as well as highly particularized [...] and historicized'.[186] An array of footnotes, endnotes and parentheses carries the reader's attention is directed to and fro across these volumes' large pages, as though upon waves.

ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey originates as a 1993 event in New York, where Brathwaite was interviewed by U.S. poet Nathaniel Mackey. Brathwaite processed the event's transcript into Sycorax Video-style, creating the book. In it, Brathwaite traces his development of tidalectics back to the early 1960s, when he stayed in seclusion on Jamaica's north coast 'after a ten-year growing-up absence in Cambridge and Ghana'.[187] Every morning, he saw an elderly woman sweeping sand from her yard:

> *And then one morning I see her body silhouetting against the sparkling light that hits the Caribbean at that early dawn*
>
> *And it seems as if her feet, which all along I thought were walking on the sand. . . were really. . . walking on the wa-ter. . . and she was tra velling across that middlepass age, constantly coming from wh*

[185] Brathwaite, 'The Search for a Caribbean Aesthetic', *Sunday Express* (Trinidad), serialised 25 October, 8 November and 15 November 1992, cited by Stewart Brown, 'Introduction' to Kamau Brathwaite, *Words Need Love Too* (Cambridge and Applecross: Salt, 2004), p. i.

[186] Reckin, 'Tidalectic Lectures: Kamau Brathwaite's Prose/Poetry as Sound-Space', *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, vol. 1 no. 1, 2003, 2 <https://anthurium.miami.edu/articles/10.33596/anth.4> [accessed 16 March 2022].

[187] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* (Staten Island and Minneapolis: We Press and Xcp: Cross-Cultural Poetics, 1999), p. 37.

> *ere she had come from – in her case Africa – to this spot in North Coast Jamaica where she now lives. . .*[188]

The reader's eyes, saccading to and fro along these short lines, mirror the broom's sweeping motion, which in turn reflects tides moving back and forth across the Atlantic. Such bidirectional movement contrasts the Middle Passage from Africa to the Caribbean. This trade route was one-way for both the human cargo and the ships themselves, which would afterwards 'carry a cargo of sugar (or even ballast) back to the home port' in Europe.[189] Brathwaite depicts the woman as an ancestor reversing this journey of no return, maintaining connections back to Africa:

> [...] ***tidalectic****, like our grandmother's – our nanna's – action, like the movement of the ocean she's walking on, coming from one continent / continuum, touching another, and then receding ('reading') from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of th e(ir) future.*[190]

In describing the woman's routine, Brathwaite asserts that the word 'tidalectics', though coined in the 1980s, names a concept guiding his poetics all along. The encounter is germinal for his nation language poetry and his break from conservative poetics:

> 'They' – these imposted meters – couldn't allow me to write the sunlight under her feet – she walk on water *and* in light, the sand between her toes, the ritual discourse of her morning broom. But by this time I'm listening to Miles [Davis, jazz trumpeter] – that muse/ical who was himself creating a spine of coral sound along our archipelago. Miles is singing the shadows of the clouds that move acr oss our landscape[191]

Brathwaite turns to African diasporic musical genres (here jazz) as models for nation language poetics that better represent the Caribbean's archipelagic nature. The same realisation manifests in his celebration of 'the syncopation of the archipelago' at *Poetry of the*

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[188] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, pp. 32–33.
[189] Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London: John Murray, 2008), p. 251.
[190] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, p. 34.
[191] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, p. 35–36.

Americas; jazz-like techniques let 'the pauses between words' embody 'the tidalectic nature of the sea'.

Underlying Brathwaite's critique of dialectics is a phenomenon outlined by G.W.F. Hegel and translated as the 'master-slave' or 'lord-bondsman' dialectic.[192] In this schema, two humans meet in a 'state of nature' (without government superseding individual wills), and engage in a 'trial by death', each vying for greater subjectivity by sublating the rival:

> For in this relationship the immediacy of particular self-consciousness is, initially, sublated only on the side of the bondsman, but on the master's side it is preserved. While the naturalness of life on both these sides persists, the self-will of the bondsman surrenders itself to the will of the master, receives for its content the purpose of the lord who, on his part, receives into his self-consciousness, not the bondsman's will, but only care for the support of the bondsman's natural vitality; in such a manner that in this relationship the *posited* identity of the self-consciousness of the subjects related to each other comes about only in a *one-sided* way.[193]

It is also possible that 'two selves opposing each other should, in their reality, in their being-for-another, posit themselves as and recognize themselves as what they are in themselves or by their concept, namely, not merely natural but free beings.'[194] This rapprochement establishes the equality needed for tidalectics. Without it, freedom is not an absolute quality, but only relative to others' lack thereof: for one person to be free, another must be metaphorically or literally enchained. Hegel's dialectics therefore describe competition for dominion not only among ideas, but between people. He regards mutual recognition of subjectivity as an ideal outcome of interactions, but is pessimistic about this occurring often unless the political state exerts moderating influence. Conversely, he seems naïve to trust that governments would prevent oppression: many states endorsed the transatlantic slave trade, and (pre-abolition) the enslaved were rarely freed through legal intervention. If

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[192] The latter translation, connoting medieval German feudalism, is regarded as more accurate. However, the former suits our Caribbean context, considering Susan Buck-Morss' compelling argument that Hegel was influenced by the uprising of the enslaved during the 1791–1804 Haitian Revolution – Susan Buck-Morss, 'Hegel and Haiti', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26 no. 4, 2000, 821–865. Throughout the thesis, I use 'enslaved person' (or variants thereof) rather than 'slave', due to the latter word's dehumanising connotations; I will, however, refer to the 'master-slave dialectic', to evoke the dehumanisation that Hegel identifies in this phenomenon.

[193] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, revisions and commentary by M.J. Inwood, p. 160.

[194] Hegel, p. 158.

dialectics explains social hierarchies whose extreme forms involve slavery, it is understandable that Brathwaite seeks alternative models for the circulation of ideas.

Many Hegelians and Marxists (Hegel's dialectics heavily influenced Marx) would dispute Brathwaite's view here. C.L.R. James foresees a point when all ideas are synthesised into Hegel's 'abstract universal', and each person 'negates all that has previously impeded him, i.e., negated him, in the full realisation of his inherent nature', so that acknowledgement of humanity's 'infinite value abolishes, *ipso facto*, all particularity attaching to birth or country.'[195] This perfection of socialism abolishes the master-slave dialectic. Brathwaite, however, loves particularities emerging from cultural difference; for him, Hegelian universalisation risks tremendous loss.

As an alternative to dialectics, tidalectics lets cultural variety flourish in 'creative chaos' without invaluable heritage becoming diluted by hegemonic imposition. It offers an alternative model of history, but also ways of thinking about cultural interchange in the present and future. For Reckin, tidalectics encapsulates Brathwaite's understanding of nation language's 'organic, its person-centred, fluid/tidal rather than ideal/structured nature'.[196] One could add Brathwaite's 'idea (and reality) of Caribbean speech as continuum: ancestral through creole to national and international forms'.[197] Writer Jean D'Costa, referring to her own Jamaican background, suggests that:

> […] the continuum, by its very nature, may not exist as an interrelated set of semantic-semiotic systems, reflecting and carrying interrelated cultural sets, and manifesting itself in variant surface structures, forming a total grammar of Jamaican culture.
>
> Put directly, it appears to me that the Jamaican language continuum operates as a single "hypercode" [with] the means of generating all of the meaning potential by which I, as a Jamaican writer, perceive and interpret my environment.[198]

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[195] C.L.R. James, 'Dialectical Materialism', *The C.L.R. James Reader*, ed. by Anna Grimshaw (Oxford and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1993), p. 163.

[196] Reckin, 'ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey' [book review], *Rain Taxi* (1999) <http://www.raintaxi.com/conversations-with-nathaniel-mackey> [accessed 16 March 2022], citing Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 49.

[197] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 49.

[198] Jean D'Costa, 'The Caribbean Novelist and Language: A Search for a Literary Medium', *Caribbean Literary Discourse: Voice and Cultural Identity in the Anglophone Caribbean*, ed. by Barbara Lalla, D'Costa, and Velma Pollard (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014), pp. 68–92: p. 73.

These gradations of speech are always '*touching another, and then receding*'. Influences are adopted voluntarily as speakers shift their registers, but this does not reflect permanent transformation or teleological improvement; speakers are free to move elsewhere on the continuum, sailing with currents of voice through the hypercode ocean.

Chapter 1.3 argued that creolisation (in language and elsewhere) must be in balance with maronage for Caribbean cultures to flourish. Brathwaite's *Contradictory Omens*, underwriting ideas he explored at *Poetry of the Americas*, considers the region's interplay between these factors that are fundamental to tidalectics. Societies experience two types of creolisation: '**ac/culturation**, which is the yoking [...] of one culture to another (in this case the slave/African to the European)' versus '**inter/culturation**, which is an unplanned, unstructured but osmotic relationship proceeding from this yoke.'[199] Brathwaite adds that 'The **creolization** which results [from interculturation] (and it is a process not a product) becomes the tentative cultural norm of the society', but it is 'cracked, fragmented, ambivalent […] subject to shifting lights and pressures.'[200] Interculturation and creolisation are themselves tidalectic. Their tentativeness means that Caribbean people constantly adjust how much they speak in any situation, navigating the continuum or hypercode of creole language. This process concerns what one does, not what one fixedly is. In environments relatively free from acculturation, two people can adopt one another's cultural ideas freely, then pursue other concepts as tides of mutual influence ebb, wax, and overlap.

Brathwaite, however, knows creole society is fragile, since institutions 'may/will be used/interpreted differently while the several segments vie for cultural hegemony, and in [...] external and/or political interference with the process could be disruptive'.[201] If one segment gains hegemony, or external/political factors disturb social balance, acculturation intervenes, and power relations once again predetermine directions of cultural interchange. In response, Brathwaite introduces maronage, a '**folk/maroon interpretation** which holds/assumes that a specific cultural root or vision could come to be recognised as the norm and model for the whole'.[202]

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[199] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 6.
[200] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 6.
[201] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 58.
[202] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, pp. 57–58.

Combining creolisation and maronage, tidalectics resolves a problem that Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw identifies: tension between liberal desire for diversity and inclusion, and need to address injustices by mobilising around political identity categories:

> Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination – that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different. According to this understanding, our liberatory objective should be to empty such categories of any social significance. Yet implicit in certain strands of feminist and racial liberation movements, for example, is the view that social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction.
>
> The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences.[203]

Brathwaite distrusts hierarchies because, in Crenshaw's words, they 'exclude or marginalize those who are different'. Conversely, overlapping creole identities let differences be celebrated as integral to the overarching culture. For Brathwaite, maronage addresses the other risk that Crenshaw perceives: that group identity 'conflates or ignores intragroup differences.' Maronage cultivates intragroup differences for the wider group's pleasure and fortification. Mapping tidalectics onto Crenshaw's schema, 'mainstream liberal discourse' represents metropolitan hegemony, each marginalised identity cluster an archipelago, and the different, intragroup collectives are islands, none truly isolated, but sharing (through tidalectic creolisation) ideas developed at the intragroup level through maronage.

For example, Brathwaite describes Rasta painters who 'show the people their spiritual thinking' by sharing ideas cultivated within their religious assembly.[204] Brathwaite believes they rejuvenate wider Jamaican society (the archipelago in this analogy), since 'when we come to appreciate the truly meaningful indigenous art of Jamaica, middle-class techniques and ideas of art are certainly going to take their true second place.'[205] The Rastas' 'primitive art is the seed, the first beginning, the ultimate ending', strengthening Jamaica

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[203] Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour', *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, ed. by Crenshaw *et al.* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 357.

[204] Painters Clinton Brown, Everald Brown and Arnold Tucker, quoted in Timothy Callendar, 'The Seed of the Plant', *Abeng*, vol. 1 no. 16, 1969, n.p., cited in turn by Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 59.

[205] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 61.

against the hegemony of 'scientific, academic art' which 'is too western, too cold for the fire of the creative spirit of the conscious Black Man.'[206] By nurturing intragroup diversity, here Rastafari's religious difference, Jamaica maintains cultural autonomy.

The image of an archipelago thus pertains to cultural exchange, suggesting a network whose nodes are each defensible and self-sufficient, but interlinked and mutually supportive. Markman Ellis sees this paradox as fundamental to island geography:

> An island's coasted boundedness established both its borders and defences, […] giving it a peculiar autonomy, self-reliance and liberty. But in empire and commerce, islands are brought into relations of trust and dependence, connection and association. In the age of empire, then, the island is produced as a paradox, as the same historical and geographical features that produce island autonomy produce island dependence.[207]

An island's remoteness reduces hegemonic influence from overseas, while nurturing local creativity. Meanwhile, surrounding oceans let commodities and ideas circulate around an archipelago. Ellis' 'empire and commerce' impose hegemony upon this setting; post-empire, though, the geography enables maronage's inward gaze to complement creole society's outgoing, open attitude. The community shares concepts with others, learns from worthwhile innovations elsewhere, and repels metropolitan dominion.

That maronage and creolisation are 'contradictory omens' is puzzling from a dialectical perspective, in which a synthesis ultimately imposes hegemony. In tidalectics, though, concepts freely overlap and intermingle. If one idea seemingly excludes others, tidalectics absorbs such contradictions. The contradictory in Brathwaite is no logical fallacy to be eliminated, but a poetic discovery. Caribbean people take up ideas and identities from the tide according to individual or communal need; different, superficially contradictory concepts may then be adopted later. Cultural elements are not eliminated when discarded, but return to circulation, awaiting future use. Ideas even overlap like waves; in terms of identity, a person might be simultaneously Jamaican, Black, Anglophone West Indian, Caribbean, and diasporic African. Contingent circumstances foreground different aspects of this identity. Such multifariousness resists what Stuart Hall characterises as the reactionary

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[206] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 59.
[207] Markman Ellis, ''The Cane-land Isles': Commerce and Empire in Late Eighteenth-century Georgic and Pastoral Poetry', *Islands in History and Representation*, ed. by Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 43–62: p. 44.

projection of nationhood 'backwards in an apparently seamless and unbroken continuity towards pure, mythic time.'[208] As the last sentence of *Contradictory Omens* says, 'The unity is submarine' – with no full stop, opening the phrase onto the sea of ideas that unifies Caribbean culture.[209] Edouard Glissant glosses Brathwaite's phrase: 'Submarine roots: that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches. […] this shared process of cultural mutation, this convergence that frees us from uniformity.'[210]

Brathwaite's *M.R.: Magical Realism* (2001) expands on tidalectics while outlining different '**continental culture paradigm(s)**', physical structures each symbolising a thought-structure that characterises a geographically defined group of cultures.[211] Cultures of European origin manifest the domineering thrust of tower, spire, rocket, and missile:

> Out of Europe's landscape >
> Comes the gleaming/dreaming/glimmer
> ing church&cathedralspear/spire(s) -
> symbol of the missile, Europe's suc-
> cessful imperial conquest of the thirst
> of speed for space/horizon, on which
> its entire sense of the xplosive loco
> motive scientific dialectic of 'progress'
> is base(d)[212]

Brathwaite illustrates this 'EuroMissile/Spire Landscape' with an image of a '**Missilic European city skyline [Oxford, England] at sunset**'.[213] Such concepts demand an imaginative commitment that some may withhold. In 1980, reporter Norman Rae attended a London poetry reading where Brathwaite was already advancing this argument. Rae complained that the event was 'not so much a poetry reading as a talk by Braithwaite on Braithwaite which embraced excursions into the fantasy land of discovery of principle by imaginative comparison'.[214] He recounts: 'Braithwaite [sic] lost me in the metaphorical comparison of Columbus to a missile heading across the Atlantic to the New World […] with

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[208] Hall, 'Our Mongrel Selves', p. 277.
[209] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 64.
[210] Glissant, 'The Quarrel with History', *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 67.
[211] Brathwaite, *M.R.: Magical Realism*, vol. 1 of 2, (Mona and New York: Savacou North, 2001), p. 68.
[212] Brathwaite, *M.R.*, vol. 1, p. 166.
[213] Brathwaite, *M.R.*, vol. 1, pp. 170–71. The image is from a postcard, *c.* 1990.
[214] Norman Rae, 'A Line from the Tower of Babble', *Sunday Gleaner* (Jamaica), 5 October 1980 [press clipping], Brighton, The Keep, Anne Walmsley Archive, SxMS88/10/2/16.

the rockets blasting off compared to church spires rising to the heaven'.[215] Rae may have found Brathwaite's simile unconvincing, but a text expressing similar concerns in related imagery is Bill Griffiths' 'Text for Translation into Russian' (1978):

> What is visible: the ribs and spikes of the colleges / like pikes, gibbets, roustabouts. / Corrupted, eaten at. / What a dead vivacity! / Almost changes / cannot change / I do not think it is going to change / it is so unlikely that what is so stone-fixed will start to change ever / […] From cell to college to county / never seen Beauty so used as a threat / hate getting so graced as happiness and help.[216]

The location is unspecified, but later references to Ely, Cambridgeshire, imply that this is Brathwaite's *alma mater*, Cambridge. Its spires' thrusting menace, ossified determinism, and disguise of violence as beauty match Brathwaite's '**Missilic European city skyline**'. Brathwaite's '**continental culture paradigm(s)**' are vast generalisations, to which there could be any number of exceptions, as when a European poet like Griffiths shares Brathwaite's critique of the dialectics that overweening architecture expresses in stone. However, this falsifiability does not disprove Brathwaite's conclusions, but offers hope. The exceptions show that there is room for these paradigms to change under influences like creolisation and tidalectics. Griffiths is one figure advocating such changes.

Some have applied tidalectics from the Caribbean to other archipelagos. *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science* (2017) was a group exhibition in Vienna. Participating artists sailed to French Polynesia. Working 'with a group of researchers, interviewing people on land, and engaging with the emerging questions beyond the shared journeys gave rise to the exhibition *Tidalectics*, which borrowed its title from Brathwaite's term'.[217] The artists created ecologically-oriented, multimedia works responding to their discoveries, confuting dialectics with 'complex thinking that transcends separations' and striving 'to test boundaries, to be *undisciplined*.'[218] The gallery embodied

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[215] Rae.

[216] Griffiths, *For Rediffusion* (London: New London Pride and The Postal Collective, 1978), n.p. Griffiths' slashes.

[217] Stefanie Hessler, 'Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science', *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science*, ed. by Hessler (T.B.A.21-Academy and The M.I.T. Press: London and Cambridge MA, 2018), pp. 31–80: p. 31. The exhibition was at Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Augarten, Vienna, 2 June – 19 November 2017.

[218] Hessler, 'Tidalectics', p. 32. Hessler's italics.

tidalectics as 'a continuous process, with several elements changing position during the duration of the show and [Jana] Winderen's sound work permeating the space at different times each day.'[219] Brathwaite endorsed the project by contributing his text 'Dream Haiti' to the exhibition catalogue, signalling willingness for tidalectics to pertain outside the Caribbean, in this case on Pacific islands colonised by France.[220] Likewise, the exhibition's curator Stefanie Hessler compares Fijian-Tongan poet-anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa to Brathwaite: 'Hau'ofa proposes that we need to change the views that fail to recognize the connectedness of Pacific Islanders across oceans and that suppose that "small island states" are too small, too poor, and too isolated to develop autonomy.'[221] The parallel with Brathwaite's interconnected communities of maronage is evident. What are the limits to this transoceanic reading of tidalectics? Can one think tidalectically about islands that, unlike the Caribbean and Polynesia, are typically associated with colonising, not being colonised – the British Isles, for example?

Before addressing this question, one must establish how closely tidalectics is enmeshed with Caribbean culture, especially language and poetry. As mentioned earlier, nation language behaves tidalectically as speakers modulate utterance along a continuum stretching from standard English to rich patois. The relationship between the concepts runs even more deeply, though. Caribbean nation language's origins lie in tidalectic interactions of creolisation and maronage, developed to resist the totalising dialectics of linguistic imperialism. To discover how dialects in England could learn from nation language, one must consider how creolisation and maronage have interacted in the Caribbean's linguistic history. Analogous structures and histories can then become apparent in marginalised speech-forms within England, inspiring innovations there.

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[219] Hessler, 'Tidalectics', p. 78.

[220] Brathwaite, 'Dream Haiti', *Tidalectics*, pp. 82–91.

[221] Heidi Ballet and Stefanie Hessler, 'A Quest toward Thinking in Oceanic Ways: Heidi Ballet and Stefanie Hessler in Conversation', *Mousse*, no. 57, 2017, 64–73: 68.

2.2. 'wha GrandeeNanny tell de backraman': Tidalectic Origins of Nation Language

Accounts of Caribbean nation language's origins vary in emphasis. This section contends that Brathwaite's theory attributes nation language's emergence to processes which he elsewhere labels as tidalectic, and that this view of language change is supported by historical research from Brathwaite and other scholars. Tidalectic understanding of Caribbean nation language's origins will enable later consideration of how poetry from other regions, including Bill Griffiths' dialect work in the North East, could partake in tidalectics' political and cultural radicalism.

Historian James Walvin's view is worth contrasting to Brathwaite's, since Walvin's wide-ranging publications about slavery, aimed at readerships from schools to non-specialist adults to academia, strongly influence U.K. readers' understanding of the topic.[222] Walvin's influence is overwhelmingly benign, but Brathwaite might disagree with him on Caribbean linguistics. Walvin stresses how, for enslaved people on sugar plantations, the linguistic priorities were sharing information among people from different African nations, and avoiding beatings for misunderstanding White overseers' orders:

> Not to understand was to incur the anger of short-tempered whites who viewed incomprehension as stupidity, rewarding blank looks with blows and punishments. Slaves soon realised how important it was to understand and be understood. Among slaves from diverse tribes and linguistic groups, a lingua franca had to be created. Throughout the Americas, African languages bumped into the dominant European language […] From the particular fusion of the two there emerged that plethora of pidgin and Creole languages that survive to this day.[223]

Walvin describes creole speech as a Hegelian synthesis, each language's speakers contributing to a new tongue better suited for exchanging information in this setting. Though occurring under pressure of violence, creolisation is presented as utilitarian; message transmission is the goal. For Brathwaite, though, the encounter between African and European languages is itself a site of violence. Changes within the speech of the

[222] Compare Walvin, *Black Ivory* as a scholarly publication; Walvin, *A Short History of Slavery* (London: Penguin, 2007) for a general readership; and Walvin, *The Slave Trade* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), an accessible account with plentiful illustrations and a pouch of facsimile documents.
[223] Walvin, *Black Ivory*, p. 57.

enslaved are not voluntary adjustments aiding comprehension, but what John La Rose calls 'Wounds still fresh-cut [...] under my words'.[224] These are scars of a violence whose 'constant threat', historian Michael Cracton says, 'was a useful ground on which to lay more subtle brushstrokes. The majority of slaves discovered a pattern of behaviour that [fulfilled] the white man's expectation while providing room for maneuver by the slaves.'[225] La Rose's words, and Caribbean language in general, are the legacy of this pattern.

Brathwaite emphasises both the deliberate suppression of African languages by planters, and creolisation's role as cultural survival strategy:

> And so Ashanti, Congo, Yoruba, all that mighty coast of western Africa was imported into the Caribbean. And we had the arrival in our area of a new language structure. It consisted of many languages but basically they had a common semantic and stylistic form. What these languages had to do, however, was to submerge themselves, because officially the conquering peoples […] insisted that the language of public discourse and conversation, of obedience, command and conception should be English, French, Spanish or Dutch. […] So there was a submergence of this imported language.[226]

This is also Hegelian, but not a mutually beneficial synthesis into more serviceable form. Instead, the master-slave dialectic's 'trial by death' is linguistically incarnated, with one language's validity suppressed to valorise another by comparison. However, Hegel's account of such struggles is insufficient to describe historical experience. The loser in this contest of self-realisation is abased before the victor, but retains capacity to revolt, even under threat of reasserted oppression. The 'trial by death' is therefore a constantly recurring trauma. Enacted as speech, this trial involved Africans continually bringing up from submersion their original languages, which were conserved as extensively as possible. Cracton records: 'African languages were sustained by the will to retain a private mode of communication and must have continued in use as long as two people who spoke the same tongue were close enough to each other to keep in practice.'[227] The Africanisation of utterance risked punishment whenever this process exceeded an overseer's tolerance.

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[224] La Rose, 'Prosepoem for a Conference', *Eyelets of Truth Within Me* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1992), p. 13.
[225] Cracton, p. 34.
[226] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 7.
[227] Cracton, p. 47.

The stakes are less extreme for recent Caribbean people, but confrontations over nation language recur, reopening cultural wounds. In the 2000s, Brathwaite recalled that his 1960s nation language poetry '**was and still is! esp cornering & controversial | even tho NL is now pretty central almost 'standard' in much Caribb po, | tho in my view its use is still not being imaginatively xtended.**'[228] This controversy has been enduring and widespread. In the U.K., Alan Young, reviewing *History of the Voice* in 1982, misinterprets Brathwaite as denigrating the English canon (rather than seeking to move beyond it). Young deems Brathwaite's anti-racist project 'racist to let nationalism so pervert thought that reason and communication are inhibited by hatred and suspicion.'[229] Meanwhile, in Barbados, a 1993 editorial for the *Sunday Advocate* claimed that '"Nation language", the latest euphemism for slang, dialect and downright verbal garbage, is an unstructured accumulation of sounds' which 'helps to entrench mediocrity in the home, the classroom, and the society beyond.'[230]

Such sublation of nation language creates ongoing need to 'xtend' the resistance that is its central, motivating feature, countering oppression that accompanies imposition of standard English**.** Walvin and Brathwaite agree on nation language's potential for linguistic resistance; here their observations are complementary. Walvin sees how such speech could conceal discourse from oppressors:

> Using African words or meanings, slaves could, however, invest their local Creole with words and nuances known only to them; it was a means of communicating with one another to the exclusion of the whites. Even in speech, slaves soon learned the importance of hiding beyond the reach of whites.[231]

For Walvin, nation language is resistance insofar as it recuperates privacy for lives that were supposed to stand transparent to their exploiters. This privacy could enable planning of overt rebellions, or simply create spaces free from policing by planters. The psyche is protected from acculturation, and groundwork is laid for more overt resistance, but the situation of threat still restricts utterances' form and content. What Walvin identifies here is nation language's opacity, as advocated by Edouard Glissant (with reference to the

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[228] Brathwaite, *Golokwati 2000*, p. 26.
[229] Alan Young, 'Dreadful Sprouts', *P.N. Review*, no. 27, 1982, 45–46: 46.
[230] 'Concern about poor English' [photocopied editorial], *Sunday Advocate* (Barbados), 14 November 1993, Brighton, The Keep, Anne Walmsley Archive, SxMS88/10/3/11. As Brathwaite pioneered the term 'nation language', this opprobrium seems directed at him.
[231] Walvin, *Black Ivory*, p. 58.

Francophone Caribbean): 'from the perspective of the conflict between Creole and French [...] the only possible strategy is to make them *opaque* to each other. To develop everywhere, in defiance of a universalizing and reductive humanism, the theory of specifically opaque structures.'[232] Brathwaite, however, takes this further, proposing a resistance mode that could operate alongside Walvin's concept. Here nation language's transparency, not opacity, to the planters enables defiance:

> [...] English was, nonetheless, still being influenced by the underground language, the submerged language that the slaves had brought. And that underground language was itself constantly transforming itself into new forms. It was moving from a purely African form to a form which was African but which was adapted to the new environment and adapted to the cultural imperative of the European languages. And it was influencing the way in which the English, French, Dutch, and Spaniards spoke their own languages.[233]

African speech here is not simply repressed in the 'trial by death', but subverts the master-slave dialectic by bringing African elements into the colonisers' English. In Britain, creolised speech by White West Indians was regarded with contempt. Brathwaite cites the White, nineteenth-century diarist Maria Nugent's views about African-Caribbean speech patterns among White Jamaicans: 'Many of the ladies, who have not been educated in England, speak a sort of broken English, with an indolent drawing out of their words, that is very tiresome if not disgusting.'[234] Such reactions typify a process identified by David Lambert, whereby the term 'creole' refers 'to a metropolitan discourse through which settler subjects, institutions and cultures were represented as negatively transformed by the colonial encounter'.[235] Planters, while exploiting the enslaved, themselves became subaltern in the metropole's eyes. Attempting to erase African heritage, they instead absorbed it, their Africanised speech leaving them marginalised in turn. This suggests fractures within Whiteness, and that a search for racial purity will always turn upon itself. The counterflow of influence exemplifies

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[232] Glissant, 'Convergence', *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 133. Glissant's italics.
[233] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, pp. 7–8.
[234] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 18, citing Maria Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal of her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805*, ed. by Frank Cundall (London: Institute of Jamaica / A. & C. Black, 1907), p. 132.
[235] David Lambert, *White Creole Culture, Politics and Identity during the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 38–39.

tidalectic resistance, the to-and-fro of linguistic power resembling sweeping motions of the Jamaican woman's broom, or the back-and-forth of water across the Atlantic.

The planters aimed to impose acculturation, but instead were creolised through tidalectics that persisted regardless of White supremacy within the master-slave dialectic. Their denial of this, sharing metropolitan contempt for their own interculturation, left them less adroit at negotiating different registers of language than were the enslaved, who (as Walvin notes) adeptly navigated the creole continuum, Africanising or de-Africanising their speech to meet changing needs. Brathwaite, citing racist, eighteenth-century historian Edward Long, argues that this linguistic struggle's frontline involved enslaved women rearing White West Indian children in plantation houses. Youngsters experienced 'constant intercourse from their birth with Negroe domestics, whose drawling, dissonant gibberish they insensibly adopt […] all which they do not easily get rid of, even after an English education, unless sent away extremely young.'[236] This resistance did not reciprocate planters' atrocities by repressing European culture and language; it gave rather than taking away. Oppressors were not annihilated but creolised, becoming vessels for African heritage. Restrictions and prejudices surrounding African speech left everyone in plantation society without doubt that language was a site of conflict, oppression, and resistance.

Brathwaite often dramatises such struggles, as in his poem 'Namsetoura' (2005), where he meets the spirit of Namsetoura, an Asante woman from the time of slavery, under a cobwebbed arbour on his property in Barbados. Interviewed, Brathwaite explains:

> [...] she criticized my own sense of poetry, which is a very humbling experience. She did it in a way which was quite unexpected because normally one would expect a sybil to speak in an oratorical manner, in a very correct, abstract system. But instead of that she used very salty language. She spoke in a mixture of Asante Twi, Ga, and Barbadian Nation language. But she spoke in a very—not a hostile manner—but she used a lot of four letter words. I mean, she chewed me out properly.[237]

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[236] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 3 vols (London: T. Lowndes, 1740), vol. 2, p. 278, cited in Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, p. 302. Long's spelling.

[237] Joyelle MacSweeney, 'Poetics, Revelations and Catastrophes: An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite', *Rain Taxi* (2005) <http://www.raintaxi.com/poetics-revelations-and-catastrophes-an-interview-with-kamau-brathwaite> [accessed 16 March 2022].

Namsetoura accuses Brathwaite of excessive debt to European models. Her imagery suggests that, for all his efforts, he has not escaped the master-slave dialectic:

Yu say yu writin poem about kimba slave Yu evva hear
wha GrandeeNanny tell de backraman a. bout she black back-
side? But looka yu doa nuh! Look wha be. come-a yu! mirasme buckra broni half-white back.
site bwoy. eatin de backra culcha. dah backra backsite culcha eatin yu

gyabiriw

Say wha?

De man yu say doan unnerstann?
Too many christels in yr engine?
Yu brain like winnmill spinnin widout cane or agency?

De caatwhip cut yu tong?[238]

'Backra' or 'buckra', discussed in the thesis' Introduction, was nation language for a slaver, and now applies to White people in general. 'Mirasme' means 'sickly' or 'malnourished'.[239] Other words are Twi: 'broni' means 'European' or 'stranger'; 'gyabiriw' can be 'coal' or 'charcoal', depending on tonal pronunciation (fiery images conclude the poem).[240] Namsetoura's African and nation language vocabulary exceeds Brathwaite's norm, and describes his defeat in a 'trial by death' against '*backra culcha*'. He has tried to assimilate Euro-American influences, but this hegemony dominates him instead, leaving a culturally 'half-white' synthesis beholden to missionary Christianity ('*christels in yr engine*'). She advocates instead that his poetry should emulate the earthy response to the 'backraman' from 'GrandeeNanny' – Queen Nanny of the Windward Maroons in Jamaica's Blue Mountains, an eighteenth-century resistance leader and 'Jamaican National Sheroe' who shared Namsetoura's Asante background.[241] Namsetoura exhorts Brathwaite to make stronger gestures of resistance, perhaps with linguistic maronage tactics similar to her conservation of African languages. '*De caatwhip cut yu tong?'* is a cliché transformed by

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[238] Brathwaite, *Born to Slow Horses* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), p. 120.
[239] *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, p. 370.
[240] Kari Dako, *Ghanaianisms: A Glossary* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2003), p. 48; Paul A. Kotey, *Hippocrene Concise Dictionary: Twi–English, English–Twi* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 2007), p. 69.
[241] Brathwaite, 'KB in Utah', *ARIEL*, vol. 40, no. 2–3, 2009, 203–73: 273.

featuring not a cat but a cartwhip, often used for beating the enslaved; the formerly enslaved Mary Prince recalls in her autobiography 'the smart of the rope, the cart-whip, and the cow-skin'.[242] In 'Namsetoura', the whip physically splits the poet's tongue, echoing imagery of lingual mutilation that, at the opening of this thesis, appeared in Brathwaite's 'Hereroes'. The line graphically conveys linguistic repression's role in wider tyrannies. In Namsetoura, Brathwaite finds a new ancestor who helps him recuperate African legacies. The spirit's maronage preserves African knowledge, and by encouraging Brathwaite to register these influences more thoroughly, she reduces his reliance on '*backra culcha*'. Her advice epitomises tidalectic resistance against dialectic synthesis.

Namsetoura's view of language as war zone is brought to worldwide and trans-historical levels by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o:

> In the American slave plantations that followed settlements, African languages including the drums would later be banned, some of those breaking the ban even earning the noose around their necks. […] each of the colonizing nations put their languages at the centre of their imperial universe. […] In all such cases of colonial conquest, language was meant to complete what the sword had started; do to the mind what the sword had done to the body.[243]

Ngũgĩ identifies this linguistic colonialism as continuing today. He recounts how 'along with the economic and political empires, Europe simultaneously created empires of the mind through language ideologies and practices, empires in tune with their world view.'[244] Even where local politicians wield power, if they replicate structures of colonial rule and European thought, they perpetuate 'metaphysical empires'. Defence of such systems 'does not necessarily come from its exporters but rather from the importers' acculturated to Europe's economic norms.[245] Ngũgĩ argues that these metaphysical empires of language continue to benefit imperial nations through financial structures that exploit former colonies:

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[242] Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, ed. by Sara Salih (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 14.
[243] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Resisting Metaphysical Empires: Language as a War Zone* (London: George Padmore Institute, 2013), pp. 16–17. Ngũgĩ refers primarily to North America, but similar practices occurred in the Caribbean. Drums are language because, in many African societies, 'talking drums' transmitted messages using tonal patterns derived from phrases in local speech – see Ulli Beier, 'Introduction: On Translating Yoruba Poetry', *Yoruba Poetry: An Anthology of Traditional Poems*, ed. and trans. by Beier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 12. Enslaved African-Caribbean people 'long retained the African art of communicating by drums, sending complex secret messages very rapidly over long distances.' – Cracton, p. 47.
[244] Ngũgĩ, p. 18.
[245] Ngũgĩ, p. 19.

> The corporate phase of the empire remains, though not in the old form […] Where royal charters once gave corporate rule the political cover it needed, today privatization gives corporate rule the political and ideological cover it needs. There is a difference; the first corporate rule was mercantile; today it is finance.[246]

'Corpolonialism' is Ngũgĩ's name for this combination of corporate and linguistic colonialism. He attributes to it the focus on English, rather than African languages, in education systems of nations formerly colonised by Britain.[247] In the Anglophone Caribbean, distinctions between languages of colonised and coloniser are subtler, due to repression of African speech under slavery. In these territories, the formal language of government and education is standard English, but nation language is arguably English too.[248] Brathwaite regards nation language's decolonial resistance as providing creative energy, but is uninterested in establishing where standard English becomes something else on the creole continuum; he derives too much poetry from remodulating language as a code of power. The Anglophone Caribbean's linguistic situation makes nation language poetry apt for challenging the metaphysical empires identified by Ngũgĩ. Consider a Jamaican song transcribed in 1790:

> If me want for go in a Ebo,
> Me can't go there!
> Since dem tief me from a Guinea,
> Me can't go there!
>
> If me want for go in a Congo,
> Me can't go there!
> Since dem tief me from my tatta,
> Me can't go there!
>
> If me want for go in a Kingston,
> Me can't go there!
> Since massa go in a England,
> Me can't go there![249]

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[246] Ngũgĩ, p. 19.
[247] Ngũgĩ, p. 19.
[248] Exceptions include St. Lucia, where the demotic language is a Francophone creole.
[249] Transcribed in J.B. Moreton, *Manners and Customs of the West India Islands* (London: W. Richardson, 1790), p. 153, cited in Brathwaite, *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica*, p. 20.

Transcriber J.B. Moreton introduces this song of the enslaved: 'When working, though at the hardest labour, they are commonly singing; and though their songs have neither rhime nor measure, yet many are witty and pathetic. I have often laughed heartily, and have as often been struck with deep melancholly at their songs'.[250] There are features still current in Jamaican nation language: use of 'Me' for 'I'; 'for' instead of 'to' when constructing infinitives; and 'in a' for 'to' in the sense of direction.[251] West African languages lack both the voiced 'th' (ð) of 'them' and the voiceless 'th' (θ) of 'thief'; the words become 'dem' and 'tief'.[252] 'Tatta', usually transcribed as 'tata', still means 'father' in Jamaican patois.[253] The song also evidences the lack of consonant clusters in many African tongues. Writing about Yoruba, Ulli Beier describes how this absence helps such languages be heard from afar, since 'European consonant clusters and indefinite vowel sounds would get lost in the winds, whereas Yoruba with only seven vowels [...] and syllables that consist usually of one consonant followed by a vowel or of a vowel by itself, remains intelligible over a long distance.'[254] This history contributes to the pronunciation of 'massa' for 'master', still current in Jamaica, though thankfully there is now less need for its use.[255] In Jamaican pronunciation, the 't' in 'can't' is usually elided, as in the resonant utterance of performance poet Michael Smith: 'me cyaan believe it | me seh me cyaan believe it'.[256]

The song's form also honours African heritage. Moreton, while listening sympathetically, regrets there is 'neither rhime nor measure'. This is an unwittingly useful observation about traditional, West African poetics. Ulli Beier reports that 'Rhyme itself is absent from Yoruba poetry, but there is alliteration and particularly vowel harmony.'[257] As for measure:

> Yoruba has no metre comparable to European poetic systems. This is to be expected, because

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[250] Moreton, p. 152. Moreton's spelling. 'Pathetic' has the older sense of 'emotionally moving'.
[251] Frederic G. Cassidy, *Jamaica Talk: Three Hundred Years of the English Language in Jamaica* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 53–55 and p. 67.
[252] Cassidy, p. 36.
[253] Cassidy, p. 222.
[254] Beier, p. 12.
[255] Cassidy, pp. 223–24.
[256] Michael Smith, 'Mi cyaaan believe it', *It a Come: Poems by Michael Smith*, ed. by Mervyn Morris (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986, 1989), p. 13.
[257] Beier, p. 13.

> there is a negligible difference between short and long vowels or between stressed and unstressed syllables. A Yoruba syllable that carries as little stress as the second syllable of the English word 'father' is simply inconceivable, because each syllable could not carry the tone that is essential to the proper meaning of the word.[258]

Refusing metrical templates and Europeanised rhyme schemes, enslaved Africans practice another form of poetic maronage here, distinct from eighteenth-century English conventions. European poetry required a modernist revolution to create a free verse tradition in the twentieth century. This genealogy is one influence on Brathwaite; he credits T.S. Eliot particularly, arguing that what 'Eliot did for Caribbean poetry and Caribbean literature was to introduce the notion of the speaking voice, the conversational tone.'[259] Charles Pollard stresses the importance to Brathwaite of how 'Eliot mimics different urban dialects to revolutionize modern poetry with the colloquial idioms of contemporary speech.'[260] However, Pollard also contrasts 'Eliot's ambivalent and Brathwaite's adversarial poetics of speech.'[261] Eliot mimics 'speech ironically because he worries that in representing linguistic fragmentation he may also be contributing to it', whereas Brathwaite is committed to nation language as resistance against linguistic colonialism.[262] For Caribbean poets, modernism's formal innovation offers reconnection to submerged, African poetics sharing 'neither rhime nor measure' with European tradition, but furnishing other resources for new writing. Each poem becomes an ocean across which tides carry words and ideas between avant-garde futures and deep history.

Alongside maronage, the song from Moreton's book manifests radical creolisation. Reminiscences about diverse African nations combine into a new, Caribbean expression that acknowledges participants' different origins while building unity among them. Whether identifying with the Igbo people (Moreton's 'Ebo'), Guinea or Congo, the Africans all mourn lost homelands and families. This intercultural sharing of Maroon elements is tidalectic, as is the likely mode of performance. Moreton doesn't record exactly how the song was enacted, but the singers' plurality, the frequent refrain and the location on a site of manual labour all

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[258] Beier, p. 15.
[259] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 30.
[260] Charles Pollard, p. 81.
[261] Charles Pollard, p. 87.
[262] Charles Pollard, p. 87.

imply group recitation. Structurally, it resembles sea shanties and other work songs for which one performer would sing out the lines that vary, the rest joining in with the refrain. As Ted Gioia notes, 'the influence of the African diaspora on the art of shanty singing was pervasive, as even the white shanty singers were quick to admit', and 'the singing style itself reflected an unmistakeably African aesthetic' where 'a back-and-forth interplay […] imparted a structure to both music and labor.'[263] This musical debt, and its recognition by White singers and sailors, seems an early example of Europeans learning tidalectically from the African diaspora. The tradition could become ancestral for acts of learning by White English poets from Caribbean poetics.

Gordon Rohlehr argues that such repetitions stem from 'characteristic West African "Call-and-Response" or Litany form', and that 'these elements have occurred in the Trinidad Calypso and in folk-songs throughout the Caribbean.'[264] Calypsonian Atilla the Hun agrees, recounting how similar performance arrangements flourished during group labour in Trinidad during slavery:

> Each gang had a leader whose main duty was to set a rhythm by improvising and chanting a song, the refrain of which was taken up and maintained in unison by the whole gang, as they wielded their implements in time to the rhythm. The leader always chose a sonorous and important-sounding name like Elephant, Thunderer, Trumpeter.[265]

Atilla situates these songs in 'a system of communal work called the *gayap*', that 'is followed in parts of the island even to this day'.[266] This originated on allotments where the enslaved cultivated their own food. Moreton does not specify where he heard the song he records, but the context (a discussion about overseers' treatment of enslaved workers) implies a cane-field setting. Holger Henke argues that traditions like gayap, occurring on provision grounds 'distant from the core estate, the planter's "great" house and the slave quarters', offered 'space which contradicted the mental suppression of the plantation system and

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[263] Ted Gioia, *Work Songs* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 122–123.
[264] Gordon Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* (Port of Spain: Gordon Rohlehr, 1990), p. 2.
[265] Raymond Quevedo (a.k.a. Atilla the Hun), *Atilla's Kaiso: A Short History of Trinidad Calypso* (St. Augustine: University of the West Indies Press, 1983), p. 6. 'Atilla' is Quevedo's spelling. There is continuity between gayap leaders' names and the rumbustious cognomens of calypsonians, including Atilla himself.
[266] Quevedo, p. 5. Quevedo's italics.

allowed the retention of African traditions and culture, as well as the development of new ones based thereon'.[267] Provision grounds therefore enabled freer use of African cultural practices and speech, and incubated resistance within plantocracy. As Cracton relates, the provision grounds were also 'meeting places, crossing points – a sort of semipermeable membrane' where the enslaved could liaise with Maroon communities.[268] Moreton, however, shows maronage (in Brathwaite's sense) occurring on the inner plantation itself. It seems that, in some Caribbean locales, African song structures were used within overseers' earshot, as well as during convivial occasions like gayap.

This genealogy includes twentieth-century calypso. Discussing call-and-response in Mighty Sparrow's song 'Dan Is the Man in the Van' (1963), Brathwaite says, 'The fourth line of each quatrain […] represents the response part of this form and is sometimes sung by chorus and/or audience.'[269] In other Sparrow songs, refrains recur even more frequently, matching the pulse of the song that Moreton transcribes. Brathwaite cites Sparrow's 'Ten to One is Murder' (1960) as 'dramatic monologue, which because of its call-and-response structure […] is capable of extension on stage':

> Well de leader of de gang was a hot like a pepperrr
> *Ten to One is Murder!*
> An every man in de gang had a white-handle razorrr
> *Ten to One is Murder!*
> They say ah push a gal from Grenada
> *Ten to One is Murder!*[270]

Mark Harris characterises the song's voicing: 'Narrating a gang assault, Sparrow's urgent vocal weaves in and out of saxophone glissandos with accelerating blasts of language that break from subdued asides into suddenly loud percussive utterances.'[271] Sparrow's performance thus incarnates the violent struggle on which he comments. Throughout this

[267] Holger Henke, 'Mapping the 'Inner Plantation': A Cultural Exploration of the Origins of Caribbean Local Discourse', *Social and Economic Studies*, vol. 45 no. 4, 1996, 51–75: 52, 59.
[268] Cracton, p. 63.
[269] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 25.
[270] Mighty Sparrow, *One Hundred and Twenty Calypsos to Remember… by the Mighty Sparrow* (Port of Spain: National Recording Co., 1963), p. 86, cited by Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 26. Sparrow's italics and spelling.
[271] Mark Harris, 'Alternative Soundscape Paradigms from Kamau Brathwaite and the Mighty Sparrow', *Small Axe*, no. 65, 2021: 16–35: 22.

calypso genealogy crossing oceans and centuries, constants are: choral refrain expanding personal drama into collective expression; a designated singer or poet as group leader; commentary on recent events; and (in the Caribbean) nation language conveying shared action against oppressors and adversaries, including enforcers of standard English.

At its end, Brathwaite notes, the song transcribed by Morton exemplifies ridicule 'turned as much against the masters as the singers themselves'.[272] Having lamented separation from Africa, the singers critique how enslavement prevents them from even visiting the port of Kingston. They conclude with a dig at the absentee plantation-owner, who lives in England (possibly in luxury) at the cost of their labour and suffering. They would rather not visit England, lest they encounter him.

Political and cultural self-assertion in the Jamaican song – preservation of African voice, mourning for lost heritage, and mockery of the planter – classifies it as 'covert resistance', as opposed to the 'active resistance' of plantation uprisings and Maroon raids. Gelien Matthews summarises covert practices:

> Covert forms of resistance seldom included violence directed at oppressors and were seldom recognized by slave masters as acts of resistance. Slaves practiced disguised resistance almost on a daily basis, and it was certainly far more frequent than overt acts. Covert resistance included such behaviour as suicide, infanticide, feigned laziness and stupidity, careless yet deliberate mishandling and destruction of plantation property, malingering or working slowly, stealing, and self-mutilation.[273]

Africans exploited Europeans' racist expectations of Black 'laziness and stupidity' by behaving as disobediently and subversively as possible while avoiding punishment, thus undermining plantation discipline and profits. Early nation language enacted covert resistance within speech. Free Black writers like Olaudah Equiano sometimes used accomplishments in standard English to demonstrate African intelligence, strengthening arguments for equality: 'did I consider myself an European, I might say my sufferings were great: but when I compare my lot with that of most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a *particular favourite of Heaven*, and acknowledge the mercies of providence in every occurrence

[272] Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, p. 223.
[273] Gilien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), p. 18.

of my life.'[274] However, on plantations, such a linguistic shift would represent capitulation. Plantation speech developed in ways that Europeans regarded as proving Africans' supposed shortcomings, but which for Africans represented insistence on submerged heritage, and a source of small triumphs in the ongoing 'trial by death'. Nation language is hence an act of maronage as well as a result of creolisation.

Africa's final legacy, entering poetry via calypso, is rhythm. Brathwaite's *History of the Voice* alludes to Ezra Pound's dictum that 'To break the pentameter, that was the first heave' in freeing Anglophone poetry from restrictive forms.[275] Brathwaite identifies this modernist potential in African-Caribbean heritage: 'In order to break down the pentameter, we discovered an ancient form which was always there, the calypso. […] It does not employ the iambic pentameter. It employs dactyls. It therefore mandates the use of the tongue in a certain way, the use of sound in a certain way.'[276]

To demonstrate, Brathwaite quotes his early poem 'Calypso': 'The stone had skidded arc'd and bloomed into islands'.[277] The line visually appears as standard English, except for a missing comma. In performance, though, it exemplifies an achievement identified by Edward Baugh: that while Brathwaite's early work 'is, quantitatively, mainly Standard English,' it stands out for 'rhythms of various kinds of New World black music'.[278] Despite superficially conventional vocabulary, spelling and syntax, the line is nation language due to incorporating Caribbean rhythms of speech and song. Brathwaite sings it with a calypso rhythm, supporting divergences from normative English scansion. Maureen Warner-Lewis scans the line as 'The stone' had skidd'ed arc'd' and bloomed' into is'lands' (her extra apostrophes mark stress).[279] However, binary conventions of stress-marking feel inadequate to nation language's gradations of emphasis; for example, in Brathwaite's renditions, the line climaxes with calypso's characteristic heightening pitch and heavy stress on the last

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[274] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. by Vincent Carretta (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 31. Equiano's italics.
[275] Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 532.
[276] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 17.
[277] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 48, cited in *History of the Voice*, p. 18.
[278] Edward Baugh, ''The Pain of History Words Contain': Language and Voice in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry', *P.N. Review*, no. 194, 2010, 18–23: 19.
[279] Maureen Warner-Lewis, 'The Rhythm of Caribbean Vocal and Oral-Based Texts', *Caribbean Culture: Soundings on Kamau Brathwaite*, ed. by Annie Paul (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2007), pp. 54–75: p. 68.

syllable.[280] Brathwaite's innovations include free verse lineation also derived from calypso: 'after the skimming movement of the first line, we have a distinct variation. The voice dips and deepens to describe an intervalic pattern.'[281] This flexibility honours traditions reaching back, through the lack of conventional 'measure' recorded by Moreton, to traditional West African poetry's freedom from metrical conventions.

Brathwaite thus participates in modernism by nurturing traditions which, in pre-colonial Africa, already embodied formal approaches that Euro-American poetry left underdeveloped until much later. His poetics challenge English poetry's normative forms, bestow flexibility of rhythm and line, bring literature closer to the Caribbean's spoken voices, and resist 'metaphysical empires' of colonial language. Furthermore, he taps traditions of collectivity that let poets (like gayap leaders or calypsonians) showcase their talents, but where poems express communal will, not individual genius. In nation language, this will motivates resistance by dramatising Caribbean history's ancestral wounds.

Since Brathwaite roots nation language so strongly in this history, one might ask how his strategies relate to non-Black writers in England. This requires not the ambivalent use of dialect identified by Charles Pollard in T.S. Eliot, but an adversarial stance intervening politically on behalf of marginalised communities. Brathwaite himself suggests how this could take place, reflecting on English modernist poetry that he perceives as representing another type of nation language.

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[280] Brathwaite, 'Calypso', *Rights of Passage* [L.P.] (London: Argo Records, 1968).
[281] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 18.

2.3. 'it doan sounn like briggflatts': North East Dialect Poetry as Nation Language

When applying Brathwaite's theories to English dialects, a sense of permission from the Caribbean is ethically important. Otherwise, English poets could unwittingly perform colonialist appropriation, not a revivifying cultural exchange. Happily, Brathwaite himself connects Caribbean nation language and English dialects, particularly in the North East. As this thesis' Introduction observes, a footnote to Brathwaite's long poem *X/Self* glosses Northumbrian modernist Basil Bunting's 'Briggflatts' as a 'nation language (*jordie*) long poem' incorporating North Eastern speech.[282] Bunting also influences Bill Griffiths: colleagues at the National Poetry Centre encouraged Griffiths to read Bunting, who was the Poetry Society's President (a ceremonial post) during the B.P.R.'s tenure there.[283]

Matthew Hart argues that, despite Brathwaite's enthusiasm, 'Bunting was acutely aware that there was little possibility of forging a new literary tradition around Northumbrian vernacular poetry.'[284] It is true that Bunting's use of dialect vocabulary here amounts to a few words (e.g., 'spuggies' for 'little sparrows'), plus insistence on correctly pronouncing 'scones'. However, like Brathwaite, he writes for a particular accent ('Southrons would maul the music of many lines in 'Briggflatts'').[285] Furthermore, Bunting's writing does not just involve non-standard lexicon: he deploys Northumbrian history as a resistance mode partaking in maronage, creolisation and tidalectics. The impact, Keith Tuma writes, is that 'Briggflatts' 'can be read as reprimanding a British center intent on covering over the collapse of an old system with new assertions of the homogeneity of "Englishness."'[286] Peter Quatermain finds that this recovery of cultural agency has political ramifications, with the Northumbrian-ness of 'Briggflatts' resisting 'Centralized power [that] is the power of self-regard and self-interest; […] inevitably a power of cruel mismanagement, for it is divorced from the immediacy of the local.'[287]

[282] Brathwaite, *X/Self*, p. 128.
[283] Griffiths, 'Interview with Will Rowe', p. 173; Richard Burton, *A Strong Song Tows Us: The Life of Basil Bunting* (Oxford: Infinite Ideas, 2013), pp. 459–468.
[284] Hart, p. 86.
[285] Bunting, *Collected Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 148–149.
[286] Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 191.
[287] Peter Quatermain, *Stubborn Poetries: Poetic Facticity and the Avant-Garde* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), p. 35.

This chapter's present section examines how Brathwaite's concepts relate to North East England's history, dialect, poetics, and political possibilities, as exemplified by 'Briggflatts'. Even if Bunting did not envisage 'a new literary tradition', Brathwaite's theories highlight possibilities unconsidered by Bunting, but nurtured by Griffiths. If 'Briggflatts' is nation language, and Bunting's English is normative compared to Griffiths' dialect poems, the latter must be nation language too, suggesting new avenues for the region's poetry.

Brathwaite's footnote pertains to his piece 'X/Self's Xth Letters from the Thirteen Provinces'. Here the narrator X/Self considers how Caribbean literature is still in the process of defining its own identity:

> but is like we still start
> where we start/in out start/in out start/in out start/in
>
> out since menelek was a bwoy & why
> is dat & what is de bess weh to seh so/so it doan sounn like
>
> brigg
> flatts nor hervokitz
>
> nor de pisan cantos nor de souf sea
> bible
>
> nor like ink. le & yarico & de anglo saxon
> chronicles[288]

X/Self seeks a voice diverging from such masterpieces, one suitable for equivalent celebrations of Caribbean belonging, searching amid what Paul Naylor calls 'a montage style that brings European and Amerindian history into play to a much greater extent than in [Brathwaite's] earlier work.'[289] However, the naïve narrator mangles the name of Melville J. Herskovits, American ethnographer of Haiti, and invents a 'South Sea Bible' through misinterpreting the South Sea Bubble, an economic crash in 1720.[290] For Brathwaite, *X/Self* is thus 'a Calibanization of what I have read, the things that informed my growth in terms of

[288] Brathwaite, *X/Self*, p. 85. The passage reappears in Brathwaite, *Ancestors*, p. 450, with revised lineation and layout. The earlier version is cited here, since *Ancestors* lacks the footnote.
[289] Naylor, p. 168.
[290] Melville J. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York: Octagon Books, 1964).

ideas'.[291] The poem ironises not only Brathwaite's scholarship, but its own narrator, who revels in botched literariness while neglecting how Caribbean traditions encode folk knowledge about African history. Such resources include 'since menelek was a bwoy', an '?inexplicable Bajan expression = 'for ages', 'for as long as I can remember'', alluding to 'Menelik I (1000BC) […] founder of the Ethiopian royal line'.[292]

'Briggflatts' can still offer a model for Caribbean poetry, but not as a voice to be imitated. Instead, Bunting's poem may inspire equivalent approaches that draw on the Caribbean's own linguistics – hence Brathwaite rendering 'Geordie' as 'jordie'. He admits elsewhere that 'the spelling might be wrong' when describing 'hadrians wall | known only to jordie goats'.[293] When discussing North East England, he uses phonetic spelling techniques developed for Caribbean nation language.

Defining 'Geordie' is contentious. Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster observe that the word typically denotes 'people born within three miles of the Tyne from Shields to Hexham'; however, these historians adopt a wider catchment, 'the whole North East region', i.e., 'the old counties of Northumberland and Durham' – they admit this 'will offend some people.'[294] The broader definition obscures intra-regional differences deriving from population movements and cultural exchange, but also consolidates a regional identity hearkening back to Northumbria, the early medieval kingdom that is the 'nation' of Bunting's 'nation language' – the origin point where he roots his identity. Northumbria was founded in 654, when the kingdom of Bernicia (in what is now North East England and south east Scotland) unified with neighbouring Deira (roughly, Yorkshire).[295] Northumbrian legacies survive in local dialects; minus territory now in Scotland, Bernicia's heartlands approximate Colls' and Lancaster's 'Geordie' zone.[296]

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[291] Mackey, 'An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite', *Hambone*, no. 9, 1991, 42–59: 44.
[292] Brathwaite, *X/Self*, p. 128. Brathwaite's question mark.
[293] Brathwaite, *X/Self*, p. 114 and p. 6.
[294] Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster, '1992 Preface', *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism*, ed. Colls and Lancaster (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Northumbria University Press, 2005), pp. xi–xiii: pp. xi–xii). The first quotation cites the *Sunday Sun*, 22 March 1964.
[295] David Rollason, *Northumbria, 500–1100: Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 20–53. At its largest, Northumbria also reached westward into Cumbria, present-day Lancashire and south west Scotland.
[296] Rollason, pp. 48–51.

Islands underwrite Northumbria's history. Its capital was Bamburgh, a coastal stronghold overlooking the Farne Islands. 'Briggflatts' depicts revels at this court:

> Great strings next the post of the harp
> clang, the horn has majesty,
> flutes flicker in the draft and flare.
> Orion strides over Farne.
> Seals shuffle and bark,
> terns shift on their ledges,
> watching Capella steer for the zenith,
> and Procyon starts his climb.[297]

The island of Lindisfarne, Northumbria's cultural and spiritual epicentre, is also visible from Bamburgh. At *Poetry of the Americas*, Brathwaite spoke for Caribbean nations: 'We are islands. We live, we work, we die *off* the great continents. That makes a difference immediately.'[298] Chapter 2.1 showed how the Caribbean's archipelagic geography suggests the back-and-forth of tidalectics, rather than Hegel's teleological dialectics. The British Isles are less topographically sundered, but lie offshore of another 'great continent', Eurasia. Furthermore, the early medieval Isles were politically fragmented. Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Welsh, Picts, Irish and Norse all creolised, albeit sometimes with more violence than in present-day Caribbean cultures. Charles Phythian-Adams argues that archipelagic thinking is especially relevant to Northumbria, and that this intercultural tendency lingers today:

> Furthest away from London, between Northumbria and Cumbria in the north and Cornwall in the south west is what may be defined as 'Archipelago England' because it continuously borders on, and even overlaps, and relates to, neighbouring Celtic societies from Scotland to Brittany. Beyond these it looks to cultural influences from the Irish Sea, the Bay of Biscay and the further Atlantic. To it may be opposed a 'European England' – from Dorset to the Wash – variously dominated within by court, government, the metropolis and the two universities […][299]

Peter Makin identifies these Celtic elements in how the Old Welsh long poem *Y Gododdin* influences 'Briggflatts'. Attributed to the poet Aneirin, *Y Gododdin* portrays warfare between post-Roman Britons and Angles in the North; as seen in Chapter 1.4, Bill Griffiths translated

[297] Bunting, *Collected Poems*, p. 58. Capella and Procyon are stars.
[298] Brathwaite, 'The Literature of the Caribbean', Side A, 08:54. Brathwaite's emphasis.
[299] Charles Phythian-Adams, 'The Northumbrian Island', *Northumbria: History and Identity 547–2000*, ed. by Colls (Stroud: Phillimore, 2019), pp. 334–59: p. 354.

it. Structurally, *Y Gododdin* is a series of interlinked elegies for the fallen. Makin argues that its imagery operates through successive oppositions, as vigorous warriors suddenly become carrion: 'he was uproar on the battle-slope, he was fire; | his spears were impetuous, they flashed; | he was raven-food.'[300] Paralleling Brathwaite's tidalectics, Makin finds *Y Gododdin* has a 'a wave-form, wherein [Aneirin] makes his paradox and then returns to it'; the poem 'goes backwards and forwards like waves, to leave a series of contrasting juxtapositions marked on its surface'.[301] Opposing truths of life and death do not resolve into synthesis; instead, each informs understanding of the other. Bunting brings these patterns into 'Briggflatts', particularly when responding to Aneurin, depicting 'the game Ida left to rat and raven, | young men, tall yesterday, with cabled thighs.'[302] 'Briggflatts' creolity enacts Brythonic culture through structure as well as descriptive content, eschewing epic narrative's dialectic thrust in favour of tidalectically interrelated details. Bunting's search for alternative poetics within local, historical models bears comparison with Brathwaite's turn to calypso rhythms. Even when 'Briggflatts' resembles standard English, underlying structures with deep histories still root the poem in Northumbrian speech.

Describing North East dialect's origins, Griffiths explains how creolisation with Norse culture took place further into the early medieval period: 'vocabulary and terminology was shared along the coast, and there is interchange of Old Norse and Old English terms'; he believes this is 'a special phenomenon of the coastal zone […] It seems fair to dub it an Anglo-Viking culture.'[303] The later Middle Ages added 'Dutch Influence [...] evident in words like *hook*, *goit*, *hobble*, *douffie*, *mizzling*, *dacker* – a reminder that contacts can as easily be cross-sea as along coast.'[304] Linguistic interchange around the North Sea, mingling English with Norse and Dutch, further establishes the relevance of tidalectics and dialect for the North East. The process affected communities in different ways, engendering

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300 Peter Makin, *Bunting: The Shaping of His Verse* (Wotton-under-Edge: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 181, citing Aneurin, *Y Gododdin: Britain's Oldest Heroic Poem*, ed. and trans. by A.O.H. Jarman (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1988), p. 24.
301 Makin, *Bunting*, p. 182.
302 Bunting, *Collected Poems*, p. 53. Ida was a Bernician king.
303 *Fishing and Folk*, p. 57.
304 *Fishing and Folk*, p. 57. Griffiths' italics. A 'hook' is a thief or scoundrel; a 'goit' is a watercourse; 'hobble' is surface ridges caused by wind on the sea; 'douffie', 'mizzling' and 'dacker' are weather terms meaning 'dull, damp, mild', 'drizzling' and 'uncertain, unsettled' respectively. *Fishing and Folk*, p. 230 and pp. 20–40.

accents and idioms that still vary noticeably. Researching Bunting's letters to Eric Mottram, Griffiths observes:

> But there are other sites he recollects – Briggflatts (so spelt), Bewcastle, Hexham, and Bywell. Now these last three sites are Anglo-Saxon in nature, and Basil comments on this by adding, "if we see any bloody Jutes or Saxons we can chuck dirt at them." That is, Basil saw himself as an Anglian, a part of that very Anglicized and unvikingized countryside of Northumberland, where indeed an annual festival at Morpeth [...] still celebrates country sports, crafts and arts, and maintains its imagined dialectical purity from urban Geordie contamination.[305]

Born on Tyneside, Bunting meets narrow definitions of 'Geordie', but his poems focus on rural Northumbria, where (as Griffiths notes) Norse influence is weaker. In Brathwaite's terms, Bunting's attitudes suggest 'Maroon consciousness' resisting Newcastle speech's local hegemony. However, Griffiths stresses that Morpeth's 'dialectical purity' (and hence that of Bunting's poetry) is 'imagined', suggesting that 'vikingized' language still creolises outward from Newcastle. Griffiths' characterisation of Bunting seems exaggerated, though, since the Northumbrian history of 'Briggflatts' incorporates non-Anglian figures like Brythonic poets Aneurin and Taliesin, and Norse king Eric Bloodaxe (not to mention Bunting's influences from Italian music and Persian literature). Importantly, Bunting decouples Northumbrian culture from ethnic chauvinism, presenting its achievements as fruits of interculturation. Lecturing in 1969 about Eadfrith, the Bishop of Lindisfarne credited with creating the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, Bunting said:

> I don't mean to suggest that his art had anything to do with his race. Indeed, the Angles who settled in Northumberland seem to have lived on such easy terms with the Britons (among them), that it would be hazardous to suggest that Eadfrith or Cuthbert or any other Northumbrian who was not a nobleman was of purely Anglic race. [...] Race (is a misty) notion anyway, and racial characteristics change with lightning rapidity. [...] race or no race, a fusion of cultures took place in early Northumberland.[306]

Bunting idealises a period when Brythonic people were frequently sublated by Angles. Throughout the Early Medieval period, Britons received less legal protection than did Angles or Saxons of the same social stratum; medievalist Alex Woolf argues that this

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[305] Griffiths, 'Basil Bunting and Eric Mottram', *Chicago Review*, vol. 44 no. 3/4, 1998, 104–13: 106.

[306] Basil Bunting, *Basil Bunting on Poetry*, ed. by Peter Makin (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 15–16. Makin's parenthetical interpolations.

amounted to apartheid.[307] However, this does not negate Bunting's point that interculturation was integral to Northumbrian identity; after all, interculturation in the Caribbean occurred despite a background of horrific oppression. Brathwaite shares Bunting's understanding of Northumbria as a locus for colonisation and creolisation, even before the Anglian arrival. He refers to 'Northumberland borderlands 'pacified' by Hadrian, Caesar and Severus': Septimius Severus was an 'African-born Roman emperor and imperial military campaigner', one of *X/Self*'s 'personae from 'the Ancient World' who […] are black, African, slave, brown, creole, Latin, Asian, Alexandrine or Byzantine'.[308] The poets' shared appreciation of the region's creole history contributes towards claiming 'Briggflatts' as nation language. Indeed, Brathwaite depicts the Western Roman Empire's fall as precipitating a creole flux, comparable to that of the Caribbean in the British Empire's wake:

the dialect of the tribes will come beating up against the crack
foundation stones of latin like the salt whip speech. less lips
of water eating the soft tones of venice

sparing us back to purest parthenon
to simple angle saxon chronicle
to ga to gar to derek walcott's pitcher of clear metaphor[309]

The Ga are an ethnic group in present-day Ghana, sharing ancestors with many Caribbean people. Species of gar, a fish, live in the Caribbean, but the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reference nudges readers toward 'gar' as Old English for 'spear'.[310] Languages of each empire's successor-states, overlapping like waves, beginning as glossolalia, engender new forms of expression: Old English and Derek Walcott's nation language. Brathwaite views Early Medieval creolisation as having failed. Hegemonies re-emerged: English kings committed to the Roman Catholic Church during the seventh century, England was unified in the tenth, and power became heavily centralised after the Norman Conquest of 1066. In Brathwaite's

[307] Alex Woolf, 'Apartheid and Economics in Anglo-Saxon England', *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by N.J. Higham (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 115–129: pp. 127–129.
[308] Brathwaite, *X/Self*, p. 114, p. 113. If by 'Caesar' Brathwaite means Julius Caesar, he is mistaken; Julius Caesar's expeditions to Britain did not penetrate beyond the South East.
[309] Brathwaite, 'Aachen', *Ancestors*, p. 420.
[310] Griffiths, *A User-Friendly Dictionary of Old English* (Benbowbridge: Amra Imprint, 1989), n.p., listed under 'G*R'. The Old English word is the root of the fish's name (*O.E.D.*).

words, 'a new forum of feudalism, a | new form of barbarity comes into the world so that the process [...] has to be started all over again'.[311] A totalising dialectic replaces the Isles' tidalectics. This reconsolidation of power ultimately escalates to the transatlantic slave trade, hence *X/Self*'s refrain that 'rome burns | and our slavery begins'.[312] As Wilson Harris notes, the lines encapsulate Brathwaite's contention that 'the expansion of European empires […] may be traced much further back than the eighteenth century through the inception of the Middle Passage into ancient Rome, Macedonia, Persia, ancient Greece, and India.'[313] Writing in 1991, Brathwaite himself sees this pattern repeating into what, as of 1987, had lain in the future: 'since the fall of the Berlin Wall […] those who look at [*X/Self*] again might understand better now the | metaphor of equilibrium and the ?meaning of Rome burns & our slavery begins'.[314]

For Brathwaite, early medieval England's fate is a cautionary tale of what is at risk for the similarly creolistic Caribbean: if the region's tidalectics fail, hegemony could supervene again. As Tuma notes, the humility of X/Self's voice, its refusal to adopt hieratic authority, enacts this aversion to dialectics of power: 'Brathwaite seems to secure a distance from monumental history by appropriating a local voice anything but aggressive and totalizing.'[315] For Tuma, this voice mitigates what he regards as Brathwaite's 'insensitivity to local differences and contingencies, a mixing of Ho Chi Minh, Castro, Africans, and Native Americans in a global victim pool sullied by the same evil.'[316] However, Tuma misses that Brathwaite's goal is precisely to safeguard 'local differences and contingencies' against such submersion. Brathwaite's transcultural juxtapositions do not synthesise his wide-ranging references into sameness, but establish tidalectic relations, clarifying the relevance of each community's distinctive struggles to those of others. The brevity of some of Brathwaite's references in *X/Self* suggests that the poem may form only part of readers' ongoing self-education about such matters.

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[311] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, p. 118.
[312] Brathwaite, *Ancestors*, p. 393.
[313] Wilson Harris, 'Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror (Reflections on Originality and Tradition)', *Sisyphus and Eldorado: Magical and Other Realisms in Caribbean Literature*, ed. by Timothy J. Reiss (Trenton NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2002), pp. 1–13: p. 5.
[314] Brathwaite, letter to Anne Walmsley, 5–6 October 1991, Brighton, The Keep, Anne Walmsley Archive, SxMS88/10/3/9. Brathwaite's question mark.
[315] Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 258.
[316] Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles*, p. 258.

In 1992, during a residency in the North East for Northern Arts, Brathwaite drafted an example of his transatlantic poetics in practice, developing connections between Northumbria and the Caribbean. During this trip, he visited Lindisfarne. An ambitious work about the experience, 'Scapeghosts', was later published in the County Durham newspaper *The Northern Echo*. The piece recounts a dream in which he returns to the Holy Island, but is simultaneously an adolescent back in Barbados, participating in a ritual of awakening sexuality. Like overlapping images on double-exposed film, the two scenes never synthesise into a whole; they are lived as separate but simultaneous realities, highlighting similarities, not sameness:

> […] i was one of those boys who use to cross over the causeway to the Holy Island befo-
> re the sea came rush. in back in w/a sound like it was River Bay or somewhere very
> near & early in my childhood when as i say they use to be these left foot games wher
>
> (e) the girls went hiding off into the salt. bushes […][317]

River Bay is a beach in northern Barbados. The text shows Brathwaite connecting the North East to the Caribbean through dream logic, observing topographies that license this tidalectic comparison of places, and using nation language innovations to write about the area. The topographical link suggests that, like the Caribbean, coastal Northumbria could host processes of creolisation and maronage. Even the poem's visual layout alludes to this. Covering a double spread of newspaper with elaborate fonts while describing Lindisfarne, Brathwaite implicitly evokes the gorgeous textuality of Eadfrith's *Lindisfarne Gospels*. These *Gospels* are a product of 'Insular' culture: 'a period of close cultural interaction between Britain and Ireland, from around 550 to 900. Elements of CELTIC, GERMANIC, antique, EARLY CHRISTIAN, and Mediterranean culture fused together to form something new, entirely the product of the islands of Britain and Ireland.'[318] The masterpiece therefore embodies tidalectic balance between creolisation of these various influences, and the maronage (implied by the word 'Insular') needed to cultivate this fusion into a distinct tradition. Parallels between Insular manuscripts and Sycorax Video-style are accentuated in the revision of Brathwaite's poem that appears as 'Scapeghost(s)' in the magazine *XCP: Cross*

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[317] Brathwaite, 'Scapeghosts', *The Northern Echo*, Tue 26 October 1993, section The Page, 6–7: 6.

[318] Michelle P. Brown, *Understanding Illuminated Manuscripts: A Guide to Technical Terms* (London: The J. Paul Getty Museum and the British Library, 1995), p. 74. Brown's capitalisation.

Cultural Poetics (1999). This version's Sycorax text loses the wave-like mustering of paragraphs across a double-spread of newspaper, but there are gains from the greater control and variation of font. Brathwaite also alludes more to Lindisfarne's monastic history. St. Aidan, founder of Lindisfarne's monastery, is now namedropped frequently, stressing an association with Aidee, the girl protagonist of the Bajan ritual. The version concludes with a note describing Brathwaite revising the text in Barbados:

> 31 aug again sev years later which is St Aidan birthda (y) with the sea gone back out […]
> & the whole ilannnn simi &
> saltbush & cowpasture **'& adorn w/gold & w/gems & gilded w/silver unallowed metal. And I, Aldread, unworthy & miserable sacristan, gloss it in this kind of Inglish w/the healp of God & St Cuthbe rt'**[319]

Brathwaite's revision process represents itself here as a trans-oceanic movement: from being in North East England while thinking (in part) about Barbados, to returning to Barbados where he considers Northumbria. The reciprocity is tidalectic. The 'whole ilannnn' of Barbados, and perhaps 'Scapeghost(s)' itself as a description of islands, become a text to be ornamented like the *Lindisfarne Gospels*. The bolded passage reworks the colophon appended to the *Gospels* by Aldred, tenth-century provost of the monastic community at Chester-le-Street in present-day County Durham.[320] Lindisfarne's monks moved there around 883, to escape Viking attacks on their former home. Aldred also supplied the *Gospels*' interlinear Old English gloss. Casting himself as Aldred, Brathwaite makes his revision an equivalent act of reinterpretation and translation. The spelling of 'Aldread' aligns this monastic tradition with Rastafari's dreadlocked devotees, suggesting that the monks, as in Brathwaite's view of Rastas, are practising maronage.

Lindisfarne's monastery was a stronghold for the Celtic Church. This branch of Christianity gradually developed a set of distinct practices within the wider Catholic

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[319] Brathwaite, 'Scapeghost(s)', *XCP: Cross Cultural Poetics*, no. 4, 1999, 7–27: 27.

[320] A normative translation: 'and adorned it with gold and with gems and also with gilded-over silver – pure metal. And (I) Aldred, unworthy and most miserable priest? [He] glossed it in English between the lines with the help of God and St. Cuthbert.' – Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality & the Scribe* (London: The British Library, 2005), p. 104. The 'I' is erased but still visible in the original – Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels*, p. 146.

Church. Notably, the Celtic power structure was decentralised: each monastery had hierarchy, but there was no coordinating authority. Historian John T. McNeill writes:

> Its leaders were never concerned to create an overall authoritative church policy that could have channeled and directed their spiritual energy and missionary compassion. While they recognised, in qualified terms, the authority of Rome, their work was done on their own initiative and without consulting the popes. When their religious influence became paramount in wide areas of Europe, they made no attempt to give it an enduring structure.[321]

Relations between monasteries involved negotiation and exchange, not imposition. Celtic missionaries' journeys utilised the British Isles' archipelagic nature; Griffiths' 'Story of Seaham' local history group describes these 'Dalriadic Scots who came originally from Ireland [...] From Iona – on the west coast – the progress of the Scots can be traced [...] along the valley of the Tweed (Jedburgh, Melrose, Kelso) to the east coast, and southward to Lindisfarne (founded 635) and beyond.'[322] The group's account stresses the monastic settlements' enisled positions, which are perhaps a factor in Brathwaite's invocation of Rastafarian maronage: 'Their sites are often typified by considerable isolation – either for religious detachment, or for protection'.[323]

Brathwaite is not the only Caribbean writer to explore these parallels. Jamaican poet Lorna Goodison wrote 'Cuthbert's Last Journey' while Laureate at the 2012 Durham Book Festival. The poem depicts monks transporting Saint Cuthbert's bones to Durham Cathedral in the late tenth century. Cuthbert was Bishop of Lindisfarne in the late seventh century. Griffiths describes him as 'reconciling the Celtic and Roman traditions of Christianity' after the Synod of Whitby in 663, when King Oswy of Northumbria chose to support Roman rather than Celtic Christianity.[324] Griffiths identifies 'the saint's occasional association with both animals and women', and his 'ascetic life as a hermit' in the Farne Islands, as signs of 'residual Celtic influence', implying that the Celtic Church's openness and humility were

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[321] John T. McNeill, *The Celtic Churches: A History A.D. 200 to 1200* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 224.

[322] *Old Seaham in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Times*, ed. by Griffiths (Seaham: Story of Seaham Heritage Group and Amra Imprint, 2001), p. 13.

[323] *Old Seaham in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Times*, p. 13.

[324] *Fishing and Folk*, p. xiii; McNeill, pp. 112–114. Some scholars date the Synod to 664 (McNeill, p. 249), including Griffiths' 'Story of Seaham' group – *Old Seaham in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Times*, p. 14.

soon to be submerged during the British Isles' transition from tidalectic to dialectic structures.[325] In part, Goodison's poem reads:

> Open coffin we shoulder, houses Brother Cuthbert.
> Wonder worker. Beloved servant leader, head
> shepherd, caretaker of the flock, and the book.
>
> Partial to the pretty obzocky duck; in all creation
> nothing alien to him; stones refused, raise up
> of own accord to level up our path; we walk good
>
> through fen and moor, along wild and rocky road
> we transport his radiant remains, light and healing
> ever active, emanate from his sweet flesh.[326]

The syntax is sometimes compacted in the style of nation language; in particular, 'walk good' is a Jamaican benediction along the lines of 'take care'.[327] In the poem, monks whose demotic speech would be a Northern, Anglian form of Old English are speaking in Jamaican idioms. Goodison presents these different Englishes, and their social contexts, as sufficiently connected that the second seems a natural medium for notionally translating the first. In this light, Aldred's Old English gloss of the *Lindisfarne Gospels* becomes a nation language achievement, winning demotic meaning from the hegemonic language of Latin. After all, Peter Quatermain argues, standard English has become 'the language of administrative and executive power, political and legal power – just as Latin once was.'[328]

The Synod of Whitby marked the diminution of Britain's participation in the tidalectic ethos represented by the Celtic Church. The process continued in the Late Medieval period with governments asserting power over Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and the English regions; and later still, through imposing British imperial power overseas. However, by detailing Northumbrian heritage while using dialect and accent, Bunting counteracts this trajectory, recuperating the region's autonomy. This is analogous to development of national and regional cultures in Caribbean countries that won independence from Britain around the time 'Briggflatts' was published. Brathwaite's equivalence between his own poetics and

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[325] Griffiths, 'Introduction', Ælfric, p. ii.
[326] Lorna Goodison, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2017), p. 566.
[327] *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, p. 587.
[328] Quatermain, p. 35.

Bunting's represents a search for models to help the Caribbean escape the metropole's cultural grip. Decentralising energies in 'Briggflatts' emerge from the same background – the British Empire's collapse – that impelled the Anglophone Caribbean towards self-determination. This validates seeking Caribbean guidance for English regional poetics: such English work already influences Brathwaite's nation language.

This is ironic, considering plausible allegations that Bunting, while working in Iran in the 1940s and 1950s, served as a spy, undermining Mohammad Mosaddeq's social-democratic government during a campaign to maintain British control of Iranian oil.[329] Bunting thereby participates in what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o dubs 'Corpolonialism', as defined in Chapter 2.2. Nevertheless, Bunting's involvement means he was knowledgeable about, and potentially influenced by, imperial decline. He even sought work in the Caribbean, unsuccessfully applying in 1953 for a Colonial Office job in Trinidad.[330]

'Briggflatts' cultural nation-building thus parallels contemporaneous establishment of Caribbean national identities. Reflecting on Bunting's reawakening of Northumbrian nationhood, Tony Lopez notes the suppression that already occurs: Bunting's co-nationals 'may not, except for this poem, know themselves as Northumbrians.'[331] Lopez relates how 'Briggflatts' orients local culture away from the metropole:

> Those who wish to pretend that modernism was a temporary aberration are outraged that a modernist can annex a region whose identity has in the recent past and only with difficulty been subsumed into Englishness. Bunting contests Englishness by producing a poem that maps completely different boundaries: Dublin - York - Orkney and which makes standard 'southron' English incorrect.[332]

Lopez references Bunting's invocation of 'Bloodaxe, king of York, | king of Dublin, king of Orkney.'[333] Eric Bloodaxe's reign does not share the topological unity later constructed for

[329] 'We know that Bunting was active among the Bakhtiari tribesmen in the Zagros mountains throughout his time in the region […] and not long after Bunting's expulsion the Bakhtiari started an insurgency against Mosaddeq's government. It is unlikely that Bunting had not been involved. […] Britain's repeated covert attempts to subvert the Mosaddeq regime were all about oil.' – Richard Burton, p. 322.

[330] Richard Burton, p. 576.

[331] Tony Lopez, 'Oppositional Englishness: National Identity in Basil Bunting's 'Briggflatts'', *Meaning Performance: Essays on Poetry* (Cambridge: Salt, 2006), p. 158.

[332] Lopez, pp. 159–160.

[333] Bunting, *Collected Poems*, p. 42.

England by the Normans (whose centralisation of authority presaged the imperial metropole), but is distributed archipelagically around the British Isles as numerous domains linked by sea routes. Bunting restores these lost, tidalectic connections, and challenges the dialectic that subsumes regional culture into a totalising edifice of power. Like Brathwaite, he dredges up a previously 'submarine' unity. Meanwhile, Bunting shares Brathwaite's articulation of communal will against the 'metaphysical empire' of standard English. His Northumbria partakes in a process envisioned by Edouard Glissant: 'Europe is archipelagising. Linguistic regions, cultural regions, beyond the boundaries of nationhood, are islands – but open islands, this being their main condition for survival.'[334]

Bunting's Northumbrian English thus embodies Brathwaite's wish that nation language should contrast 'the language of the conquistador – the language of the planter, the language of the official, the language of the Anglican preacher.'[335] Bunting and Brathwaite both see metropolitan education depriving their regions of historical heroes who might validate local culture: Bunting laments how 'Northumbrians should know Eric *Bloodaxe* but seldom do, because all the school histories are written by or for southrons', while Brathwaite critiques how students undergoing colonial education learned more 'about English kings and queens than they do about our own national heroes, our own slave rebels'.[336] The repression also affects North East dialect. Griffiths surveys accounts of schooling in the region, and finds that, in the late nineteenth century, 'No dialect words were in the school books, nor were any written and this alone was sufficient to bring about its decline. Some schoolmasters did their best to ridicule it out of existence'; while, in the early twentieth, pronunciation was impacted by the phonetic method of teaching literacy.[337]

The metropole thus reproduces itself through universalised curricula that exclude alternative models for political organisation or linguistic expression. In England, Lopez argues, this miseducation includes poetry. Conservative poetics become institutionalised, valorising a nationhood that does not reflect lived experiences of poets or readers: 'There is not, I take it, one British or even English poetry that can now be taken up and taken over by

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[334] Glissant, 'From Introduction to the Poetics of the Diverse', p. 120.
[335] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 8.
[336] Bunting, *Collected Poems*, pp. 148–49 (Bunting's italics); Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 8.
[337] Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, p. xxi–xxii, quoting John Lee, *Weardale Memories and Traditions* (Consett: Ramsden Williams, 1950), p. 222.

Geoffrey Hill or Philip Larkin or the pre-eminent representative of any other literary group. The peoples that live in the British Isles won't stand for it any longer.'[338] In this context, by moving from London to the North East, Bill Griffiths disentangles himself not just from Thatcherism's governmental centralisation, but from verse cultures that articulate those politics.

There are other examples of bridge-building between Caribbean nation language and English dialects, sometimes unintended. Brathwaite describes English cricket commentator John Arlott's impact on Barbadian radio listeners:

> [...] who stunned, amazed and transported us with his natural, *riddmic* and *image*-laden tropes, in its revolutionary Hampshire burr, at a time when BBC meant Empire and Loyal Models and Our Master's Voice: and cricket, especially against England, was the national war-game, our colonial occasion for communal catharsis. Not only was Arlott 'good' (all our mimics tried to imitate him) but he subverted the Establishment with the way and where he spoke: like Eliot, like jazz...[339]

Brathwaite here finds common ground between the Caribbean and the English regions. Arlott's linguistic subversion exemplifies covert resistance, his 'revolutionary Hampshire burr' contrasting standard English pronunciation, just as Bajan nation language might. The B.B.C. typically imposed a master-slave dialectic upon Caribbean listeners. An exception was the literary programme *Caribbean Voices*, which ran from 1943 to 1958, and platformed Brathwaite among many Caribbean writers; he calls this show 'the single most important literary catalyst for Caribbean creative and critical writing in English'.[340] Overall, though, 'the **BBC = VOICE OF AUTHORITY**', and Brathwaite recalls 'editors' rooms with | Mrs Thatcher's mandates pinned to the breasts | of their green baize walls'.[341] From this institution, Arlott spoke to Bajans tidalectically, echoing their creolization of the imperial tongue by corroding English linguistic hegemony from within.

Brathwaite's discovery of this ally on B.B.C. radio resembles his identification of Bunting as a poetic counterpart. In both cases, English regional voices have their own stake in dismantling the metropole. Speech from a marginalised, English context becomes a proxy

[338] Lopez, p. 161.
[339] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 31.
[340] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 87.
[341] Brathwaite, 'Meridiam', *DS(2): Dreamstories* (New York: New Directions, 2007), p. 87.

for Caribbean listeners, until they adopt Arlott's own voice. Brathwaite recruits Bunting and Arlott into Caribbean struggles for linguistic self-determination, just as Frantz Fanon celebrated French dissidents who advocated for Algeria during the Algerian Revolution:

> The native surrounds these few men with warm affection, and tends by a kind of emotional over-valuation to place absolute confidence in them. In the mother country, once looked upon as a bloodthirsty and implacable step-mother, many voices are raised, some those of prominent citizens, in condemnation of the policy of war that their government is following, advising that the national will of the colonised people. Certain soldiers desert from the colonialist ranks; others explicitly refuse to fight against the people's liberty and go to prison for the sake of the right of that people to independence and self-government.[342]

Fanon argues that these allies are 'nearer to the national struggle than certain sons of the nation', so that 'barriers of blood and race-prejudice are broken down on both sides.'[343] This revolutionary care demonstrates that relationships between metropole and colony are more complex than geographically-directed antagonism, and also play out through oppression and exploitation within each region. For White French people to support Algeria's Revolution, Fanon observes, was to 'become Negroes or Arabs, and accept suffering, torture and death.'[344] Such activists voluntarily braved Hegel's 'trial by death' to assert equality between France and Algeria.

Arlott's and Bunting's regional speech did not hazard torture or death, but Barbadians received Arlott's performances as sedition against the B.B.C.'s formality, a counterpart to their own historical resistance through nation language. Meanwhile, though Bunting opposed Mossadeq's struggle against 'Corpolonialism', he was imprisoned as a conscientious objector during World War One, losing (for a time) a 'trial by death' against British militarism.[345] Celebrating Northumbrian speech in 'Briggflatts', Bunting similarly defies the centralised metropole's diktats.

Since Bunting and Arlott inspire Brathwaite's nation language poetics, it seems apt that English writers look to Brathwaite for ways to decolonise and de-imperialise their own poetics of community-based speech. Complicating relationships between colony and

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[342] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Books, 1965, 2001), p. 116.
[343] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 116.
[344] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 116.
[345] Richard Burton, pp. 64–65.

metropole, Fanon recognises that individuals from metropolitan nations can side with the colonised. This is a welcome step, but might go further, since to be conceptualised as nation language, speech-forms need community-based histories of resistance.

However, as this chapter shows, Brathwaite's theories are applicable to milieus beyond the Caribbean, including the English regions. His philosophy of tidalectics underlies a poetics of political resistance refuting not only the actions and concepts of a hegemony, but the validity of hegemonic power itself. His account of nation language's origins roots it in tidalectic ways of living and thinking, approaches that were fundamental to enslaved African-Caribbean people's survival and resistance. Finally, by reading Northumbrian culture through Caribbean poetics, Brathwaite licenses readings of North East English history and culture as tidalectic, and that region's dialect as nation language. This opens ways to consider how North East dialect could articulate its own resistance against hegemony.

2.4. 'trying to break into paradise': Stuart Hall, Bill Griffiths and the Internal Colonies of England

Developing Brathwaite's identification of Basil Bunting's 'Briggflatts' as a nation language poem, I have established that North East England's archipelagic history underlies the region's dialect, and that considering Bill Griffiths' poetry in terms of Brathwaite's theories would therefore be especially appropriate. Importing Brathwaite's poetics to England, rather than constituting another ransacking of colonial products, can instead be a gesture of humility, respect, solidarity, and care. A tidalectic poetry of resistance can thus emerge through dialects of a country which itself is a hegemony that others seek to resist.

This apparent paradox is made possible through complicating and nuancing the traditional binary of colony and metropole. Stuart Hall's thought offers a framework for considering the U.K.'s marginalised communities as having a colonial relationship to metropolitan power, and allows for both creolisation and maronage to flourish in these environments. His concept of the internal colony clarifies themes that Bill Griffiths addresses in his own poetry, challenging restrictive definitions of the English working class. The focus here will be on how his poem *Mr. Tapscott* (1999) depicts care across boundaries of ethnicity, as Griffiths explicates systems of exploitation and oppression against which communities share tactics of resistance. Such pooling of cultural resources is fundamentally tidalectic, and subverts the metropole's dialectics of power. By echoing Hall's understanding of colonial relationships within as well as between nations, Griffiths establishes kinships between marginalised communities, based in shared difference from hegemony. He thereby demonstrates how activists and writers in England can emulate decolonising movements overseas to undo master-slave dialectics.

An early but powerful expression of Stuart Hall's ideas on the internal colony came on 31 August 1968, with 'West Indians in Britain', his keynote address for C.A.M.'s Second Conference. Hall described how increased numbers of Caribbean migrants were galvanising political awareness among the long-term population:

> Confronted with people who, after all, do belong to the empire, who are in a sense British, who've been linked with the metropolitan society for hundreds of years; that whole experience which divided the imperial world into colonised and colonisers, governors and

governed, owners and owned; became, once again, right at the very end of 400 years of history a living historical presence in this country. [...] I suppose few people in this country had fully faced up to the degree to which the history of the empire had become so deeply entwined in British society, with class, with the very idea of history itself, with tradition, with many of the feudal rites and rituals which in this as in other societies keep the whole thing together.[346]

This awareness was not always channelled as Hall wished. White British people sometimes resented reminders of the Empire's injustices. Hall's primarily Caribbean audience at C.A.M. recalled the egregious 'Rivers of Blood' speech against immigration that Enoch Powell had made on 20 April 1968; discussions after Hall's presentation referenced this.[347] Powell attributed to an unnamed constituent the fear that 'in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man'.[348] Bill Schwartz identifies here 'the recovered memory of the terror of the plantation', sublimated dread that White British people would receive the same treatment their countrymen had inflicted on enslaved African-Caribbean people.[349] Nor did Powell's attitudes seem exceptional; Samuel Bonhomme argues that 'To condemn Enoch Powell as being a blind racialist is to condemn the whole white world for its racial tendencies. […] racialism to the white man is like the colour of his skin.'[350] Hall hoped, though, that Black presence might spark positive developments in Britain. He sees creolistic interchange within poor, urban areas among people of colour who migrated to Britain, and between them and marginalised White populations:

[...] Englishmen can now see forming before them, what it is like to build up the colony. It's a very special kind of colonial slum. It contains many people who are both white and black. [...] Into this area are drawn families too large to manage, people with very little educational equipment, prostitutes, the Irish – the Irish tinkers a quite different race, Pakistanis, Indians, Maltese, a whole variety of peoples. It is one of the truly international communities in Britain. And the ways of survival in such colonies draw on all the resources which people who have travelled four thousand miles bring with them, that is to say, pull them into the orbit of British life, a whole complex variety of cultural qualities, of political attitudes and so on from

[346] Hall, 'West Indians in Britain', pp. 4–5.
[347] Hall, 'West Indians in Britain', p. 19, p. 34.
[348] Cited in Bill Schwartz, *The White Man's World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 53.
[349] Schwartz, p. 53.
[350] Samuel Bonhomme, *Enoch Powell and the West Indian Migrants* (Harrow Weald: The Afro-American & West Indian Publishers, 1971), p. 38.

> the home country and at the same time subject those attitudes and values to really rapid, serious, deep-rooted transformation.[351]

Hall attributes this unusual use of 'colony', denoting a poor, multicultural area of England rather than an overseas locale, to sociologist John Rex, his colleague on the magazine *New Left Review*'s editorial board.[352] Rex, with co-author Robert Moore, develops this usage in *Race, Community and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook* (1967), which investigates race relations in Sparkbrook, a working-class district of Birmingham. By 'colony', Rex and Moore mean a self-organised community allowing mutual support among immigrants who share a culture of origin. Here the immigrant can 'reproduce at least some of the social institutions of his homeland and provides himself with a norm-governed home into which he can retreat from the world of the market-place.'[353] Sparkbrook thus contained colonies of Pakistani, Irish, Kitticians and more. There is also a double meaning: such colonies house communities from overseas, but residents are still exploited and marginalised by the metropole. In different ways, colonisation is performed both by and upon recent arrivals.

Hall's expansion of this concept is indebted to his Jamaican upbringing. Internal colonies are no longer monocultural enclaves existing side-by-side in one neighbourhood. Instead, the colony is an area's entire complex of interacting, marginalised communities. In Caribbean contexts, when different cultures meet in colonial spaces, creolisation follows, operating along diverse vectors: acculturation to norms set by the powerful; infiltration of mainstream culture by previously subaltern practices; and what Brathwaite terms 'lateral creolisation', cultural 'leakage' between non-dominant groups.[354] The resulting 'rapid, serious, deep-rooted transformation' affects not only recent migrants, but the hegemony, as well as other colonial populations. This new knowledge could inspire White British people to decolonise and de-imperialise themselves. In later work, Rex explains how Britain's experience of two World Wars led some to this realisation, and others to negative responses:

> The experience of wars has left nearly every family in the situation of having seen some of its members or relatives killed or injured, and the searing experience which this is provides a

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[351] Hall, 'West Indians in Britain', p. 6.
[352] Hall, 'West Indians in Britain', p. 6.
[353] John Rex and Robert Moore, *Race, Community and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 14–15.
[354] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 63.

> deep and emotional basis for identification with 'our' cause against 'them', the enemy. Logically, of course, this could have meant the growth of anti-war and internationalist sentiment, but, although the sixties did see the emergence of peace movements of various kinds as war itself became more and more horrific, the overwhelming response was an immediate and emotional one. Being British was an identity which had to be defended against successive groups of evil foreigners. [...] as Britain lost its grip on its empire and had to yield power to a series of nationalist and 'terrorist' movements, these colonial peoples, largely black, brown and yellow, became the prime target for hostility.[355]

Threatening British pre-eminence was perhaps the only trait that decolonial movements shared with the Third Reich, this sufficed for colonial peoples of colour to become 'enemies' in British consciousness. Given Powell's mischaracterisation of Caribbean migrants as initiating violence against White British people, Rex's explanation is credible, at least as one aspect of a tangled phenomenon. Opposing ignorant fears that Powell inculcated, Rex's 'anti-war and internationalist' tendency responded to racism and militarism as components of one imperialist gestalt. Such opposition involved participants identifying and severing links to profits of unjust systems, and escaping networks through which they were exploited in turn. Bonhomme is similarly optimistic about the long term: 'the prejudices and fears of the white man are his own making. The old cannot help believing in them, but the young, they know better; they are not going to be fooled any longer.'[356]

Hall and a group of co-authors reviewed the situation in *Policing the Crisis* (1978), an investigation into media hysteria surrounding a supposed crime wave of Black 'muggers'. The term 'colony' was again used, but with emphasis on what Brathwaite would call maronage (which here had developed in defence against racism), rather than the lateral creolisation that Hall had stressed earlier:

> At one level the formation of the ghetto 'colony' was a defensive and corporate response. It involved the black community turning in upon itself. This emphasis on defensive space becomes more pronounced in the face of public racism, which rapidly developed in the society outside the boundaries of 'the colony' through the 1960s. 'Colony life' was, in one of its manifestations, simply a defensive reaction – a closing of the ranks – against official racism […][357]

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[355] John Rex, *Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Mobilisation in Britain* (Warwick: Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, 1991), pp. 44–45.
[356] Bonhomme, p. 68.
[357] Stuart Hall *et al*, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), p. 351.

Many of Bill Griffiths' poems address these themes and debates, enacting allyship with and learning from communities of colour. One thinks of 'In the Coal Year', where picketing miners adopt Vodou rituals from Haiti; the original version of 'The Lion Man', which depicts a biker of colour 'out-civicking the murder-sucking whites'; 'Commodities', which addresses the question of reparations for colonialism, asking '*what is it to be sorry | if you still keep all the goods?*'.[358] In all these, strategies of creolisation and maronage, and how they enable resistance within the internal colony, can be discerned. However, we will turn to *Mr. Tapscott* (1999), a long poem that does not merely propose or document activism; circumstances of its publication and distribution make the poem itself an anti-racist, decolonial act. Its melange of voices and perspectives unfolds through a tidalectic montage, evoking tensions and friendships within a creolising community.

Griffiths self-published *Mr. Tapscott: A Poem in Nine Sections with Inserts & List of Resources* as a chapbook in 1999; the poem reappeared as 'Mr. Tapscott' in his *The Lion Man & Others* (2008), with substantial revisions, rearrangements, additions and subtractions.[359] A section was also repurposed as a separate poem, 'The Toxteth Riots', in Griffiths' *The Mud Fort* (2004), a selected poems.[360] Unless otherwise noted, references here are to the original version, to consider the poem in relation to the '*Inserts & List of Resources*' only included there. One immediately noticeable addition in *The Lion Man & Others* is a parenthesis below the poem's title: '(with Ray Gilbert, convicted 1981, and still waiting to access the Appeal Court)'.[361] This partially replaces information from the inserts in the original edition. One of these inserts simply gives Griffiths' address, normally included in publications' front matter; it may be presented separately to reduce risks incurred by the second insert. This is a leaflet from the prisoner support organisation Anarchist Black Cross (A.B.C.), publicising the case of the 'Toxteth Two': Ray Gilbert and John Kamara, who received life sentences for the 13 March 1981 murder of Toxteth bookmaker John Suffield. The leaflet lists 'dirty tricks' that secured wrongful convictions:

[358] Griffiths, *North Scenes* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1992), n.p.; Griffiths, *The Lion Man or Four Poems in One*, (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1995), n.p.; Griffiths, *Nomad Sense* (London: Talus Editions, 1998), p. 57.
[359] Griffiths, *The Lion Man & Others*, pp. 29–51.
[360] Griffiths, *The Mud Fort* (Cambridge and Applecross: Salt, 2004), pp. 187–91.
[361] Griffiths, *The Lion Man & Others*, p. 29.

- **NO IDENTIFICATION.** Not one of the eye witnesses picked out Ray from any of the I.D. parades.
- **NO FORENSIC EVIDENCE** to link either of the two to the crime.
- **FABRICATION OF EVIDENCE** by police and various inmates.
- **UNCORROBORATED STATEMENTS** used in prosecution evidence.
- **ALIBIS** of the accused were not properly investigated by the police.
- **TWO JURIES DISMISSED** one on point of law, the other not disclosed.
- **INTERFERENCE** with witnesses.
- **DESTRUCTION** of custody records.
- **DEALS BETWEEN THE POLICE** and remand prisoners were made, testifying for shorter sentences. Then not all interviews and statements were released to the defence.[362]

The court case unfolded following the 'Toxteth Riots', an uprising in July 1981, when residents of Liverpool's multicultural Toxteth district, plus neighbouring areas like Granby, confronted police. Causes attributed to the riots include unemployment, poor housing, and police harassment. Sociologist Stan Taylor observed shortly after the events that 'the diversity of theories […] is in part a consequence of the fact that riots are multi-faceted phenomena with multiple causes.'[363] However, interviewed by media researcher Howard Tumber, young rioters reported that 'when they told the media the trouble was because of harassment they were not interested. Instead […] journalists wanted to talk about unemployment and housing.'[364]

Gilbert and Kamara were imprisoned on remand throughout the uprising; their trial concluded on 16 December 1981. Nevertheless, these events may have contributed to their conviction. Both men were from Black, mixed-race backgrounds. The A.B.C. leaflet complains that 'the trial of two [men of colour] was presented to an all white jury, shortly after the 'Toxteth Riots'' – implying that prejudicial coverage of the riots might bias White jurors against men of colour from the area. The leaflet emphasises Gilbert's situation, since a documentary on the Toxteth Two was being made for the Channel 4 T.V. series *Trial and Error*, which investigated miscarriages of justice. Gilbert and the A.B.C. had learned 'that **'TRIAL AND ERROR'** want to place all the blame on Ray, in an attempt to clear **John**.'[365]

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[362] 'Free Ray Gilbert, Free the Toxteth Two: Police Use Dirty Tricks to Ensure Conviction' (Birmingham: Anarchist Black Cross, n.d.), insert in Bill Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott: A Poem in Nine Sections with Inserts & List of Resources* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1999). The A.B.C.'s bolding.
[363] Stan Taylor, 'Riots: Some Explanations', *New Community*, vol. 9 no. 2, 1981, p. 170.
[364] Howard Tumber, *Television and the Riots* (London: British Film Institute Broadcasting Research Unit, 1982), p. 13.
[365] 'Free Ray Gilbert'. The A.B.C.'s bolding. The documentary was broadcast in 1997, so the leaflet predates Griffiths poem by two years or more.

Kamara was exonerated in 2000, after police were discovered to have concealed exculpatory witness statements.[366] Gilbert was released when his sentence expired in 2016, and still maintains his innocence.[367] He and Griffiths corresponded extensively from October 1999 to December 2004, regarding Gilbert's ongoing appeal process. Gilbert moved between prisons frequently, but from April 1999 to June 2000 was imprisoned at Durham. Durham City is easily reachable from Seaham by bus, so Griffiths visited Gilbert 'twice there before he was moved away and was impressed by his resilience and commonsense in an environment a degree hotter than Hell.'[368]

As John Seed summarises, *Mr. Tapscott* is 'a bitter political history of Liverpool interwoven with fragments of the autobiography of Ray Gilbert and extracts from his trial and from official and press sources on the Toxteth Riots of 1981.'[369] Griffiths focuses on the malfeasance of, and complicity between, legal institutions and the media. Gilbert's continued imprisonment and misrepresentation make clear that these factors still plagued him when the poem was published. Combined with its leaflet insert, *Mr. Tapscott* is a campaigning document publicising a friend's plight, and contextualises Gilbert's experiences against racism and inequality in Gilbert's home city. The title character is an immigration agent from a Liverpool folk song, and is associated with exploitation of impoverished arrivals in the city, a theme recurring throughout the poem.[370]

Toxteth fits Hall's description of an internal colony. Griffiths' collage of voices dramatises cultural tensions that Brathwaite, in *Contradictory Omens*, sees operating in colonies where there is ongoing creolisation. In particular, *Mr. Tapscott* represents contradictory models of '**a plural society**' ('conflict/differences according to race, class, culture […] the whole being kept together by an imposed imperium' of the British establishment, '**a creole society** based on the concept of interculturation', '**a national society**

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[366] Max Clements, 'John Kamara: "It was the anger that kept me going"', *Liverpool Echo*, 20 October 2019 <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/john-kamara-it-anger-kept-17103077> [accessed 16 March 2022].
[367] John Siddle, 'Murderer [sic] Ray Gilbert released from prison 36 years after notorious Toxteth killing', *Liverpool Echo*, 6 October 2016 <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/murderer-ray-gilbert-released-prison-11989227> [accessed 16 March 2022].
[368] Marsh, p. 32,
[369] John Seed, ''In music far mair sweet': Bill Griffiths in Durham', *The Salt Companion to Bill Griffiths*, pp. 108–121: pp. 111–112.
[370] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p.; 'Resources'.

[…] with a political module in which all races/cultures melt and mix' (perhaps cognate with the idea of a multicultural Britain), and '**a folk/maroon interpretation**' whose Toxteth manifestation I will explore.[371] The poem opens with a historical perspective on Liverpool's prosperity as an international port:

> For then (be sure of it) the slave-brokers had took over: […]
> then there were black slaves out of Africa for the plantations
> a rich venture for wools and irons
> even after making the deductions for perceived losses
> and remember, premiums…
> In the time of great war
> to import sugar or tobacco.
> Jams, sweets and wines on the white man's tongue.[372]

Liverpool is embroiled in networks of trade and exploitation, and was Britain's preeminent port for the slave trade: 'Merchants from Liverpool were responsible for transporting about 1.4 million Africans, over 10 per cent of all those who were taken [by all European slavers combined].'[373] Iron goods, manufactured in England's North West, were certainly a major export, traded for enslaved Africans, who were then shipped to plantations in the Americas, before the ships took on 'the main cargo to be carried back to Liverpool […] sugar and sugar products such as molasses and rum.'[374] Wools were less important for the slave trade, being uncomfortable to wear in the tropics, but cotton moving to and from Lancashire's mills was vital for the port.[375] Griffiths again connects this business's most inhumane aspect, slavery, to British desire for 'sugar or tobacco. | Jams, sweets and wines on the white man's tongue.'

Later in the poem, trade routes and systems of imperial dominion create an influx to Liverpool's urban colonies 'from the sensible islands | the loyal lands to the west | Barbados, St. Kitts, Anguilla' – the already creolised territories of the Caribbean.[376] This is one source of the population settling in the area where Gilbert and Kamara later grew up:

> this horseshoe
> Liverpool 8

[371] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, pp. 57–58.
[372] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 2.
[373] Anthony Tibbles, *Liverpool and the Slave Trade* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), p. 1.
[374] Tibbles, p. 57.
[375] Tibbles, pp. 16–17.
[376] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 4.

the roads of Toxteth and Granby
tall towers of iron
.
it has a mixed community of Africans, Somali's, Jamaicans, Indians, Ghanains, Scots, Irish beside Scousers. The houses were terraced and tenament high rise flats which fell to bulldozers and some old Victorian Georgian buildings which are listed. Most of the community has been knocked down, all the gardens and estates on Upper Parliament….
.
the arrangements of race and place
the distribution or restriction of public housing
are record, exact, are policy
.
are
Walls
to edit, realise, make clear[377]

The italic paragraph is Gilbert's description of Toxteth; his list of local cultures recalls Hall's enumeration of people 'both white and black […] the Irish – the Irish tinkers a quite different race, Pakistanis, Indians, Maltese, a whole variety of peoples' in the U.K.'s urban colonies. Gilbert's categories are not mutually exclusive; Kamara, for example, had an Irish Liverpudlian mother, and in film footage speaks with a Scouse accent.[378] Confronted by such ambiguities, socio-economic and administrative 'Walls | to edit, realise, make clear' impose themselves, segregating creolised and tidalectic reality into dialectic binaries of Black and White. Griffiths' description of boundaries around Gilbert's neighbourhood is reminiscent of Stuart Hall *et al.*'s remark that 'formation of the ghetto 'colony' was a defensive and corporate response' which involved the black community turning in upon itself.'[379]

This defensive maronage combined with hostility of White residents in surrounding areas, mean that distinctions between districts were starkly experienced: '*Princes Road side belonged to whites & Princess Street side to us.* Ambushes could be set up for errant people who strayed.'[380] Finding work outside the area was challenging for similar reasons, viewable in Hegelian terms as a master-slave dialectic:

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[377] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 4. Griffiths' italics. Idiosyncratic spellings and punctuation are in Griffiths' text, and might originate with Gilbert. In this poem, full stops to mark stanza breaks.
[378] Louise Shorter (director), *Life after Life: A Rough Justice Special*, B.B.C. Documentaries, 2001, <https://www.insidejustice.co.uk/tv/tv-archive-john-kamara-life-after-life/9> [accessed 16 March 2022]. At 13:35.
[379] Stuart Hall *et al*, p. 351.
[380] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 4. Griffiths' italics.

Work is non existent when I was out.
(The 85% unemployment of school leavers)
Coming from the Ghetto was enough to put employers off.
A defined place, a subordination
.
LIVERPOOL DAILY POST on 17 December 1981 p.11 noted that of Liverpool
Council jobs
only 169 out of 30,000 Council employees were black.[381]

Griffiths then surveys photographs in the *Liverpool Echo* for 2 March 1981 and 3 March 1981: shortly before Suffield's murder, so a good indicator of Black visibility in Liverpudlian media at the time. The papers feature one 'black supercook achiever lady', but 'everyone else is left out'.[382] Griffiths notes elsewhere that 'The Echo, though usually careful in its language on race, might be considered a white person's newspaper.'[383] Despite the paper's allegedly careful language, in the poem's subsequent section Griffiths describes a story from the *Echo* a few days later: *Fury over 'jungle of crime' image.* | and the headline not far away | *BLACK HOOLIGANS*'.[384] Griffiths' research again recalls Hall: 'The struggle to come into representation was predicated on a critique of the degree of fetishization, objectification and negative figuration which are so much a feature of the representation of the black subject. There was a concern not simply with the absence or marginality of the black experience but with its simplification and its stereotypical character.'[385] These twin difficulties – invisibility and harmful stereotyping – are uncovered by Griffiths' newspaper analysis. Consequences include the Toxteth Two's treatment, and the police response to the Toxteth Riots.

Is invisibility always undesirable, though? Hall *et al.* describe how, in conditions of underemployment and marginalisation, 'crime, semi-crime, fringe-dealing and hustling become appropriate modes of survival for the black community, and thus […] what appears to those outside the 'colony' as the criminal life of the minority became, if not fused, then

[381] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 4.
[382] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 4.
[383] Bill Griffiths, 'Ray Gilbert: the context of the trial of 1981', previously at <http://www.bgriffiths7.freeserve.co.uk/context.htm>, now available via Wayback Machine at <http://web.archive.org/web/20050407155221/http://www.bgriffiths7.freeserve.co.uk/context.html> [accessed 16 March 2022].
[384] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 5. Griffiths' italics.
[385] Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, pp. 441–49; p. 442.

inextricably linked to the survival of the black population as a whole.'[386] An underground economy, necessary for the community's survival, complements Maroon cultural elements developed away from the hegemonic gaze. Gilbert and Griffiths depict venues where mysteries of culture and commerce intersect:

> *The Toxteth community had a multitude of night clubs called 'Ibo', Freetown', 'Jamaican House', 'Nigerian', 'Yoruba', 'Dutch Eddy's', 'Gladrag' 'Skyliner'. […]*
> .
> all of them offered special effects
> .
> […] here is no seeing but music
> a high
> lights
> .
> Listen.
> .
> *The clubs in the 70's had Soul music, Disco music & Reggae with Northern Soul. All depended where. Usually went to our own in community & town for our community. In early 70's 'Motown' was in.*
> .
> that was a buzzing and a purring
> a blending of a juice of song[387]

These cultural epicentres of the urban colony manifest a balance of creolisation and maronage. The music is a creolised blend of African-American, Jamaican and Northern English genres; meanwhile, the clubs' African and Caribbean names announce their maronage as places that Black clientele might consider '*our own in community & town for our community*.' Griffiths links the venues to Rastafari's imagery of chosen people exiled in a hostile environment:

> the logan-skinned
> the ripe people of the Lord
> of the pipe of the chosen knotted heads of Jah, my daughter
> will you ever now leave Babylon?[388]

[386] Hall *et al.*, p. 390.
[387] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 5.
[388] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 5.

The term 'logan-skinned' conveys multiracial heritage, as loganberries are hybrids of raspberry and blackberry. Hybridity here is to be cherished, and is linked through the fruit metaphor to the 'blending of a juice of song' in the clubs' creolised playlists. However, this hybridity does not prevent participation in what Rastafari epitomises for Brathwaite: modern maronage, which avoids racial essentialism ('consequence and logic of national/international projection') and offers the 'specific root or cultural vision' that 'could come to be recognised as the norm and model for the whole'.[389] At the section's end, Gilbert becomes a character in the poem, participating in this Maroon tradition:

> see this little speck
> running down here and here?
> he has gone in the club now –
> well, we have lost him –
> he will be out later.
> He is our subject.
> He is called Ray.[390]

Gilbert is the subject in that he is the protagonist, but he is also a subject of surveillance, and a suborned subject of the British Crown. The narrator and (through Griffiths' collectivising 'we') the reader become the authoritarian gaze of a film crew monitoring Gilbert, as he dodges pursuit ('running down here and here'). The club offers refuge not only from police, but from Griffiths and perhaps the reader, as outsiders to this community. How could surveillance operate where there 'is no seeing but music'? The poet recognises the Maroon environment and respects it by not venturing within.

After a section about Gilbert's arrest and interrogation, Griffiths depicts the Toxteth uprising. He compares the police's anti-riot tactics to those used in Ulster, hinting at grounds for co-operation between Toxteth's youth and Liverpool's large Irish presence:

> recall:
> there were whole systems of practice of management in Northern Ireland, followed by the less familiar series of unexplained carnage by dedicated MUFTI squads. at quiet prison protests from 1979
> rehearsal works
> .

[389] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 58.
[390] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 5.

the move to the public
but you must always seem to act second
the violent response
evades bias.
.
Merseyside Chief Constable Ken Oxford denied the rioting had anything to do with race. "It was exclusively a crowd of black hooligans intent on making life unbearable and indulging in criminal activity," he said.[391]

This 'practice of management', including the public relations strategy of goading opponents into striking first ('first you contain | then you provoke', Griffiths adds), had already been rehearsed in Northern Ireland, though the Province is not these techniques' ultimate origin. Graham Ellison and Jim Smyth describe how policing methods in Northern Ireland during the late 1960s and early 1970s were originally deployed against anti-colonial movements throughout the waning British Empire:

> In the decades after the Second World War, Britain was engaged in a retreat from empire, forced by anti-colonial and nationalist movements to cede independence to its former colonies in a manner reminiscent of its withdrawal from the Southern part of Ireland in 1922. […] The colonial war model of suppressing dissent was distilled from these experiences and their integration into an interlocking strategy of strangling support for insurgents prior to their military defeat. […] Censorship and media manipulation are used to hinder the mobilisation of public opinion, both domestic and national.[392]

Here the British state undergoes the post-imperial anxieties diagnosed by John Rex, and demonises its former subjects in misplaced reaction to its own loss of power. Repressive tactics from the wider empire are initially redeployed in Northern Ireland, then in Britain's multicultural, internal colonies. Media manipulation during the 1984–85 miners' strike, such as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher labelling strikers as an 'enemy within', also partakes of this genealogy of oppression.[393] Chief Constable Ken Oxford, who led suppression of the uprising, uses the tactic when mischaracterising rioters as '*exclusively a crowd of black hooligans*', echoing racialised language that Griffiths identified in the *Liverpool Echo*. In fact, non-Black locals participated *en masse*, as Madeline Heneghan and Emy Onoura outline:

[391] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 7.
[392] Graham Ellison and Jim Smyth, *The Crowned Harp: Policing Northern Ireland* (London and Sterling VA: Pluto Press, 2000), pp. 73–74.
[393] Cited in Seumas Milne, *The Enemy Within: The Secret War against the Miners* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), p. 23.

> Over half of those arrested were white, but due to such statements [as Oxford's] the events in Liverpool […] have often been termed 'race riots'. In fact, they were a multicultural response to economic and social issues including the marginalisation of both black and white youth within those inner-city areas rather than the traditional notion of a race riot, whereby black and white are directly opposed to each other.[394]

Tumber verifies that initial T.V. reports depicted how 'Both black and white youths were involved in the rioting and it was generally agreed that this was not a race riot […] but was more the sudden fusing of elements common to black and white youths'.[395] The uprising hence exemplified lateral creolisation in the urban colony, with locals from disparate backgrounds uniting against a metropole that suppressed decolonisation in the crumbling British Empire, Northern Ireland, and Liverpool itself. Police concealment of this truth, plus problems of media representation, are why Griffiths emphasises the racial climate surrounding the Toxteth Two's trial. Oxford himself 'thought it possible that rioters had picked up certain methods of rioting from Northern Ireland' – reasonable, since many participants' families had migrated from there.[396] Lateral creolisation could therefore include using Ulster Republican techniques of protest against racist harassment of Black Liverpudlians. The poem then presents further grounds for shared resistance, depicting violent measures introduced from Northern Ireland by police themselves:

> using para-tanks on the mainland
> rockets, turrets, castles, moats
> all back to the start
> the standing army
> like changing technology running
> the heavy horse, knight, armour […]
> .
> curving and smashing the road
> the tanks on wheels
> mark out and sequester
> in this strategy
> than man gets crushed and his spine
> ruptured

[394] Madeline Heneghan and Emy Onuora, *Great War to Race Riots: Black Experience in Post-WW1 Liverpool* (Liverpool: Writing on the Wall, 2019), p. 123. The title refers to disturbances in 1919 that meet the authors' definition of race riots.
[395] Tumber, p. 3.
[396] Tumber, p. 15.

before he is pictured as he is being dragged away.
He never burned anything before he died.
.
at the foggy demos
arcing canister (CS)
that maim and slew the bodies
and ship lungs and eyes raw
running for air, but just more intake.[397]

In Griffiths' 'Resources' for the poem, two texts discuss these tactics' origins. Margaret Simey, Councillor for Granby and Chair of the Merseyside Police Authority at the time of the riots, criticises how, as in 'the Ulster tradition, police vehicles were used as a means of dispersal. On the Monday, a man's back was broken following a blow from a police vehicle.'[398] This is the man who 'never burned anything'. Meanwhile, historians Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn observe that 'For the first time outside of Northern Ireland, C.S. gas was used by the police against a riot.'[399] Griffiths portrays police vehicles as updates of 'the heavy horse, knight, armour' with which medieval authorities exerted power; the long-term English population's oppressive conditions are thus linked to forces confronting twentieth-century colonies, external and internal. This suggests that struggle against current hierarchies could be shared not only between migrant communities, but with the wider working class, who are also colonised by such powers. Griffiths elaborates:

The Racquet Club burned, and the Rialto….
.
they would be apathetic… fools… if they didn't protest
.
against a property
that has left us all in slavery[400]

The italic line is from Simey. Phoned during the riots by a journalist seeking comment, she excoriated her ward's treatment by the wider authorities:

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[397] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 7; 'than man' is probably a typo for 'that man'.
[398] Margaret Simey, *Democracy Rediscovered: A Study in Police Accountability* (London: Pluto Press, 1988), p. 43.
[399] Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn, *Liverpool: A City that Dared to Fight* (London: Fortress Books, 1988), p. 53.
[400] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 7.

> I told the reporter of how I had been round the flats the weekend before, and nothing had changed. For all the drama and the burning and the looting, for all the media fuss and the visits by Ministers, nothing had changed. Not even the bins had been emptied in all those three weeks. I told her that I was not surprised that there had been trouble: indeed '....they would be apathetic… fools… if they didn't protest.'[401]

Simey was afterwards shunned by colleagues in power, but acclaimed by constituents. The moment was a 'conversion'; previously deeming herself 'justly set in authority over other lesser beings', she now realised 'the law is not relevant to life in Granby and that to enforce it can result in injustice, not justice.'[402] Her Damascene experience exemplifies 'rapid, serious, deep-rooted transformation' that Stuart Hall hoped White English people might undergo in the internal colony. In line with Griffiths' thinking, Simey realises that it is insufficient to wield power benevolently, but that one must question the basis of power itself. Recognising her constituents' subjectivity, she no longer suborns them within a master-slave dialectic. Her de-imperialisation begins.

Griffiths' contention that institutions of property have 'left us all in slavery' reinforces how colonisation affects communities beyond those of colour. However, he could be critiqued for eliding massive differences between chattel slavery and the subtler exploitation of the modern English working class. Furthermore, Toxteth suffered from unemployment, the apparent opposite of forced labour. However, Griffiths had long contended – for example, in his essay *A Note on Democracy* (1974) – that England's 'definition of civilization depends on a permanent and dirigible slave class.'[403] Hall *et al.* ascribe this role to the Black working class in particular, with the 'insertion of black labour into the productive relations of metropolitan capitalism, and thus its position as a sub-proletariat to the white working class as the central, all-important feature with respect to how capital now exploits black labour-power'.[404] In other words, sublation by White neighbours subjects Black working-class people to what historian and C.A.M. member Orlando Patterson calls 'social death': 'ritually incorporated as the permanent enemy on the inside,' each stands 'as a living affront to the local gods, an

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401 Simey, p. 43. Simey's ellipses.
402 Simey, p. 44.
403 Bill Griffiths, *A Note on Democracy* (London: Pirate Press, 1974), n.p.
404 Hall *et al.*, p. 392.

intruder in the sacred space'.[405] This makes it psychologically easier to exploit and economically marginalise them until they feel forced to accept degrading employment.

Against this degradation, illicit labour, hustling and petty crime emerge as Maroon forms of resistance. During high unemployment, White English people might find themselves exposed to the same forces. Taaffe and Mulhearn report that 'Unemployment in Liverpool between 1974 and 1981 rose by 120 per cent', and 'in the same period black unemployment in Liverpool 8 increased by 350 per cent'; however, 'unemployment of youth in Croxteth, an almost totally white area, was greater than in Toxteth.'[406] Racism created gulfs between Black and White working-class experiences; nevertheless, many White locals shared their Black neighbours' sense of dispossession. How, though, could the 'property' that Griffiths identifies cause such feelings of enslavement, and how did the rioters respond? Taaffe and Mulhearn, as Marxist historians, deny that Marxists instigated the riots:

> But riots have never been the method of Marxists. As Martin Luther King put it: 'riots are the voice of the voiceless'. They express the inchoate rage and despair of an alienated section of working class youth, particularly of black youth. The method of Marxists, however, is to develop a class-conscious, politically aware working class.[407]

In contrast to the structured activism preferred by these historians, riots abound in what Joshua Clover calls '*instrumental irrationality*'.[408] Clover associates 'labor organising with "logic," […] that can't but mirror the congealed rationality of the factory assembly line', whereas 'The riot goes with disorder, illogic, the ambient social space of rumor.'[409]

Contrary to Taaffe and Mulhearn, King remarked that that 'a riot is the language of the unheard'.[410] Emphasising 'language' rather than 'voice', King conveys that the unheard is not 'inchoate rage', but carries semantic meaning that is ignored by the powerful. However, Taaffe and Mulhearn's misremembrance has value. Clover gives a critique of King that explains this other truth: 'even the demandless riot is transcoded into *being itself a demand*,

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[405] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 39.
[406] Taaffe and Mulhearn, pp. 246–247; p. 52.
[407] Taaffe and Mulhearn, p. 52.
[408] Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot. The New Era of Uprisings* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), p.104. Clover's italics.
[409] Clover, p.104.
[410] Cited in Peter J. Ling, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 252.

something that could be satisfied by the current order if it could just be understood'.[411] Additionally, though, there is another impulse:

> It turns less toward a polity than toward practicalities, turns toward the material in both low and high senses. These practicalities might include looting, controlling space, eroding the power of the police, rendering an area unwelcoming to intruders, and destroying property understood to constitute the rioters' exclusion from the world they see always before them and which they may not enter.[412]

Rioting doesn't only demand political change, but is itself a material intervention. Griffiths' observations about Black Liverpudlians' exclusion from public sector jobs and media representation certainly hint at frustration with a 'world they always see before them and which they may not enter'. Media attention, though, was not rioters' principal goal: Tumber relates that T.V. crews' equipment was damaged or stolen amid 'a distinct feeling amongst the rioters that the media were part of the 'establishment', and therefore the 'enemy'.'[413] This was destruction of 'property understood to constitute the rioters' exclusion'.

Clover's formulation echoes Griffiths' 'property | that has left us all in slavery'. Technologies sublating Toxteth's residents included not only police riot equipment and legal institutions, but media devices and retail outlets. The riot, in Griffiths' view, revolts against the concept of property. Participants exercise power through more innate capacities:

> A community
> trying to break into paradise
> the zigzag breath
> bringing the world more in
> taking and turning power
> 'n firing the most out – the body
> become action
> wind-catching flailing lungs
> *whole* into *now*.[414]

Paradise here is the act of 'breaking into', rejecting property relations that institute master-slave dialectics. Rioters' power arises not from wealth or social status, but through bodily

[411] Clover, p.185.
[412] Clover, p. 185.
[413] Tumber, pp. 24–25.
[414] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 7.

violence. The process occurs via breathing, an absorption of world into self, recalling Charles Olson's description of the sense of proprioception allowing the body to process its surroundings: 'that one's life is informed from and by one's own inner mechanism […] and the unconscious is the universe flowing-in, inside.'[415] For Griffiths, this intake is reciprocated by exhalation of self back into world, the latter depicted as 'firing', the lungs representing artillery. The resulting sense of immediacy ('*whole* into *now*') is no demand for power – it is power itself. There is a link here to the sound poetry with which voice and voicelessness were explored by Griffiths, Bob Cobbing, and others on the London B.P.R. scene, discussed in Chapters 3.2 and 4.2.

Disappointment follows this temporary triumph, as the government-backed Scarman Report into 1981's nationwide riots proceeds, in Griffiths' words, 'to find the masters of the master race | blameless'.[416] An account of Gilbert's imprisonment on remand comes next, then his trial. Mr. Tapscott appears as judge, cementing Griffiths' connections between the exploitative economics that drove immigration through the port, and the legal system's racism. Gilbert and Kamara are convicted. The poem ends with Gilbert's imprisonment:

> More and more of the sentence is to be spent in solitary confinement.
> A prisoner who acts as if he's innocent is trouble.
> Parole Boards will not entertain it.
> There may never be release.
> No one has any say.
> Under arbitrary rules of general unsuitability, solitary is imposed.
> It becomes continuous.
> .
> What else is the Law?[417]

Essentialised 'Law', the ruthless force rejected by Margaret Simey, presumes that 'punishment demonstrates the guilt | so bad or it wouldn't be'.[418] Flaws in *Trial and Error* recur in the B.B.C. documentary *Life after Life* (2001), which follows Kamara after release from prison. This programme raises worthwhile points about lack of help for acquitted prisoners reintegrating into society, but nevertheless presumes Gilbert's guilt.[419] The

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[415] Olson, *Proprioception* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1965), p. 2.
[416] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 7.
[417] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 9.
[418] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 9.
[419] Shorter. The account of Gilbert is at 10:00.

broadcasters conduct master-slave dialectics by proxy: to make Kamara sympathetic, worthy of uplift, and 'good', he is juxtaposed with Gilbert, who is reduced to an unrepentant killer. Griffiths, however, questions absolutist attributions of good and bad, for example in his earlier sequence 'Five-Liners':

> So what will you give me for being good?
> Good at lying?
> Or loving?
> Or lurching into work?
> No, just generally, being good.[420]

This mocks assumptions that goodness is an irreducible essence. Gilbert proves that morality is a less binary affair. His life in Toxteth was criminal, but he was no murderer, despite police in the poem insisting that 'If you have a record already, it simplifies matters as there are no human rights to worry about.'[421] Gilbert was a 'bad' prisoner in that he was difficult to manage: he participated in 'dirty protests' (smearing excrement on walls) against violations of inmates' rights; joined prison riots; and acted in self-defence against prison officers. Griffiths, however, sees this 'badness' as a truer form of good: 'Ray is not a model prisoner, but over 20 years he has arguably shown more responsibility and respect for human rights than the regime in charge.'[422]

Refusing the prison's dialectics, the dirty protest adopts Clover's '*instrumental irrationality*', rejecting fundamental assumptions about how to behave in a logically structured society. Gilbert's excrement communicates contempt for racist and classist systems in which he is caught, but this is emphatically 'voice' rather than 'language' – faecal smears of 'inchoate rage' against institutions that ignore his protests of innocence.

In this protest, Gilbert's own body becomes the site of resistance. Like Toxteth's rioters, he is 'bringing the world more in | taking and turning power | 'n firing the most out | the body | become action.' These acts of resistance link to breath's role in Brathwaite, who quotes Wilson Harris: 'One must remember that *breath* is all the black man may have

[420] Griffiths, *Collected Poems & Sequences (1981–91)*, p. 381.
[421] Griffiths, *Mr. Tapscott*, n.p., section 6.
[422] Griffiths, 'Ray Gilbert – prison moves', previously at <http://www.bgriffiths7.freeserve.co.uk/record.html>, now at <http://web.archive.org/web/20050407155221/http://www.bgriffiths7.freeserve.co.uk/record.html> [accessed 16 March 2022].

possessed at a certain stage in the Americas. [...] he possessed nothing but the calamitous air of broken ties in the New World'.[423] Brathwaite adds: 'this ruin/vestige, shred of breath, vital possession of the dispossessed, becomes the survival rhythm from which transformation may proceed.'[424] This resort to the body and its emanations is a recurring element in poetry that articulates marginalised communities' positions: as with Gilbert and the Toxteth rioters, it is the final, inalienable sanctuary from which to perform resistance.

Mr. Tapscott interlinks arguments about how creolisation strengthens marginalised communities in an urban, internal colony like Toxteth. Some are encoded at the formal level, with polyphonous voices enacting creole diversity, and local speakers triangulating shared opposition to authoritarianism. Others emerge through the narrative. Maronage's inward turn, practised in Toxteth's clubs, aids cultural and economic survival of communities otherwise frozen out of opportunities. There is potential care between marginalised groups, based on sharing tactics of resistance against a common adversary, as during the Toxteth Riots. And freedom can be experienced by abandoning property-based hierarchies of dialectical society, instead developing power and expression through bodily resources.

Unfortunately, the structures arrayed against Gilbert proved insurmountable, but by co-authoring *Mr. Tapscott* with him and distributing it with information about the miscarriage of justice, Griffiths continues to acquit Gilbert in the court of public opinion. The poem, like its rioters' breath, takes in the world's voices, sounds and history, then releases this content as speech and text, turning power against itself. Griffiths transforms authoritarian utterances into satire that highlights institutional inhumanity. If Gilbert's use of his own excrement to critique injustice is another form of 'voice', *Mr. Tapscott* is Griffiths' own 'dirty protest', a demonstration against master-slave dialectics that suborn working-class Liverpudlians of colour. It is a political, poetic intervention recentring power in the individual body. Through this embodied poetics of breath, communities of individuals may work together to break into paradise.

Mr. Tapscott finds an English poet applying tidalectic approaches to cultural relationships between marginalised communities in England. Stuart Hall's concept of the

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[423] Wilson Harris, *History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas*, p. 28, cited in Brathwaite, 'The African Presence in Caribbean Literature', *Roots*, pp. 231–232. Brathwaite's italics (bolded in Harris).
[424] Brathwaite, 'The African Presence in Caribbean Literature', *Roots*, p. 232.

internal colony, where marginalised peoples within the metropolitan nation find grounds for collaboration and cultural interchange, underwrites how Griffiths also complicates distinctions between colony and metropole. If a long-term community within England experiences oppression by the powerful, this suggests possible alliances with peoples of the multicultural, internal colony, and hence with colonised regions overseas. In *Mr Tapscott*, Griffiths depicts Toxteth in terms redolent of Hall's internal colony, and develops two forms of co-operation between Black and White communities: the way locals from all backgrounds found common cause during the 1981 Toxteth Riots, standing together against their economic and social alienation; and how Griffiths himself, through the poem and his friendship, supported the clearing of Ray Gilbert's name. The human body's innate resources become the final line of resistance against oppression; breath itself is an essential means to contest power, akin to how Brathwaite sees breath as a basis for poetry. The poem shows how English communities can transcend the metropole's totalising dialectic, decolonising and de-imperialising their own attitudes, and regaining aspects of the decentred, archipelagic model of culture that Griffiths, Brathwaite and Bunting locate in the Early Medieval period. This necessitates inventing new, previously submerged ancestors. In some cases, forgotten forerunners will emerge from English folk sources, regenerating culture with an influx of voices and ideas, sometimes from marginalised groups of the past, but also, more importantly, from peripheral communities in the present day. In other situations, decolonial struggles overseas will provide inspiration. All these sources move English culture closer to tidalectic engagement with other communities worldwide, learning from them without spreading or acquiescing to hegemony. This is a huge project for an entire society, let alone a humble thesis, but poetry has a role, and England's dialects are among the resources that could flourish in response to Caribbean nation language.

Such concepts offer a basis for the tidalectic care sought throughout the present chapter. Denise Riley cautions against what she terms a 'unifying division', an 'unwillingness to tolerate constructive divisions' within political identity categories, so that a Black Muslim (in her example) faces marginalisation within both Black and Muslim communities.[425] Instead, tidalectics brings a dividing unity, nurturing difference within and between groups

[425] Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 179.

so that cultural creativity can be shared and benefit all. This licenses two distant and historically divergent regions – such as the Caribbean and Northern England – to engage with each other's culture. Rather than neutralising difference through Hegelian synthesis, tidalectics offers an unending pluralisation of cultural forms. Audre Lorde speaks of losses that result from closing oneself to potential allies from different backgrounds:

> [...] we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek these words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own. For instance, "I can't possibly teach Black women's writing – their experience is so different from mine." Yet how many years have you spent teaching Plato and Shakespeare and Proust? Or another, "She's a white woman and what could she possibly have to say to me?" [...] And all the other endless ways in which we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other.[426]

Lorde is speaking particularly about intersectional feminism, but her thoughts have power on an even wider scale. Much has been, and more could still be, gained from large-scale intersections, such as working-class campaigners forming bonds that transcend nationality and race. Brathwaite's attention to Northumbrian history and poetics, and Griffiths' care for Ray Gilbert, exemplify this principle. As Lorde argues, 'it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence.'[427] As colonies break silence to converse with one another, poetics developed through maronage can creolise across intercultural differences, spreading not a totalising, imperial language, but ideas for artistically developing unique resources already available to the learning culture. This will be the project of the next two chapters, which consider the many innovations that Kamau Brathwaite has realised through his nation language, and ponder how these discoveries could influence innovative English poetry.

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[426] Audre Lorde, 'The Transformation of Silence into Action', *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), pp. 43–44.
[427] Lorde, p. 44.

Chapter 3: Ananse's Dictionary

3.1: 'an underground volcane of voice': Total Expression in Kamau Brathwaite's Performance Poetics

This chapter begins an exploration of how Kamau Brathwaite and Bill Griffiths approach the challenge of bringing nation language and dialect to full realisation in performance and on the page. Brathwaite's various approaches to this problem, and his ideas about the embodied performance he calls 'total expression', emerge in poetic innovations developed throughout his opus; for him, 'total expression' is intrinsically linked with nation language. His early work's orality is accentuated, not abandoned, with introduction of heightened visuality, and each new experiment grows organically from its predecessors. All, however, spring from nation language as their basal technique.

To explore how this poetics could rejuvenate poetry in England, I will relate each development to poetry by Bill Griffiths, whose career trajectory (in terms of a succession of technical developments) is rather different. In the 1970s, his engagement with Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum and the B.P.R.-led Poetry Society plunged him into an environment where visual experimentation was valued; simultaneously, the Poetry Society's print shop provided technology for page-based innovations. Alan Halsey notes that 'from 1971 to 1980' Griffiths 'mostly produced on ink duplicators with some use of silkscreen and offset litho'.[428] In Seaham, now with a home computer, he primarily issued 'A5 pamphlets produced by photocopy or computer printer'.[429] Domestically producing pamphlets predetermined many formatting decisions. However, if Griffiths' Seaham poetry is less confrontationally avant-garde than his early work, the project of integrating culturally and linguistically into a new community, and representing this culture, is also an experiment – in the context of innovative poetry in England, an even bolder one than his earlier production.

Since Griffiths' dialect writings cluster in his later career, discussion of his work in these chapters does not match the chronological sequence in which I explore Brathwaite's innovations. Further necessitating this decision is his less frequent experimentation with layout and lettering in County Durham. This development means that textual experiments

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[428] Alan Halsey, 'Pirate Press: A Bibliographical Excursion', *The Salt Companion to Bill Griffiths*, pp. 55–71; p. 55.

[429] Halsey, 'Pirate Press', p. 55.

paralleling Sycorax Video-style do not substantially overlap with dialect in his poetry, though it is feasible to review the earlier, visual work and imagine how techniques there could develop dialect poetics.

The tour through Brathwaite's oeuvre begins in this section by defining his 'total expression', observing how it manifests in performance. Essentially, the phenomenon involves a positive feedback loop within a performance space, with an audience receiving the energy of a poet's embodied presence, and responding to it in kind. In a modern society, though, the relationship of text and technology to performance and speech is complex, and results in exciting possibilities for Brathwaite to explore.

I then consider 'total expression' in Bill Griffiths' work, initially examining his participation in Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum workshops and related sound poetry activities. Performances on this scene engaged audiences in ways congruent with Brathwaite's theory. Griffiths' 1990 move to Seaham seemingly presents a retreat from this level of experimental performance, but I argue that the participatory, communitarian focus of his dialectology and publishing in fact constitute an extension of the poetics of audience engagement practised at Writers Forum.

This leads into discussion of both poets' vocabularies. Such phrases pepper Brathwaite's early work, but his most sustained nation language in this period occurs in two poems, 'The Dust' (1967) and 'Rites' (1969).[430] The former portrays Bajan women in a grocer's shop, discussing memories of a volcanic eruption on nearby St. Lucia. The latter takes place in a Barbadian tailor's shop where men dissect a cricket match. I focus on the second poem, since such homosocial backdrops abound in Griffiths' poetry, such as *The Coal World: Murton Tales Reworked as Dialect Verse* (1995), which makes a fruitful comparison with 'Rites'.[431] Griffiths' pamphlet appropriates material from F.N. Platt's genealogical fiction *The Canny Man* (1970), turning its prose into dialect verse set in a County Durham mining town. Both 'Rites' and *The Coal World* depict specifics of everyday lives, advocating an ethos of mutual aid that inculcates political resistance.

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[430] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, pp. 62–69 and pp. 197–203.
[431] Griffiths, *The Coal World: Murton Tales Reworked as Dialect Verse* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1995).

The next section centres on Brathwaite's *Sun Poem* (1982), middle volume of his *Ancestors* trilogy.[432] *Sun Poem*'s lineation and layout reveal kinships with modernist and postmodernist poetics from the U.S.A., though his intensifying nation language still makes the poetry unmistakeably Caribbean. The trilogy introduces many 'calibanisms', Brathwaite's term for subversive, decolonial puns that use nation language pronunciation, reflected by unorthodox spelling, to subvert standard English. Calibanisms apply tidalectic principles to the fabric of individual words, letting Brathwaite articulate two meanings simultaneously: the word's standard English significance as conventionally spelled; and, undermining colonial assumptions implicit therein, a second word arising from the pun. For example, 'malitia' (described in the Introduction) reveals the malice of colonial militia.

As the Introduction showed, Griffiths' dialect poetry also uses puns, albeit more subliminally. I consider historical reasons for why calibanisms work better in Caribbean nation language than in North Eastern speech, before turning to a different means with which Griffiths doubles words: the kenning, a periphrastic technique whose roots in Old English and Norse poetry parallel Caribbean traditions of folk etymology. Griffiths' kennings similarly critique societal controls. His *Scaffold Hill* (1992) combines kennings with North Eastern language to excoriate political and economic forces oppressing the region, often with humour equivalent to Brathwaite's: domesticated pigeons pay an 'egg-mortgage', for example.[433] The poem explores personal and communal immanence through language, while Griffiths' dialect and rich sound-patterns enact these very ideas. By analysing the various means through which Brathwaite and Griffiths experiment with performance, lexicon, and the doubling of meaning, we will be equipped to consider the poets' startling interactions with visuality, found text, and modern technology – all of which could be regarded as extensions of 'total expression' – in the final chapter.

To define 'total expression', though, let us start with an example: Kamau Brathwaite sits at a desk, telling a seated audience about his initial arrival in Jamaica. He wears a light-

[432] The first volume is *Mother Poem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), the last *X/Self*; *Ancestors* collects the three in revised, Sycorax form. The first two books concern Bajan heritage, while *X/Self*, addressed in Chapters 2.3, explores wider, historical contexts.
[433] Bill Griffiths, *Scaffold Hill* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1992), n.p.

coloured daishiki (Ghanaian-style shirt), signifying pan-African loyalties.[434] He intersperses his discourse with poems from *Rights of Passage* – the opening 'Prelude' and 'Folkways' – which he reads from the page.[435] Otherwise, he improvises, with hesitations and self-corrections that this approach entails. D.V.D. footage of the event is black-and-white; the University of the West Indies archives service dates it to 1983, presumably having digitised it from videotape.[436] An on-screen logo proclaims that the film was made for (perhaps at?) the National Library of Jamaica. The D.V.D. repeats the same material several times as its producer strives to improve the terrible sound quality. The recording glitches repeatedly, with tiny pauses interrupting the footage. Brathwaite's talk is a variation on the story, discussed in Chapter 2.1, about his 1960s revelation of tidalectics while watching a woman on Jamaica's north coast sweep her doorstep.

Tidalectics is unnamed in this recording. Nevertheless, Brathwaite showcases its aesthetic and political importance. He identifies the site of his revelation as Runaway Bay in St. Ann Parish, a place he associates with enslaved Africans' struggles for freedom, where 'slaves used to move, to attempt to dream, to make that connection inside back to an ancestral place.'[437] He describes this community's architecture and routine:

> There was a compound situation, which is the same as in Africa. The house next to where we were staying had an open courtyard where members of the family spent most of the day, early morning cooking, pounding food, in the middle of the day they had a rest, and then in the evening they would sit on their doorstep, and then the songs and the stories would begin. And it was the same songs and the same stories as I heard in Africa, the same pattern of light, the same physical appearance. The toes of these old ladies walked through de dust of the courtyard. And as they walked through the courtyard at Runaway Bay, on a cliff, their bodies were silhouetted against the light, against the ocean.[438]

Brathwaite was living in Ghana only weeks before this holiday, so was qualified to make such observations. The women's preservation of African legacies is maronage in action.

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[434] Kwame Dawes describes how, in 1970s Jamaica, Brathwaite's daishiki connoted 'an Afrocentric, grassroots writer, in contrast to the Eurocentric Derek Walcott' – Kwame Dawes, *Natural Mysticism: Towards a New Reggae Aesthetic* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008), p. 85.
[435] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, pp. 4–8 and pp. 30–34.
[436] *Kamau Brathwaite* [video], Mona, University of the West Indies, West Indies Collection, D.V.D. no. 196.
[437] *Kamau Brathwaite* [video], 40:50. All quotes from this recording are my transcriptions.
[438] *Kamau Brathwaite* [video], 41:45.

As Brathwaite tells his story, factors arise that conventional transcription would elide. Though his English is relatively standard, enthusiasm occasionally precipitates him into nation language ('de dust'), and his Bajan accent determines some pronunciation: the context clarifies 'a compound', but Brathwaite enunciates it like 'Accompong', a Maroon town in Jamaica's Cockpit Country.[439] The resemblance (probably coincidental) further connects the women's activities to historical practices of resistance and cultural consolidation. Similarly, 'toes' could be 'tones', given his reference to the women's songs. Either word would suit, so that the two nouns feel cognate, and the women's walking and singing become one action. Brathwaite's body language compounds the conflation: he points two fingers diagonally downwards in front of him, perhaps mimicking toes, but then drums these fingers up and down, suggesting dance rhythms.

Brathwaite sits still while reading poems, hands preoccupied with pages. Otherwise, his body language is demonstrative. If one notates his gestures, this results:

There was
[*his pointed finger traces a horizontal arc before him*]
a compound situation
[*circulates his hands with cupped palms upward*],
which is the same as in Africa. The house next to where we were staying
[*hand knocks in the air to hit stresses of speech, then makes a gesture of placement to his right*]
had an open courtyard
[*mimes a circle with his hands, finishing with palms up, indicating openness*]
where members of the family spent most of the day
[*up-and-down motion of hand for emphasis*],
early morning cooking, pounding food
[*vigorous, pounding motion*],
in the middle of the day
[*touches left earlobe*]
they had a rest, and then in the evening they would sit
[*both hands move downward, palms up, in front of chest*]
on their doorstep
[*gesture of placement away from chest with both hands*]
and then the songs and the stories would begin.
And it was the same songs and the same stories as I heard in Africa,
[*right-to-left chopping gesture*]
the same pattern of light, the same physical appearance
[*hand touched to chest, then opening outward*].

[439] This is not an artefact of the sound recording, which is clear at this point.

The toes of these old ladies
[*index and middle finger point ahead, beating up and down*]
walked through de dust of the courtyard
[*hand rests on desktop, representing groundedness*].
And as they walked through the courtyard
[t*humb and forefinger at right angles, thumb down, gesturing out from chest to table*]
at Runaway Bay, on a cliff
[*downward motion of hand, high before chest*],
their bodies were silhouetted against the light
[*touches air in front of him to indicate positions against the light*]
against the ocean
[*holds hand flat before his face, wiggling fingers like waves*].[440]

Many gestures go beyond emphasising Brathwaite's meaning, instead adding new resonances. When he describes the 'open courtyard', his hands convey not just architectural space, but that the guests were safely 'in the hands' of the women; his upward palms equate the open-air environment to a welcoming, egalitarian attitude. When he describes pounding food, he mimes utilising a large pestle like those which make fufu from yams in West Africa and the Caribbean; the motion evokes transatlantic, cultural continuities. And, noting that the women have 'the same physical appearance' as Africans, he touches his own chest, indicating that he shares this history, before his hand opens to the mostly Black audience, inviting them to feel this connection.

Performing seated at a desk might seem restrictive, but its surface comes to symbolise the groundedness, the sense of home, in which his gestures root Runaway Bay's community. Other visual aspects prove meaningful too. Brathwaite's daishiki emphasises his points about African heritage in Jamaica, while the wall behind him sports a painting of white-robed participants in a ceremony; one of them discards his robe, dancing ecstatically.[441] The camera films the painting in close-up, then zooms out and returns to Brathwaite, who reads from 'Folkways':

Come
come bugle
train

[440] *Kamau Brathwaite* [video], 41:45. My italics, justification, and lineation, for clarity and aesthetics.
[441] Owing to the time elapsed since Brathwaite's reading, and uncertainty regarding the venue, it has proved impossible to identify the painting. Its subject recalls works by the artist and Zion Revival bishop Kapo, but the style is more conventionally realistic.

come quick
Bugle
train, quick
quick bugle
train, black
boogie-
woogie wheels
fat
boogie-
woogie waggons
rat tat tat
on the flat-
out whispering rails[442]

'But the poem has to have a centre,' Brathwaite adds, hand moving on alternating left then right diagonals towards a notional centre before him, 'Runaway Bay, where the poem was being written.'[443] Brathwaite therefore composed this poem during experiences that inspired his concepts of nation language and tidalectics.

The painting depicts Myal (a neo-African practice involving spirit possession) or Revival (Christianity influenced by Myal and other African concepts); in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both traditions' celebrants wore white robes.[444] Brathwaite esteems both as what, at *Poetry of the Americas*, he called 'people's churches':

> These are the religious and cultural expressions of the people who were brought over on the slave ships. [...] And when the drum was not permitted to sound, the people made sounds with their voices as a drum, or with their hands or their feet, so that that rhythmic impulse is an impulse which we have throughout Caribbean history. It is the impulse to worship. And in literature it is the impulse of rhythm and you will find that in this period now […] you have for the first time coming into Caribbean literature the impulse of rhythm.[445]

In Brathwaite's performance 'Folkways', this rhythm becomes incarnates in how the poem's onomatopoeias, pararhymes, and assonances clack along like a train at speed, punctuated by long vowels ('bugle', 'boogie- | woogie') mimicking the train's horn; as Gordon Rohlehr notes: 'If the rhythm of the wheels seems to express hope and progress, the cry of the horn

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442 Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 33.
443 *Kamau Brathwaite* [video], 46:40.
444 Dianne M. Stuart, 'The Ordinance of Baptism, 1843', *Victorian Jamaica*, ed. by Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 69–72: p. 70.
445 Brathwaite, 'The Literature of the Caribbean', Side B, 23:15.

expresses longing and homelessness'.[446] Resemblance between 'boogie' and 'bogie', as in a railway truck's undercarriage, is at play too. The rhythmic, percussive performance, paired with the painting, recalls the 'drumming and the form of rhythmic breathing known as "groaning" or "sounding"' that ethnomusicologist Kenneth Bilby says was common in ceremonies with 'clear African influence'.[447]

Juxtaposing poem and painting implies deeper connections between African religion and modern technology. Brathwaite's 1994 tome *Barabajan Poems* reflects on these. He reproduces the 'Folkways' excerpt in large, bold, Sycorax font, prefaced by discussing the 'Yoruba/Dahomey god Shango of hammer & | axe & electricity & fire & blinding lightning/thunder [...] who, with Ogou his broth | er/ half-brother of metal, xpresses himself in the Americas as among | other ikons John Henry the legendary African-American folk hero'.[448] A litany of titles from train-inspired songs follows, leading to the realisation:

> that Shango & the others of PanAfrica are here too, were already alwa
> ys here from since we listened since we sang & clapped & drummed &
> danced & dreamed - transformed & thunderous as a train, the

loco

motive engine[449]

This locomotive is a 'loco | motive', an intentionality appearing crazy ('loco') due to divine possession. The 'Folkways' excerpt follows, recontextualised into a hymn of unity with Yoruba orishas (divine spirits) of energy and technology, actualising the link that the camera operator in 1983 intuited between Brathwaite's trainlike soundings and neo-African divinity. Brathwaite then segues into the "groaning" or "sounding"' that Bilby notes in African religious practices:

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[446] Rohlehr, *Pathfinder: Black Awakening in The Arrivants of Edward Kamau Brathwaite* (Tunapuna: Gordon Rohlehr, 1981), p. 90.

[447] Kenneth Bilby, 'Jamaica', Peter Manuel, Kenneth Bilby and Michael Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), pp. 143–82: pp. 152–53.

[448] Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, p. 172.

[449] Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, p. 174.

[...] **an underground vol-**
cane of voice/   sound &
throat/ pulse & naaase &
deep *chest/belly* vibe

going

huh huh haaaah[450]

The spelling '**vol- | cane**' for 'volcano' draws the word closer to 'Vulcan', Ogou's Roman equivalent, god of volcanoes and smiths. The '**cane**' suggests sugar cane cultivated by enslaved African-Caribbean people, presenting the ritual against a background of atrocity. Meanwhile, '**vol-**' abbreviates 'volume', meaning either 'loudness' or 'book'. A '**vol- | cane of voice**' would erupt into cacophony that is also text (like Brathwaite's book), originating from histories of enslavement embodied in a worshipper's '**throat/ pulse & naase & | deep *chest/belly* vibe**'. Brathwaite describes a devotee bursting with divine energy, as in the painting in the video.

Throughout the footage, non-verbal aspects (the painting, Brathwaite's gestures, his use of the desk) create meaning. Conventional transcription, or even sound recordings, omit such elements. Other performance aspects are absent even from the video: colour (the footage is monochrome), audience reactions (their backs face the camera), and precise information about date, time, and location. Nevertheless, the video documents how physical presence – Brathwaite's immanence before his audience, and the audience's experience of the performance space – determines reception. Even Brathwaite's stillness while reading

[450] Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, p. 178.

poems is significant, inviting listeners to hear the texts as separate, premeditated entities, unlike his talk's embodied improvisation. Brathwaite blurs this distinction between poet and poems in later works, in line with *History of the Voice*:

> The other thing about nation language is that it is part of what may be called *total expression*, a nation which is not unfamiliar to you because you are coming back to that kind of thing now. Reading is an isolated, individualistic expression. The oral tradition on the other hand demands not only the griot but the audience to complete the community: the noise and sounds that the maker makes are responded to by the audience and are returned to him. Hence we have the creation of a continuum where meaning truly resides. And this *total expression* comes about because people be in the open air, because people live in conditions of poverty ('unhouselled') because they come from a historical experience where they had to rely on their very *breath* rather than on paraphernalia like books and museums and machines. They had to depend on *immanence*, the power within themselves, rather than the technology outside themselves.[451]

During Brathwaite's poems in the video, total expression manifests through mimetic sounding of 'Folkways' and his words' interaction with their visual backdrop, but remains limited compared to his other discourse. When he speaks unscriptedly, hand movements draw his audience into a community; even unconscious gestures, like touching his earlobe, reinforce embodied immanence. Using the desk as a substrate for these gestures, he may even remind viewers of Wolof griots who, Patricia Tang outlines, are 'masters of the sabar drum': one of the 'talking drums' discussed in Chapter 2.2, its music thus retaining verbal dimensions.[452] Otherwise, he improvises without 'paraphernalia like books'.

The Sycorax Video-style of Brathwaite's later career apparently contradicts this performativity. In *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, Mackey asks him, '`Are you no longer an oral poet?`' Brathwaite answers, '`Have no fear!`'[453] He elaborates:

> What we have to remem
> ber - get to know - about
> the 'Oral Tradition,'
> is that it's never
> only *heard*, its *seen*
> - is *part* of a total
> kinesis, right? Is n-

[451] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, pp. 18–19. Brathwaite's italics.
[452] Patricia Tang, *Masters of the Sabar: Wolof Griot Percussionists of Senegal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), p. 1.
[453] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, pp. 210.

ot simply that we he-
ar it but we watch an
(d) we *witness* the *gr*
iots as they go thru
the sweat of their me
mory to their memory

and we ourselves, wi-
thin this Tradition -
part of it or coming
from it or *influence*
by it - are not or
are not only 'audien-
ce' in the sense of
'Passive' - but like
- *thank you* - like yu
here tonight - *really*

- as watchful breath-
ing witness and *parti*
cipants - you don't
sit back and simply
'take it' - you have
been involve in the
'process' of witness/

participation - the
call-and-response tha
(t) gathers us into
community

[Audience responds: movement, applause, some inter-talking]

> **KB**: See! you begin to do what you're beginning to do now an (d) what I'm provoking you to do. You laugh and you groan, and you fidget, and above all, you *breathe*. And there's ridd-im to all this Structure and shape and hopefully destination Because it's tidalectic [...][454]

This 'total kinesis' or total expression is integral to nation language's orality, manifesting in tidalectic call-and-response as audience and poet form a community, but it also has visuality that Sycorax Video-style reflects on the page, and which itself conjures a community between author and reader. Total expression thus underlies a range of Brathwaite's poetics, performative and textual. Indeed, he argues against distinctions between these categories. In literate societies, performance becomes increasingly textual:

[454] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, pp. 224–26.

> […] an Oral Tradition - is also nowadays often also 'visual', based on the art of memory of some kind of 'script', being mo re 'compose' like a modern musical score than how the 'ancien ts' - the griots - did it, do it. Nowadays we tend to call it 'oral' because we 'see' it on stage and/or it's on *tape recor dings*, and I think that's our big problem[455]

This, then, is the paradox of oral performance in a modern society: the more developed the total expression of a live performance, the more radical the textuality needed to envision, score, or record it, hence the plurality of Brathwaite's experiments in notation. This is a challenge that, many miles from Runaway Bay, was also addressed by Bill Griffiths, as we will see in the next section.

[455] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, p. 215.

4.2. 'inmates of the Duck Yard': Bill Griffiths, Writers Forum, and Community as Performance

Bill Griffiths' career trajectory superficially seems the reverse of Brathwaite's. The latter's poetry deepens 'total expression' through increasingly experimental language and visuality; in contrast, Griffiths begins in the 1970s with radical forms of concrete and sound poetry, before settling into methods that, while avant-garde next to many English poets, appear less so than his early work. In Seaham, his poetry makes less daring use of page space, is more likely to maintain a stable, lyric or dramatic 'I' for each poem, and largely eschews his earlier enthusiasm for polyvocal performance. Instead, his texts imply that live readings would proceed as relatively normative declamations to an audience.

This impression is misleading. The community poetics of Griffiths' dialect work in Seaham has roots in practices developed amid the London nexus of the B.P.R., and particularly through association with Bob Cobbing. This section tracks the development of these concerns during Griffiths' time in London, arguing that his dialectology in Seaham is an outgrowth of 'total expression' in performance. Cobbing is an important antecedent for Griffiths' community poetics, with a love of establishing groups and institutions for poetry and other arts. These range from his Writers Forum workshops for experimental poets, to nationwide bodies like the Association of Little Presses. Cobbing was committed to opening up opportunities for creativity, collaboration and decision-making to wider demographics. Stephen Willey argues that 'the democratic implications of Cobbing's performance practice did not derive through live performance alone, but were also formulated through a series of institutional engagements in postwar Hendon' (where Writers Forum was founded).[456] Willey conceptualises Cobbing's poetry, events and institutional work as a continuum of practice, so that 'Writers Forum was Cobbing's best poem'.[457] Griffiths' work is a similar continuum, with poetry, fiction, essays, activism, publishing, translations, lexicography, historical research and community organising all aspects of one creative drive.

Griffiths recalls how Writers Forum participants would 'form a seated circle, and take turns round the circle to read or exhibit something new – and perform it, solo or with

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[456] Stephen Willey, *Bob Cobbing 1950–1978: Performance, Poetry and the Institution*, PhD Thesis, Queen Mary University of London and the British Library Sound Archive, 2012, p. 19.
[457] Willey, p. 271.

help from those present'.[458] cris cheek, whose 'first witness-participation in the productive-interpretative community of a Writers Forum workshop during 1975 was at the invitation of Bill Griffiths', describes the milieu:

> Staple reports of poetry openly contested at these workshops were the unitary voice of epiphanic glibness, and the boundaries of lyric *I*; both frequently put under pressure by polyphonic recomposition and polychronic attention. Poetic texts, all manner of alphabetic and non-alphabetic mark-making, graphic scores and visual notations, were frequently read by two or three voices (or more); voiced in an improvised interaction, with syncopation, with overlapping stresses, with partial erasure, foreground and background scripting, staccato narrative assemblages and dialogistic interjection. […] Witness-participation attention was full on and wide open, exhibiting a porous frame.[459]

This group improvisation exemplifies total expression, integrating the audience into the poem during performance. In cheek's words, 'performance of writing was an embodied occasion, belonging to neither giver nor receiver'.[460] Interviewed by Eric Mottram, Cobbing claims that this communal experience resolves an apparent contradiction: the poet becomes utterly engaged as 'the muscles of the whole body are relaxed and it turns into almost a dance', yet 'It is the poem itself that matters, something that exists outside the self […] and therefore it is an area in which not only you can join, but other people can join.'[461] The poem is the relationship between everyone present in the performance space. As Brathwaite says, '`The truth of the moment comes not only in the song, the poem,| the utterance, but in the` *`interaction`*`.`'[462] Cobbing compares this 'feeling that people respond to' to 'a jazz concert, people are moving to it.'[463]

Using similar terms, Brathwaite reminds us that, with jazz, 'we are speaking of "folk" culture: the group, the individual-in-the-group, and group-individual improvisation'; however, he is wary that '"modern folk" is mainly cerebral, a desperate effort of the over-urbanised to escape "civilisation", a conscious neo-primitivism', whereas 'jazz is an example

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458 Unsourced quotation from Griffiths in Sean O'Huigin, 'Earl's Court Squared', *The Salt Companion to Bill Griffiths*, pp. 51–54: p. 51.
459 cris cheek, 'Bob Cobbing's Performances: Production and Circulation of the Text', *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, vol. 4 no. 2, September 2012, 159–89: 160–61. cheek's italics.
460 cheek, 'Bob Cobbing's Performances', 161.
461 Mottram, *Composition and Performance in the Work of Bob Cobbing: A Conversation* (London: Writers Forum, 2000), n.p. Mottram's underlining.
462 Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, p. 227.
463 Mottram, *Composition and Performance in the Work of Bob Cobbing*, n.p.

of a living, active expression on easy terms with all the world.'[464] His concerns about 'modern folk' recall Stuart Hall's awareness (explored in this thesis' Introduction) that folk phenomena risk idealising simplistic visions of the past, eliding the complex, diasporic realities of all cultures. Cobbing, though, situates folk-inspired practices in modernity: 'I want to establish my primitive roots, and at the same time show that because we live in a modern age and have things like tape-recorders and duplicators […] we can take it further, today, through the instruments. So that it is both primitive and sophisticated.'[465]

Griffiths seems largely uninterested in jazz, referring to it rarely and obliquely. However, his practices in performance, writing and self-publishing are jazz-like in the sense suggested by Brathwaite and Cobbing. cheek recounts how Writers Forum workshops involved 'dynamic interchange between improvisation and composition […] Writings thereby explored through out-loud readings became subjects for revision, a direct result of having aired.'[466] This ethos is immanent in Griffiths' publications, where constant revision and reformatting is a key to his practice. Alan Halsey summarises:

> It is not only that his poems migrate, with or without revision, from one publication to another and undergo a degree of metamorphosis by this frequent recontextualization and re-design(ation) but that phrases, lines and short passages also migrate from poem to poem. A straightforward view of mimeo would be that the process of duplication from typewritten stencils turns a typescript into a book with the implicit suggestion that a book guarantees a certain textual stability; a Griffiths mimeo, on the other hand, particularly in the period 1971–6, retains some of the provisional status of a private typescript.[467]

The word 'migrate' figures the poems as a diaspora, suggesting how changes in context may lead to changes in meaning for people as well as poems. Ian Davidson elaborates: 'For Griffiths, the completed or finished text can only ever be a possibility that is never achieved, or is only achieved temporarily, and in the same way that every reading of a poem is a performance that produces new meanings, each publication context provides an opportunity

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[464] Brathwaite, 'Jazz and the West Indian Novel', *Roots*, p. 57.
[465] Mottram, *Composition and Performance in the Work of Bob Cobbing*, n.p.
[466] cheek, 'Bob Cobbing's Performances', 160–161.
[467] Halsey, 'Abysses and Quick Vicissitudes: Some Notes on the Mimeo Editions of Bill Griffiths', *Journal of British and Irish Poetry*, vol. 6 no. 1, 2014, 41–53: 42.

for a variation of the text.'[468] Kamau Brathwaite is one of the few poets to revise their work to Griffiths' extent; he shares this rejection of the authoritative text, and his performances and publications employ similar levels of revision and renovation, 'like a | second well or wall of composition - which is where the 'ora- | (l) is; […] So| that in the end the 'oral' is how well the composer can recom|pose the song in performance, before (in front of) or within the|echo of an audience'.[469] For Brathwaite, each new book is a performance, allowing modulation and re-presentation of older poems (alongside original ones) in response to new contexts, as occurs in many poets' live readings. This can involve what Halsey calls 're-vision – the text reproduced verbatim but in a different page space and/or variant setting', sometimes radically changing a poem's impact, as in Brathwaite's Sycorax re-visions of earlier poetry.[470]

Griffiths' revisions mirror Brathwaite's refusal to elevate a definitive version of any text: both poets reject hierarchies between different versions of a piece, keeping their work open to further negotiation. Griffiths' clearest example is his mimeographed essay *A Note on Democracy* (1974), which outlines a programme to abolish government:

> Present govts seem gcared to minimize change. Paradox: instability precipitates govt, but govt is limited by its own ambitions and creation from dealing with total reality. Events, populations, rrsources, are non-stable. So we have no continuous govts but a series of attempts. Each time a govt's failure or corruption is exposed, and the concept of authority comes under scrutiny, we are told the only solution is an intensification of authority. Consider this in relation to English prison policy in the 1970s[471]

Griffiths' politics here seem anarchistic; there are parallels with Peter Kropotkin, who advocates 'a world in which the bonds which bind the individual are no longer laws, but social habits – the result of the need felt by each one of us to seek the support, the co-operation, the sympathy of his neighbours.'[472] Griffiths resists neat insertion into anarchist traditions: many anarchists reject government's ossified structures, whereas Griffiths shows

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[468] Ian Davidson, 'Mobility and Autonomy in Bill Griffiths', *Journal of British and Irish Poetry*, vol. 6 no. 1, 2014, 113–26: 113.
[469] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, pp. 227–228.
[470] Halsey, 'Pirate Press', p. 5
[471] Griffiths, *A Note on Democracy* (London: Pirate Press, 1974), n.p. Griffiths' typos.
[472] Peter Kropotkin, 'The Conquest of Bread', *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, ed. by Marshall Shatz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 37.

willingness to transform democracy from within (see Chapter 4.6). Further complicating the matter, Griffiths never directly self-identifies as an anarchist, nor does he namecheck anarchist thinkers like Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, William Godwin, or Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, here or in later works. Reluctance to cite the anarchist tradition may result from preferring 'democracy' as a name for this means of organisation: 'Democracy should be: sharing of power and planning; the sharing of labour; the sharing of benefits.'[473] Griffiths holds that these values have gone unrealised by governments falsely claiming democratic legitimacy; his anarchist definition of democracy reinforces this point. This resembles Cobbing's own creed: 'Have we ever had democracy in practice or Communism in practice? I think my politics […] would be anarchist.'[474]

These principles inform the layout of *A Note on Democracy*, which has unusually wide margins. This feature originates with medieval scribes and early modern printers, who often included such spaces for readers to add glosses and remarks in conversation with the text. Medievalist Michael Camille notes how this subverts the hierarchic authority of book over reader: the marginal note 'interacts with and reinterprets a text that has come to be seen as fixed and finalised', so that 'the manuscript page becomes a matrix of visual signs and is no longer one of flowing linear speech', enabling 'disagreement and juxtaposition – what the scholastics called *disputatio*.'[475] If the self-interruptions of Brathwaite's footnotes and parentheses in his 'tidalectic lectures' challenge textual hierarchies and linearity through internal *disputatio*, Griffiths takes the concept further, inviting readers to create their own 'matrix of visual signs'. At the pamphlet's conclusion, this becomes explicit:

> *You are invited to use the space at the right of each page or any extra paper, to make your own comments and further points upon. You might like to return the annotated copy to Bill Griffiths, 107 Valley Drive, London NW9 9NT.*[476]

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[473] Griffiths, *A Note on Democracy*, n.p.
[474] Wolfgang Görtschacher, 'What Is Important Is What Is Done, Not What It Is Called' [interview with Bob Cobbing], *Contemporary Views on the Little Magazine Scene* (Salzburg: Poetry Salzburg, 2000), p. 341.
[475] Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), pp.20–21. Camille's italics.
[476] Griffiths, *A Note on Democracy*, n.p. Griffiths' italics.

Griffiths' principles are therefore evident in this text's circulation, envisaging conversations between writer and reader. This exceeds the provision created by medieval scribes, most of whom could not see marginalia added to their texts. *Disputatio* there was between book and reader, whereas Griffiths requests personal responses for incorporation into ongoing writing and thought. More recent computer technology enables readers to annotate electronic documents and return these to the author. However, the process remains little-used outside some professionalised fields (marking or peer review in academia, online writing workshops, publishers' editing processes) where the goal, contrary to Griffiths, is to finalise a text. Also, email is a less embodied practice than writing into and then mailing a book: it is a different kind of sociality. Incorporating responsiveness to feedback on the conceptual level, *A Note on Democracy* presages present-day software, and shows how such applications could let texts grow and metamorphose through online dialogue. The pamphlet's *disputatio* is textually equivalent to feedback that Brathwaite and cheek find in live performance.

One such interaction occurs years later, in correspondence between Griffiths and Mottram. No year is given for the letter, but Griffiths' mention of 'Thatcherism' (a term coined by Stuart Hall in January 1979) suggests it was written in the aftermath of Margaret Thatcher's May 1979 General Election victory.[477] Griffiths says: 'What I intended was not a positive ideology or an exposition of Anarchism, but an ongoing interpretation, by which a 'permanent' negative force (not dependent on organisation) can be recognized to counterbalance the control-system.'[478] This ''permanent' negative force', with its 'ongoing interpretation' that refuses synthesis into a 'positive ideology', that perpetually counteracts centralised power while never assuming it, resembles Brathwaite's tidalectics. Griffiths also ponders how to find a poetics that could articulate his opposition to Thatcherism:

> Given my stance of opposition to Thatcher, maybe the problem is that works and ideas formulated 1971–8 are no longer a viable or acceptable mode of opposition. I even begin to doubt what relevance poetry can have (now): if it ignores government issues I think it fails; if it concentrates on them, it is so far out of key with public apathy that it maybe won't mean anything.[479]

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[477] Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Selected Political Writings*, p. 172.
[478] Griffiths, letter to Eric Mottram, 17 June, no year, London, King's College, MOTTRAM 5/100/1–36.
[479] Griffiths, letter to Eric Mottram, 17 June, no year.

In 1975, Griffiths already felt an '`intensification of authority`' under Charles Osborne's efforts to impose control over the Poetry Society: 'I left a year before the eventual confrontation with the Arts Council came, feeling that my presence would only force the issue, and went to Germany as a guest-worker.'[480] Griffiths returned to England in 1977. He promptly heightened his commitment to group performance, joining Cobbing and Paula Claire in the sound poetry trio Konkrete Canticle (replacing Michael Chant, who had recently left the group). Claire recounts how feedback between performers and audience was integral to their work: 'This chap started to shout: "NOT PROPER POETRY," unaware that we considered any vocal response a valuable contribution. To show him the marvellous potential in every phrase, we did a quick improvisation on his words – that got him incensed.'[481] The group often sought audience participation, welcoming unpredictability. Recorded at a 1979 Konkrete Canticle performance, Griffiths introduces his poem 'Four Winds': 'if anyone wants to join in at all with the sort of sounds we're making, any sort of breath or suitable sound like that, you'll soon see what we mean, then come into it so that we make a larger sound altogether [or all together?], by all means.'[482] On the page, this poem is a visually appealing but non-verbal array of blobs and smudges; in improvised performance, it comes alive as a typhoon of sounds representing wind and breath.[483] This recalls Brathwaite's conviction that breath is the fundamental, inalienable means for oppressed people to exert their power, as well as Griffiths' later image of rioters' breath as artillery in *Mr. Tapscott*. In the sound poetry performance, this capacity for power is equally accessible to both poets and audience.

The link between collaborative performance and anarcho-democratic politics was not lost on Griffiths. In a 1983 article, he describes attending a Greater London Council meeting about funding 'community art'. He was disappointed that poetry had no role in this category, and that funding mostly targeted activities that (whatever their other merits) he

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[480] Paul Holman and Bridget Penney, 'Transcripts from an Interview with Bill Griffiths, Including Some Additions and Emendations Made by Him, 14 September 1993, Wembley Park', *Haiku Monthly*, no. 10, 1993, 25–30: 25.

[481] Paula Claire, 'Bill Griffiths: A Severe Case of Hypergraphia', *The Salt Companion to Bill Griffiths*, pp. 37–50, p. 46. Claire's capitalisation.

[482] 'Four Winds / Konkrete Canticle' (digitised recording), 1979-06-10, London, British Library, 00:26. My transcription.

[483] Griffiths, *Four Winds* (London: Writers Forum and Pirate Press, 1979).

did not define as arts *per se*. The concept of 'community art' therefore 'has a name and it has funding and if nothing corresponds with it, then badminton, photography lessons and local clubs can always be put in its place' – with 'local clubs' each focusing on the needs of a particular ethno-cultural group.[484] He wonders what 'community art' could involve if realised in practice, and what role poetry could play:

> Community art may at best suggest a concept of audience participation, and few poetry events do this (other than in the more general sense of audience involvement); in the sense it would be a development to break the fixed (and rather Benedictine?) role of appointed reader and hushed, regimented listeners, this seems a useful approach. But 'community' also implies social relevance and here the intention seems not so much to establish any new identity of community as to deal only with sections of the community (those that are capable of calling for attention or that are regarded as underprivileged or worthy of assistance).[485]

The gulf between 'appointed reader and hushed, regimented listeners' is not intrinsic to poetry itself, but has arisen in the U.K. through contingent factors, including class hierarchy. Konkrete Canticle's events eroded this barrier; Griffiths takes a complementary approach in *A Text Book of Drama* (1987), a teaching anthology of group performance texts from outside the mainstream of European theatre, ranging from ancient Egyptian invocations to modern sound poetry. His introduction suggests political ramifications for the 'new identity of community' formed through collective performance:

> If further, we replace the concept of commercial entertainment with local or community performance, the gains in spontaneity become immense. If a chorus is involved, virtually everyone can participate; to do something for yourself, I would argue, is innately preferable to having it done for you.[486]

Griffiths' call to 'do something for yourself' applies equally to poetics and (as his activities in Seaham will show) his politics; group action in one field is a rehearsal for engagement in the other, and vice versa.

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[484] Griffiths, 'The Arts and the GLC: A Mystery', *Poetry and Little Press Information*, no. 10, 1983, 24–27: 26. His failure to recognise photography as art is unfortunate.
[485] Griffiths, 'The Arts and the GLC', 26.
[486] Griffiths, 'General Introduction', *A Text Book of Drama*, ed. by Griffiths (London: Writers Forum, 1987), p. 5.

When he moved to Seaham, then, Griffiths had spent two decades enmeshed in collaborative poetry performance. A democratic culture of improvisation informed his textual production, leaving poems open to 're-vision' by new contexts. He also saw Cobbing's work as an organiser of the Poetry Society, National Poetry Centre, and A.L.P., and would have heard about earlier projects like Better Books and the Antiuniversity of London. Griffiths delved more deeply into such poetics with Konkrete Canticle, which cultivated audience participation and explored performance as a continually transforming relationship between individuals. This provisionality's strongest textual manifestation is *A Note on Democracy*, a pamphlet that itself becomes a forum for dialogue between writer and reader. In Seaham, Griffiths' democratic anarchism would lead him to form new communities around the principle that 'to do something for yourself [...] is innately preferable to having it done for you.' Writing later, he identifies communal identity as vital for asserting equality within a group, against externally imposed hierarchies:

> Can humans define themselves as equal? or is the act of definition always one of comparison, group-oriented, positional and hierarchical?
> To be a human may itself imply being a particular status or level of human, because the definition depends on certain positive qualities recognised in the individual, which in turn can be placed on a ladder or grid of the same.
> It is hard to distinguish this from the effect of political pressures towards hierarchies.
> Yet definition within a group also implies a situation of equality of assessment: perhaps this depends whether the group is managed or spontaneous: but with a tendency for any group to assert its internal equality.[487]

The challenge is whether the group's maronage, in resisting hegemony, remains open to creolisation with other communities. This is what Hall sees occurring between communities in the urban colony, what Brathwaite calls 'lateral creolisation' in the Caribbean, and what Griffiths depicts in *Mr. Tapscott*. Even before Griffiths moved to Seaham, he was concerned with collaborative creation of art, and interested in how non-specialists might participate in such practice. In North Eastern dialect, these areas of enquiry – the creation of 'community art' and the challenging of linguistic domination – would combine in the Seaham community's resistance to standard English hegemony. It took some years for these

[487] Griffiths, *Now We Are Twenty*, n.p., section SIX.

preoccupations to crystallise as the Durham & Tyneside Dialect group, but Seaham speech immediately interested Griffiths. Days after moving north, he wrote to Eric Mottram: 'I have only been here a week or so, but the difference to the tensions of the London Borough of Hillingdon is already striking, and I look forwards [sic] to making many good friends here (when I have learned the language).'[488] That parenthesis seems a quip, but Griffiths' subsequent endeavours show he meant it – unsurprisingly, given his ruminations on vocabulary as a civic strategy. His early research in the field involves editorial projects on dialect texts. He introduces his anthology *Durham & Around: A Dialect Reader* (1993) by insisting that the dialect is no monad of folkic purity, but embodies histories of intercultural flux:

> Durham has arguably changed more, since about 1800, then almost any other area of the country, and is still changing. Even in the relatively settled agricultural era, the dialect would be in continual slow reaction with 'Standard' English, and doubtless shade into neighbouring speech at different ends of the County, […][489]

Griffiths also reissued County Durham poet Alexander Barrass' *The Pitman's Social Neet* (1897) – 'neet' means 'night'. The sequence portrays miners taking turns to perform songs at a Working Men's Club. In Barrass' sequence, Griffiths diagnoses 'a fixed society (as insisted on by the Church of England), with an ethic of hard work (as approved by Methodists), tinged with fatalism.'[490] Barrass' attitude 'is conventional rather than radical, and […] he seemingly questions the wisdom of direct industrial action.'[491] The poetry bears this out:

> Fate's garr'd ye drink a bitter cup,
> Fate's sent ye drivers, scorners, chaffors,
> But really aal things reckon'd up,
> Ar' ye much warse off than yor gaffors?
> If ye mun toil, they hae thor care,
> Thor chaffs an' bullyins just as mony:
> Yor station's here, an' thor's is there,

[488] Griffiths, letter to Mottram, 9 June 1990, MOTTRAM 5/100/1-36, Kings College London.
[489] Griffiths, 'Preface', *Durham & Around: A Dialect Reader*, ed. by Griffiths (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1993), n.p.
[490] Griffiths, 'Introduction', Alexander Barrass, *The Pitman's Social Neet*, ed. by Griffiths (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1993, 1994), n.p.
[491] Griffiths, 'Introduction', Barrass, n.p.

That's aal the difference if thor's ony.[492]

Different characters speak the poems of Barrass' sequence, but the above is from the framing narrator's conclusion, and is the collection's moral. Barrass' explicit message ('Yor station's here, an' thor's is there') represents failure of maronage, advocating deference to those who subjugate the community. However, he dramatises the total expression of communal, dialect performance, which reinforces group identity while obstructing comprehension by 'gaffors'. Despite political disagreements, the miners interact as equals, dissolving the conventional, priestly hierarchy of poetry readings. In fact, their group performance recalls Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum workshops.

The multiple personae and fictive framing device of Barrass' sequence, both conveying total expression through text, seem likely influences on a self-published pamphlet of Griffiths' own poetry. *The Cuddy Anthem: A Mini Dialect Anthology* (1993) draws on North East dialect's tradition of resistance; 'Cuddy' is a diminutive of 'Cuthbert', patron saint of the North East. Many of the poems, in contrast to Griffiths' usual procedures, use traditional, rhyming forms.

Griffiths created the pamphlet while his scepticism about County Durham's local government was growing. Seaham was subject to three nested levels of oversight: Seaham Town Council, Easington District Council, and Durham County Council. All three were closely complicit, and Griffiths thought the councillors placed their political interests above Seaham's needs. For example, in 1992, councillors proved unwilling to intervene against storage of explosive chemicals at Seaham Docks, near Griffiths' home. The incident opens 'The Emergency', a poem in *The Cuddy Anthem*:

Lork a day! the postman's went
An left me a bonny note
Aal aboot the Dock Company
An' thor storin' o' Ammonium Nitrate. […]

'It's harmless, man, it gans on crops.'
'I' weeny tits, but this is a bank
Of nigh ten thoosand tons,
An' that's a canny bowk Aa think. […]

[492] Barrass, n.p., 'Conclusion'.

Se Aa axed a coonsillor, 'What's ti be deun?'
'Aa canna act,' sez he, 'ye see,
In case Aa sell ma ahn bit hoose
To the vary same Dock Companee.'[493]

The Health and Safety Executive halted the Dock Company's plan. The District Council became more active soon afterwards, after proposals to transfer their functions to Durham County Council: 'A rare exception to this shyness is the referendum, as mounted by Easington District Council in 1992–3, over (please note) the issue of their own possible abolition. In this case, leaflets were posted through each house door in the district inviting people to support Easington against a possible merger with the County level.'[494] The District Council won the referendum, but was abolished during nationwide changes to local government in 2009; its powers were then absorbed by Durham County Council, as proposed in 1993. At the conclusion of 'The Emergency', the referendum highlights the District Council's skewed priorities:

Lork a day! the postman's went
An' he's left me a canny note,
It sez in bowd, 'EASINGTON FIRST –
We need yor hilp, we need your vote….

'Yor frien'ly local coonsil's threat
Be this new Unitary Status!
Se rally roon' and dee yor best,
Oor vary existence iz at stake!

'We've printed up thoosands an' thoosands o' these
An' sent them oot at terribol fee
Jis' se ye'll appreciate
Here's a reel emergency!'[495]

This poem uses ballad stanzas; common in narrative folk poetry, these give 'an illusion of primitive sincerity and openness'.[496] However, Griffiths flouts expectations of ballad form:

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[493] Griffiths, *The Cuddy Anthem*, n.p. 'Bowk' is glossed as 'blast'.
[494] Griffiths, *A Century of Self-Service? – Aspects of Local Government in the North-East with Special Reference to Seaham* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1994), n.p., section 1, footnote 9.
[495] Griffiths, *The Cuddy Anthem* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1993), n.p.
[496] Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 134.

some quatrains are pararhymed or unrhymed, and line length varies substantially. He thus eschews an aura of professionalism, with results crucial to his pamphlet's conceit. A framing device posits the poems not as his own work, but as entries to a poetry competition established in response to proposed changes to local government:

> In mid 1993, with the up-coming creation of a new centralized Co. Durham and the appointment of a new Bishop predicted, it seemed just the time for people to get together and create a new County Anthem for St. Cuthbert's Land. A competition was launched among the inmates of the Duck Yard, but, sad to say, the level of entries was not very high and the adjudicator decided, on the closure of the competition last week, that the prize could not be awarded. (He then ate the rice cake himself.)[497]

The word 'inmates' is revealing. The Duck Yard was not (literally) a prison, but a run-down street in Seaham, demolished during slum clearances in 1934.[498] Invoking a vanished neighbourhood emphasises Griffiths' satire, while linking the poems to a tradition of working-class culture which could oppose the Council.

The framing device engages playfully with the thinking about community art that Griffiths developed in London. That 'the level of entries was not very high' is not false modesty from Griffiths: it politically weaponises apparent shortcomings. Apparent lapses of craftsmanship make the texts more credible as a voice for Seaham. Despite its mask of formal conservatism, the poem is complex and experimental in its approach to ideas of anonymous authorship, the epistolary, and local government. In this regard, the poem is closer to Bob Cobbing's work than might first appear, since a large element of Cobbing's innovation went beyond experimentation on the page, to explore new social and institutional structures.

No putative authors are named in the anthology: 'On the plus side, anonymous works get to qualify as authentic folk material, which is always worth a few pence.'[499] Griffiths' comment reflects the difficulty of promoting little-press publications by named authors, as he experienced at A.L.P., but also identifies the pamphlet as a folkic project. The

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[497] Griffiths, *The Cuddy Anthem*, n.p.

[498] 'Demolition of the Duck Yard under the Slum Clearance Scheme began on September 10 1934.' James Coyle, 'Diary of James Coyle (up to 1937)', *Fred Cooper's Website*, 18 September 2019 <https://seahampast.co.uk/index.php/history-of-seaham/122-articles-about-seaham-from-books-and-articles-/1085-diary-of-james-coyle-up-to-1937> [accessed 16 March 2022]. Diary owned by Seaham Family History Group.

[499] Griffiths, *The Cuddy Anthem*, n.p.

District Council and Durham County Council both appropriate power from town level; Griffiths' satirical concept of a county anthem frames the proposed unitary authority as 'an essentialist conception of national identity, […] a surreptitious return to 'tradition'' that Stuart Hall associates with incipient fascism.[500] *The Cuddy Anthem*, in contrast, presents cynicism towards this power grab as an authentic expression of the folk, who have responded to the fictive contest with entries critiquing the contest's fundamental assumptions. The entrants also implicitly criticise the wider institution of poetry competitions. Such contests have typically been disregarded by B.P.R. poets as a means of replicating conservative poetics. Roy Fisher satirically describes another fictive competition: 'There were no problems || such as the judges giving one another the prizes; they gave them | to next year's judges as it turned out, but nobody knew that at the time.'[501] Poetry competitions force writers into hierarchies, with the winner as Hegel's master suborning the rival entrants (and the judges as gods lording it over all). In contrast, the fictive entrants to Griffiths' competition emulate how Griffiths and his friends infiltrated the Poetry Society. The competitors participate in the structure that is hostile to them, but turn it to their own ends, so that *The Cuddy Anthem* short-circuits the dialectic: contributors' attacks on the contest's *raison d'être* render the exercise unworkable. The competition becomes a space for community formation, not through authorities instituting community art, but in resistance via dialect. It is a descendent of how Griffiths welcomes readers' voices into *A Note on Democracy*, and an ancestor of the Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group.

This textually constructed community suggests total expression without an actual, embodied performance taking place. The imagined mustering, though, could be a prototype for his later, real-life organisation of dialect research in Seaham, which enacted audience participation on a massive scale. His pamphlet's existence as a textual object partakes in Brathwaite's understanding that total expression is a confluence of script and speech.

[500] Hall, 'Our Mongrel Selves', p. 278.
[501] Roy Fisher, 'A Modern Story' (1981), *The Long and the Short of It: Poems 1955–2005* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2005), p. 145.

3.3. 'WHA HAPPEN at Kensington Oval?': Nation Language Resistance in Kamau Brathwaite's 'Rites'

To understand how Brathwaite's later innovations stem from nation language, one must identify how his earlier poetry articulates resistance on behalf of Caribbean peoples. Having established his techniques for conveying this theme, it will be possible to compare poetry by Bill Griffiths that deploys related tactics, discovering which of Brathwaite's features are already present, and locating areas for further development in English dialect poetry. This section therefore focuses on 'Rites', from Brathwaite's 1969 collection *Islands*, which concludes his *The Arrivants* trilogy. Brathwaite's later work is unequivocally more avant-garde than 'Rites', but his experimentation has roots in poems like this. In a B.B.C. Radio 4 schools broadcast from 1982, Brathwaite introduces a reading of 'Rites' by describing its goals:

> And now the third and final item which I want to share with you today is how we make our people speak. Again there is going to be a difference. The imported language, standard English, speaks in one way, we speak in another, and it is in this poem on cricket that I make the people of Barbados speak in their own language in poetry.[502]

The poem does not name Barbados, but the setting is obvious through local idioms, and references to Kensington Oval, the Bajan cricket stadium. The poem mostly uses the tailor's own nation language as he chats with a friend. Initially, the tailor recalls a boyhood cricket game on a Bajan beach, and how a lad named Gullstone missed a chance to save the match. Conversation then turns to a recent match against the M.C.C. (Marylebone Cricket Club, the English national team) at Kensington Oval. Here Bajan star player Clyde Walcott, batting, enraptures the crowd with successive runs before being bowled out by Jim Laker. Support for Walcott then evaporates. The tailor uses both incidents to stress that 'when things goin' good, you cahn touch | we, but leh murder start an' you cahn fine a man to hole up the side', a refrain (with variations) throughout the poem.[503] The tailor implies that Bajans have not yet

[502] Kamau Brathwaite, *From the Caribbean*, BBC Radio 4 Schools Broadcast, 26 February 1982, London, British Library, C56/13, 15:12.
[503] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 201.

developed the resilience needed to flourish as a community or culture. At Kensington Oval, the criticism applies to both Walcott and the fans who abandon him when a setback occurs.

The poem is among Brathwaite's more widely studied pieces. Gordon Rohlehr's *Pathfinder* (1981) attends to the matches' racial dynamics; Frank Birbalsingh's *The Rise of Westindian Cricket* (1996) admirably details the poem's cricketing action; and Claire Westall's *The Rites of Cricket and Caribbean Literature* (2021) describes how Brathwaite cultivated the poem from the prose of a short story.[504] My investigation attends more closely to resonances of Brathwaite's language as text and in performance, concentrating on how Brathwaite's nation language elevates cricket to a spiritual level.

The poem's critique is not aimed primarily at the English. The tailor could boast about Walcott's performance and frame the match as a backdrop for Caribbean self-assertion, but instead analyses a problem in Bajan culture. Stephen E. Criswell observes: 'Paradoxically, while the men are criticizing the weaknesses of the community, they are reinforcing it by coming together and sharing their concerns.'[505] The tailor's nation language opposes standard English's colonial associations, and marks him as an insider pronouncing authoritatively upon his island's problems. Bajan idioms and pronunciation establish a community with his guest, signified through the collectivising 'we'. This is not a universal 'we', assuming that all humanity shares the speaker's values and concerns; it refers to specifically Bajan issues arising from colonialism. Here Brathwaite continues a line of thought originating with C.L.R. James, for whom West Indian cricket dramatises political resistance. James applies this to social tensions within his native Trinidad:

> From the moment I had to decide which club I would join the contrast between the ideal and the real fascinated me and tore at my insides. Nor could the local population see it otherwise. The class and racial rivalries were too intense. They could be fought out without violence or much lost except pride and honour. Thus the cricket field was a stage on which selected individuals played representative roles which were charged with social significance.[506]

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[504] Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, pp. 227–29; Frank Birbalsingh, *The Rise of Westindian Cricket: From Colony to Nation* (St. John's, Antigua: Hansib Publishing, 1997), pp. 221–31; Claire Westall, *The Rites of Cricket and Caribbean Literature* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), British Library Legal Deposit, n.p., Chapter 4.

[505] Criswell, *Folklore and the Folk in Derek Walcott's Omeros and Edward Kamau Brathwaite's The Arrivants*, p. 150.

[506] C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Yellow Jersey, 2005), p. 66.

Mike Philips and Trevor Philips explain how cricketers, embodying political values in this way, incarnated decolonial energies:

> Like the Empire, cricket and its rituals belonged to everyone within its reach, but the English were its masters. That is, it was the only game in town, but to play it you had to accept and propagate all the English assumptions of imperial mastery. On the other hand, the rules also meant that it was the one arena in which colonials could dispute on equal terms with the metropolitans. Given the forced nature of the relationship, every time Britain faced one of the colonies on the cricket field the game became a confrontation within which a variety of strains and contradictions were exercised. For black and Asian colonials such confrontations provided a unique and solitary opportunity to challenge established beliefs about racial superiority.[507]

This is why the umpire in 'Rites' is punningly dubbed 'de empire.'[508] The West Indian game is a creole form, not in rules but in style of play. Grantley E. Edwards describes how, having learned cricket during slavery, African-Bajans transformed the game to suit African aesthetics, eventually developing 'stylish aggressive batting and hostile fast bowling' that 'was successful because it put the opposition on the defensive.'[509] In this respect, Caribbean cricket seems analogous to nation language: a form recognisable to the colonial power, but deployed for a counterattack upon 'English assumptions of imperial mastery.' 'Rites' thus combines the creolisation of superficial comprehensibility with a secret tongue's maronage. In this tidalectic text, the English language and an English sport are both turned against their originators by outsiders who master and supersede colonial rules. The poem's success in this regard is evident from its acclaim by Conservative U.K. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher: 'Brathwaite showed in 'Rites' that not only can West Indians play the best cricket in the world, they can also write the best poems about it.'[510] It is debatable whether the poem affected Thatcher's policies, but winning the verbal concession is itself an achievement.

Much nation language in 'Rites' also appears in *Notes for a Glossary of Words and Phrases of Barbadian Dialect* (1955), compiled by Bajan poet Frank A. Collymore. Collymore

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[507] Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), p. 100. Quoting Trevor Philips here does not constitute endorsement of his remarks regarding British Muslims.
[508] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 202.
[509] Grantley E. Edwards, *Return to Glory: The Rise, Fall and Redemption of Barbados and West Indies Cricket* (Christ Church, Barbados: Caribbean Chapters, 2015), p. 52, p. 74.
[510] Sylvia Lee, 'Jamaica's natural beauty, charm captures Maggie's heart', *The Gleaner* (Jamaica), 20 July 1987, 1.

mentored the young Brathwaite, and as editor of the magazine *Bim*, published some of Brathwaite's early work. Even today, *Notes...* remains the text closest to a Bajan national dictionary (as opposed to Caribbean English dictionaries including Bajan terms). This scarcity is perhaps because Bajan nation language is nearer to standard English than (say) strong Jamaican patois, and because other islands share many of its non-standard words. Brathwaite recounts how Collymore inspired him:

> [...] or working on some 'Collybeasts or the latest edit
> ion of the increasingly popular - and unique - important - **Notes for a glossary of wor
> ds & phrases of Barbadian dialect** (started in *Bim*, first pub as book 1955 w/sev eds+) which
> I realize only now as I writin this - wd/might/shd(!) have been the inspiration <
> not only for Richard Allsopp's **Dictionary of Caribbean English usage** (1996) but <
> my own **History of the Voice** (1984) the development of nation language out of Co
> lly's **Dialect**[511]

Since Brathwaite admits direct influence from Collymore's lexicography, the latter's research should help identify alternative meanings within 'Rites'. The tailor's discourse abounds in terminology that, at one level, non-Bajan readers can follow easily enough, but which conveys extra meanings to linguistic initiates. Many Barbadian words sound identical to standard English ones, but have subtly different meanings. This can give the illusion that a sentence is being followed perfectly, whereas many connotations are in fact ignored. Collymore elaborates:

> [A Bajan] cannot always be quite certain what words are Standard English and what are not. Take *gap*, *scotch*, and *tot*, for example. He is worried when first he consults a dictionary to discover that a gap is not an entranceway or driveway to a residence, that digging one's heels in the earth in order to secure a foothold is not scotching, and that a tot is not a drinking-vessel made of tin. These words have carried these meanings for him all his life; his confidence is shaken.[512]

'Rites' decolonially places non-Barbadian readers into uncertainties that Bajans might feel in standard English environments. Aptly, some puns refer to Bajan cricketing terminology. When the tailor remembers advising the hapless Gullstone, he recalls saying 'watch | de ball

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511 Brathwaite, *Golokwati 2000*, p. 147.

512 Collymore, Frank A., *Notes for a Glossary of Words and Phrases of Barbadian Dialect* (Bridgetown: Advocate Company, 1970), p. 7.

like it hook to you eye' and 'Uh doan mean to *poke*'.[513] Superficially, 'hook' has the sense of a fishing hook, while 'to poke' might mean to pester with repeated instructions. However, the words also name batting techniques in cricket: a 'hook shot' designates a flamboyant attack on a ball around shoulder level, while a 'poke' is a timid stroke unlikely to drive the ball far. Grantley E. Edwards describes how Everton Weekes, who appears in 'Rites', pioneered hooking:

> 'Poking' became a term of abuse, while playing shots all around the wicket like Weekes was met with approval. To hook like Weekes was seen as a sign of manliness, a sign that you had become an African lion. From here on, this notion of a good hooker seems to have been embedded in the minds of Bajans.[514]

The puns thus criticise Gullstone's unambitious style. Another cricket pun occurs later in the poem, when Walcott struggles against Laker's bowling: 'Clyde play forward firm | an' de ball hit he pad'.[515] According to Collymore, 'firms' is 'A game of cricket in which any number may take part. Two or three boys form a firm and have alternate strokes at the wicket until one of them is either caught or bowled. Then the boy who catches the ball or bowls the batsman takes his turn, along with his "firm" at the wicket.'[516] Coming soon after the scene at the beach, where firms would be played, the word links Walcott to Gullstone, anticipating that the former will fail like the latter.

Brathwaite's readings of the poem guide audiences through nation language's ambiguities and double-meanings. I will draw on two recordings of 'Rites': the B.B.C. Radio 4 performance mentioned above, and an undated recording for the Inner London Education Authority [I.L.E.A.] Caribbean Anthology. Brathwaite's renditions clarify some points in the poem, while highlighting conventional notation's limits. In the poem's phrase 'the all Gullstone ever could catch | pun dis beach was a cole!', a 'cole' is evidently not a 'coal' (Barbados has no seacoal), nor a colefish (which prefers chillier waters), but a 'cold' (which for Bajans signifies a range of ailments).[517] One fathoms the meanings readily enough, but the spelling presents a stumbling block. When Brathwaite performs the poem, though, one

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[513] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 198.
[514] Grantley E. Edwards, p. 58
[515] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 201.
[516] Collymore, p. 49.
[517] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 198; Collymore, p. 33.

hears the elided ghost of a 'd' at the word's end.[518] Normative writing cannot convey this detail, though Brathwaite's later texts sometimes parenthesise a word's last letter to achieve this effect. Performance resolves ambiguity for a non-Bajan audience, where ambiguity would not aid the poem's meaning.

However, Brathwaite's various performances sometimes suggest different interpretations. When the tailor initially mentions the match at the Oval, questions follow: 'At de Oval? | Wha' happen las' week at de Oval?'[519] On the B.B.C. recording, the tone here is of exaggerated disbelief, with a sharp, quizzical rise in pitch at the end, indicating that the tailor rhetorically repeats untranscribed questions from his visitor.[520] On I.L.E.A.'s version, the tone suggests earnest enquiry, the guest interjecting these lines before the tailor resumes.[521] This element of staged interaction might sound effective for accentuating total expression, but the B.B.C. rendition is more successful: it still implies the interruption, while suggesting how the tailor's performance is 'responded to by the audience and [...] returned to him.'[522] As Claire Westall notes, 'the tailor functions akin to both the calypsonian and the griot in the West African oral tradition, simultaneously leading and including those who listen' in 'Brathwaite's idea of "*total expression*"'.[523] The tailor proceeds:

> You mean to say that you come
> in here wid dat lime-skin cone
>
> that you callin' a hat
> pun you head, an' them slip slop shoe strap
>
> on to you foot like a touris';
> you sprawl you ass
>
> all over my chair widdout ask-
> in' me please leave nor licence,
>
> wastin' muh time when you know very well that uh cahn fine
> enough to finish these zoot suits

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[518] Brathwaite, 'Rites', 1981, London, British Library, 1CA0014306, 02:00. The lines are among many elided for the B.B.C. recording, presumably to suit the programme's length.
[519] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 199.
[520] Brathwaite, *From the Caribbean*, 18:14.
[521] Brathwaite, 'Rites', 02:23.
[522] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, pp. 18–19.
[523] Westall, *The Rites of Cricket and Caribbean Literature*, n.p., Chapter 4. Westall's italics.

'fore Christmas; an' on top
o' all this, you could wine up de nerve to stop

me cool cool cool in de middle
o' all me needle

an t'read; make me prick me hand in me haste;
an' tell me broad an' bole to me face

THAT YOU DOAN REALLY KNOW WHA' HAPPEN
at Kensington Oval?[524]

The above, single sentence is a *tour de force* of rhetorical construction. It exemplifies Brathwaite's closely woven sounds, maintaining conversational form even while most couplets offer some degree of pararhyme or rhyme. In both recordings under consideration, Brathwaite relishes the sentence. The tailor's tone starts in cold, quiet disbelief, then increases in volume, speed, and outrage to crescendo at the capitalised line.[525] However, the tailor puts on his wrath to jest with his friend. This becomes evident in performance when, after this philippic, the tailor relaxes: 'We was battin', you see; | score wasn't too bad'.[526] The shift is evident in textual form from the sheer moderateness of 'wasn't too bad', but in performance the tailor's sudden deflation is comedic.

The passage includes other jokes more evident to a Bajan audience. 'Lime-skin' is Bajan, Collymore reports, for 'A felt hat that has seen its best days.'[527] Allsop elaborates that 'being too small for its user's head; the brim is pulled down to help it fit', until it resembles 'half a squeezed lime'.[528] Meanwhile, 'slip slop', is an early calibanism, a derogatory malapropism denoting tourists' flip-flops. Perhaps the tailor criticises his guest's dress sense to encourage a purchase, like one of the zoot suits mentioned in another joke: the tailor complains that he 'cahn fine | enough [time] to finish these zoot suits || 'fore Christmas'. International cricket in the Caribbean is played between January and May, when the climate is congenial. Since the match described 'happen las' week at de Oval', the conversation

[524] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 199.
[525] Brathwaite, *From the Caribbean*, 18:24; Brathwaite, 'Rites', 02:25.
[526] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 199; Brathwaite, *From the Caribbean*, 18:56; Brathwaite, 'Rites', 03:12.
[527] Collymore, p. 70.
[528] *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, p. 349.

occurs many months before Christmas. To non-Caribbean readers, the lines seem a sincere complaint; to a Bajan who makes the connection, the tailor cracks a hyperbolic joke about workload. The tailor's pronunciation of 'find' as 'fine' creates another pun, becoming homophonous with the adjective 'fine', which Collymore says is ''most often used with the meaning "slender, thin, sharp, in small particles", as, fine **twine**'.[529] The term would conventionally apply to the 'needle || an' t'read' with which the tailor works, emphasising the challenge of completing finely detailed work to a deadline.

In both recordings, between the tailor's rant and the moment of deflation is a detail absent from the text.[530] Brathwaite kisses his teeth, making what Bajans call a 'chupse', which Collymore describes as 'A sound made by pouting the lips and sucking in air between the teeth; indicative of distrust or sulking.'[531] In the I.L.E.A. recording, the noise accompanies a disdainful grunt: 'hnn'. There is no popular convention for transcribing chupses; even the onomatopoeia cannot convey the noise's range of meanings, which Collymore lists:

> (i) the chupse of AMUSED TOLERANCE used in retort to some absurd remark or statement, a sort of oral shrugging of the shoulders; (ii) the chupse SELF-ADMONITORY, when the chupster has done something of which he has no occasion to be proud; (iii) the chupse DISDAINFUL, accompanied by a raising of the eyebrow; (iv) the chupse DISGUSTED in the performance of which the eyelids are almost closed; (v) the chupse SORROWFUL, in reality a series of quickly emitted chupses, the head being shaken slowly from side to side; (vi) the chupse OFFENSIVE or ABUSIVE; (vii) the chupse PROVOCATIVE, a combination of iii, iv, and vi, which often leads to blows. But even this enumeration, I fear, is not comprehensive.[532]

The tailor's chupse blends (i) and (iii); marking the moment when his wrath deflates, it may well be (i) ironically disguising itself as (iii) or (iv). The sound is only transcribable by expanding one's range of textual techniques, and can only be fully appreciated when physically present in shared, total expression.

The poem's humour, which Brathwaite's performance emphasises, might sound at odds with the title 'Rites', which implies a religious dimension to these collective experiences. This is only a problem, though, if one associates religion with dour seriousness, rather than the equally serious joy of ceremonies at the 'people's churches'. The word 'Rites'

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[529] Collymore, p. 48. Collymore's bolding.
[530] Brathwaite, *From the Caribbean*, 18:53; Brathwaite, 'Rites', 03:09.
[531] Collymore, p. 30.
[532] Collymore, p. 31.

could apply to the ritual of socialising in the tailor's shop, but religiosity manifests more strongly at the M.C.C. match. This force escalates while Walcott bats successfully against English bowler Johnny Wardle, and the Bajan spectators become impassioned:

> All over the groun' fellers shakin' hands wid each other
>
> as if was *they* wheelin' de willow
> as if was *them* had the power;
> one man run out pun de field wid a red fowl cock
>
> goin' quawk quawk quawk in 'e han';
> would'a give it to Clyde right then an' right there
> if a police hadn't stop 'e![533]

The word 'groun'' establishes the theme, denoting the cricket ground, but with multiple resonances in nation language. Allsop describes how 'ground' is 'the floor of any dwelling (wh[ich] in the slave era was often the surface of the earth), 'land at the rear of a sugar-plantation assigned to slaves to grow their own food' (the provision grounds discussed in Chapter 2.2), and (as verb) 'to sit and talk with or among poor, socially deprived people [...] to help them develop a sense of their social and political rights.'[534] The word thus situates Kensington Oval as a space for descendants of enslaved Africans; as a zone for recuperation of personal freedoms and African traditions, as on provision grounds; and as a locus for galvanising political resistance. Grounding is also a Rastafarian practice of communal, mutual learning, as per Brathwaite's friend, historian Walter Rodney: 'that is Black Power […] a sitting down together to reason, to 'ground' as the Brothers say.'[535] Brathwaite introduces further connotations, alluding to African spirituality, in a note appended to *Masks* (second volume of *The Arrivants*), then reprinted in the trilogy's collected edition: 'In the moment of possession, the divine electrical charge becomes *grounded* (so that the earth and the things of the earth assume a special significance).'[536] The 'groun'' is therefore the ceremonial location where divine forces possess human worshippers, as in Vodou or Myal.

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[533] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 200.

[534] *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, p. 613 finds all three meanings occurring throughout the Anglophone Caribbean.

[535] Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1969), pp. 62–63.

[536] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 271.

This is why the audience responds 'as if was *them* had the power'. Walcott's performance summons 'the divine electrical charge' to the Oval, renewing his congregation's historical, cultural and political engagement.

In this context, the offering of the 'red fowl cock' makes sense as a double-entendre, and the pitch invasion expresses sexual energies sublimated within this homosocial environment. The offering also carries aspects of Vodou ritual: a red cockerel is the traditional sacrifice for Ogou, one of the *lwa* (or *loa*), divine spirits who sometimes possess workshippers.[537] This *lwa* originates as the Yoruba deity Ogoun, identified by Brathwaite with locomotives' energy, as seen in Chapter 3.1, hence 'wheelin'' for 'wielding'. Ogou can manifest as Ogou-Feraille, the red warrior *lwa* whom Maya Deren describes as 'the national hero, the general who is greeted with a military salute and the national anthem, an impressive figure.'[538] This is a spiritualised version of political energies that C.L.R. James finds embodied in cricketers. Deren continues, 'Power resides, too, in the sabre or machete which is sacred' to Ogou; Walcott's bat may symbolise this weapon.[539] This *lwa* is especially revered when defeated, representing warriors' self-sacrifice for their community:

> The most poignantly noble [manifestation of Ogou in a possessed worshipper] would probably be that of the mortally wounded warrior, whose opening song, sung haltingly and in obvious pain, announces: "I am wounded, oh, I am wounded." [...] he becomes the uncannily precise image of Christ being taken down from the cross.[540]

Honouring the defeated Walcott would strengthen the resistance already present in the crowd's behaviour. Ogou's Haitian worshippers remember what the Bajan spectators forget: that eventual defeat is inevitable, and that to confront this bravely is praiseworthy. This lesson applies particularly to cricket, where nearly every batsman is bowled out sooner or later in each match; defeat is only staved off as gloriously as possible, not averted.

C.L.R. James praises Walcott's fielding in divine terms, recommending that audiences 'integrate our vision of Walcott on the back foot through the covers with the outstretched arm of the Olympian Apollo'.[541] Claire Westall notes that 'We may be critical of

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[537] Herskovits, p. 162.
[538] Deren, p. 133.
[539] Deren, p. 133.
[540] Deren, pp. 131–32.
[541] James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 211.

James's recourse to seemingly elitist/imperialist classical mythology, but we should first appreciate the appropriateness of the comparison.'[542] She adumbrates parallels between Walcott and Apollo, concluding that the former is 'a Caribbean God of the Sun, (de)colonization, and healing. It is the cricketing crowd that knows all this through their keen observations, and it is the aestheticians that need to adapt.'[543] In 'Rites', Brathwaite perceives the same religious phenomena, and invokes the actually 'Caribbean God' whom Walcott resembles, his choice of Ogou emphasising African roots, not the European substitute proposed by James and Westall.

In performance, Brathwaite's speech-rhythm strengthens and quickens while describing supporters' ecstatic reactions, and resembles drumming that accompanies Vodou ceremonies.[544] This culminates in an extension of this theme of African presence:

> one ball-headed sceptic snatch hat off he head
> as if he did crazy
>
> an' pointin' he finger at Wardle,
> he jump up an' down
> like a sun-shatter daisy an' bawl
>
> out: 'B... L... O... O... D,   B... I... G   B... O... Y
> bring me he   B... L... O... O... D'
> Who would'a think that for twenty-
>
> five years he was standin' up there
> in them Post Office cages, lickin' gloy
> pun de Gover'ment stamps.[545]

This spectator's job keeps him encaged, symbolically licking the Empire's backside every day. His description as 'ball-headed' also resonates. Not widespread in Barbados, this variant on the noun 'bald-head' originates among Rastafarians in Jamaica (where Brathwaite

[542] Westall, 'The Arts of *Beyond a Boundary*: Literary Lessons, Cricketing Aesthetics, and World-Historical Heroes', in *Marxism, Colonialism and Cricket: C.L.R. James's Beyond a Boundary*, ed. by David Featherstone *et al*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 173–90: p. 187.
[543] Westall, 'The Arts of *Beyond a Boundary*', p. 187.
[544] Brathwaite, 'Rites', 04:00.
[545] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, pp. 200–201.

lived in 1969). It denotes a 'person not dealing with Rasta; non-believer of the dread culture; person who has not got his hair in locks'.[546]

Rastafari has major differences from Vodou. It is monotheistic and does not feature rites of possession. It does, however, share interest in recuperating African heritage. Designating the postal worker as 'ball-headed' therefore emphasises his de-Africanised state, and hence the radical transformation, resembling possession, that Walcott induces. The spectator's demand for human blood seems an exaggerated allusion to possessed Vodou disciples' requests for offerings; Ogou-Feraille prefers tributes of rum.[547]

The postal worker's exclamation is the poem's boldest example of voices straining against normative textuality; capitalisation and ellipses in 'B... L... O... O... D' represent high volume and drawn-out enunciation. The dots suggest calmness that is mirrored in performance, since Brathwaite's tone at this point is not angry, but a confident command.[548] The similarly elongated 'N... o... o...', repeated when Wardle pitches to Walcott, deploys the same technique with different affect, mimicking the 'sweet sweet slow-medium syrup' which Wardle's movements resemble.[549] Brathwaite's reading here sounds like a parent negatively answering a child during a guessing game.[550] Other words are italicised for stress, notably onomatopoeias ('*swoosh!*', '*click!*', '*bruggalungdung!*', '*prax!*'), and a couple of lines are capitalised for emphasis ('THAT YOU DOAN REALLY KNOW WHA' HAPPEN | at Kensington Oval?').[551] Collymore notes that Bajan nation language is 'rich in Echo Words (Onomatopoeia)', and some of Brathwaite's choices are characteristically Barbadian: '**bruggadung** [a shorter '*bruggalungdung!*'], dull, heavy noises of falling' and '**plax**, a dull, smacking sound, as *The ball hit him on the jaw, plax!*'[552] Such onomatopoeias directly incorporate sensory phenomena into text.

In 'Rites', nation language thus manifests visual impulses that later flourish as Sycorax Video-style. Twice, textuality infiltrates utterance, rather than vice versa, exemplifying Brathwaite's argument from Chapter 3.1, whereby orality in literate societies is

546 Velma Pollard, *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari* (Mona: Canoe Press, 1994), p. 31.
547 Deren, pp. 132–33.
548 Brathwaite, 'Rites', 04:25.
549 Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 198.
550 Brathwaite, 'Rites', 03:33.
551 Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, pp. 197–99.
552 Collymore, p. 44. Collymore's bolding and italics.

predicated on underlying textuality. In one instance, the tailor spells the English team's name: 'We was *only* playin' de MCC, man; M – C – C'.[553] Birbalsingh observes that the tailor reports this name, not 'Inglan', because 'The letters carry more weight by virtue of their official, technical look, which will best be appreciated by knowledgeable insiders like himself.'[554] Key to this are preconceptions of the metropole as source of literacy and learning, while Brathwaite renders the tailor's own speech faithfully by diverging from normative spelling, tapping an alternative power source in oral expressions that the tailor has mastered.

The other instance occurs when the tailor excoriates his guest: 'Look wha' happen las' week at de O- | val!'[555] The 'O', detached by mid-word enjambment, depicts both a geometric oval and Kensington Oval's layout. This textuality interacts with nation language articulation. Collymore notes 'that peculiarity of local intonation – the accentuation of the former syllable of disyllabic words', and 'that most vowel sounds tend to be drawn out, and that some of them like O, for example, actually become compound vowel sounds; **O-AH**; as, *boaht* and *goaht* for goat and boat.'[556] A Bajan reader might stress and stretch the poem's 'O' until it becomes disyllabic, the mid-word enjambment falling more naturally than with non-Bajan pronunciation. The human mouth forms a visual 'O' when pronouncing 'O'; Brathwaite's pun thus finds its performative equivalent through readers' bodies. With Bajan pronunciation, the mouth's 'O'-shape becomes even more evident than in standard English, as lips remain parted for the 'ah' that follows. This exemplifies '*the motor theory of speech perception*', as Reuven Tsur summarises: 'we attend from the acoustic signal to the combination of muscular movements that produce it; and from these elementary movements, we attend to their joint purpose, the phoneme.'[557]

Among Brathwaite's '**continental culture paradigm(s)**' in *M.R.: Magical Realism* is an account of how the 'O' links to African spirituality:

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[553] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 199.
[554] Birbalsingh, pp. 224–25.
[555] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 199.
[556] Collymore, pp. 91–92. Collymore's bolding and italics.
[557] Reuven Tsur, *What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive?: The Poetic Mode of Speech Perception* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 8–9.

O ut of **Africa** emerges the dramat-

ic Nilotic Saharan **pyrAmid**. But more typi-
cal of the continent/culture as a whole, is th
(e) sign of the **circle** [...]
its magical/cosmological movement as **anan**
se capsule into the NewWorld/middlepassag
es/diaspora -[558]

Illustrations of a Zulu village's circular layout follow.[559] Care are thus linked to communitarian creativity, predicated on total expression before an audience. As in Chapter 2.2, calypso's call and response exemplifies the circular paradigm as an '**anan | se capsule**' bearing African practices across the Atlantic.

Textually and architecturally, Kensington Oval's 'O' represents the performance circle of African culture, an *humfo* (Vodou shrine) where Ogou-Ferraille possesses Walcott, summoning divine energy to the encircled ground. Bajans' alleged failure to handle setbacks, and their irreverence for Ogou's defeated aspect when Walcott is bowled out, dissipates this power. 'Rites' portrays Kensington Oval as a Sycorax inscription of a vévé (a symbol channelling one of the Haitian *lwa*) into Bajan geography, articulating the communitarian, neo-African ethos that still awaits full realisation in Barbados. The Oval has also hosted 'religious revivals, Louis Armstrong and his band' and 'calypso extravaganzas'.[560] Brathwaite would identify all three as continuations of African traditions.

Brathwaite's nation language in 'Rites', then, has special characteristics. Its 'insider' position within a marginalised community frees the poem to critique both colonial imposition and the home culture. Its linguistic decoloniality serves as metaphor for its subject matter; its vocabulary is grounded in scholarship as well as personal experience. Its lexical ambiguities disclose special significances to the initiated; it is rooted in total

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[558] Brathwaite, *M.R.*, vol. 1, p. 147. Note the mimesis of 'A' in '**pyrAmid**'.
[559] Brathwaite, *M.R.*, vol. 1, pp. 150–52. Brathwaite sources the images from Susan Denyer, *African Traditional Architecture: An Historical and Geographical Perspective* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 112–13.
[560] Carlisle Burton and Keith A.P. Sandiford, *Cricket at Kensington 1895–2005* (Barbados: Sir Carlisle Burton, 2006), p. 10.

expression of collective performance. It has potential in performance for nation language features that elude normative transcription. Lastly, it creates group consciousness in opposition to the metropole; and its mimetic textuality edges towards new visual representations.

4.4: 'aal woz riddy fer confrontation': Dialect Writing as Dialect Research in Bill Griffiths' *The Coal World*

Many characteristics of the nation language in Kamau Brathwaite's 'Rites' recur in the poetry that Bill Griffiths wrote in Seaham. Griffiths' pamphlet *The Coal World* in particular, shares a communitarian atmosphere with Brathwaite's poem, and makes a fruitful point of comparison. Other than North East dialect, these poems are relatively free from experimental devices, and therefore show Griffiths' dialect strategies clearly. The collection consists of modified and versified extracts from *The Canny Man* (1970). This novel by F.N. Platt details a mining family's life in Murton, a colliery town inland from Seaham. Platt's book was apparently self-published, without wide distribution: 'The publication was issued when the author had already left the area, and affords no contact address of any kind. I have therefore to hope that no one will much mind about my adaptations, which I have tried to keep in the spirit of the original text'.[561] The book has proved impossible to track down, but based on Griffiths' quotations elsewhere, appears to be in standard English.[562] Given the novel's scarcity, *The Coal World* is an archival project, assisting Platt's efforts to conserve a fictionalised yet personal history. Murton Colliery closed in 1991; Seaham's last mine, Vane Tempest, provisionally closed in 1992 (a status confirmed the following year). *The Coal World* therefore also archives a way of life in danger of being forgotten.

Griffiths had engaged with Seaham's coal-mining history ever since moving north. His long poem *Coal* (1990), for example, celebrates collieries as places of communal spirituality and subterranean beauty:

> A celery-centre
> dun-crystall'd and fixed
> and shadeless core.
>
> The open-altar
> and coal-heart.[563]

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[561] Bill Griffiths, *The Coal World: Murton Tales Reworked as Dialect Verse* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1995), n.p. (preface).
[562] *Pitmatic: The Talk of the North East Coalfield*, ed. by Griffiths (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Northumbria University Press, 2007), p. 152.
[563] Griffiths, *Coal* (London: Writers Forum, 1990), n.p.

Coal's syntax is experimental, but the poem does not venture into dialect. Historically, though, North Eastern pits were hotbeds of dialect, producing the speech-form known as Pitmatic, a dialect tailored to the needs of mining work. Pitmatic abounds in specialist vocabulary for use in collieries (so a 'windy pick' is a pneumatic pick).[564] It also adapted traditional (agricultural) dialect to an industrial context'; for example, 'inbye/outbye – terms for zones around a farm' became applied to 'underground pit workings'.[565] Griffiths' enthusiasm for, and archiving of, this argot culminated in one of his last projects, *Pitmatic: The Talk of the North East Coalfield* (2007), a volume assembling documentation of colliery life alongside glossaries of Pitmatic.

The Coal World forms part of Griffiths' self-education in North Eastern dialect and history, and his borrowings from Platt have an ethical impetus. In 1995, Griffiths had only lived in County Durham for five years, and could not claim expertise ingrained from growing up locally. He therefore derives material from someone with the requisite background, conceding to their mastery. Platt's North Eastern experience lets Griffiths develop his dialect skills by translating the prose into Platt's local tongue. This process shows the same openness to folkic expertise that Griffiths later displayed with Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group.

The Coal World postdates Griffiths' *Durham and Around: A Dialect Reader* (mentioned in Chapter 3.2), whose songs and poems include an early version of 'The Trapper Boy Starts Work', which opens *The Coal World*. It concerns a young man, Tim, and his first shift in the local mine. Tim is a trapper, in 'charge of a door in the mine', who will 'open trap-doors to allow passage of [coal] tubs and close them to aid currents of air'.[566] The text's two appearances differ substantially. These lines are from the first version:

> His Mam com waken'd him, proper dark still it woz a'reet:
> 'The caller's been, se get up, or thoo'll be late.'
>
> His Mam set him on the way, fer it woz dark outside,

[564] Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, p. 187.
[565] Griffiths, Words with Edges', *Northern Review*, vol. 11, 2002, 41–51: 48. Griffiths' underlining.
[566] *Pitmatic*, p. 76, citing Thomas Wilson, 'Pitman's Pay', 'published in three parts in the journal *The Newcastle Magazine* in 1826, 1828, 1830' (see *Pitmatic*, p. 274), and Robert Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

Nieve in nieve, ti the lit-up pit-shaft an’ open cage. [...]

Thor it woz aal quiet an’ black. Wiv a whoosh
Th’cage shot doon; it made his ears pop.[567]

In *The Coal World*, this becomes:

His Mam com waken’d him, reet dark still it woz aal abowt;
‘The caller’s been, seea get up, or thoo’ll be late.’

His Mam set him on the way, fer it was pick-black thor,
Hand in hand, ti the lit-up pit-shaft an’ open cage. [...]

Forbye it woz aal wheesht an’ black. Wiv a whoosh
Th’cage shot doon; it made his ears pop.[568]

Most changes add more dialect, drawn from Griffiths’ developing research. For example, ‘pick-black’ seems cognate with ‘pick-dark’, which Griffiths glosses in his dictionaries as a Teeside term for ‘pitch-dark’.[569] The new term is stronger than mere ‘dark’, evoking subterranean blackness where miners work with picks. Portrayed at their work, the miners are connected to Brathwaite’s tailor: with ‘pick-black’, the work metaphor connects the labour within the story to the wider environment. It also highlights miners’ long-term lack of sunlight: Tim goes to work before dawn, entirely misses daylight during a ten-hour shift (the poem must be set during winter), then goes ‘hiem agen in the dark’.[570]

Another improvement is ‘seea’ for ‘so’. One parallel between North East dialect and Bajan nation language is how, as Collymore observes on Barbados, diphthongs often become two syllables (the spelling of ‘hiem’ for ‘home’ is another example within this piece). ‘Seea’ conflates the mother’s ‘so get up’ with ‘see you get up’,

Some word changes simply feed in more vocabulary from Griffiths’ research, like ‘thor’ meaning ‘there’, or ‘forbye’ for ‘besides’ (both are first recorded in the nineteenth century, so the words suit Platt’s period setting).[571] There is room for ‘thor’ to pun on ‘Thor’, thunder-god of the North East’s Early Medieval Norse settlers, but that does not happen yet.

[567] *Durham & Around*, n.p.
[568] Griffiths, *The Coal World*, n.p.
[569] Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, p. 131.
[570] Griffiths, *The Coal World*, n.p.
[571] Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, pp. 172–73 and p. 61.

Other alterations show a penchant for onomatopoeia that parallels Barbados. Substituting 'quiet' with 'wheest' is an example, the dialect term echoing barely audible airflow through underground tunnels. There is also a double-meaning, since 'wheest' (or 'wheesht', or 'eesht') can be a 'sound of disapproval', exasperatedly (in both senses) blowing air through teeth, perhaps equivalent to Bajan chupses.[572] The quiet around Tim acquires an admonitory tone. Furthermore, the word's placement among wider sound-patterns is significant, alliterating strongly on 'w', and echoed by the descending cage's 'whoosh'; the two words are so similar that the quiet itself seems to suddenly become noise as the cage drops. Other, similarly effective vocabulary appears later; both versions describe how Tim 'heer'd the tub comin', yowked the door open'.[573] This improves on standard English 'pulled', resembling an effortful cry when straining to shift a heavy item.

Substituting 'nieve in nieve' with 'hand in hand' is a move in the opposite direction, replacing dialect with standard English. A 'nieve' or 'nief' is typically a fist; Griffiths finds a few examples of the word signifying the more general 'hand', but these are a small minority.[574] Since Tim's mother is a caring presence, the violent undertones of 'nieve' seem inappropriate. In this situation, a dialect speaker would indeed be more likely to use the standard English 'hand'.

This dialect poem therefore presents kinships with Brathwaite's nation language in 'Rites'. There is conscientious use of previous research and practice: Griffiths draws on Platt's prose and on his own lexicographic research, as Brathwaite learns from Collymore and creates 'Rites' by reworking his short story 'Cricket' 'into a long poem, cutting long sections and enhancing the dramatic, communal and political rituals characterising Caribbean cricket culture.'[575] The dialect words and pronunciations introduce double-meanings that flesh out each utterance's connotations, and onomatopoeias bring embodied elements into the poem's language. Furthermore, Griffiths' poem closes on a note of familial care as Tim returns home (having briefly nodded off earlier while on the job):

> An' then they was oot, hiem agen in the dark, ti wesh an' eat.

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[572] Griffiths, *North East Dialect: Survey and Word List* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Centre for Northern Studies, 2002), p. 134.
[573] Griffiths, *The Coal World*, n.p.
[574] Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, p. 122.
[575] Westall, *The Rites of Cricket and Caribbean Literature*, n.p., Chapter 4.

His Da settled doon tiv a pipe. 'Come an' sit doon lad.

'Timorra, thoo'l collect thy ahn lamp, rimembor ti return it.
Second! Dinnot faal asleep agien.'

'Aye (an' he laugh'd) – the owerman com by an' seed yi asleep
But it was near lowse, yi forst day, se yi got nae bunch.

But mind it dinnut happen ye agien.
Them doors, they hev ti be shut for the air-flow an' open for the tubs.'

'Aye, fadder, Ah'll mind,' sed Tim. Then his big brother com in:
'How did thoo mak oot?' sed Sam, 'Ah bet thoo's tired.' 'Aye, some.'[576]

Like the Bajan tailor's shop, this space is homosocial; Tim's mother, prominent at the poem's start, is now absent. Also, as Criswell observes of 'Rites', 'while the men are criticizing the weaknesses of the community, they are reinforcing it by coming together and sharing their concerns.' The critique addresses Tim, and supports the mining community by ensuring ventilation. Tim is not offended by the admonition, since he clearly has colleagues' backing (unlike Gullstone and Walcott after their failures, Tim is still trusted). Dialect suggests mutual trust in the pit and the family home, conveying that all present are actively engaged in one community.

Missing from this poem, but present in 'Rites', is political resistance. No characters or voices are from outside Murton (except Griffiths as mediator of Platt's writing, but as Griffiths says in an earlier poem, 'When you write a play, | do you get the actor | to speak insults | of the author?').[577] Even Tim's 'owerman' ('overman' or supervisor) is supportive. The dialect's double-meanings enrich expression, and enable precision about details of mine work, rather than concealing meaning from oppressors.

However, *The Coal World*'s final poem, 'The Strike', introduces conflict with the metropole. The poem concerns industrial action over shift patterns at Murton Colliery:

Us that wor shop-keepers thowt hard what credit we cud give
En fowk i' the skiuls set up soup-kitchens ti feed the bairns.

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[576] Griffiths, *The Coal World*, n.p. 'Lowse' is the end of shift; a 'bunch' is a kick – Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, p. 109, p. 22.
[577] Griffiths, 'Peri Ponoias Proton: On Providence', *On Plotinus* (London: Amra Imprint, 1990), n.p.

> The men wor bitter an' fierce ti see thor fam'lies tret seea;
> The maistors browt in poliss frev Ireland ti deal wi' them.
>
> The men marched wi' a banner: it woz three vests on a line
> Which telled o' the shifts disputed; aal woz riddy fer confrontation.
>
> The wives forbye set oot ti show thor anger:
> Wi' thor sho'els they gat buckets o' coal frae the Pea Heap.
>
> That woz the small coal nae gud for price.
> But the women thowt it splendid ti hoy at the poliss.
>
> The under-manager, Mr Bell, read them the law.
> But he ran for his life as the women cam up nigh.[578]

Here is the same care as in the earlier poem, reaching beyond the miners to shopkeepers and teachers, all united against 'maistors' and management high above Tim's forgiving 'owerman'. Just as cricket and nation language in 'Rites' are metaphors for one another's subversive potential, so are coal and dialect here. The small coal from the Pea Heap is thought 'nae gud for a price', much as the miners, their families and their language are regarded by notional superiors; this kinship partakes of the underground spirituality depicted in Griffiths' *Coal*. Dialect and coal both gain anti-authoritarian power in 'The Strike'. (The vests work similarly, as the miners create means of communication from whatever materials are to hand.) These dialect speakers confront Mr. Bell, whose reading of the law uses standard English to exert oppression; indeed, the line introducing Bell is standard English, contrasting the rest of the poem. Murton's struggle is linked to those of occupied Ireland, hinting that Murton shares an enemy with colonised peoples elsewhere. This ferrying of enforcers across from Ulster is mirrored by use of R.U.C. tactics by police during the Toxteth Riots in *Mr. Tapscott*.

It may seem that *The Coal World*'s dialect is missing Caribbean nation language's potential for concealment: the way that Bajan readers can access meanings from the poem beyond the words' surface-level meanings. Dialect excoriates 'maistors' in 'The Strike', but there is no sense that, for Murton locals, it could offer up meanings additional to its explicit purpose. However, mining itself is concealed, and revealing it is the act of resistance.

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[578] Griffiths, *The Coal World*, n.p.

Resistance is built into the cricket game's structure: perhaps documenting the coal mining community is an act of resistance in itself? Margaret Thatcher, during the U.K.'s 1984–85 miners' strike, branded the miners as an 'enemy within, which is much more difficult [than Argentina in the Falklands War] to fight and more dangerous to liberty'.[579] In that dehumanising context, using the miners' dialect to rehumanise them is a powerful act of resistance.

Both Brathwaite and Griffiths use lexicography in their composition process. Such research into dialect and community histories cannot be dissociated from the poetry's sound-patterns. This factor is also present in Griffiths' poetry through a different device that stems from deep in the North East's history, and that also licenses a poetics of concealment. This technique, the kenning, complicates words by multiplying their possible significances, but also carries numinosity that at times feels spiritual. A parallel technique in Brathwaite is his calibanisms, which also pluralise the meanings of words, but through means so different from kennings that they are essentially opposites. The natures of these contrasting approaches, and the reasons why they are each effective in their respective linguistic contexts, are explored in this chapter's final sections.

[579] Cited in Milne, p. 23.

4.5: 'of sons, of songs, of sunshine': Doubled Meanings in Kamau Brathwaite's Calibanisms

As Brathwaite develops his poetics after *The Arrivants*, he delves further into nation language's potential for subversive textuality. His next trilogy – *Mother Poem* (1977), *Sun Poem* (1982) and *X/Self* (1987), revised and collected as *Ancestors* (2001) – uses lineation and indentation in ways that parallel postmodern American poets like Charles Olson, or the British Poetry Revival. Simultaneously, his non-standard spelling intensifies to reflect Caribbean pronunciations. His avant-gardism's roots in Caribbean folk culture and, beyond that, Africa, are evident on the page as well as in performance. In the *Ancestors* trilogy, he deploys in force his 'calibanisms', puns employing nation language pronunciation to subvert standard English. These expressions often rely on sound, demanding to he heard aloud. They balance two meanings in a single word: the standard English sense that emerges from an imperialist episteme, and an alternative reading repurposing the English word for decolonial ends. In fact, the calibanism 'alter/native' recurs within Brathwaite's work, suggesting 'oppression's opposite; found often in disguise or surreal form'.[580] The slash emulates line break notation to divide the word in two, so that the 'alter/native' represents colonised peoples altering their own destiny by retrieving it from imperialist possession, challenging imperial mindsets in the process. The slash also connotes 'or', weaving alternativity into the verbal fabric.

This section of the present chapter considers the effects of Brathwaite's calibanisms, and how his doubled meanings express political resistance. His apparently avant-garde technique stems from long-term traditions of linguistic subversion in Caribbean speech. This empowers the chapter's final section to consider how Brathwaite's innovations, or their equivalents, could manifest within English dialects.

On one level, calibanisms recover and re-indigenise poetic language from the Caribbean 'cultural disaster area':

> And in terms of what we write, our perceptual models, we are more conscious (in terms of sensibility) of the falling of snow [...] than of the force of the hurricanes which take place every year. In other words, we haven't got the syllables, the syllabic intelligence, to describe

[580] Brathwaite, 'Caribbean Culture: Two Paradigms', p. 51.

the hurricane, which is our own experience, whereas we can describe the imported alien experience of the snowfall.[581]

Calibanisms recuperate this 'syllabic intelligence'. The expression recalls Olson's 'the syllable *and* the line, they make a poem, they make that thing, […] the Boss of all, the "Single Intelligence."'[582] However, Brathwaite rejects the singular, and recognises that the type of intelligence required depends on one's environment. He achieves 'syllabic intelligence' by manipulating not just sounds but the sense they offer. Altering (and alter/nativising) a syllable's spelling or splitting it from its source word, he remakes a language accustomed to describing 'snow falling on the playing fields of Shropshire' (his example), giving nation language the resources to represent Caribbean experience.[583] Interviewed by Nathaniel Mackey and asked whether 'These linguistic turns and detours and fragmentations and neologisms and so forth that you call calibanisms would be in the tradition of that kind of folk/slave rebellion,' Brathwaite heartily agreed.[584] The technique embodies Edouard Glissant's framing of Creole language as a 'conspiracy that concealed itself by its public and open expression' and 'that could conceal and reveal at the same time a hidden meaning.'[585]

Brathwaite names this aspect of his poetics after Caliban from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Fellow Bajan George Lamming's influences Brathwaite here, reading the play as an allegory for the transatlantic slave trade, with the wizard Prospero enslaving Caliban in the Caribbean. Lamming observes how Prospero's domination of Caliban depends on imposing European language:

> Prospero lives in the absolute certainty that Language which is his gift to Caliban is the very prison in which Caliban's achievements will be realised and restricted. [...] Language itself, by Caliban's whole relation to it, will not allow his expansion beyond a certain point. This kind of realisation, this kind of expansion, is possible only to those who reside in that state of being that is the very source and ultimate if the language that bears them always forward. [...] To be a child of Nature, in this sense, is to be situated in Nature, to be identified with Nature, to be eternally without the sense of a dialectic which makes possible some *emergence* from Nature.[586]

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581 Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, pp. 8–9.
582 Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse', *Collected Prose*, p. 242. Olson's italics.
583 Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 9.
584 Mackey, 'An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite', *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, pp. 13–32: pp. 15–16.
585 Glissant, 'The Situation of the Spoken', *Caribbean Discourse*, pp. 125–26.
586 George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 110. Lamming's italics.

Caliban's heritage excludes him from complete identification with Prospero's language; it always remains an agent of his subjection. Without existing in and through the colonial tongue, he is barred from teleological dialectics that Brathwaite associates with European culture. As Lamming says, such modes 'are no part of [Caliban's] way of seeing.'[587] For Shakespeare and Lamming, Caliban has no exit from this impasse, except for being left alone as the European characters depart his island at the *The Tempest*'s end. Brathwaite's tidalectics, however, suggest how Caliban's culture and language could develop without dialectics: with calibanisms, tidalectics occurs on the micro-verbal level. Mackey describes how 'the anagrammatic "derangement" Shakespeare had recourse to in fashioning *Caliban* from *cannibal*, the puns, malapropisms, odd spellings, neologisms, and strained meanings Brathwaite resorts to, speak of disturbances outside as well as inside the language,' so that 'social disruptions of the word' are 'made to register.'[588] With each calibanism, counter-currents of alter/native meaning flow back into standard English, tidalectically turning words against themselves as nation language draws out different meanings.

Gestures towards calibanisms are already present in *The Arrivants*; for instance, the cricketing umpire written as 'empire' in 'Rites', or the 'O- | val' relating the Bajan cricket stadium to African rituals' circularity. However, it is the poem 'Caliban' that links punning techniques with the figure from *The Tempest*. This passage describes economic inequality in pre-Revolutionary Havana, with casinos welcoming wealthy foreigners:

> the Chrysler stirs but does not produce cotton
> the Jupiter purrs but does not produce bread
>
> out of the living stone, out of the living bone
> of coral, these dead
> towers; out of the coney
> islands of our mind-
>
> less architects, this death
> of sons, of songs, of sunshine[589]

[587] Lamming, p. 111.
[588] Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement*, p. 272.
[589] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 191.

The first two lines, with their parallel structures, give way to dynamic enjambments, embodying an engine different to the American automobiles whose names connote divine authority (echoes of 'Christ' in 'Chrysler'). New York's Coney Island is known for theme parks; *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958) is a Beat poetry collection by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, whose title Ferlinghetti intends to signify 'a kind of circus of the soul'.[590] His orality and ludic subversion mirror Brathwaite's own, but Brathwaite subverts him in turn. There was also an amusement park called Coney Island in Kingston, Jamaica, while the Caribbean's coral islands are geometrically 'coney', a stark literalism contrasting Ferlinghetti's poetry funfair.[591] Instead of offering democratic space for entertainment, like Ferlinghetti's collection and the actual Coney Islands, the Caribbean's luxury economy abandons the local poor in a tropical version of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), with 'crippled owners' standing in for Eliot's Fisher King. The punning, mid-word enjambment 'mind- || less architects' reinforces this. The phrase refers to coral polyps that produce reefs without conscious intent, and to (as Gordon Rohlehr enumerates) 'chartered accountants who build the new concrete cities, and the political architects, fathers, founders and flounderers of each mini-state.'[592] This might include the powerful casino owners of pre-Revolutionary Cuba (mostly affiliated with the U.S. Mafia), whom the image likens to polyps creating barren islands.[593] There is, however, resistance in Brathwaite's passage: the Caribbean's coniest landscape is the karst limestone hills of Jamaica's Cockpit Country, still home to the island's Maroons, and a heartland of anti-colonialism.

Puns in *The Arrivants* remain unobtrusive compared to Brathwaite's later work. Roots of subsequent developments are evident, though, in the quotation's last line, with parallels between sons, songs and sun: the three become metaphors for each other through sonic similarity, a process that Brathwaite later condenses further, notably in *Sun Poem*. 'Son' in that volume, and in 'Caliban', is not only a male child, but the Cuban folk song genre which, musicologist Robin Moore argues, is 'a stylistically pivotal genre linking the culture of the

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[590] Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *A Coney Island of the Mind* (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 8.
[591] Keashia Rhoden-Batchelor, 'Call for Jamaica-type Disneyland', *Daily Gleaner* (Jamaica), 2 July 2008 <http://old.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20080702/letters/letters6.html> [accessed 16 March 2022].
[592] Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, p. 222.
[593] For Mafia dominance of Havana casinos, see Cipriano Chinea Palero and Lynn Geldof, 'Waiting Tables in Havana', *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 253–56.

Afro-Cuban underclasses with that of mainstream society.'[594] This form's demise would represent maronage's defeat by metropolitan hegemony.

In *Sun Poem*, Brathwaite's calibanisms become a structuring principle for his poetry. This semi-autobiographical poem features Adam, a Bajan boy whose childhood unfolds similarly to Brathwaite's, with experiences of being a son, of sun and of song. The poem's richness in calibanisms is partly due to its characters' youth, and their efforts to grasp standard English vocabulary while living in a nation language context. Significantly, Lamming links Caliban to the Biblical Adam; both find themselves defined in Hegelian terms, sublated by their masters: 'Caliban is Prospero's risk in the sense that Adam's awareness of a difference was a risk which God took with Man.'[595] To illustrate Brathwaite's calibanistic tactics, consider section 14 from the poem's chapter 'Yellow Minnim'. *Sun Poem* was revised and re-sequenced in Sycorax video-style for incorporation in *Ancestors*, but I focus here on its original publication, partly to explore how Brathwaite's calibanisms function before his Sycorax breakthrough, and partly because Carrie Noland's 'Remediation and Diaspora: Kamau Brathwaite's Video-Style' (2009) has already adumbrated 'changes Brathwaite makes in orthography, word choice, and even rhythm (and thus pronunciation in performance) from one version [of these lines] to the next.'[596]

The section opens with Adam near his family's beachside house, considering how to hold his breath long enough to swim underwater to a distant pilot buoy. He has just consumed soap in the hope that, by holding a bubble in his mouth, he could maintain an air supply, 'but the soap stung like ants at the sides of his face; his tongue big and smooth in the burning bush as he spat out like a fire . . .'[597] This subversion of Pentecost is followed by a speaking-in-tongues as Adam's sister, washing clothes nearby, investigates his actions, and the two begin a conversation full of calibanisms. A deliberate pun from Adam sets the tone:

watcha doin dat for
for bubbles, he told her

[594] Robin Moore, '*Afrocubanismo* and Son', *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 192–200, p. 193.
[595] Lamming, p. 109.
[596] Noland, 'Remediation and Diaspora: Kamau Brathwaite's Video-Style', *Diasporic Avant-Gardes*, pp. 79–97, p. 83.
[597] Brathwaite, *Sun Poem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 27. Brathwaite's ellipsis.

for what for, she asked him

for bubbles, he told her
for why for, she pressed him
for z for, he said[598]

Through Adam's petulant allusion to alphabetical sequence, Brathwaite shifts the terrain from oral speech to its means of transcription. The move draws attention to the calibanisms that the poem releases by textually embodying nation language's sound. A later pun, though, is unintended by the protagonist:

i int goin anywhere an is bess
you start mindin you biz-
ness

my biz-
ness? my

bizness! you int see i
suddin dese cloze?[599]

The word '*bess*' is nation language for 'best', but the poem has earlier referenced 'angels' who 'were not white roses nor faery queens' but 'black besses and bussas who came sculling over the reefs in their bateaus'.[600] Brathwaite glosses 'black bess' as a 'Bajan place-name, and word for a 'strong woman''.[601] Adam, unawares, puts his sister into this lineage of determined women who share the anti-slavery leader Bussa's convictions. In his B.B.C. Radio 4 schools reading, Brathwaite argues that 'the women, who remain at home, preserve a great deal more of their own culture, of our own culture. And therefore we have this contrast between the outward-looking […] male, who has been converted to a great degree to the imitation culture, and the inward-looking female, the mothers, who have retained their Caribbean culture.'[602] The sister is situated in this tradition of wisdom, unlike Adam, who is literally 'outward-looking', but not wise. Gordon Rohlehr argues that Adam's wish to

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[598] Brathwaite, *Sun Poem*, p. 28. Brathwaite's italics.
[599] Brathwaite, *Sun Poem*, p. 28. Brathwaite's italics.
[600] Brathwaite, *Sun Poem*, p. 19.
[601] Brathwaite, *Sun Poem*, p. 99.
[602] Brathwaite, *From the Caribbean*, 07:27.

'live underwater and transcend all mortal limitations is the poet's quest for dream-space and instinct for poetry, but that this 'hermetic isolation [...] runs counter to the necessity for audience and society evident in the bulk of Brathwaite's aesthetic.'[603] In that light, the sister could be read as advocating a poetics of immersion in the struggles and shared responsibilities of Caribbean life, against Adam's lyric individualism.

There are also calibanisms in the sister's response, with '*suddin dese cloze*' ('sudding these clothes') approaching standard English for 'sudden' and 'close'; her temporal and spatial proximity means that she couldn't help but notice Adam's antics, but also emphasises that ancestral traditions of 'black besses and bussas' remains ready-to-hand in Barbados. The poem continues:

> *you think*, a-
> dam started
> *you think*
>
> *i cud dive from hey to de pilot?*
>   *to de pilot?*
>   eyes opening out from her basin of blue
>   to de pilot
>
>   *but it faaaaaar* she said slowly
>   travelling back homewards over the glistance
>   *you tink yu cud dive to de pilot?*
>
> *dat's why* adam said
> *i goin to have to invent*
> *it*
>
>   *in what int?*
>
> *in vent it* he told her
> *to breed underwater* he told her
> *as if it's a summarine*
>
>   *you's a what!*
>
> *summarine.*

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[603] Rohlehr, *Ancestories: Readings of Kamau Brathwaite's Ancestors* (Caroni: Lexicon Trinidad, 2010), p. 392.

cause den i cud dive
to de pilot he told her

but a mahn cahn dive like a sum machine ting[604]

This passage's puns, concealed within nation language pronunciation or the children's misunderstandings, add to the poetry. Sundering the protagonist's name into 'a- | dam', Brathwaite refers back to the boy's struggle against the waters: a dam is a blockage to be broken, letting in a flood, but also provides power – and the line break is a dam in mid-word. Nation language '*cud*' ('could') alludes to vomited food re-chewed by ruminants, recalling Adam's chewing of soap. To '*in vent it*' describes efforts to access air underwater, and the sister's '*sum machine ting*' is a plausible etymology for 'submarine'.[605] A vortex disturbs the words, a hurricane rearranging them into new sense. Meanwhile, in the narrator's pun 'glistance', distance does not merely separate but shimmers, like the sea during the vision at Runaway Bay that inspired Brathwaite's tidalectics.

Throughout the quotation above, calibanisms reveal more than 'correct' words could. Many of these expressions emerge from children's negotiations with language, but elsewhere in *Sun Poem*, adult perspectives build on such childhood discoveries. English is deconstructed as Brathwaite seeks modes of expression that transcend hegemonic frameworks. Nathaniel Mackey identifies the following passage as 'fractured wordscape [...] a broken mode and a breaking mode, as if to chatter were indeed to shatter'.[606]

how i
with all these loco

motives in me
would like to straighten

strangle eye/self out

grow a beard wear dark glasses
driving the pack straight far

ward into indigo and vi

[604] Brathwaite, *Sun Poem*, p. 29. Brathwaite's italics.
[605] Brathwaite, *Sun Poem*, p. 30.
[606] Mackey, 'Wringing the Word', *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, pp. 132–51; p. 133.

olet and on into ice like a miss

ile[607]

The pun 'loco | motive', recurring from Brathwaite's 'Folkways' (see Chapter 3.1), conveys irrational thought moving with a train's irresistible force, perhaps energised by Ogoun, whom Brathwaite associates with railways. Then, 'eye/self' plays on use of 'I' as a prefix in Rastafarian idioms to signify that the speaker partakes in the being of the subject described, and to proclaim the Black self as worthy of pride and self-defence ('as a black man seeing I-self, I know').[608] Here, though, Brathwaite also figures the self as a perceptual organ preserved by donning 'dark glasses', garb signifying coolness on the jazz scene, here protecting against arctic environments' dazzling whiteness. Given the connection in *History of the Voice* between snow and literary English as an 'imported alien experience', the ice might represent English itself.[609]

'Far forward' becomes 'far | ward', compressed into one adverb. The first half of 'vi | olet' suggests 'to vie'; the enjambment hints that completing the word will produce 'violence'. Likewise, fracturing 'miss || ile' emphasises that the 'loco' projectile of self has poor guidance and may 'miss', but also homophonically conflates this self with an 'isle' like Barbados itself.

The calibanistic soundscape's momentum and fractured appearance suggest avant-garde affiliations, but these practices have deep roots in Caribbean linguistics. In *M.R.: Magical Realism*, Brathwaite transcribes Chilean poet Cecilia Vicuña's reflections on early encounters between conquistadors and Indigenous Americans:

> In that first moment when the Europeans
> arrive, the *clash* or the mis-understanding was
> created - the collision of these two cultures
> and everything that has been happening ever since,
> spells misery for most of the people and spells
> amazing creations on the other hand - amazing
> linguistic creations on both parts of the
> misunderstanding

[607] Brathwaite, *Sun Poem*, pp. 3–4.
[608] Joseph Owens, *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica* (London, Kingston & Port of Spain: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), p. 264.
[609] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 9.

the spaniards started to take on the
New words as they **mis**understood them as they
Misheard them. For example **hurricane** for example
Canoe for example **hammock** . ***tobacco***

– all these are mispronounced words. All these new
mispronunciation(s)/**mis**readings [are] the source of
our culture

on the Indian side exactly the same thing happened,
compounded now w/the slaves, the Af slaves that came

and then all the rhythms, all the sources, all the
energies at work in the language, are pushing in all
directions[610]

In Barbados, these '**mis**pronunciation(s)/**mis**readings' create what Collymore classes as '**MALAPROPISMS.** These are many and various; the following, however, may be regarded as common currency: **bim** (absit omen) a dust bin; **costive**, costly; **cupella**, propeller; **human cry**, hue and cry; **portugal**, portico; **refuge**, refuse (noun); **spawn**, span; **spry**, spray; **swivelled**, shrivelled.'[611] Some of these require placement within wider patterns of imagery to carry weight, but others have intrinsic power: 'human cry' conveys alarm implicit in a 'hue and cry'. 'Portugal' for 'portico' captures colonial architecture's elegance but also the horror that such architecture symbolises, since 'Slavery, indeed, was one of the main pillars of the Lusitanian empire.'[612]

If such 'mispronounced words [are] the source of our culture', those further developing the culture might cultivate such terminology, without awaiting fortuitous accidents. However, such happenstances do bless Brathwaite's writing, as when *Contradictory Omens* etymologises the term 'creole': 'The word itself appears to have originated from a combination of two Spanish words **criar** (to create, to imagine, to establish, to found, to settle) and **colon** (a colonist, a founder, a settler) into **criollo**: a committed settler, one

[610] Brathwaite, *M.R.: Magical Realism*, vol. 1, p. 30.
[611] Collymore, p. 73. Collymore's bolding.
[612] C.R. Boxer, *Four Centuries of Portuguese Expansion, 1415–1825: A Succinct Survey* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Johannesburg: University of California Press and Witwatersrand University Press, 1961, 1972), p. 44.

identified with the area of settlement.'[613] Creativity is thus written into the very language for describing creolisation. However, Brathwaite's etymology is incorrect. His source is an 1846 history of Martinique, which may have evaded modern rigours of peer review.[614] *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966) gives an alternative explanation in wide circulation by the time of Brathwaite's monograph: '**Creole** krī.oul (descendent of) European or Negro settler in the W. Indies, etc. XVII (*criole*). – F. *créole*, earlier *criole* – Sp. *criollo*, prob. – Pg. *crioulo* negro born in Brazil, home-born slave, formerly of animals reared at home, f. *criar* nurse, breed. – L. *crēare* CREATE'.[615]

French *créole* does derive from Spanish *criollo*, though not Spanish *colon*, which is etymologically unrelated. *Criollo* likely comes in turn from Portuguese *crioulo*. In addition to senses Brathwaite attributes to the Spanish word, Portuguese *criar* can mean 'to breed', 'to raise' or 'to bring up' a child. The creole is hence a person (or custom, or language) born into a particular place, a passive object of the verb, not an active agent. Etymologist Eric Partridge explains the Portuguese noun's development: 'The obscure Port suffix *–oulo* prob answers to the L dim *–ulus*, a Creole being, as it were, a *by-product* of certain racial and sociological conditions.'[616] The diminutive suffix suggests this person is raised in servitude from childhood or, at least, is regarded from a patronising position of superiority. This is the opposite of the agency Brathwaite sees encoded in the term; the actual etymology seems more in line with V.S. Naipaul's contention (which Brathwaite rightly dismisses) that 'The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. . . . *History is built around achievement and creation: and nothing was created in the West Indies.*'[617]

However, etymology is an unreliable source for historical truths. As Chapter 2.2 explored, Caribbean creole societies developed tremendous creativity, not least in preserving pre-colonial and decolonial legacies within imperialist culture's shell; nation language is a

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[613] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 10.
[614] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 67 cites M.S. Daney, *Histoire de la Martinique*, 3 vols. (Fort Royal, 1846), 1963 ed.; vol. 1, p. 415.
[615] *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C.T. Onions, G.W.S. Friedrichsen and R.W. Burchfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966, 1978), p. 227.
[616] Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958, 1966), p. 128.
[617] Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820*, p. 267, citing V.S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies – British, French and Dutch – in the West Indies and South America* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 29. Brathwaite's italics and ellipsis.

supreme example. Brathwaite, while etymologically erring, presents historical, social and poetic truth. In creolisation, the interculturated imagination becomes indigenised, 'to entrench itself and begin the process of spiritual possession of the landscape'.[618]

Brathwaite's counter-etymology of 'creole' resists 'facts' originating from European perspectives. He reclaims creole identity from passivity, releasing creole ingenuity and resilience into the open for recognition. His invention exemplifies the cultural maronage he acclaims, offering an alter/native concept to be shared tidalectically between communities.

Creole etymology operates as a form of Maroon poetics, as in Louise Bennett's telling of the Jamaican folk tale, 'Anancy and Sorrel'. During this escapade of the trickster-hero Anancy, a bundle of sorrel lands in a hominy-lady's pot at market.[619] The plant is nameless until immersed, when it reddens the boiling water in the pot. Anancy adds spices, then tastes the brew:

> "Kya, kya, kya, kya!" Anancy laughed. "It taste nice, like real-real wine."
> The hominy-lady said, "It smell nice!"
> Anancy looked fondly into the pot and whispered in wonderment, "How you so real, so real, so real!"
> Somebody in the crowd shouted, "It name So-real! Sell me tru-pence wut a So-real!
> [...] Anancy brewed and sold So-real, all day. It was the most popular drink at the Grand Market. By the end of the day, in our own true fashion, So-real had become Sorrel. And from that day to today, Sorrel is a famous Christmas drink. Is Anancy make it.[620]

This is not European common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), but Jamaican sorrel (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*). As B.W. Higman outlines, the latter 'is unrelated to other plants of the same name […] *H. Sabdariffa* probably came to Jamaica from Africa, and as early as 1750 it was called "Jamaican sorrel"'.[621] The species acquired its Jamaican name when Europeans noted a tenuous resemblance to a known plant (both species taste sour). The name is a legacy of colonialism, displacing West African nomenclature. Anancy, however, has survived transition from

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[618] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p. 62.
[619] 'Anancy' or 'Ananse' has variant spellings; the former is common in the Caribbean, the latter in Ghana. Brathwaite often uses the latter to honour his Ghanaian experiences.
[620] Louise Bennett, 'Anancy and Sorrel', *Caribbean Folk Tales and Legends*, ed. by Andrew Salkey (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Press, 1980), pp. 75–78: p. 78.
[621] B.W. Higman, *Jamaican Food: History, Biology, Culture* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2008), p. 181.

Africa; as Brathwaite reminds us, this is 'the Akan spider-hero, Ananse'.[622] The trickster rescues the flower from colonial naming, but cannot restore what was lost. A new, creole etymology is invented, springing from the flower's folk use for making beverages (again, a West African practice). The creole etymology subverts the colonialist assumption that an African species should be named after a European plant, rather than from a language of the peoples already utilising it. There is also an Amerindian legacy, as hominy is made from maize, an indigenously American plant. The story even creolises religion, with a god-hero from Akan polytheism preparing a drink to celebrate Christmas.

Within Brathwaite's framework, Bennett's etymology exemplifies folk or Maroon creativity. Impossible without nation language, it indigenises both sorrel itself and the brewing of it, claiming the plant as authentically Jamaican, and re-rooting it in creole contexts. Factually, the story is inaccurate; culturally, it repairs historically and scientifically erroneous misnaming. The word 'sorrel' is unchanged, but its origins are made new. This indigenisation is the 'our own true fashion' celebrated by Bennett. Since planters forced European names onto enslaved Africans, Anancy's subversion of European nomenclature is bubbling with decolonial politics: in Orlando Patterson's words, 'The changing of a name is almost universally a symbolic act of stripping a person of his former identity […] The slave's former name died with his former self.'[623] In that spirit, inventing a calibanism can be liberatory, choosing new significance for a word to free it from meanings that standard English enforces.

The wordplay in Bennett's story is calibanistic, finding a new word within the English term, and creating an alternative etymology that subverts the standard English origin. The technique responds to creole, nation language contexts with acts of Maroon innovation. Such mimicries resemble those which Homi Bhabha outlines, whereby colonised populations imitate oppressors' behaviours in ways that superficially approach metropolitan norms, but that satirically draw attention to injustice:

> [...] mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualises power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant

[622] Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, p. 239.
[623] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 55.

> strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both "normalised" knowledges and disciplinary powers.[624]

Far from entailing surrender to the metropole, adopting metropolitan behaviours can ridicule these orthodoxies. This could either take the form of mockery intended and appreciated by colonised people, or unsettle colonisers themselves, whose norms might be exposed as arbitrary through imitation by notional inferiors. Both alternatives can coincide as the mimic 'visualises power' to appropriate it, as when Brathwaite's calibanisms literally 'visualise power' through textual effects. If imperialists' power inheres within their language and other cultural practices that mark them as supposedly superior, then colonised peoples could use such tools of power to establish themselves as social equals of their oppressors. This method 'poses an immanent threat to both "normalised" knowledges and disciplinary powers' because, by appearing to inhabit the imperialist episteme, mimics disprove racist assertions that such accomplishments should be beyond them. Also, by apparently consenting to the coloniser's cultural demands, the mimic will likely escape punishment for any implicit subversion. Behaviours whose content appears to indicate acculturation may mean something radically different: the content is acculturated but the meaning is creole.

Bennett's folk etymology for 'sorrel' achieves this, keeping the English word but changing its significance. Brathwaite's calibanisms enact similar transformations, creating Bhabha's 'double articulation' through puns that utilise colonial language while undermining its hegemony. Like the Jamaican woman whom Brathwaite sees as incarnating tidalectics, these linguistic innovations are always '*receding ('reading')|from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of th | e(ir) future*'.[625] In calibanisms, concepts of tidalectics, creolisation and maronage overlap and flow into one another in constant movement back and forth between future and past.

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[624] Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October*, vol. 28, 1984, pp. 125–33: p. 126.
[625] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, p. 34.

4.6. 'Perhaps we are all one word': Kennings and Dialect in Bill Griffiths' *Scaffold Hill*

Griffiths' puns are more subliminal than Brathwaite's, but he also deploys a different means of doubling words: the kenning, whose roots lie in Old English and Norse poetry. This technique offers a parallel to Caribbean traditions of folk etymology. Griffiths' kennings similarly critique societal controls. His long poem *Scaffold Hill* (1992) is notable for combining kennings with North East dialect, and in doing so, excoriating political and economic forces that repress the region's people. Before analysing Griffiths' kennings, though, it would be wise to ask: why not calibanisms? Why shouldn't calibanisms operate within an English dialect, like that of Bill Griffiths' North East? Basil Bunting suggests a key difference between two forms of English and their respective poetries:

> Now American began by being British English such as the English speak, and only gradually [...] turned into a kind of Esperanto. The immigrants learned English words, and how to put them together in an English syntax. But the words did not bring with them all the hazy suggestions and cousinships that they have for English people. [...] So little by little the immigrant English has coloured or discoloured the normal English of the United States. Words mean to an American, usually, what the dictionary says they mean, and no more.[626]

In contrast, English poets 'float in an unconscious soup of etymology', so that 'The feel of the language which results is quite different.'[627] Despite unfortunate word-choice ('discoloured', 'normal'), Bunting does not view American English's transformation as necessarily bad for poetry. For one thing, British and American English are deemed 'two dialects', rather than a language and a less valid derivative; Bunting thus avoids 'pejorative overtones' that Brathwaite finds in the word 'dialect'.[628] Bunting proposes that Louis Zukofsky, 'only less important than Pound to [the twentieth] century', epitomises poetics of American 'Esperanto'.[629] Zukofsky's roots as the son of Lithuanian-Jewish immigrants, and Yiddish being his first language, mean that:

[626] Bunting, *Basil Bunting on Poetry*, p. 152.
[627] Bunting, *Basil Bunting on Poetry*, p. 152.
[628] Bunting, *Basil Bunting on Poetry*, p. 152; Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 13.
[629] Bunting, *Basil Bunting on Poetry*, p. 154.

> Homonyms and puns in general come to his mind more readily than the ancestral relations of words. They're a constant feature of his poetry, connecting things together; not only a joke, (but as) a serious means of knitting together the poetry; as would be done, by an English poet, rather than with the ancient cousinships of words which you hardly notice. Puns are much more prominent.[630]

Bunting's generalisation is debatable, but is true of Zukofsky, as is most evident from the latter's homophonic translations, such as the passage from the *Book of Job* within his long poem *"A"*. This uses English words that cleave to the original Hebrew sounds while treating syntax and meaning loosely:

> He neigh ha lie low h'who y'he gall mood
> So roar cruel hire
> Lo to achieve an eye leer rot off
> Mass th'lo low o loam echo
> How deal me many coeval yammer
> Naked on the face of white rock – sea.[631]

As Chapter 1.4 showed, Griffiths' translations of texts like *The Story of the Flood from Gilgamesh*, preserving original word order while defying English syntax, offer synthetic creole languages, transferring aspects of the source tongue's episteme into modern English. Zukofsky's homophonic translations create similar creoles by foregrounding the source language's sound. Caribbean nation language similarly incorporates African pronunciations and speech-rhythms into superficially English speech, as demonstrated in Chapter 2.2. Zukofsky's *Job* passage shares with Brathwaite's nation language an impulse to conserve an oft-oppressed diaspora's ancestral speech by incorporating its features into the hegemonic tongue.[632] The relationship between homophones is horizontal, synchronic rather than diachronic, again refusing hierarchy.

Considering other American poets who share Zukofsky's love of puns, one thinks of e.e. cummings and Robert Duncan, both disliked by Bunting. The former, he says, is 'essentially trivial', passing off 'gimmicks for originality', while the latter has 'no syntax

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[630] Bunting, *Basil Bunting on Poetry*, p. 152. Editor Peter Makin's parenthetical extrapolation.
[631] Louis Zukofsky, *"A" 13–21* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 106.
[632] The parallel need not obscure differences between anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism, explored (for example) in James Baldwin, 'The Harlem Ghetto', *Notes of a Native Son* (New York City: Bantam, 1964), pp. 47–60; and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), pp. 121–41.

whatever'.[633] Writing to poet Denis Goacher, Bunting expresses broader reservations about puns: 'No, I don't think wordplays, however neat, should stand if they hamper the rhythmic movement. Goodness knows it is difficult enough to move at all.'[634] In contrast, he considers Zukofsky's puns 'a serious means of knitting together the poetry'; Zukofsky's wordplay does not hamper but drives 'the rhythmic movement.'

By 'American' poetics, Bunting means the U.S.A.; he cites no writers from elsewhere on the double continent. However, there is pun-filled poetry in other American countries: bpNichol in Canada, the Noigandres poets in Brazil, and Brathwaite among many Caribbean writers. In fact, Bunting links Caribbean speech to a shift in British English: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, he says, received 'their education at a time before the immigrants had affected [American English] as widely as they have since, and in a class as remote from that of the immigrants as the English public school class is from the Jamaicans and Pakistanis of Peckham.'[635] Bunting's attitude to nation languages in Peckham, an archetype of the internal colony investigated by Rex, Moore and Hall, is ambivalent. To associate such speech to Zukofsky's poetry is no insult, but Bunting seems anxious that this presence could dilute English, etymological inspirations, supplanting them with quasi-American poetics.

However, while Bunting regards America's linguistic change as an accidental side-effect of transculturation, Caribbean adoption of punning, alternative etymologies – including Brathwaite's calibanisms – is frequently deliberate. The practice sunders each word from the definition that chained it to European history. The word is then free to become indigenised by finding new origins more relevant to Caribbean environments.

Puns can emerge from North East dialect, demonstrated in previous discussions of Griffiths' 'On Vane Tempest Provisionally Shut' and *The Coal World*. Etymological poetics, though, not punning, suit North East dialect better. Maronage is key to this. Calibanisms are fruitful for doubling meanings within Caribbean poetry, participating in the region's history of linguistic misunderstandings and subversive wordplay, undermining power structures

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[633] Bunting, letter to Ronald Johnson, 7 August 1970, University of Durham, Basil Bunting Archive, Bunting MS 390/1–8, p. 2; Bunting, *Basil Bunting on Poetry*, p. 153.
[634] Bunting, letter to Denis Goacher, 13 December 1954, University of Durham, Basil Bunting Archive, Bunting MS 116.
[635] Bunting, *Basil Bunting on Poetry*, p. 155.

that standard English has imposed. Calibanisms therefore express maronage in this context, protecting indigenised reinventions of English words.

In contrast, North East dialect diverges from standard English in sharing more, not less, with the language's historic roots. As shown in Chapter 2.3, North Eastern speech, especially in rural areas, retains more Anglian vocabulary and pronunciation than is found further south. Even in maritime areas of the North East, which experienced creolisation with Early Medieval Norse settlers and Early Modern Dutch mariners, Griffiths notes: 'it is often difficult to be certain of exact word origins: if you go back far enough, English, Dutch, Danish and other Germanic languages share a degree of common ancestry'.[636]

These influences mean that, in the master-slave dialectic between standard, metropolitan English and North East dialect, creolisation is characteristic of hegemony. The Caribbean dynamic is reversed. Calibanisms in North Eastern contexts could bring the dialect closer to standard English; interesting effects might arise, but maronage and resistance would become corroded. To express resistance by challenging standard English epistemes, the dialect requires movement not towards puns, but to etymology.

This perspective unlocks an alternative route to double meanings. In fact, Griffiths uses such a technique throughout his work. It occurs frequently in his poetry during his PhD studies in the 1980s, but continues after his 1990 move to Seaham, sometimes mingling with his dialect poetry. These are kennings, periphrastic descriptions in Norse and Old English poetries. Medieval Icelandic poet Snorri Sturluson illustrates the practice:

> Hamdir's tunic [a coat of mail] falls around the operator of the fire of the spear-clash [user of the sword, warrior] where the upholder of the king's dynasty protects the limbs of his shoulders with rings [mail]. The outstanding one covers the hill of the dwelling of his brain [his cranium] with a battle-boar [helmet] and the distributor of gold brandishes the battle-fish [sword] in the hawk's perch [hand].
>
> Here in this verse all the concepts are expressed by kennings [...] Kennings are distinguished by three kinds of usage: first there are simple kennings, second double, third extended. It is a kenning to call battle 'spear-clash', and it is a double kenning to call a sword 'fire of the spear-clash', and it is extended if there are more elements [...][637]

[636] Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, p. xvii.
[637] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. by Anthony Faulkes (London: Everyman, 2004), pp. 167–68. Faulkes' parenthetical interpolations.

Kennings take words beyond Bunting's 'what the dictionary says they mean, and no more.' The form lets descriptions emphasise aspects of their subject. Calling a sword 'fire of the spear-clash' has a different affect to a 'battle-fish'; the first stresses destructive violence, the second the weapon's grace in expert hands. Other uses of sword-kennings include the extended allegory: 'The wise prince makes the adders of battle [swords] creep the scabbard-path [be drawn] [...] The worm of the slain rushes along the mind's path to the warm war-river.'[638] 'Adders of battle' suggests strikes that are determined and precise; 'the mind's path' is glossed as 'men's breasts', while 'the warm war-river' represents bloodshed. Later, a sword signifying kingly authority is 'Vidhler's helmet-filler [Heimdall's head]', suggesting divine right; a sword to avoid in combat is 'battle-danger'; a sword beating at a shield-wall is 'the reddening rod of shields'.[639] Though often expressed as compound nouns, kennings differ from English compounds such as 'football' or 'greenhouse', which are neologisms naming distinct objects; rather , kennings name something already known, but in a riddling fashion that foregrounds certain experiences of the thing. They are culturally specific; some aforementioned kennings would be hard to parse in a culture without knowledge of the god Heimdall, or which does not use shield-walls in battle. Furthermore, many kennings are commonplaces in Norse literature, widely understood by original audiences; the art of kennings lies in weaving them into larger patterns, as in the serpent allegory above. This cultural knowledge is also a prerequisite for deciphering many calibanisms; the play on 'bess', identified in *Sun Poem* (see Chapter 3.5), demands not only familiarity with Bajan sounds to recognise the nation language for 'best', but acquaintance with the island's stock phrases to catch the reference to 'black besses'.

Kennings enter Griffiths' work early. His 1974 translation (with John Porter) of verses from *Gisli's Saga* incorporates literal, syntactic translations alongside prose decodings:

> Hides in secret under veil
> OF-SERPENT-FIELD <u>her</u>-mood of-women
> (sorrow flows from good)
> GEFN (ale-casks of-sleep);
> OAK wears (in-sorrow) OF-LEEKS,
> Of-peace-dispelling, of-brows' spears,

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[638] Snorri, *Edda*, p. 170. Faulkes' parenthetical interpolations.

[639] Snorri, *Edda*, p. 170, p. 171, p. 176. Faulkes' parenthetical interpolations. The god Heimdall or Vidhler protects the divine stronghold, Asgard.

(for-her-brother) dew on both
Gentle high-seats then.

> Gold(serpent-field)-adorned woman(Gefn/goddess)[Aud] hides her woman's tears in secret under veil, sorrow flows from her eyes(sleep's good ale-casks). The woman(oak of leeks) then wears in both her gentle eyes(high-seats of brows' spears[lashes]) the tears(dew) of misery(peace-dispelling) in sorrow for her brother.[640]

The English verse exemplifies practices of resistant translation, kennings confronting readers with the medieval Icelandic world-view's sheer difference. Decoding 'SERPENT-FIELD' as 'gold' is challenging unless we know that 'serpent' indicates 'dragon' as well as 'snake', while 'ale-casks of-sleep' and 'OAK [...] OF-LEEKS' would befuddle anyone not steeped in Norse culture. The political potential of this resistance is evident. Kennings protect texts from outsiders' understanding, while deepening resonances for those with privileged knowledge; in this combination of excluding from and consolidating into the community, they recall Maroon aspects of nation language, and share the double-meanings present in calibanisms. In his 1980s poetry, Griffiths' kennings imply (or create among readers) a community that experiences phenomena unconventionally. His long poem *Morning-Lands* (1989) sometimes combines terms synaesthetically ('Waterfall-Sunset', 'sky-treble', 'beak-pipes'); sometimes uses Old English roots to imply intuitive authenticity ('body-show, blessing-share'); and sometimes depicts alienation from modern society and technology, so that an oil tanker's funnels are 'mast-tubes', or a soldier is made of 'soljer-molecules', a different material from other humans' substance.[641]

While kennings do not dominate North East dialect, there are examples in the region's. Within Northumberland fishing communities, a 'barr'l-arse' is a squid, 'haddock bags' are sea squirts ('haddocks eat them'), 'hard-shells' are guillemots' eggs, a 'kep-shite' (shit-catcher) is a skua, 'old maids' laces' are 'long thin strands of sea-weed', a 'sailor's

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[640] *Gisli's Saga: The Verses*, n.p. The translators note: 'underlined words are those with no preceding expressed equivalent in the Icelandic, but which are either implied there and/or necessary in the English. [...] capital letters isolate kennings for human beings when they are the subjects of a clause, or when they are being addressed. Round brackets further isolate material which belongs together. Icelandic being an inflected language these relationships are grammatically apparent in the original.'
[641] Griffiths, *Morning-Lands* (Cowley: Pirate Press, 1989), n.p.

purse' is a 'skate's egg-case', and 'winter beef' is 'a barrel of salt herring given to women workers as part of payment'.[642] Griffiths gives examples of more modern kennings emerging:

> In traditional mode are the recorded compounds shackle-bane (wrist), monifeet (centipede), horn-top (snail), queen's-heed (postage stamp), slap-heed for a dull or forgetful person; more modern in mode are 'raad-haader' or road-holder, for a car (originally CB slang?), 'star-heed' for a Philips screw, and joinedy-up thinking for adult intelligence (on the model of joined-up writing?).[643]

Each kenning describes an item's appearance, behaviour or use, and builds a community among dialect-speakers who share this knowledge. There is thus precedent in North East dialect for kennings that highlight knowledge within the community a poem represents, posing riddles easily solvable among that group, but distancing other readers, who might nevertheless gain insight into the episteme from which the kennings arise. This approach could incorporate affects achieved through Griffiths' kennings in *Morning-Lands*: images taking the communal episteme into new territory, and critiquing the alienating technologies of capitalism and militarism.

Scaffold Hill is perhaps Griffiths' most thorough integration of kennings with North East dialect. In Newcastle's eastern suburbs, Scaffold Hill was a popular mustering-point for demonstrating miners. The poem honours mutual care among the region's colliery towns, opening with:

> Let us be sober.
> Again,
> Let us conjoin hand/heart/head,
> be understood
> as organic/corallic whole.[644]

Like the Caribbean's 'coney islands' in Brathwaite, the men's collectivism is a coral structure, but Griffiths' image works differently, implying that this human reef is not life's fossilised, limestone aftermath, but still a vivacious structure. Notably, there is one image that could

[642] Porteous, pp. 229–244. A skua does not eat faeces, but 'chases other birds until they drop their food, thought by fishermen to be droppings' – Porteous, p. 55.
[643] Griffiths, 'Retaking the Language', 131.
[644] Griffiths, *Scaffold Hill*, n.p.

refer to trade union banners (whose redness can fade with time to brownish-purple), but may also liken the miners' communal ethos to Maroon practices:

> Only, glorious and maroon,
> there is resistance.
>
> In every comma,
> every cheated clause,
> I sense it,
> I hold against,
> I pick up the flag of –
>
> I will not be loyal.
> There is nothing
> between word-man and word-man[645]

Griffiths' miners are so invested in their comrades' lives that they partake in one selfhood. In this context, loyalty – sublating oneself to others' demands in a master-slave dialectic – need not exist, since all one's comrades are envisioned as other incarnations of oneself, and can be cared for in that light. The men become language-units articulating their ethos in unity:

> Words are heavy,
> with deliverable masses.
> I know, for I ama word.
> There are other words like me.
> Perhaps we are all one word.
> But it is my word, too, is me.
> Words eat and sleep together.
> When something that is not a word comes up,
> we roll into balls.
> Along the sentence, we grow.
> And at the end of the line, they say, 's a great fire.[646]

Each word has individual characteristics, while functioning in a cohesive, articulate whole. Within the poem, 'something that is not a word' could be white space between stanzas, at which point the stanza might close itself off into a hedgehog-like ball, a Maroon act of self-defence. The 'great fire' at each line-break superficially resembles a Christian apocalypse, but

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[645] Griffiths, *Scaffold Hill*, n.p.
[646] Griffiths, *Scaffold Hill*, n.p. Griffiths' 'ama'.

since the poem continues thereafter, a more apt eschaton is the Norse Ragnarök, when 'The sun turns black, the earth sinks into the sea, smoke and flames lick the sky itself', but then 'The earth arises from the sea, and a new generation of gods inhabits it.'[647] The poem's verbal cosmology is inflected by Northumbria's deep history.

The idea that 'Perhaps we are all one word' has ramifications for the poem's language, and for calibanisms and kennings in general. The poem's register shifts back and forth between standard English with some concessions to orality ('I ama word', ''s a great fire'), and stronger dialect:

> For love and load is everything,
> it heaves the deck, straights the rolly-way
> an' if we wosna true all one,
> would the mine ever gan, else?
> How could it, man?[648]

Given the poem's collectivism, the contrasting registers of language could represent different speakers from the community, as well as a creole continuum's tidalectic back-and-forth, as the text negotiates differing expectations implicit in dialect and standard English – the realisation marvellously demonstrates how readings of Griffiths' work and its politics can be enriched by an understanding of Brathwaite's poetics. The voices are 'all one word' because all are available within one community, all part of the poem's unified expression. If the words are all one, though, what happens in the poem's kennings, where Griffiths hyphenates nouns into new entities? It may be helpful to consider kennings from *Scaffold Hill*, to analyse what these fusions convey.

A few examples will be drawn from the opening pages. In the third stanza, an assembly on Scaffold Hill is 'everything's holiday. | Fire and foot and thistle, | Stud and cloud-shirt'.[649] The kenning is ambiguous: maybe a white shirt fills with breeze, or a cloud billows along like a rumpled shirt.[650] Both images fit the scene; there is no need to choose between them, for the poem conveys both. Shortly afterwards, male orgasm is graphically

[647] John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 257.
[648] Griffiths, *Scaffold Hill*, n.p.
[649] Griffiths, *Scaffold Hill*, n.p. This is also the source for other quotations in the present paragraph and the following one.
[650] And is the 'Stud' part of the clothing, or a handsome man?

represented as 'leak-seed'. Subsequently, 'song is | tunnel- | measure', an expression of rhythm that takes place in the pit, but also a measurement of time worked or distance marched underground. The songs are also 'wind-journies', departures of breaths which are portrayed as non-committal members of the labouring body, who 'quit and desert | and they do not mean to betray, but'. A different take on breathing appears immediately afterwards, as exhaled condensation in winter becomes 'heavy steam-wolves'. This kenning's sense is clear, but the poetry makes readers imagine not steam momentarily resembling wolves, but wolves made of steam, emphasising Griffiths' point that all phenomena (including words and breath) are material, and there is 'weight everywhere'. The kenning also projects readers back to Early Medieval culture, where wolves could actually be encountered.

A more complex kenning emerges as the speaker's 'adventure-smoke-rain | above the thudding-of-the-herd | and ghost-flute sez 'I'll write home ev'ry day'. 'Thudding-of-the-herd' (a stamping crowd) and 'ghost-flute' (background music, perhaps from a store) are readily decoded, but 'adventure-smoke-rain' is chewier. Perhaps the speaker steps outside (a brief 'adventure') to smoke in the rain, and the kenning condenses this experience into one expression. However, the smoke is personified as going on an adventure too. The image again strengthens the physicality of a substance usually considered liminal, as does a later encounter with 'massive massive salt-scents | brave off the dock'. Maybe the speaker is near the docks (in Seaham?) and smells the sea, but immediately before, he was 'at the gym'. It is unclear that he left, so the 'massive salt-scents' could be muscular dockers entering the gym after their shift.

Three different, often overlapping, functions of Griffiths' kennings are present in the above examples. One articulates a phenomenon from within a subjective viewpoint, often with language closer to lived experience than more normative expressions, as in 'leak-seed', whose Old English roots and tactility feel more vivid than abstracted, medical terms like 'ejaculation' (from Latin) or 'orgasm' (Greek) that were creolised into the language more recently. In this sense, Griffiths' language enacts his theme of materiality. As with Snorri's kennings for 'sword', Griffiths technique applies different expressions to phenomena normally covered by one word; 'wind-journies' and 'steam-wolves' are different experiences of breaths. These functions of the kenning usually operate in tandem with another, arguably more significant one: a fusion of meaning between the kenning's parts. So, 'cloud-shirt'

suggests both shirts like clouds and clouds like shirts, while 'adventure-smoke-rain' involves both going on an adventure to smoke in the rain, as well as smoke going on an adventure. Thirdly, there is the riddling element, where multiple solutions co-exist, so song might be 'tunnel-measure' due to being performed in tunnels, or because it measures tunnels, while 'salt-scents' could be odours of salt, or a synecdoche for men smelling this way.

In different ways, these functions of the kenning combine words into greater wholes. This is the opposite of the 'double articulation' theorised by Bhabha or practiced in Brathwaite's calibanisms, where an existing word splits into different meanings. Instead, kennings form unified meanings by creating a collective from apparently separate words. The different approaches stem from different relations to English etymology in the Caribbean and the North East. Caribbean nation language deploys calibanisms as alter/native etymologies to undermine colonial imposition of standard English. North East dialect demands a different approach, an excavation of English's Anglian roots, as well as Old English and Norse poetics. In the Caribbean, maronage's inward turn is tidalectically balanced by an outward reach towards non-English cultures and languages previously suppressed by Anglophone hegemony. In the North East, one instead digs down into English itself, delving through etymological strata to recover a more tidalectic approach to language and power. The collectivism of *Scaffold Hill* is one aspect of this recovered, Northumbrian tidalectics, eschewing hierarchies of 'loyalty' to recognise an egalitarian, mutually reliant relationship between selves. Griffiths' kennings enact the ethos microcosmically, combining words in unions that resist easy interpretation, but whose apparent difficulty lets multiple readings co-exist tidalectically.

This chapter has discussed orally focussed aspects of nation language and dialect: 'total expression' achieved in performance through Kamau Brathwaite's readings or in Bill Griffiths' sound poetry performances; community-specific vocabulary and syntax, as with the Bajan diction of Brathwaite's 'Rites' or the Pitmatic of Griffiths' *The Coal World*; and communication of parallel, sometimes subversive meanings through Brathwaite's calibanisms and Griffiths' kennings. These oral manifestations are in a constant, tidalectic exchange with the textuality of the poems and their sources. This takes place through Brathwaite's recreation of audiences through the way his 'tidalectic lectures' transcribe performance occasions; through Griffiths' creation of a fictive community of texts in *The*

Cuddy Anthem; the way 'Rites' and *The Coal World* draw on textual resources such as Frank A. Collymore's Bajan lexicography, F.N. Platt's genealogical fiction, and Griffiths' own dialect research; and how calibanisms and kennings use written forms on the page to achieve their impact. The final chapter considers what happens when this visual, written form takes over, becoming mediated through forms of technology, whether old (the book) or new (the Internet). Both Kamau Brathwaite and Bill Griffiths maintain an immanent presence in such works, not despite the enhanced textuality, but by using such resources to maintain a sense of total expression via diverse media.

Chapter 4: History of the Eye

4.1. 'when the written word could still hear itself speak': Text as Embodied Language in Kamau Brathwaite's Video-Style

To explore the experimental potential of nation language and dialect, it is crucial to explore the role of technology. Kamau Brathwaite and Bill Griffiths both used unorthodox methods to structure and disseminate their publications; the political significance of these approaches can be read back into the writing itself, steering reception of their texts that deploy subaltern speech. This chapter reviews the two poets' engagement with technologies as methods for presenting, distributing, and researching their writings. For Brathwaite, the key factor is Sycorax Video-style, his radical mobilisation of fonts and layout to enhance poetry's meanings; this includes texts that combine nation language and Sycorax Video-style to advance a decolonial politics, highlighting injustices that result from institutionalised power imbalances. Griffiths creates related effects, and arguably takes them further, using poetic technologies to secure aid for those in need, to campaign for change through (and to) electoral systems, and to apply his anarcho-democratic politics into methodologies of dialect research. As the range of technologies available for innovating poetry and poetics continues to pluralise, the sometimes contrasting, sometimes complementary approaches of Brathwaite and Griffiths suggest new ways to form communities, while challenging the hierarchies of access and control that often accompany new media.

I begin by exploring how Brathwaite's Sycorax Video-style expands upon the performance poetics explored in the previous chapter. I analyse a passage from Brathwaite's *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* to ascertain how Brathwaite uses word-processing software to engage the reader's body in a vicarious experience of performance, so that Brathwaite's textuality enhances, rather than supplants, total expression. A particular letter (of the alphabet, not correspondence) from the collection *Middle Passages* (1992) is then close-read to showcase how this book's fonts not only 'create a system of notation for poetry to make it affect the ear, when it is on the page, as effectively as it can in performance' (in Fenella Copplestone's words), but express entire histories and ecologies.[651]

[651] Fenella Copplestone, 'The Attraction of Opposites', *P.N. Review*, no. 89, 1993, 60–61: 60.

Bill Griffiths offers equivalent means of expression through the visual poetics he developed at Writers Forum. His *Forming Four Dock Poems* (1974) uses page space to suggest potential interpretations through sound poetry performance, while implying histories within its choice of lettering, offering a parallel to Brathwaite's incarnation of nation language via Sycorax fonts. The text bears bodily traces from its makers: Griffiths' own assembling hand, and the medieval scribe whose handwritten letters are manipulated to create the work. In some of Griffiths' subsequent works, like *Morning-Lands* (1989), hand-drawn lettering also registers authorial physicality on the page, suggesting the bodily presence of total expression. If a filmic dimension to Brathwaite's visuality is implied by the name 'Sycorax video-style', Griffiths' ally Lawrence Upton intuits a similarly cinematic aspect to how Writers Forum's poetics suggests poets' physicality: 'Let us recognise the importance of what we say which does not use recognisable words, grunts, sighs and so on, gestures and less easily perceivable signals. A film camera extends it and we are happy, and the wiser for it.'[652]

The artistry here lies in visual choices made when formatting the text, as much as in the words' conventionally semantic content. The poet processes language with the creativity that medieval scribes or Early Modern printers brought to their work. This opens possibilities for poets to operate through documentary methods, with their writings as records of injustice that prime their readers for political action. Brathwaite and Griffiths both used such tactics, particularly in the 1990s. Brathwaite's *Trench Town Rock* (1992) uses Sycorax Video-style to register the soundscape of Kingston, Jamaica – its dancehalls, radio shows, cries of distress, and vocal creativity – in a documentary intervention against urban violence. Griffiths in *Star Fish Jail* (1993) uses related, documentary techniques to record abuses at H.M.P. Wandsworth, poetically reproducing the voice of a friend incarcerated there, a voice that Griffiths characterises in terms reminiscent of nation language. The technology deployed here is Griffiths' small-press distribution methods, used to raise money to assist his friend – an act of poetry with an immediate, remedial function in the world.

Brathwaite's later publications see him afflicted by modern technological surveillance, and using his Sycorax Video-style poems as protective talismans to repel the

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[652] Lawrence Upton, 'Word Score Utterance Choreography', *Word Score Utterance Choreography in Verbal and Visual Poetry*, ed. by Cobbing and Upton (London: Writers Forum, 1998), n.p.

'**post-9/11 metropolitan obeah**' of structural racism and ageism.[653] His final books assume a stance of maronage that defends the narrator's psyche from further incursions, enabling healing and potentially resurrection. Much of Griffiths' work in Seaham also takes on an attitude of maronage, especially in the 1990s as he seeks to reconfigure local democracy via a campaign for election to the local council. After his electoral campaign failed, Griffiths carried his principles forward into organising the Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group, which used online technology to democratise the study of dialect. The result was truly tidalectic, embodying creolistic openness to global input, while consolidating a dialect community that emphasised inclusion rather than valorising a mythic point of origin.

The calibanisms of Brathwaite's *Ancestors* trilogy bring a visual aspect to his poetry. Using unorthodox spellings and placing punctuation or enjambments mid-word, he creates subversive puns, introducing counter-currents of 'alter/native' meaning to challenge assumptions inherent in standard English. Brathwaite's development of visual poetics accelerated rapidly during the 1980s, leading to his breakthrough into Sycorax Video-style: his radical use of word-processing software's variations in font and layout to convey nuances of tone, volume and emphasis, a technique already glimpsed in quotations during this thesis. However, the poetic leap originates in personal tragedies.

The first such blow was the early death of Kamau's first wife, Doris, in 1986. Doris was an early adopter of home computing, and kept electronic files of Kamau's poems. Kamau could not access the computer's hard drive, so these records were lost, and he was obliged to engage anew with the machine.[654] The Brathwaites had named their machine Sycorax, after the Caribbean 'witch' and mother of Caliban from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, channelling the 'new spirit of the *Iwa*. I name this *Iwa* Sycorax, the mother of the Cali | ban i am becom(ing).'[655] Brathwaite's calibanisms are hence an early stage of initiation to mysteries that Sycorax Video-style let him explore more deeply. Simultaneously, grief created a mental block against his accustomed writing methods. He describes the change:

> And as my ?luck or fate wd have it - since w/the dis/app-
> ear dis/ruption of the cosmos, I cd no longer write - that
> is w/the traditional pen & ink - or ty/ping - the writin <<

[653] Brathwaite, *Strange Fruit* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2016), p. 20.
[654] Noland, pp. 79–81.
[655] Brathwaite, *M.R.*, vol. 1, p. 426.

Haan, held in its ancient forum has become a fist of silen
(t) stone…
[...]

but once again Thanks to the Legba
Zea Mextitlan, I have - just before
these devastations - like Noah before
the Creation of the Ocean - started
to play piano on the computer board[656]

The calibanism 'forum' (for 'form') denotes that the writing hand comes to resemble the Forum in Rome: previously enabling open communication, but now ruined. In 1988, Brathwaite's bereavement was followed by destruction of his house and archive in Irish Town, Jamaica during Hurricane Gilbert. Two years later, he was traumatised by an attempt on his life, discussed in Chapter 4.4. Brathwaite calls this disastrous period his 'Time of Salt'.[657] As well as creating new, visual texts, he revised older writing into Sycorax form, sometimes embedding them within new collections, sometimes reissuing entire publications (like the *Ancestors* trilogy).

My analysis here concentrates on establishing Sycorax Video-style's kinships with medieval and Early Modern European traditions of expressive lettering in Europe. This is by no means the only influence on Brathwaite's technique, but is vital for this thesis, since such European traditions also underlie Bill Griffiths' visual poetics. Beyond this, I will not examine Sycorax Video-style in depth, as there is already abundant research into this development, notably Carrie Noland's 'Remediation and Diaspora: Kamau Brathwaite's Video Style' (2009), which close-reads how Brathwaite creates the Sycorax poem 'Bubbles' out of the 'Yellow Minnim' section of *Sun Poem* (including the passage whose calibanisms were discussed in the previous section). Noland concludes:

> In an aural/oral performance context, the community is expected to respond to and generate vocalizations; their improvisations – or, one might say, "creolizations" – of the given idiom derive from the resources of their vocal cords, an apparatus that is organically constrained. In contrast, when Brathwaite works at/with the computer, the process of creolization is accelerated out of a call-and-response context; there is no immediate audience providing vocal retort and no ethical necessity that inclusion, or even communication, occur. [...] Digital "improvisation," in other words, threatens to become detached from any connection to a specific community, a specific set of voices.[658]

[656] Brathwaite, *M.R.*, vol. 2, p. 409. 'Zea Mexican' was Kamau's nickname for Doris.
[657] For example, in Brathwaite, *Golokwati 2000*, p. 239.
[658] Noland, p. 95.

This concern – that Sycorax Video-style might corrode the poet's 'total expression' – particularises a more general preconception that the aesthetics of speech and of writing will inevitably conflict. Edouard Glissant portrays the dichotomy: 'The written requires nonmovement: the body does not move with the flow of what is said. […] The oral, on the other hand, is inseparable from the movement of the body. […] To move from the oral to the written is to immobilize the body, to take control (to possess it).'[659] Brathwaite overcomes this division by making his Sycorax texts embody performances before communities and audiences. His work always featured, as Wilson Harris observes of Brathwaite's earlier poems, 'an **oral** and **visual** coincidence […] which invokes a speaking oracular voice as well as an imagistic intelligence. Because of this gateway between voice and image his icon **breathes** and the oracle addresses us'.[660] Sycorax Video-style's innovation is to make the gateway visible on the page, so that the orality of Brathwaite's words becomes the visual icon. Furthermore, technology always played a major role in bringing Brathwaite's orality to textual realisation. His 1992 Northern Arts residency in North East England, mentioned in Chapter 2.3, occurred in the Time of Salt's aftermath. Interviewed during this visit by Graeme Rigby, editor of *The Northern Echo*'s arts supplement (which published 'Scapeghosts'), Brathwaite described how his new techniques grew from earlier practice:

> When I started off, everything I did I read aloud into the tape recorder. I also wanted it to look interesting. Now, with the computer, I have really gone into that, into what I call my Video Style. I think that oral traditions do have a very strong visual aspect. In the African tradition, they use sculpture. Really, what I'm trying to do is create word-sculptures on the page, but word-song for the ear.[661]

Brathwaite here identifies technological mediation of the word as an old phenomenon historically, rooted in pre-colonial Africa, but also an old practice for him personally. His methodology presages questions about audiotape later articulated by N. Katherine Hayles: 'what happens to literature when the voice – not any voice, but one's own voice – comes from the machine? Can the tape recorder be understood as a surrogate body? Is the interior

[659] Glissant, 'The Situation of the Spoken', *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 122.
[660] Wilson Harris, *History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas*, p. 27. Harris' bolding.
[661] Brathwaite, 'Improvisations and Dreams', *The Page* (June 1992), p. 2.

monologue a recording played on the body as tape recorder?'[662] Listening to playback of his own lines, Brathwaite served as audience for the tape-recorder's 'surrogate body' as it spoke in his own voice; one could even say that his interior monologue became a fresh recording of the surrogate body's speech. Thus, total response in his poetry had always been mediated through technology.

The call-and-response patterns that Noland mentions, used for example in calypso, are generally premeditated; audiences may respond spontaneously, but the poet or singer nurtures and cues this. In other words, even when an audience is absent, its projected presence, the anticipation of its response, influences composition. Many of Brathwaite's Sycorax writings, especially the tidalectic lectures, originate as transcripts of performances before audiences, whose questions and responses may appear in the text. The audience response becomes primary to the finished book, as Brathwaite selects Sycorax strategies based on recordings or recollections of how the talk functioned in performance. Finally, Brathwaite's Sycorax decisions often do engage readers bodily in the text, and this engagement itself has aspects of performance.

To illustrate the last point, it will be instructive to compare Brathwaite's textual rendition of an anecdote with footage of him performing it. Thankfully, Brathwaite's anecdote about his revelation of tidalectics at Runaway Bay in the 1960s, as examined on video in Chapter 3.1, is repeated in *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*. The renditions are not identical, crediting different events with inspiring Brathwaite's tidalectics: earlier it is the community's repertoire of songs and stories, but later, their housekeeping rituals:

> *One day. . . one day on the north coast of Jamaica, we staying in a house on a cliff overlooking the ocean and this is a sandy situation. . .*
>
> ***The yard where we staying... it's a humble - is not a Jamaica North Coast bikini situatio (n) that you would go to tomorrow or at Thank sgiving. This is not the North Coast of the great hotels, James Bond, 'Goldeneye' and tourism.***
>
> ***This is a ole yard, okay? And this old woman is sweeping, sweeping the sand of her yard away***

[662] N. Katherine Hayles, 'Voices Out of Bodies, Bodies Out of Voices: Audiotape and the Production of Subjectivity', *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, ed. by Adalaide Morris (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 74–96: p. 75.

> ***from her house. Traditional early morning old woman of Caribbean history. She's going on like this every morning, sweeping this sand - of all things! - away from… sand from sand, seen?...And I say Now what's she doing?***[663]

The transition to Runaway Bay is accompanied by a change in margin and font. Previously formed from lines stretching across the page in courier font (connoting mechanical typewriter production), the text shifts to a narrow band on the right of the page, becoming bold and cursive. On the video footage of his anecdote, Brathwaite introduces Runaway Bay as 'a place where clearly the slaves used to move, to attempt to dream, to make that connection inside back [back-and-forth hand motion] to an ancestral place.'[664] There is no guarantee that Brathwaite used the same movements when interviewed by Mackey as he did at the earlier, Jamaican performance, but the interview's Sycorax transcript performs equivalent gestures. To read, a body typically remains still while its eyes do the work: this tension between the body's stillness and the eyes' mobility becomes experienced intensely. As Brathwaite's margins narrow, the eyes saccade more rapidly across the page, imitating the waves tidalectically bringing culture from Africa to the Caribbean, and connecting readers' bodies with Brathwaite's own total expression in performance. There is even an analogy to the action of sweeping, where the woman's body moves in a disciplined, grounded way to propel rapid movements of the broom. Acting thus as a broom, the reading eyes join with Brathwaite's own sweeping away of colonialist imagery – the beaches of Hollywood and the tourism industry – to attain the beach he wants to talk about: refuge of African culture, and destination of escapees from slavery. The cursive script mimics oceanic fluidity. Changing from an explicitly mechanical font to one based on handwriting, Brathwaite conveys a setting where embodied engagement is paramount.

In the video, when describing the yard – 'a compound situation, which is the same as in Africa' – Brathwaite uses a pointed finger to trace part of a horizontal circle in front of him, then circulates his hands with cupped palms upward.[665] In both versions of the anecdote, he trails off mid-sentence while seeking the right description. This may be deliberately performative, indicating that the living arrangement does not fit into

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[663] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, pp. 29–30. Brathwaite's ellipses.
[664] *Kamau Brathwaite* [video], 40:40.
[665] *Kamau Brathwaite* [video], 41:38.

preordained categories. In *ConVERSations*, the phrasing he eventually uses is '***This is a ole yard, okay? And this old woman*** [...]'. Thinking back to Brathwaite's play with the 'O' of 'O- | val' in 'Rites', one notes that the line here repeatedly assonates on 'o'. Brathwaite's circular gestures, and the compound's roundness, are presented visually within the line, and haptically (if the text is read aloud) as the reader's mouth draws into the same shape. Contrary to Noland's fears, then, Sycorax Video-style elides distance between author and reader, bringing total expression into the visual field.

An example from a different publication clarifies how painstakingly Brathwaite considers his Sycorax choices. *Middle Passages* (1992) selecting poetry from throughout Brathwaite's career, was issued by North Eastern publisher Bloodaxe Books to coincide with his residency in the region. As with Brathwaite's *Ancestors* trilogy, the volume's older poems are reworked into Sycorax Video-style. Graeme Rigby recounts the collection's genesis:

> Brathwaite turned up at the beginning of the visit with the manuscript for his new book. From a standing start, Bloodaxe managed to get it typeset, designed, proofed and printed within two weeks. Anyone who has ever worked on a book will recognise the achievement and the midnight oil involved in something like that.[666]

Two proofs of the book, corrected by Brathwaite and now in the Bloodaxe Books Archive at Newcastle University, confirm this. The first was printed 27 May 1992, the second 3 June 1992; timestamps on the printouts confirm that work continued late into the night, with printing of the second set commencing at 11:04pm.[667]

Middle Passages contains 'Colombe', a poem addressing Christopher Columbus' explorations of the Caribbean. The subject was topical, since 1992 was the 500th anniversary of Columbus reaching the Americas. The event was celebrated internationally, with several films released about his exploits. Brathwaite used publication opportunities in the U.K. to advance a critical view of Columbus, and *Middle Passages* re-presents the poem 'Columbus' from his debut collection *Rights of Passage*.[668] The new title is French and translates the colonialist's Ligurian surname 'Colombo'; all three versions of the name mean 'dove'. This

[666] Graeme Rigby, 'On the Up', *The Northern Echo*, section The Page, 25 June 1992, 2.
[667] Brathwaite, *Middle Passages* (proofs), Newcastle University Library, Bloodaxe Books Archive, BXB/1/1/BRK/1/1 and BXB/1/1/BRK/1/2.
[668] Brathwaite, *Middle Passages* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1992), pp. 15–18; Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, pp. 52–53.

pacifist symbolism becomes darkly ironic, considering what the poem's Indigenous Caribbean narrator calls 'the slaughter that his soldiers | furthered here'.[669] The title also alludes to the descending dove of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and suggests missionary evangelism's role in colonial atrocities.

The two versions are worded identically; differences in *Middle Passages* are reduced punctuation, refusal to capitalise many sentences' first letters, a shift from left-hand to central justification, and separating the previously contiguous poem into three sections – each opening with 'C | olumbus', the 'C' each time on its own line in a much larger font. The proofs reveal Brathwaite's and Bloodaxe's efforts to achieve the desired effect. In the first proof, the font for each large 'C' is relatively conventional, and Brathwaite annotates each one with 'more deco'. Evidently, Bloodaxe lacked a sufficiently 'deco' font in its arsenal. The later proof is accompanied by a sheet of paper from which three small squares are neatly scalpelled out; within the document, these squares, each bearing a 'C' in line with Brathwaite's wishes, are stuck into place at the head of each section of 'Colombe'. It appears the publisher sourced font from elsewhere to meet Brathwaite's vision.

What is gained by this labour? The 'C' consists of three notional strokes, a crescent shape like a subsidiary 'c', an upper stroke that resembles an 'r', and a vertical line like an 'I':

Fig. 1 from 'Colombe', *Middle Passages*, p. 17.

Together, they suggest the first three letters of Columbus' forename in Spanish, Cristóbal, cementing identification between grapheme and colonialist. The vertical stroke is a legacy of earlier, Gothic fonts, emphasising Columbus' position at the hinge of the medieval and modern periods. The 'C' also appears more solid than in conventional fonts, its left-hand side enclosed by the three strokes, and its two prongs protruding pincer-like from this semicircle's corners. The letter becomes an image of the creatures Columbus meets as he makes landfall at the poem's end:

[669] Brathwaite, *Middle Passages*, p. 17.

I watched him pause

Then he was splashing silence
Crabs snapped their claws
and scattered as he walked towards our shore[670]

The crustaceans, claws jutting from shells, resemble Brathwaite's 'C's, as does each of their pincers. Strengthening the link is the text's centralisation on the page (mimicking the symmetry of many crabs' bodies), and capitalisation (unusual in this poem) of 'C' in 'Crabs'.

The visuality does not imply that Columbus is allied with the crabs, which are alarmed by him. Indeed, the creatures represent the Caribbean's Indigenous peoples, who were devastated by colonialism that Columbus heralded, and on whose behalf the poem speaks. Rather, the juxtaposition creates ironic contrast between the crustaceans' natural weaponry, and the conquistadors' 'Pike | point & musket butt'.[671] The crabs belong to an Indigenous ecology that Columbus puts in jeopardy.

In that light, one could think of a font as a textual ecology that can be invaded or enriched by other fonts, the 'C' of 'Columbus' being an invader. Relevant here is how fifteenth-century printers would guide their readers with paraphs, marks emphasising beginnings of new paragraphs. In modern contexts, such as word-processing software, these survive as the pilcrow sign: ¶. The pilcrow, however, evolved from the earlier capitulum: ⸿. Brathwaite's 'C' is feasibly a variant capitulum, and thus brings Columbus' writings into the poem. Back in Europe from his first transatlantic voyage, Columbus distributed a pamphlet of a letter he had sent to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, announcing his encounter with the Americas. The document's first character is a capitulum.[672] This paraph launches an era of genocide and colonialism in the Caribbean, and a new phase in world history. Columbus himself, textually incarnated as his initial in *Middle Passages*, re-enacts his disastrous arrival in the 'New World' at each stanza's outset.[673] Brathwaite definitely had

[670] Brathwaite, *Middle Passages*, p. 18.
[671] Brathwaite, *Middle Passages*, p.17.
[672] Christopher Columbus, letter to Ferdinand and Isabella (1493), New York, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC01427 <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/content-images/01427.jpg> [accessed 16 March 2022].
[673] For more jovial use of capitula to mock Columbus, see Eric Thacker and Anthony Earnshaw's surrealist novel *Musrum* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), p. 11. An excerpt (the authors' ellipsis):

Columbus' letters in mind around this time; another outcome of his Northern Arts residency was the *Northern Echo*'s publication of his Sycorax poem 'I Cristóbal Colón', a dramatic monologue which a frame narrative presents as 'a hitherto unknown letter of Columbus'.[674] The explorer ruminates upon the apocalyptic legacy implied by Brathwaite's capitulum:

> **So in the hazard Caribbean we have a people with - out root without their parent & apparent seed - all the result of this dis/traction - loop in space when I came down upon this Other side upon this Other mountain: dis/traction, as I say/destruction -**[675]

This close reading of one grapheme in Brathwaite's 'Columbus' demonstrates that his visual poetics are not merely decorative, but entail careful decisions and substantial effort to accentuate his poetry's meaning. It also shows, once more, a microcosm of textual detail reflecting the macrocosm of historical conditions. Brathwaite's proofs disclose his meticulousness in using textuality to clarify his imagery. Sycorax Video-style has an impact complementary to that of Brathwaite's performative hand gestures and modulations of voice in live performance.

Reading English dialect poetry in light of these developments is an exciting prospect, though searches for analogous approaches within Griffiths' work may encounter the obstacle that his shift to North Eastern dialect poetry coincided with increasingly normative use of type. A solution lies in Brathwaite's thoughts about global ancestors of his Video-style:

> But the very concept of writing has alter, and it's as if I'm gone back to the Middle Ages, in a way, and I'm trying to cre ate those things that they did - what-do-you-call-them? Scro-lls? that kind of tone. And the computer gives me that oppor-tunity. To release the pen from the fist of my broeken hand and begin what I call my 'video-style', in which I tr

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◐ Many European rulers commissioned Columbus to discover new continents so as to enhance their prestige; but he was a monomaniac …He discovered America fifty-seven times in different versions.
◐ It pleased him, in his old age, to converse with other mariners. A wide range of subjects included the sites of sea battles, undiscovered continents, and the repair of ancient islands.
◐ Crabmeat; wishwater; hard sunshine; milkwet silvershard; Christobus smiling remotely.

[674] Brathwaite, 'I Cristóbal Colón', *Northern Echo,* 17 February 1993, section The Page, 6–7: 6.
[675] Brathwaite, 'I Cristóbal Colón', 7.

(y) make the words themselves live off - away from - the 'pa ge', so you can see - *is this true? Does this make sense - or does it simply try to mean what i mean?* - like *see their sound* [...]
I continue to think of the MiddleAges - what was 'happening' in Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Islamic wo rld of the **ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS** when the written word could still *hear itself speak*, as it were[676]

In medieval Europe's illuminated manuscripts, text can '*hear itself speak*' because it maintains a sense of (metaphorical) voice, insofar as 'No two scribes can write identical copies, even in the most organised of manuscript 'publishing' campaigns.'[677] This meant that a book would always bear the physical trace of its inscriber. Reading aloud to a group – text as occasion for performance – was also much more common than in modern times, given the rarity of both books and literacy, so books were often described as speaking. On one occasion, King Alfred of Wessex distributed copies of his English translation of St. Gregory the Great's *Cura Pastoralis*:

> In a poem the book 'speaks' and tells how Alfred 'sent me to his scribes north and south' ('me his writerum sende suð und norð') to be copied for the bishops of the kingdom [...] Alfred tells that 'on each copy there is an *æstel*' worth several pounds ('on ælcre bið an æstel'). What an *æstel* was is not known for sure: it could be a clasp on the binding, but etymology suggests it was a pointer, with which somebody could follow the words and keep his place, say, when reading aloud.[678]

This suggests textual engagement akin to that which Sycorax Video-style induces in readers. The book's voices enmesh the reader in total expression, and bodily interaction is required to follow the writing to and fro on the page. Another sense in which medieval texts spoke is that the art of illumination let textual words, or even individual letters, accentuate meaning more radically than even Brathwaite's Sycorax computer. The following describes an 'M' in the *Lindisfarne Gospels*:

> The compartments of the 'M' are further adorned by fine interlaced strands terminating in bird heads at the foot and in beast heads with gracefully arching attenuated necks, perhaps intended to resemble horses. The fine colour balance of these infills, with their yellow details and bi-partite green and mauve grounds serve once again to link this complex register of

[676] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, p. 167.
[677] Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels*, p. 152.
[678] Daniel Wakelin, *Designing English: Early Literature on the Page* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2018), p. 16.

> ornament with the simpler lines which follow, this theme of decorative diminuendo being picked up by the 'O' in line 2 with its bird heads and bi-coloured infill.[679]

The 'M' is the final letter of 'nouum' ('new'), the first word of St. Jerome's 'Novum Opus', his epistle to the Pope announcing his Latin translation of the Bible.[680] The adjective 'nouum' describes Jerome's translation. Partially infilled with green and erupting with animal life, the 'M' implies fertility that matches the word's meaning, and suggests the cultural and spiritual productivity that would arise from Jerome's project. There are similarities to Brathwaite's 'C' in 'Colombe', whose form relates to its poem's content. Covertly representing Columbus, Brathwaite's 'C' could be what manuscript specialists call an 'inhabited initial' – 'An enlarged letter at the beginning of a chapter, paragraph or important section of a text that contains human or animal figures' – or even a 'historiated initial', 'A letter containing an identifiable scene or figures' suggestive of a narrative.[681]

Brathwaite's Sycorax Video-style therefore shares major characteristics with the tradition of manuscript scribes and early printers in Europe: the text becomes a surrogate body speaking to the reader in total expression. This is not to say that text and speech equate to each other in their affects; rather, textuality brings its own histories into play, ingrained into its style and layout just as accent, pronunciation and gesture inhere within live performance. Lettering opens an alternative, visual dimension of meanings that are no less informed by heritage than are the vocabulary and syntax of nation language speech.

[679] Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels*, p. 310.
[680] Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels*, p. 308.
[681] Brown, *Understanding Illuminated Manuscripts*, p. 72, p. 68.

4.2. 'FLAREZ IN THE NITE-SCAPE': Manuscript Lettering in Bill Griffiths' Visual Poetics

Bill Griffiths shares Kamau Brathwaite's conviction that text and performance are one: 'The transformation of any text, be it from one language to another, from symbol to gesture or word to song is an essential step in a process that can be called performance. Every text implies performance, that is an enactment to increase the experience of the human.'[682] The quotation is from a statement accompanying the republication (in a Writers Forum anthology) of his early concrete poetry suite, *Forming Four Dock Poems* (1974). To examine Griffiths' visual poetics, I turn to this pre-Seaham phase, since from 1990 onwards (coinciding with a growing interest in North East dialect) he moves away from visual experimentation, instead pursuing total expression through his poetry's relationship to the surrounding community, as documented in Chapter 3.2. The early poetry, though, contains numerous works whose visuality relates to deep histories, including textual traditions that also influence Brathwaite's Sycorax Video-style. Examining these poems by Griffiths therefore highlights how other poets could take English poetry into new territory where dialect meets textual innovation, akin to Brathwaite's Video-style. This is a dynamic envisioned by Robert Sheppard, who notes Sycorax Video-style exemplifying how 'Whatever the future, there will remain the potential for a close formal tie-in between writers and their media'; Sheppard finds such futures presaged by Griffiths' 'poetic form as it manifests through the medium of poetry and in the medium of the small press *pamphlet*'.[683]

Forming Four Dock Poems presages how Brathwaite manipulates letters as physical material, modulating their function pictorially or with reference to sound. Two differences are crucial. Firstly, Brathwaite uses word-processing software, but Griffiths' mimeographed pamphlet is made by arranging letters from a facsimile medieval manuscript. Secondly, while Brathwaite's Sycorax lettering forms words and sentences, Griffiths uses letters for their shapes and sounds – no words emerge, other than single-letter forms like 'o' and 'i'. Griffiths' text seems created as a score for sound poetry improvisations with his Writers Forum comrades, as described in Chapter 3.2.

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[682] Griffiths, untitled statement, *Word Score Utterance Choreography in Verbal and Visual Poetry*, n.p.
[683] Sheppard, *The Meaning of Form in Contemporary Innovative Poetry*, p. 175. Sheppard's italics.

In 1974, Griffiths was just embarking on his medievalist career. He credits Welsh concrete poet Peter Finch for engaging him with the field: 'About 1974 I had been introduced to Old Welsh by Peter Finch; the side-step to the great literature of Old English was unavoidable.'[684] Elsewhere, Griffiths specifies the text that Finch shared: 'My first introduction to Welsh literature was an 1870s translation of *The Gododdin* in which perhaps no single line was properly rendered.'[685] Soon after reading this, Griffiths published his own translation of *Y Gododdin*. *Forming Four Dock Poems* also derives from the Welsh text. The *Book of Aneirin*, the thirteenth-century manuscript through which *Y Gododdin* survives, contains variants of the poem in two different though similar hands. Griffiths' pamphlet translating the poem has a cover whose lettering matches that of *Forming Four Dock Poems*.[686] In both pamphlets, Griffiths uses lettering from the *Book of Aneirin*, primarily (in my judgement) by the calligrapher known as Scribe B.[687]

As to what Griffiths makes the letters say or depict, analysing a couple of the poems will prove useful. Within Cobbing's circle, the idea of a 'definitive' performance of any text was irrelevant. Interviewed in 1989 for the B.B.C. Radio programme *Kaleidoscope*, Cobbing noted: 'you've got a score in front of you, and you let it, as it were, perforate into you and come out the other side and, yeah, […] you don't know what it's going to sound like until you've done it. And the second day you do it, it's different.'[688] Readings of the text should therefore remain open to multiple, sometimes contradictory interpretations.

Amy Cutler describes *Forming Four Dock Poems* as 'asemic writing: constructed from several Roman looking glyphs are four different organisations of illegible text in the blankness of the page, possible to interpret as an arrangement of jetties or docks.'[689] Over his career, Griffiths becomes increasingly preoccupied with boats and shipping. He inhabited a houseboat during the 1980s, and wrote about the pleasures of navigating the Thames, notably in *The Book of the Boat* (1988), a visually stunning publication reproduced from

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[684] Marsh, 29.
[685] Griffiths, untitled statement, *Word Score Utterance Choreography*, n.p.
[686] Aneirin (attrib.), *The Gododdin*, trans. by Bill Griffiths (London: Writers Forum and Pirate Press, 1974), front cover.
[687] Aneirin (attrib.), *Facsimile + Text of the Book of Aneirin*, ed. by J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Pwllheli: J. Gwenogvryn Evans, 1908), pp. 23–24 and pp. 30–38 of the facsimile.
[688] *Kaleidoscope Feature: 'Bob Cobbing, the Sound Poet'*, 1989, London, British Library, 29:21. My transcription.
[689] Cutler, p. 144.

Griffiths' holograph.[690] This work is hence ancestral for Griffiths' later research into the history, culture and language of Seaham's fishing community, leading to poems like *Mid North Sea High* (1992) and 'Mackerel' (2001), plus local history publications on the topic, culminating in 2008's posthumously published compendium, *Fishing and Folk*.[691] When Griffiths mentions docks, it is thus natural to assume a maritime context. Consider this piece:

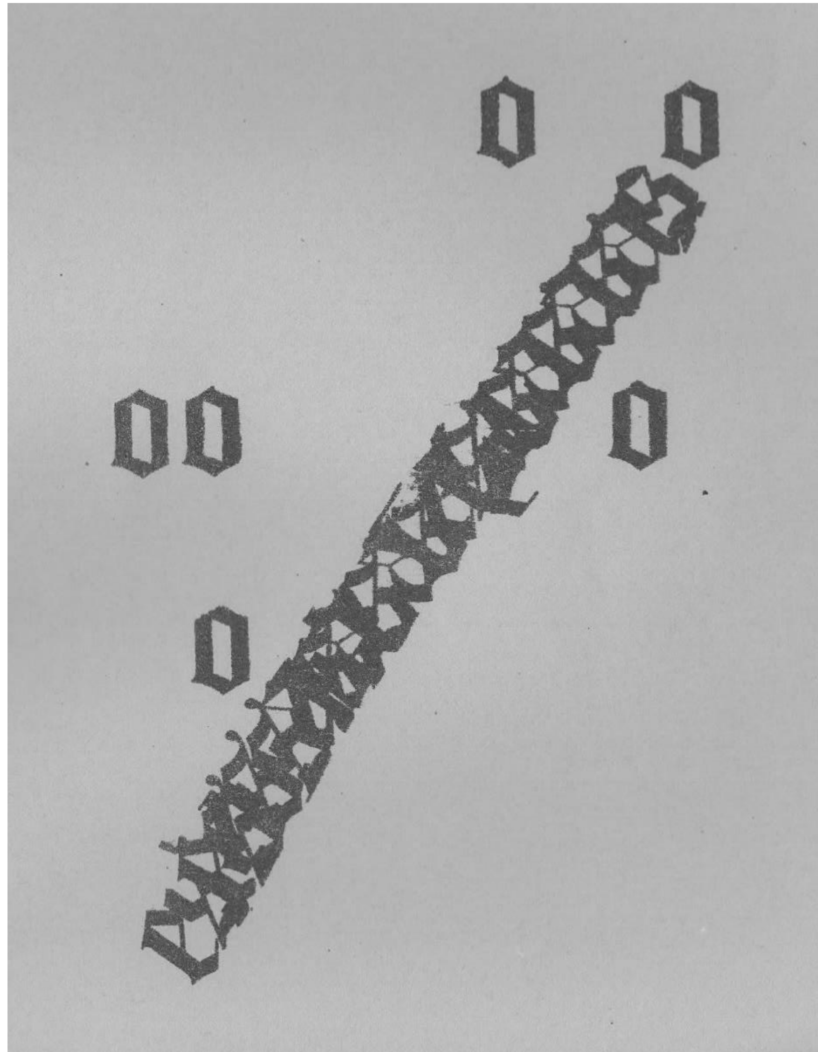

Fig. 2 from *Forming Four Dock Poems*, n.p.

The poem plausibly represents either an aerial view of a jetty surrounded by boats or ships, or a dockside crane's raised arm surrounded by birds. If the latter, use of 'o' to represent each bird would be puzzling when, say, a 'w', better matches the shape of a bird's wings.

[690] Griffiths, *The Book of the Boat* (London: Writers Forum, 1988).

[691] Griffiths, *Mid North Sea High* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1992); Griffiths, 'Mackerel', *The Lion Man & Others*, pp. 59–77.

However, a letter is not simply a shape, but a sound. Each 'o' could suggest a bird's call, the performer deciding whether to enunciate it as the call of, say, a pigeon, gull, or starling. If each 'o' is a vessel by a jetty, the performer must choose the scene's scale: cargo ships might merit a deep, orotund 'O'; working boats like lightermen's barges could utter an 'o' of effort or exhaustion; pleasure barques might exclaim joyously. The central structure is formed from letters that overlap until their forms become indistinguishable; one could perform this as a sequence of overlapping phonemes that never coalesce into syllables. This could signify a working, commercial dock's cacophony: 'horses' hoofs on the stones, the puffing of many steam engines, the blows of heavy hammers, the grind of pulleys, the groaning capstans'.[692]

The poem, then, is only asemic if one seeks meaning in words and sentences. Shapes of individual letters, sounds they suggest, and obfuscations of their identity, all offer significance. In such readings, we should remember that the word 'dock' is polysemous, with a flotilla of meanings beyond port architecture. Griffiths' friend Allen Fisher writes of his own poem-sequence, *Docking* (1978):

> The title brings in a weed with large leaves and a long root, summary of a larger writing, a place of arrival and departure, a way of cutting short, the French for bundle, a way of joining together in space, the enclosure in court for the accused, the words doctor, doctrine, documentation, dokesis, docimasy &c.[693]

Fisher introduces sexual connotations too: 'my body moving out with your sighs the docking'.[694] These meanings relate to Griffiths' concrete poetry as a whole, particularly the connotations of documentation, dokesis (seeming) and docimasy (close examination). The legal pun is relevant to Griffiths' preoccupation with the criminal justice system, while the botanical sense feels pertinent in this poem:

[692] Patricia Pye, *Sound and Modernity in the Literature of London*, 1880–1918 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. xvi.
[693] Allen Fisher, *Prosyncel: A Sketch Map of Heat* (Penfield: Strange Faeces Press, 1975), p. 33.
[694] Allen Fisher, *Docking* (Bishop's Stortford: Great Works Editions, 1978), n.p., section 18.

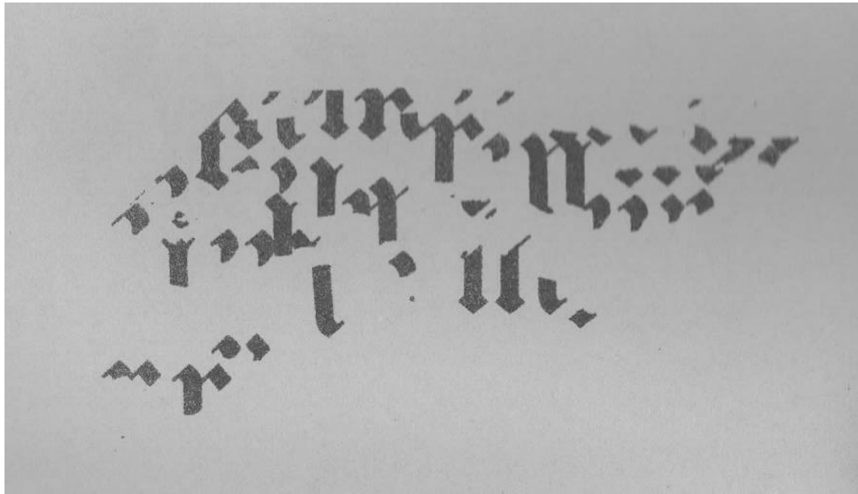

Fig. 3 from *Forming Four Dock Poems*, n.p.

Straight lines and mechanised structures of maritime docks are absent. The poem's organic sprawl, and its position at the bottom of its page, as though spilling across ground, suggest a dock plant. However, the lettering mostly consists of a repeated 'r'; there is also a piece of 'f' at the top left, and fragmentary marks resembling punctuation, such as speech marks around the 'r' at bottom left, and a row of semicolons at the right (perhaps continuing the preceding 'r' sounds). The 'r's imply effort, anger, or mechanical grinding. Such sounds could represent a dock plant's determined growth, massively amplified, bringing an audience into the total expression of the plant, proxied via human performers. Or again, it could be the sounds of a working, commercial dock, here seen drifting through the air like the smoke from a funnel. The plant and the workplace could even become indistinguishable through focus on their mutual labour.

These poems' manuscript lettering conveys two salient impressions. The first is of medievalism, a peculiar affect to seek if the poems depict modern dock scenes. London's docks, however, were closing in the 1970s, leaving many locals unemployed: 'An industry that had supported 25,000 London dock workers in 1960 was reduced to just 4,100 by 1981 […] One job lost in the docks left another four vulnerable in related industries.'[695] *Y Gododdin*'s elegiac sensibility, honouring vigorous men left as carrion on the battlefield, transfers to the depiction of docks via the shared lettering. The implication is that the docks' working culture may soon feel as remote from contemporary experience as the kingdom of

[695] Janet Foster, *Docklands: Cultures in Conflict, Worlds in Collision* (London and Philadelphia: U.C.L. Press, 1999), p. 35.

Gododdin. There is also hope: if *Y Gododdin* resurfaces into modernity via 'Briggflatts' or Griffiths' concrete poems, the same may prove true of the docks' cultural legacies. Rather than being subsumed into the Hegelian synthesis of the docks' financial repurposing (Canary Wharf's towers epitomising a '**Missilic European city skyline**'), the area's cultural legacies could enter tidalectic circulation, ready to be taken up again when needed.[696]

The lettering's other affect derives from traces of production by a living body. Not only were the original graphemes written in the B Scribe's human hand (in contrast to Brathwaite's mediating software), but there is the tactility with which Griffiths arranges the glyphs on the page. The bodily process of writing is foregrounded, just as the physical voicing of nation language manifests in the rhythms and phonetic spellings examined during Chapter 3. The script's historic dimension adds to this impression, referencing marginalised peoples of the North East's past, and *Y Gododdin*'s record of their tribulations.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, Griffiths continues publishing haptically generated, handwritten texts, emulating medieval scribes. As noted, *The Book of the Boat* is one example, as is the earlier *A Preliminary Account of Nordrheim-Westfalen etc.* (1978), which intermingles holograph poems with found images and found text from printed sources.[697] Handwritten lettering was not unusual among Writers Forum poets; compare Clive Fencott's *Non Hysteron Proteron* (1984), or Michael J. Weller's *Beowulf Cartoon* (2004).[698] Griffiths holograph works stand out, though, for combining Fencott's experimental modernity with Weller's historical depth. A publication embodying this practice, with lettering not merely written but drawn, is the first edition of Griffiths' sequence *Morning-Lands*, which opens thus:

[696] Brathwaite, *M.R.*, vol. 1, p. 171.
[697] Griffiths, *A Preliminary Account of Nordrheim-Westfalen etc.* (Todmorden: Arc Publications, 1978).
[698] Clive Fencott, *Non Hysteron Proteron* (Toronto: Underwhich Editions, 1984); Michael J. Weller, *Beowulf Cartoon* (Sutton and Whitstable: Writers Forum and visual associations, 2004).

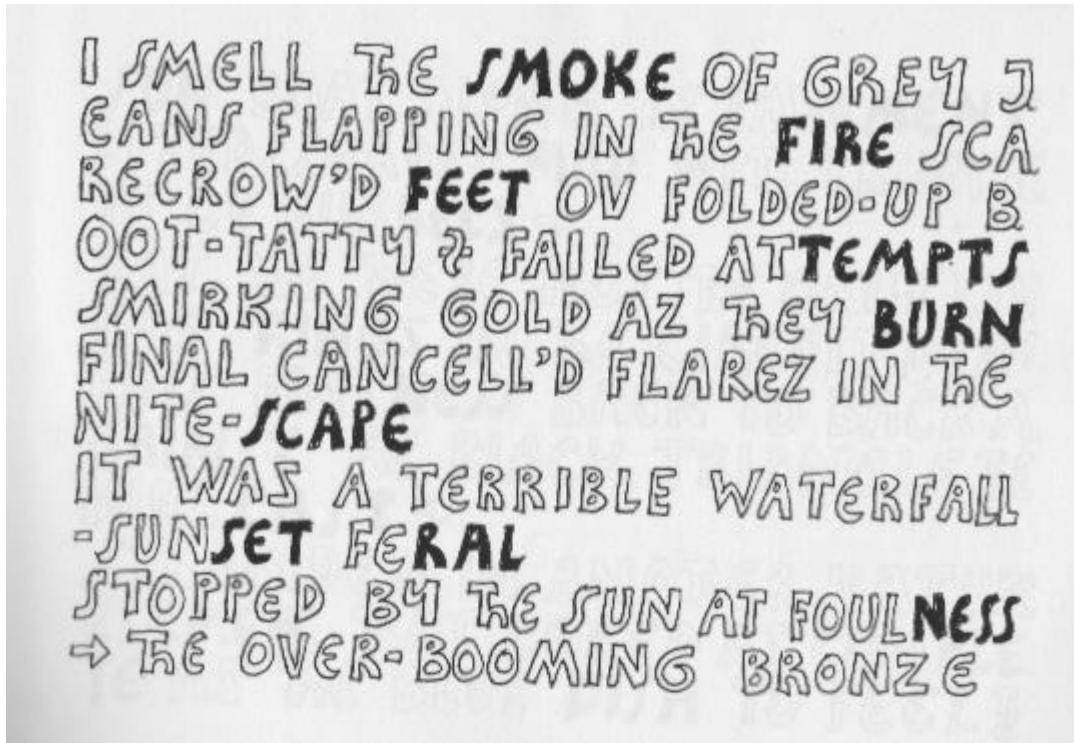
I SMELL THE SMOKE OF GREY J
EANS FLAPPING IN THE FIRE SCA
RECROW'D FEET OV FOLDED-UP B
OOT-TATTY & FAILED ATTEMPTS
SMIRKING GOLD AZ THEY BURN
FINAL CANCELL'D FLAREZ IN THE
NITE-SCAPE
IT WAS A TERRIBLE WATERFALL
-SUNSET FERAL
STOPPED BY THE SUN AT FOULNESS
→ THE OVER-BOOMING BRONZE

Fig. 4 from *Morning-Lands*, n.p.

The outlines and capitalisation give Griffiths' lettering solidity suggestive of an inscription in stone or wood, yet his characters retain the lightness and care with which they were drawn. John Muckle summarises the competing affects: the book 'follows the Anglo-Saxon practice of a hand-lettered text (executed the way you used to doodle the names of favourite rock groups on your school exercise books)'.[699] Of the visual form, Griffiths notes: 'The lines of varying length of Old English verse were written continuously; + I adopt this system, blocking in the last syllable of each 'line' as a halt.'[700] The blocking-in of syllables gives them emphasis that usually attaches to the end of a verse line, and could even be read as equivalent to the rise in pitch and stress at line endings in calypso songs, described in Chapter 2.2. Griffiths follows the medieval practice of breaking a line in mid-word at a page's right-hand margin, a tactic also common in Brathwaite's Sycorax texts, including the quotations from *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* in this chapter's first section.

Morning-Lands is not exactly dialect, but the text includes much colloquial English. Elision of the second 'e' in 'SCARECROW'D' and 'CANCELL'D', the spelling of 'OV', 'FLAREZ', 'AZ' and 'NITE', folding of 'th' into a single character (like the Old English letters

[699] John Muckle, 'Review: Bill Griffiths: Morning Lands', *City Limits*, no. 406, July 13 – July 20, 1989: 63.
[700] Griffiths, *Morning-Lands*, n.p.

eth, Ð, and thorn, 'þ'), and the reduction of 'and' to an inconspicuous '+', all bring written English closer to spoken patterns. There is appropriacy to this match between informal orality, and the text's casual character with its resemblance (as Muckle notes) to classroom doodles. In contrast to this accessibility, the kenning 'waterfall-sunset' communicates both deep English history, and a mentality alien to modern conceptions of the world. This combination of demotic, ancient, and experimental, also found in Brathwaite's poetry, makes Griffiths' lettering apt for *Morning-Lands*, and carries over into the means of publication, with reprographics enabling wider distribution of hand-drawn manuscripts.

Griffiths composed the book while taking refuge in Essex after his London houseboat burned down; he had been, in a sense, 'unhouselled', as Brathwaite describes nation language's originators: 'they had to rely on their very breath rather than on paraphernalia like books and museums and machines. They had to depend on immanence, the power within themselves, rather than the technology outside themselves.'[701] Griffiths' response diverges from theirs in his embrace of technology. Muckle argues that *Morning-Lands* was 'Griffiths' way of surviving; this ongoing redeployment of every scrap of wonderfully recondite erudition he can muster is all he has, and therefore his saving grace as a poet.'[702] Griffiths relied on books and machines, but by retaining traces of his physical engagement with the page, the publication nevertheless retains the immanence of his embodied presence, a sort of voice.

Palaeographer Elaine Treharne describes how scribes' bodily engagement lets their individual work be recognised by manuscript scholars: 'no single **a** could easily represent the total performance of a scribe's **a**'s. Individual letters change depending on contiguous graphs, but there will nearly always be a proportionality of space and measure throughout the hand's stint that yields to expert recognition.'[703] Such records of embodied presence, the trace of individuals' performances with the pen, would make hand-written or hand-drawn lettering an excellent technique for expanding on Brathwaite's Sycorax techniques while creating new poetry.

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[701] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 19.
[702] Muckle, 'Conan in Trouble', *P.N. Review*, no. 218, 2014, 69–70: 70.
[703] Elaine Treharne, *Perceptions of Medieval Manuscripts: The Phenomenal Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 51. Treharne's bolding.

These scribal comparisons raise the possibility of the poet operating as a scribe, and making transcription (the re-presentation of words from sources other than one's own invention) into poetic praxis. This would build upon an Early Medieval phenomenon: 'The fact that so many scribal invocations appear, with and without names, is some evidence that the duplication of books was not a mere mechanical function, like building a wall, but was a human and individual activity.'[704] In Chapter 2.3, Brathwaite borrowed the scribal invocation of the monk Aldred to commemorate his 1999 revision of 'Scapeghost(s)'. The following two sections explore how both Brathwaite and Griffiths use scribal creativity in politically engaged work, deploying documentary poetics to resist injustice.

[704] Christopher de Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts* (London, New York, Sydney, and Toronto: B.C.A., 1994), p. 37.

4.3. 'dancehall business in the dark': Sampling and Dubbing of Nation Language in Kamau Brathwaite's *Trench Town Rock*

Owing to his difficulty in maintaining old habits of composition during his 'Time of Salt', Brathwaite increasingly used found material in this period's writing. A prominent engagement with such sources is his long poem *Trench Town Rock*.[705] A documentary investigation of violent crime in Kingston, Jamaica, this opus was precipitated in June 1990. By that point, Brathwaite had lived in Jamaica for nearly 22 years, teaching at the University of the West Indies. One night, he awoke to sounds of three murders being committed near his Kingston home. After witnessing the bloody aftermath, he began an enquiry into violence suffered by the city's people. The subject became even more traumatically personal when, that October, he was held at gunpoint during a burglary of his apartment. The poem combines Brathwaite's first-person accounts with newspaper articles and radio transcripts. *Trench Town Rock* uses such techniques to represent voices, music and noises that suggest Kingston's surrounding violence but also hint at redemption from it. Reggae and related genres are crucial to this sonic background; they also invoke musical techniques that are forerunners of Brathwaite's literary innovations here.

Brathwaite's youth predated reggae, but he nevertheless found this music congruent with his desire that Caribbean nations develop new aesthetics incorporating African roots. Curwen Best identifies poems like 'Wings of a Dove' and 'Negus', both from *The Arrivants*, as ancestral for the dub poetry that arose in response to reggae during the 1970s.[706] Brathwaite participated in that decade's cultural renewal, performing with reggae musicians at Kingston's Zinc Fence Theatre.[707] Nevertheless, *Trench Town Rock* develops in a different direction. Transcending formal resemblances to reggae lyrics, the poem's soundscape manifests visually as well as orally, finding textual equivalents for how reggae organises sonic materials. Also, contrasting Brathwaite's earlier enthusiasm, *Trench Town Rock*'s

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[705] The poem first appeared as Brathwaite, 'Trench Town Rock', *Hambone*, no. 10, 1992, 123–201; it was subsequently published in book form as Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock* (Denver: Lost Roads Publishers, 1994).

[706] Best, *Roots to Popular Culture: Barbadian Aesthetics: Kamau Brathwaite to Hardcore Styles* (London and Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2001), p. 188.

[707] Kwame Dawes, *Natural Mysticism*, p. 83.

attitude to this music and its related genres is more ambivalent. The epigraph is from Bob Marley's eponymous song:

This is Trench Town Rock
Don't watch that
Trench Town Rock
Big fish or sprat
Trench Town Rock
You reap what you sow
Trench Town Rock
And only Jah Jah know
Trench Town Rock
I never turn my back[708]

Marley's lyric conveys experiences of threat, but also his commitment to observe, document and comment: '*I never turn my back*'. However, Brathwaite's poem is not primarily set in Trench Town. He lived on the other side of Kingston, around the corner from Marley's former home on Hope Road. By invoking the song 'Trenchtown Rock', Brathwaite suggests that conditions identified by Marley in Trench Town have become totalised across the city.

The poem unfolds in six sections. The first, 'The Marley Manor Shoot/in', opens by showcasing Brathwaite's sound-world:

L ass night about 2:45 well well well before the little black bell of the walk of my electronic clock cd wake me –

aweakened by gunshatt

– the eyes trying to function open too stunned to work out there through the window & into the dark with its various glints & glows: mosquito, very distant cockcrow, sound system drum, the tumbrel of a passing en-

[708] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, front matter, citing Bob Marley and the Wailers, 'Trenchtown Rock,' *Live!* [L.P.] (Kingston: Island and Tuff Gong, 1975), track 1.

gine somewhere some/where in that dark.[709]

As with the passage from *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* in Chapter 4.1, Sycorax font mimetically enmeshes readers in the action, here sharing Brathwaite's perplexity, 'eyes trying to function' as he parses Kingston's soundscape. Alternative spellings depict pronunciation ('Lass night', 'gunshatt'), or furnish calibanisms (the 'aweakened' Brathwaite wakes debilitated by fear and confusion). Word-sounds are closely worked: 'tumbrel' encloses a rhyme with 'drum' and sounds like 'rumble', so might escape notice as a simple onomatopoeia. In fact, a tumbrel or tumbril is a wagon that, among other roles, transported prisoners to the guillotine in revolutionary France.[710] Latent violence saturates the overheard city, then erupts:

TWO SHATTS

– silence –

not evening the dogs barking or the trees blazing
& then a cry we couldn't see of

do

do

do

nuh kill me[711]

[709] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 9.
[710] 'All eyes are on Robespierre's Tumbril, where he, his jaw bound in dirty linen, with his half-dead Brother, and half-dead Henriot, lie shattered; their 'seventeen hours' of agony about to end.' Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History in Three Volumes, Vol. 3: The Guillotine* (London: James Fraser, 1837), p. 395.
[711] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 9.

Sight is synaesthetically subsumed into the sonic environment ('a cry we couldn't see'), while the nation language and visual layout of the victim's plea are affecting, bringing his physical presence into the poem more surely than visual description could. Immediately afterwards, seven more shots ring out. Brathwaite describes the ensuing sounds – police walkie-talkies, radios blaring from surrounding apartments – as he surveys the apartment complex's courtyard, and sees:

> **HELL**
>
> where just a world before there had been laughter
> splashing in the pool, reverb & ghetto-box, Red Stripe,
> bells softly sing/ing sing/ing, somebody sucking cane
> & shouting out dem dancehall business in the dark –[712]

Sounds remain paramount, even in memory. Listening is a kind of seeing: like sonar, sounds map the space and render it visible, fixing the ghosts of dancehall celebrations into the crime scene's 'HELL'. Brathwaite writes in a tradition of linking Hell to notions of visibility: the demons of Milton's *Paradise Lost* see in Hell via 'No light, but rather darkness visible', while for Emanuel Swedenborg, Hell's inmates 'look backwards away from the Lord, and toward the densely dark body that is there in the place of the sun of the world, and is diametrically opposite to the sun of heaven'.[713] Hell, then, is a condition of clarity, of inescapable knowledge concerning sin. But the Christian Hell is also a colonial imposition upon peoples whose ancestors followed different cosmologies, a concept inflicted simultaneously with the literalised Hell of slavery, from which Jamaica's recent conditions ultimately follow.

It is surprising that Brathwaite uses negative imagery regarding Kingston; he criticises works like Orlando Patterson's novel *The Children of Sisyphus* (1964) – with its Kingston full of demonic presences, so that even traffic on the roads is steered 'by the satanic power of some unseen hand' – for excessive pessimism about Caribbean life.[714] Patterson's

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[712] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 11.
[713] John Milton, *Poetical Works*, ed. by Douglas Bush (London: Oxford University Press), 1966, p. 213; Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders, and Hell*, trans. by J.C. Ager (New York: The American Swedenborg Printing and Publishing Society, 1919), p. 365.
[714] Patterson, *The Children of Sisyphus* (Harlow: Longman Drumbeat, 1964, 1982), p. 1.

book is Brathwaite's shorthand for this tendency: '*Sisyphus* is a term i use for the negative tra(d) in Caribb esp anglopho Caribb lit'.[715] Gordon Rohlehr argues that the poem's attitude reflects how the Time of Salt 'filled Brathwaite with feelings of loss and desolation that are reflected in everything that he has written since 1986.'[716]

However, Brathwaite's imagery echoes wider discourses in Jamaican media. On the front page of an edition of Jamaican newspaper *The Gleaner* that came to the present author's attention, the lead story concerns a warehouse fire in Kingston. The headline reads 'HELL OF A DAY', above a photograph of the conflagration; the story continues inside, beneath the one-word sub-header 'HELL', like in Brathwaite's poem.[717] The edition's opinion columns and letters page lament Jamaica's high crime rate, suggesting that 'idol worship has caused God to allow those things to happen', and that 'we need divine intervention if we are to once again sing the Lord's song in this strange Jamaica'.[718]

Addressing related media discourse, the poem's second section, 'Straight Talk' is named after a radio talk show on Jamaica's KLAS F.M. Brathwaite transcribes a discussion, during the programme's 19 July 1990 edition, between host Motty Perkins and one Mr. McKenzie, Jamaica Labour Party Councillor for the Rema area of Trench Town. This part of the poem originates entirely as broadcast sound; Sycorax lettering occasionally swells in size as debate becomes heated. The J.L.P. was in opposition at the time. McKenzie alleges that Rema residents were humiliated by police conducting raids in a crackdown on gun violence. Police allegedly: forced men to kiss each other; made locals eat grass, plastic bags, and dog faeces; assaulted a reporter; and withheld medication from a young man with asthma.[719] This last act was allegedly to extort information about crime boss Jim Brown, a.k.a. Lester Lloyd Coke, Don of West Kingston's Tivoli Gardens neighbourhood.

A superficial reading of this section is that the airwaves are a public sphere where claims to truth are contested and the powerful are held to account. However, McKenzie's

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[715] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, p. 31.
[716] Rohlehr, *Ancestories*, p. 500.
[717] Sashana Small and Paul Clarke, 'Hell of a Day', *The Gleaner* (Jamaica), 12 February 2019, 1–3. *The Gleaner*'s capitals.
[718] Sobrena Anderson, 'Jamaica needs warfare prayers to solve crime', *The Gleaner* (Jamaica), 12 February 2019, 5; Lloyd Myrie-Porus, 'Jamaica has become a strange land', *The Gleaner* (Jamaica), 12 February 2019, 4.
[719] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, pp. 30–39.

position is not celebrated. For one thing, Brathwaite reports, the wave of gun crime was 'coevil' (note the calibanism) with trial of J.A.G. Smith, a former J.L.P. minister who stole funds earned by poor agricultural workers.[720] Brathwaite appends much detail about the brutal career of Jim Brown, with whom the J.L.P. maintained an alliance that supplied them with votes.[721] Both the J.L.P. and their rivals, the People's National Party (P.N.P.), established such alliances in poorer districts, resulting in what criminologist Anthony Harriott calls a 'local regime type which is based on the rule of crime network – political party coalition' where 'This local regime seeks political monopoly and provides a safe haven for criminal groups.'[722] McKenzie offers no alternative to this violence, merely its redirection onto P.N.P. supporters. The transcript encapsulates how violence – its actual sounds and its justificatory rhetoric – dominates the soundscape on radio and elsewhere.

The melding of organised crime, political parties, and the police into one oppressive structure, recalls Rastafari's opprobrium for the 'Babylon system'. *Trench Town Rock*'s third section investigates such structures further. 'Kingston in the Kingdoom of this World' is more obviously poetry than the rest of Brathwaite's text; in fact, it repurposes work from his *Third World Poems* (1983).[723] It details how spiritually regenerative forces collapse when humans are reduced to perpetrators or victims of violence. Again, sound indexes this lapsarian condition, 'here where the frogs creak where there is only the croak | of starlight'.[724] Music's redemptive potential is here:

> gospel was a great wind freedom of savannas
> gospel was a great mouth telling thunder of heroes
> gospel was a cool touch warm with the sunlight like
> water in claypots, healing[725]

A recurring theme for Brathwaite is the African diaspora's need to recover or even reinvent the cultural continuum connecting it to Africa; musical traditions, often enmeshed with religious practices followed by the African-Caribbean population's enslaved ancestors, are

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720 Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 41.
721 Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 41.
722 Anthony Harriott, *Organised Crime and Politics in Jamaica: Breaking the Nexus* (Mona: Canoe Press, 2008), p. 44.
723 Brathwaite, *Third World Poems* (London: Longman, 1983), pp. 53–55.
724 Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 47.
725 Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 48–49.

conduits to this history. This applies even when the form of expression has adapted to Christianity, as with gospel, which Brathwaite's lines associate with African geography, epic narrative, and healing practices. However, gospel's achievements appear in the past tense, smothered under the 'kingdoom of this world', whose brutality is reminiscent of enslavement and police brutality:

> your authority is these chains that strangle my wrists
> your authority is the red whip that circles my head
> your authority is the white eye of interrogator's
> terror. [726]

Marley's 'Trenchtown Rock' celebrates music as respite from torment – 'One good thing about music | When it hits, you feel no pain' – but here even this comfort dissipates, reducing the narrator 'to this damp | to this dark | to this driven | rag'.[727] The narrator's misery foreshadows *Trench Town Rock*'s fourth section, 'My Turn', which unfolds in the early hours of 24 October 1990. Awakened by noises from his sitting room, Brathwaite investigates; he is pushed back into the bedroom at gunpoint and forced to lie face-down on the bed. He can't see, but hears everything around him:

> *swishes & billows &*
> *clatterings down & then again & again somebody wd sit*
> *on the bed near my head with the hard & hot & cold of*
> *the gun at the back of my neck the other hand drown-*
> *ing me into the blackwater dark of the mattrass & whis-*
> *pering whispering* **whe de money deh bwoy &yu goin**
> **sorry yu nevva tell we whe de money deh bwoy**[728]

This imagery of drowning alludes to the Caribbean's history of Africans being deliberately drowned by slave traders, as in the Zong Massacre of 1781, and foreshadows later developments in the poem. Nation language, used throughout Brathwaite's career for poetic renewal, here expresses threats from robbers who destroy his poetry. Later books describe an even more terrifying development. The gunman pulled the trigger, but the gun didn't fire – at least not physically. However, Brathwaite felt the impact of a 'ghost bullet':

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[726] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 48.
[727] Bob Marley and the Wailers, 'Trenchtown Rock', *Live!*; Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 49.
[728] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 59.

But I feel it go through my mind, right? all its detail of rushing gold and shatter and catastrophe and silence

. . . I mean – and I know this – that I'm not the same person after this experience and that either I'm dead - lookin and talkin to you the living; or I'm talking to what my sister call 'a cloud of witnesses'. . .[729]

This becoming unstuck between life and death informs the vision of Kingston as Hell, particularly in the next section, 'Short History of Dis ǀ or ǀ Middle Passages Today'. In Jamaica, 'dis' is a polyvalent term. Donna P. Hope describes the dancehall as a 'dis/place', drawing on potential meanings of 'dis': as a prefix suggesting negation, freeing place to become 'a site of revolution and transformation'; as nation language for 'this', so that 'the dancehall dis/place' becomes 'social commentary on the negations and relationships within and beyond the immediate space of the dancehall'; and as 'disrespect committed against an individual's status or identity' (in the dancehall, this often 'results in retaliatory violence').[730] Hope explains her wordplay's ramifications:

> Consequently, dis/place as used herein refers to "this disrespectful place where we have been placed"; "this place where we are consistently disrespected and mistreated"; "this place where we are denied access to resources"; "this place where our identities are negated" and [...] "this place from which we are forced to re-create and claim our resources, identities, personhood and self-esteem by any means".[731]

The dancehall is thus a synecdoche for Kingston itself, where efforts to 're-create and claim our resources, identities, personhood and self-esteem' is congruent with Brathwaite's quest to reconnect Caribbean culture with African legacies. In the fifth section of *Trench Town Rock*, however, Brathwaite supplies an additional meaning, alluding to Dante's *Inferno*, where Dis is the city in Hell's depths.[732]

By now the Age of Dis. Distress Dispair & Disrespect.

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[729] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, pp. 246–47.

[730] Donna P. Hope, *Inna di Dancehall: Popular Culture and the Politics of Identity in Jamaica* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), pp. 25–26.

[731] Hope, p. 26.

[732] 'la città c'ha nome Dite, ǀ coi gravi cittadin, col grander stuolo' ('the city whose name is Dis, with the weighty citizens, the great host'), Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Vol. 1: Inferno*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 128–29.

> Distrust Disrupt Distruction. A Gardener cutlashes off a Helper’s hand for saying that he shd not come in here & take Employer’s food. The Friends he entertain laugh after him for letting Woman dis im[733]

Part of the section, including the above quotation, is a repurposed passage from Brathwaite’s *Ancestors*; this is collaged with anecdotes from newspaper articles and personal memory, communicating Brathwaite’s version of a ‘dis/place’: Hell on earth, trapping the dead in cycles of violence, and (at this point in the poem) keeping them from the ‘revolution and transformation’ envisioned by Hope.[734] At times, modern Jamaica seems trapped in a slow-motion Holocaust, as when Brathwaite recalls T.V. footage of murder victims at ‘Spanish Town morgue where children’s bodies were piled up like at Belsen or Auschwitz’.[735] The ‘ghost bullet’ makes sense in this context. If living people have no more agency than the dead citizens of Dis, distinctions between life and death lose meaning.

The section’s subtitle, ‘Middle Passages Today’, even suggests that life in 1990s Kingston is a continuation of the journey aboard slave ships from Africa to the Caribbean.[736] Such continuities are inherent to Jamaican culture, especially music, but can offer hope. Sonjah Stanley Niaah argues that ‘Dance halls date back to plantation culture’, but that their ‘recoding of mainstream perception of the margin, in deploying its potential to create and communicate a sense of identity, is indicative of power.’[737] In *Trench Town Rock*’s final section, Brathwaite identifies such a means to reclaim agency from Dis via performance. ‘Anansese’ repurposes a passage from Neville Dawes’ novel *The Last Enchantment* (1960). In a story that Dawes places in the mouth of a child, the Jamaican folk hero and Akan spider-god Ananse retrieves a rat from a pinguin hedge.[738] Ananse’s granny eats the rat without permission; in compensation, she gives Ananse a knife. Ananse then has a series of encounters. At each step, he meets a stranger and barters his last acquisition while reciting the genealogy of preceding trades. In the final transaction, Ananse gives a woman milk for her baby:

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[733] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 73.
[734] Brathwaite, *Ancestors*, pp. 349–53.
[735] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 18.
[736] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 18.
[737] Sonjah Stanley Niaah, *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010), p. 19.
[738] Neville Dawes, *The Last Enchantment* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1960), p. 286.

Ananse seh, 'Come come Woman gi me mi milk mi milk
come from Cow Cow eat mi grass mi grass come from
Man Man bruk mi knife mi knife come from Granny
Granny eat mi rat mi rat come from PingWing
PingWing juk mi hann mi hann come from God'[739]

In the novel, the tale concludes soon afterwards, with Ananse stuck to a tar stump.[740] However, the improvisation could continue, limited only by the teller's memory. Indeed, Brathwaite's essay 'Jazz and the West Indian Novel' (1967) cites this passage from Dawes as a 'folk form' that offers 'an almost perfect example of improvisation, in the jazz sense, where tone, rhythm and image come together.'[741] Given storytelling's verbal nature, a stronger parallel than jazz is the reggae tradition of toasting by vocalists 'exhorting the crowd to dance with their various styles of stream-of-consciousness vocalizing.'[742] Norman C. Stolzoff compares toasting to other Jamaican traditions of oral improvisation like Ananse stories.[743] The tale is rooted in live performance, and Brathwaite dedicates this section to cookery writer Yvonne Sobers 'who brought it first alive to us one afternoon in Ghana (1961).'[744] Dawes' narrator describes this Ananse tale as 'the perfect story no writer could ever write', perhaps because it is so reliant on tension generated in performance by the question of how far the teller can push their memory.[745] Such performances embody Brathwaite's 'total expression', requiring 'not only the griot but the audience to complete the community' so that 'we have the creation of a continuum where meaning truly resides.'[746] The section title 'Anansese' is both a neologism suggesting Ananse stories' nation language, and a pun on 'Anansesem', which Velma Pollard describes as 'a word from Twi, the language of the Akan people of Ghana […] The word literally means 'Anancy stories''.[747] Such art-forms all

[739] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 78.
[740] Neville Dawes, p. 288.
[741] Brathwaite, *Roots*, p. 80.
[742] Michael E. Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), p. 55.
[743] Norman C. Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 56.
[744] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 78.
[745] Neville Dawes, p. 286.
[746] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, pp. 18–19.
[747] Velma Pollard, 'Preface', *Anansesem: A Collection of Folk Tales, Legends and Poems for Juniors*, ed. by Velma Pollard (Kingston: Carlong Publishers, 1985, 2020), p. i.

emphasise community of performer and audience. As Sonjah Stanley Niaah outlines, both nation language and dancehall performance 'can be seen, like spiritual practice, as a means of making links to one's source of existence through ritual, to inner selves, unmasked selves, as well as each other'.[748]

In Brathwaite's poem, such 'total expression' emerges through sound patterns, including rhymes, that convey performance even when superficially resembling journalistic prose. Some of his methods seem to militate against this, though, notably his appropriation of found material from radio, newspapers, Neville Dawes' novel, and his own earlier poetry. This appears the opposite of the intuitive expression typically expected from creative artists. Brathwaite even disavows the creative achievements within the poem's autobiographical first section, saying that this began 'not as a 'piece' but as a letter' to Nathaniel Mackey.[749] The fourth section originates as a Sycorax Video-style letter sent from Brathwaite to Anne Walmsley, soon after the burglary.[750] Owing to these origins, Brathwaite categorises the work as '?only a report on an experience. [...] But I don't regard that as creative writing.'[751] It would be fairer to say, though, that a different type of creativity occurs: that of scribes rather than poets, at least insofar as the latters' role is traditionally understood. As this chapter's previous sections demonstrated, visually inventive transcription can be as splendid an art form as more normative incarnations of 'creative writing', requiring equally close engagement with the created text. Sycorax Video-style, being electronically produced, may be more mediated than the hand-drawn works of Eadfrith or Bill Griffiths, but Brathwaite's embodied identity impresses itself into the poem through other means. An African-Caribbean victim of crime in Jamaica, he shares a bodily identity and a set of violent experiences with his subjects. His first-person narrations express his own embodied, African-Caribbean identity. Meanwhile, although cited newspaper articles are mostly in formal English, quotations within the articles are nation language (standard practice in Jamaican newspapers), as when an eyewitness describes seeing robbers chop off a woman's hand to steal her jewellery: '**When de hann drop, one a de man grab it**

[748] Stanley Niaah, p. 191.
[749] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, p. 277.
[750] Brathwaite, letter to Anne Walmsley, undated (written between 24 October and 11 November 1990), Brighton, The Keep, Anne Walmsley Archive, SxMS88/10/3/9.
[751] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, p. 250.

up, and while running drag off de bracelet and dash wey de hann'.[752] Making embodied identity immanent in his poem through nation language, Brathwaite emphasises the physicality of citizens whose bodies are violated, representing them as heirs to the history of enslavement and colonial oppression to which nation language responds.

In this Caribbean approach to found sources, particularly the emphasis on orality, Marley is again a forerunner. The song 'War' (1976), based on a 1963 speech by Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, is another example of seemingly 'uncreative' poetry that proves highly imaginative.[753] Although Marley epitomises classic reggae and was working over forty years ago, his poetics remain avant-garde compared to much contemporary poetry. Nation language refrains intersperse the standard English into which the Emperor's speech was translated, while reggae backing brings Haile Selassie's ideas into the contexts of Rastafari and the Caribbean:

> That until there are no longer first class and second-class citizens of any nation
> Until the colour of a man's skin is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes
> Me say war
>
> That until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all
> Without regard to race
> Dis a war[754]

The reggae tradition of repurposing found material is not limited to lyrics. Michael E. Veal describes how, in 1960s and 1970s Kingston, 'producers recycled musical material to maximize profits in a depressed economy', developing 'a patchwork-collage approach to (re)composition, [...] and the modular reuse and recombination of musical source materials."[755] The resulting tracks could still be enjoyed as 'original' in the Rasta, roots sense of tapping into a vital origin, providing opportunities for artists and audiences to renegotiate

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[752] Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*, p. 72. Brathwaite's bolding.
[753] His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, 'Address by His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia', translated by the Emperor's delegation, *United Nations General Assembly, Eighteenth Session Official Records, 1229th Plenary Meeting, Friday, 4th October 1963 at 3pm*, 3 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/731800/files/A_PV.1229-EN.pdf> [accessed 16 March 2022].
[754] Bob Marley and the Wailers, 'War', *Rastaman Vibration* [L.P.] (Kingston: Island and Tuff Gong, 1976), track 9.
[755] Michael E. Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), pp. 246–47.

societal situations through ‘total expression’ in Donna P. Hope’s ‘dancehall dis/place’. Perhaps finding normatively ‘creative’ methods inadequate to process his trauma, Brathwaite uses collage techniques at his word processor to channel Kingston’s voices, noise, and music into text. By analogy, his computer is a mixing desk where he samples and recombines pre-existing texts, processing them into Video-style, creating new soundscapes to be played through the technology of the book. The written sound-world vibrates haptically through readers’ bodies, like the bass at a dub night. Representing the city’s audio-world and nation language in vivid, sometimes terrifying detail that reaches ‘total expression’, *Trench Town Rock*’s Sycorax video-style offers a ‘dis/place’ where poet, audience and the depicted citizens form a community whose care for one another might *re:place* the violent city of Dis.

4.4. 'this is people-midden': Documentary Poetics in the Prison Collaborations of Bill Griffiths and Delvan McIntosh

Like Brathwaite during the Time of Salt, Bill Griffiths frequently uses appropriated, found texts in his poetry. This was common among the British Poetry Revival, with poets like Paula Claire, Bob Cobbing and Veronica Forrest-Thompson taking seemingly banal texts like newspaper articles and processing them through versification or performance to establish ironising critiques.[756] Early examples of found poetry by Griffiths include 'Found Sea Texts', 'Tolkien Texts (for two voices)' and 'Rochester', all from the 1970s.[757] He revisits the approach throughout his career; *The Coal World*, discussed in Chapter 3.4, reworks material from F.N. Platt's *The Canny Man*, translating Platt's conventional prose into Pitmatic that brings alive the sound-world of Murton Colliery.

While *The Coal World* and Griffiths' early found poems work from textual sources, other poetry processes documentary material aurally, paralleling Brathwaite's method in *Trench Town Rock*. A difference is that from his Time of Salt onwards, Brathwaite speaks less often through personae like Adam or X/Self, instead writing autobiographically. Griffiths eschews any similar shift. Personal experiences are evident in his work, but he is reluctant to become the focus. His strongest examples of found speech explore tribulations of comrades ventriloquised by the poems.

This applies particularly to poetry emerging from Griffiths' support and advocacy for prisoners. Griffiths did not collaborate with these men as an authorised element of the prison system; he did not run creative writing classes for prisoners, for example, although he did propose this to the Greater London Council.[758] Instead, he provided friendship and practical aid to prisoners met through his network of contacts, or of whom he learned through activist groups like the Anarchist Black Cross. Ray Gilbert, discussed in Chapter 2.4, is one example.

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[756] For example, see Paula Claire, 'VAN GOGH : SYMPTOMS', *Declarations Poems 1961–9* (Oxford: International Concrete Poetry Archive Press, 1991), work no. 272; Veronica Forrest-Thompson, 'At the Head of the B.B.C.', *Poetic Artifice*, ed. by Gareth Farmer (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2016), pp. 64–66; Bob Cobbing, 'Fifteen months ago, Gil Singh', *Sockless in Sandals: Collected Poems Volume 6* (Cardiff: Second Aeon Publications, 1985), p. 10.

[757] Griffiths, *Collected Earlier Poems (1966–80)*, pp. 130–133. 'Found Sea Texts' originates from Jane Austen's *Persuasion*; 'Rochester' is sourced from novels by Charles Dickens. See Alan Halsey's notes, Griffiths, *Collected Earlier Poems (1966–80)*, pp. 359–360.

[758] Griffiths, 'The Arts and the GLC', 26.

Many of Griffiths' poems reflect his friendships with, and activism for, these men. A successful example of documentary poetics within this field is *Star Fish Jail* (1993), a collaboration between Griffiths and his friend Delvan McIntosh.[759] Luke Roberts' essay 'Grave Police Music' already offers an admirable account of how the poem relates to Griffiths' wider campaigns for prisoners' rights, and to the correspondence documenting their friendship. I will instead consider the role of voice within the poem: how Griffiths textually produces a speaking voice that carries many qualities of nation language, and how the poem lets this voice access a public sphere from which it would usually be excluded. The technology of Griffiths' little-press publishing is important for both functions.

In 1993, McIntosh found himself on remand in H.M.P. Wandsworth, a prison notorious at the time for neglectful and violent treatment of inmates. A 2009 report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons summarised: 'During the 1990s and the early part of the present century, the prison received a number of highly critical H.M. Inspectorate of Prisons inspections, as well as being widely considered as failing on most other measures.'[760] The prison had apparently improved since then, but 'twice as many black and minority ethnic and Muslim prisoners as white prisoners reported that they had been victimised and intimidated by members of staff.'[761] Racism was a threat to McIntosh, since he came from a complex, mixed-race background: 'one-quarter Arawak Indian, one-quarter Jamaican African, half European'.[762] Griffiths published numerous texts detailing McIntosh's experiences, sometimes entire chapbooks. They tend to be written in first person, from McIntosh's perspective, and using working-class argot. Despite McIntosh's heritage, this is not Caribbean nation language, nor a dialect underpinned by a historical nation (like the North Eastern speech that Griffiths was researching at the time). Nevertheless, McIntosh's voice shows many characteristics that Brathwaite finds in nation language. One collaboration, written by McIntosh and published by Griffiths, is *A List of Slang Terms from Morden, Surrey* (1995) – McIntosh was from Morden. Introducing this lexicon, Griffiths notes different currents of influence: 'prison slang, much of which dates back to 18th century

[759] Variant spellings of McIntosh's surname are in circulation. I use the spelling under which his *A List of Slang Terms from Morden, Surrey* (1995) was published.
[760] Anne Owers, *Report on an Announced Inspection of H.M.P. Wandsworth, 1–5 June 2009* (London: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2009), p. 7.
[761] Owers, p. 39.
[762] Holman and Penney, 29.

'cant''; ''cockney' i.e. the slang of inner London in the middle of this century, transferred to outer London with re-housing after World War Two', and 'U.S.-inspired, a mix of influence from films, TV series, rock lyrics, drug and black/street cultures'.[763] This is a creolised English, with some inputs (prison slang, African American speech) from marginalised communities. Griffiths notes:

> 'Slang' implies a group-usage, a sub-culture, a code to hide things, a playing with living language, an inventiveness and humour, and a resistance to the tendency to impose 'Standard Received English' (a euphemism of colossal violence).
> As to grammar, many of the points noted by V.K. Edwards in his brief survey *The Grammar of English Dialect* (1984), also apply to Morden: loss of final '-s' in plurals and the genitive of nouns, and in the present of verbs; the erosion of the past and the passive participle of strong verbs, replaced by a form from the present e.g. he give me it, it was give me, and the continuance and extension of weak verb past forms e.g. he see'd. Arguably, the whole is less a 'slang' than the emergence of a new common spoken English.[764]

This slang, argues Griffiths, displays enough consistency in its unorthodox grammar to be a new version of English. The new argot's relation to standard English resembles that of Brathwaite's nation language, with its opposition to 'the language of the conquistador – the language of the planter, the language of the official, the language of the anglican preacher.'[765] Where the 'colossal violence' of standard English is institutionally enforced – in prison, for example – the subversive potential of McIntosh's Morden slang becomes evident.

Though Griffiths' poems give the impression of a gregarious narrator, one cannot assume that they transcribe McIntosh's speech word for word, nor that they are based on conversations (as opposed to correspondence or imagination). Different books cover the same occurrences with divergent phrasing, and it is possible that McIntosh recounted the same incident differently on separate occasions. For example, 'Wandsworth', a short poem in *Delvan's Book* (1993), describes another prisoner bragging to McIntosh about knifing a woman. Understandably enraged, McIntosh strikes him:

> *Inside a geode*
> first place, me and this guy tends me a cig I draw deep

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[763] Griffiths, 'General Note' in D.R. McIntosh, *A List of Slang Terms from Morden, Surrey*, revised by Paul Campbell, with notes by Griffiths (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1995), n.p.
[764] Griffiths, 'General Note' in McIntosh, *A List of Slang Terms from Morden, Surrey*, n.p.
[765] Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 8.

325 feet, then of 650 feet, and finally of 980 feet
tells how he cut his girl up, smart like
apostle of spelaeology
when I hit hard
na, the screws were on my side, said OK
had trouble with the numerous porcupines which live in those caves.[766]

Ian Davidson explains: 'Through bringing together the text on underground caves, presumably a found text and reproduced in italics, and the description of prison life, Griffiths suggests physical restriction, lack of light, and danger.'[767] The caves, though, are also depths of the body, both the speaker's, so that the act of smoking is a downward exploration as the lungs inhale and expand, and the woman's, so '*apostle of speleology*' becomes a darkly ironic euphemism for a man who stabs his girlfriend. The phrase presents the geologist's standard English as concealer and enabler of misogynist violence, whereas the informal voice discloses the truth at the same time as the abuser is chastised.

'Wandsworth' demonstrates Griffiths' avant-garde collision of materials from divergent frames of reference and speech registers. Such transitions happen on larger scales in *Star Fish Jail*. This chapbook-length poem was first published in 1993, during McIntosh's imprisonment; it was revised and reissued three times in 1994. The title again names H.M.P. Wandsworth, whose central building is a five-pointed star. During this poem, the altercation with the misogynist prisoner is retold:

An' I was by this guy : I cadged a ciggy off him.
He seems OK. : He starts to talk then,
all about how he stabbed his girl-friend : knifed her, shows me,
once, seven, nine times : all them wounds and reckons he can laugh over it.
So I took my fist back : a' bent him one,
one straight in the face : really caught him.[768]

Even ignoring the earlier poem's geological material, this version of the anecdote differs, reading as entirely demotic. However, long passages of accessible narrative like this occasionally segue into lyrical moments with more signs of Griffiths' poetic intervention.

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[766] Griffiths, 'Wandsworth', *Delvan's Book* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1993), n.p. Griffiths' italics.
[767] Davidson, 'Bill Griffiths', *A Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Poetry, 1960–2015*, ed. by Wolfgang Görtschacher and David Malcolm (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2021), British Library Legal Deposit, n.p.
[768] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1993, 1994), n.p.

The two men's status as poets remains ambiguous: as Davidson notes, on the first edition's front cover 'the name of the pamphlet is preceded by "Bill Griffiths Presents," a suggestion that his role is more facilitator of production and distribution rather than author.'[769] Meanwhile, McIntosh goes unnamed. However, this is no intellectual theft, but a means to disseminate McIntosh's experiences while protecting him from retribution:

> I issued the poem in my name, in the first instance because a prisoner is liable to punishment if he gets work printed while serving a sentence (so much for creative writing therapy) [...] It is though a two-author work, growing from conversational and oral material, to reach focus on my own theory.[770]

The introduction to the first edition explores oral transmission and poetic reproduction more deeply. Poetry sidesteps usual debates about an account's truth-value:

> The material presented here is folkic. Like Schrödinger's cat, whose fate is hidden in the box, it can neither be affirmed as fact nor discounted as invention. The reason for this uncertainty is necessarily the security, secrecy, and privilege under which the Royal Prison Service insists on operating. This acts as the pre-condition of terror (internally) and (externally) the best way that a projected, manufactured image of its own reality can take precedence over actuality.[771]

The dilemma resolved here is that, if provably true, the text would place McIntosh in jeopardy, while if demonstrably fictive, it would open Griffiths to accusations of mendacity. The folkic approach allows the poem to make subjective claims for truth of experience on behalf of a prison community (working-class diction plays a role here), bringing the story into the public sphere without exposing one individual as the truth-teller. This does not make the account unreliable; it is congruent with official sources published later. For example, McIntosh had terrible experiences of being wrongly labelled as mentally ill while in the prison's segregation unit (solitary confinement). In 2000, *Hansard* recorded the Lord Bishop of Lincoln's remarks following a negative report on H.M.P. Wandsworth: 'In his highly critical comments on the segregation unit at Wandsworth, the chief inspector mentions mentally disordered prisoners', says the Bishop, adding, 'what his team observed in the segregation unit confirmed his suspicions that the priorities of management are

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[769] Davidson, 'Bill Griffiths', n.p.
[770] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1994), n.p.
[771] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1993), n.p.

directed elsewhere than to the correct treatment and conditions of prisoners.'[772] *Star Fish Jail* reported these problems seven years earlier. Griffiths' folkic method lets McIntosh share his experiences safely, generalising his voice to one that speaks for a community: here the totality of men abused at the prison.

The poem has two sections, the first dealing with prison and the second with the world outside. The first describes McIntosh's initial incarceration in Wandsworth, not yet convicted, only there on remand. A White prison officer, having opened confidential correspondence to McIntosh's solicitor, then racially abuses the prisoner, later harassing him again by falsely alleging that McIntosh's shirt is untucked. Goaded further, McIntosh responds violently, not against the staff, but his cell's furnishings:

> I oughta known it : he couldn't get me much for my shirt, could he?
> And now he could say : 'I told him to tuck his shirt in proper and he went berserk.'
> So I did : well I had this chair yes : I'd picked it up like to keep him off.
> An' I thought if I don't throw it : I'm gonna look a real plum.
> So I chucked it : I wasn't even mad, much, just to look good.
> It couldn't hit him, he had the door between us : using it like a shield.[773]

Prison officers now have a pretext for moving McIntosh to solitary confinement, where he continues protesting volubly. He is falsely labelled as mentally ill and transferred to Wandsworth's medical wing, where he is drugged so heavily that he lies unconscious for three days without eating or drinking. Even when conscious again, the drugs' after-effects leave him unable to speak properly during a consultation with a prison doctor. Already excised from the public sphere through imprisonment, and having had his correspondence with the outside world tampered with, he is now deprived of the most fundamental communication with other humans. Through the poem, however, McIntosh's counter-institutional slang describes not just events leading up to his drugging, but the process of his language's suppression. The latter effect is achieved through one of Griffiths' lyrical interventions, portraying sedation:

> A world : and all sucked into the Sun;
> a world : with no more continuance [...]
> not for its perfection : or shame : or flawfulness

[772] *Hansard*, 16 February 2000, column 1313.
[773] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1994), n.p.

but because of starting an' stopping : and having to end;
Not city : anti-sound
un-time : de-rebuild[774]

This lack of 'continuance', this 'starting an' stopping', disintegrates McIntosh's life into discrete cells of 'un-time', a constellation of separate points of semi-awareness. His consciousness drowns in void. The communicative possibilities of the city, of life outside, may be flawed, policed, and thus awful (as the calibanism 'flawfulness' hints), but even these vanish as language becomes suppressed not just to the point of its silent absence, but beyond that, to 'anti-sound'. Sedation, through Griffiths' folkic process, emblematises prison life more generally, as inmates' speech and subjectivity are denied. This is less a case of banishment from the public sphere than of burial beneath its surface. McIntosh moves through successive layers of incarceration: life outside, nominally free but heavily policed; imprisonment on remand; solitary confinement; and finally, descending as though through the earlier poem's caves, to the medical unit:

There I was lumped in with all them types : a corridor of them breathing senseless sound
scratching their veins red : or aging geezers calling out for Mum
over-screaming here, or no sound : as frantic or out of it – I don't know.
I was four days there without any doctor : so I told them that
but all that I got : was a yelling off.

No gross, dross, brassy trysting this : this is people-midden.
Straw and crud : bits of once wings, fragile fossils.[775]

If this cacophony resembles Kingston's sound-world from *Trench Town Rock*, the strong caesuras, marked by colons, recall structures from Old English, alliterative verse that Griffiths studied and translated. Also deriving from medieval writing, as in *Scaffold Hill*, are Griffiths' kennings: 'people-midden' is the medical wing, a waste dump for discarded humans (again, the image is of burial rather than exile). *Star Fish Jail* often feels like a loose translation of an Early Medieval text; specifically, there are parallels to *Guđlac B*, an Old English poem that Griffiths translated in 1985. This narrative concerns the final illness of Saint Guđlac, a hermit in the East Anglian Fens. Like *Star Fish Jail*, the poem segues between

[774] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1994), n.p.
[775] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1994), n.p.

an easily followed story and denser passages; in Griffiths' translation, 'Occasionally a two-column format is introduced to indicate passages which seem to bear special compositional emphasis in the OE verse.'[776] Though *Star Fish Jail* does not allegorically retell *Guđlac B* (the poems' plots do not straightforwardly match), there are kinships between the protagonists' situations. Guđlac also inhabits a cell, and spends much time in solitude (albeit self-inflicted). He is visited by screaming demons who attempt to induce despair, an experience paralleling McIntosh's encounters with prison officers. Guđlac's ordeals impede his speech, so that 'scarcely | could he | draw up breath | or good speech | or raise a word.'[777] Furthermore, the saint is visited by a servant, Beccel, who takes messages to the outside world, rather like Griffiths publishing McIntosh's accounts. Connections between medieval hagiography and modern prison narrative present McIntosh as a figure of virtue, though in McIntosh's case for his anti-authoritarian stance, rather than Christian purity.

The second half of *Star Fish Jail* flashes back to McIntosh's childhood. After he vents frustrations at school by breaking a window, social services transfer him to a boarding institution whose punitive regime foreshadows his prison experiences. After school, he performs labouring work but also burglaries, sometimes getting in trouble with the police for these offences, but sometimes for lesser matters, as when he gets beaten after verbally defending a friend who made a rude gesture at a passing police car. While McIntosh commits crimes against property, none of his convictions are for harming other people. Within the legal system's logic, he might seem to deserve discipline, but the brutality inflicted by police and prison officers is wholly disproportionate. Interviewed, Griffiths explained his rationale for supporting criminals:

> Prison both contrasts with the governed society and is its direct consequence. Asked (as I once was by Wandsworth magistrates) if I condoned crime, I would say No, but it doesn't surprise me either. Violence is approved only in the service of the state; and the death count over the last century is untold millions.[778]

Criminal violence results from how society brutalises its members, and is trifling compared to structural violence inflicted by the authorities, whose hypocrisy is highlighted by the

[776] Griffiths, 'Introduction', in *Guđlac B*, trans. by Griffiths (Peterborough: Spectacular Diseases, 1985), p. 3.
[777] *Guđlac B*, p. 24.
[778] Bill Griffiths, 'Interview with Will Rowe', p. 192.

difference. Such structural violence is further explored as *Star Fish Jail* ends in Griffiths' encounter with Wandsworth magistrates. Having fast-forwarded past the first section's events, McIntosh is back in court, this time for breaching probation. The probation order results from a confession made under threat from prison officers while in solitary; once more, his governance of his own voice is compromised. The court processes McIntosh using language both formalised and false: 'And my old probation officer : said I'd broke another appointment, | tho' I was stood there while my mate phoned her and warned her : and explained I was just homeless'.[779] This homelessness, and the consequent chaos that makes him miss the appointment, itself stems from delayed payment of his housing benefit, so one branch of government's failures make him miss another's targets. When Griffiths speaks to defend McIntosh in court, officials ask, 'was he saying he knew better than their own experts?' and McIntosh observes 'Well, at least he'd met me : it beats handing in a probation paper on someone you've altogether not talked to'; meanwhile, 'the charges were read out mis-dated : to look like recent stuff.'[780] Throughout the hearing, the authorities misrepresent McIntosh to expedite prosecution. When the court imposes another prison sentence, McIntosh ponders the development: 'I just kept quiet : being a fictional character, like. | Seeing police are true people : and we're made-up, | in-nominate : apes on a slab.[781]

The authorities consider themselves the authors of legal fictions in which criminalised people are mere characters. The legal system refuses McIntosh's subjectivity, reserving for itself the right to taxonomise him. Only this system can present McIntosh within the public sphere; his own power to represent his selfhood to others is curtailed. Griffiths elaborates on this dehumanisation during his 1994 introduction:

> [...] prisons have a sacrificial role; and survive (like the majority of contemporary literature?) solely to support the myth of middle class privileged existence by creating a sector of population that can be abused, confined and dehumanised. The ratio is probably something like one lyric sonnet to every 3-day sentence in solitary confinement.[782]

This suborning of a population group to elevate another by comparison is the quintessence of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. In Griffiths' schema, the relationship of bourgeois privilege

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[779] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1994), n.p.
[780] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1994), n.p.
[781] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1994), n.p.
[782] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1994), n.p.

to imprisoned oppression resembles that of metropole to colony in Brathwaite's thought, with Euro-American civilisation as a missile 'capable of (upward) mob | ility, travel, x/ploration, x/ploitation, | de-struction & xtraction', while colonies 'provide metall/ic sugar & banana | bases for arrival/relaunch/above all | fuel for the continuation energy of the | missile & its metaphor(s)'.[783] To equate the British prison system with plantation slavery would be controversial in many quarters, yet from Griffiths' viewpoint the two are qualitatively the same. Resisting this injustice seems paramount, yet Griffiths problematises the very concept of resistance:

> Prisons and prisoners in some sense need each other: it is a symbiosis where the controlling class can play at doing good while doing whatever it likes, and the victim class can invent a reciprocal myth of resistance that makes more sense than anything available in the "real" world. This cycle of credence can only be tackled from outside, and I consider it urgent that it should be, before conditions degenerate further.[784]

The earlier, chair-throwing incident signals this 'reciprocal myth of resistance' in McIntosh's recognition of it as a performance, based on what he would otherwise look like ('a real plum'). Participation in the myth is acquiescence to a master-slave dialectic. The prisoners in this scenario make the mistake of not thinking beyond their assigned position in this binary. What is needed is to transcend the dialectic, entering a more tidalectic way of thinking, resisting not the oppressor *per se*, but the idea that one must take a position in hierarchies of oppression at all. How to attempt this while incarcerated is a challenge. Ray Gilbert's dirty protests might suggest one approach (see Chapter 2.4); *Star Fish Jail* enacts a different means of tidalectic resistance, refuting the court's ignorance and preserving McIntosh's subjectivity by detailing his perspective in what is presented as his own voice. Griffiths' publication, manifesting McIntosh's voice within the public sphere, heals damage inflicted by courts and prison, and not only symbolically. When sent to H.M.P. Wandsworth, McIntosh had outstanding fines. On completion of his sentence, he would have been immediately rearrested for non-payment. Griffiths sold the first edition of *Star Fish Jail* – 40 copies – among his circle of friends and aficionados, raising money to pay off the fines, and saving McIntosh from more racist abuse.[785]

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[783] Brathwaite, *M.R., vol. 1*, p. 167.

[784] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1994), n.p.

[785] The story is detailed in a note left posthumously by Griffiths on a computer disc. Griffiths, *Collected Poems Volume 3*, p. 514.

It is unlikely that employees of the prison or courts knew of Griffiths' initiative. Instead, an imaginative solution is found beyond these institutions' purlieus; by circulating the poem among a community of poets, not prison staff and prisoners, Griffiths lets McIntosh escape the system's master-slave dialectic. As a self-published, little-press volume, *Star Fish Jail* reached a tiny audience compared to most mass media, but would intensely impact its readers, helped by the tactile intimacy of Griffiths' handmade booklets, and the fact that the first edition was sold by advance subscription. Before posting the pamphlets, Griffiths wrote to one subscriber, Eric Mottram:

> The subscription strategy occurred to me one evening after receiving a rather harrowing letter from a friend in Wandsworth Prison; he badly needs some sort of sense that reality is not all negative (if that makes sense), so I hit on this form of 'poetic justice'. […] The beauty of my present scheme is that the information that makes up 'Star Fish Jail' came from Delvan himself, so it is not strictly 'charity' but a nice sort of self-help.[786]

As well as minimising reprisals against McIntosh, this small-press approach means each copy would have been received as a gesture of personal care for its subject's wellbeing and its reader's awareness; it might also feel akin to the restricted circulation of items amongst a prison's inmates.

Since the 1990s, it has become even harder for the criminalised to access the public sphere. The *Coroners and Justice Act 2009* restricts prisoners, even after release, from making money by writing about their crimes or incarceration.[787] The government can now appropriate such profits. Consequences for rehabilitation are counterproductive, blocking one route for former prisoners to develop satisfying, lawful careers. Griffiths' little-press approach remains unlikely to fall foul of this Act, since generating substantial profits through avant-garde poetry is neither a likely outcome nor a major goal.

Griffiths' deployment of found voice and narrative in *Star Fish Jail* offers parallels to Brathwaite's *Trench Town Rock*. Both poems concern systems of violence institutionalised by government. Both incorporate documentary material into folkic structures, with voices that represent both an embodied individual and a community, so the individual's experiences

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[786] Griffiths, letter to Eric Mottram, 12 May 1993, King's College London, MOTTRAM 5/100/1-36.
[787] *Coroners and Justice Act 2009, c. 25, Part 7: Exploitation proceeds orders*
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/25/part/7/crossheading/exploitation-proceeds-orders> [accessed 16 March 2022].

apply more widely. In their struggles, both protagonists tap into deeper traditions: for Brathwaite, African legacies that refuse to be drowned during 'Middle Passages', historical or modern; for McIntosh, the tradition of resilience developed in England by Saint Guđlac. The poems' found speech indicates ways out of the master-slave dialectic. In *Trench Town Rock*, this occurs with the transition from Dis to the tidalectic ethos of 'Anansese' storytelling. Griffiths instead finds hope in the publication of *Star Fish Jail*, mobilising support through poetry to help Delvan McIntosh escape the Dis of the prison system. The aim of found speech in both poems, as per Griffiths introduction to *Star Fish Jail*'s first edition, is 'a sense of totality, that is, a realisation that permits everyone to participate in humanity, not just those clever enough to draw up the rules in their own interest.'[788]

[788] Griffiths, *Star Fish Jail* (1993), n.p.

5.5. 'post-9/11 metropolitan obeah': Kamau Brathwaite's Late Poetry as Techno-Magical Resistance

In the early 2000s, Kamau Brathwaite suffered his own experience of the discriminatory policing techniques that reach throughout the public sphere. Two of his final books, *Strange Fruit* (2016) and *The Lazarus Poems* (2017) respond to this, exploring how artists might disrupt control measures and recover agency from institutions that increasingly surveil their employees and service users. Both volumes develop Sycorax Video-style into a poetic technology that sabotages such intrusion. *Strange Fruit* tells how, while Brathwaite was teaching at New York University, thefts occurred from his university apartment. Thousands of books and documents vanished during 2004–2011, each time with no break-in. The perpetrator(s) had institutional access to Brathwaite's home, and the university failed to investigate the crimes or protect him. When the resulting stress made him ill, Brathwaite was forcibly retired. Presumably, N.Y.U. would dispute Brathwaite's account; the poet recounts a rumour '**that i was/am in fact suffering from a MENTAL PROBLEM – DEMENTIA**'.[789] Brathwaite was 81 in 2011, but his writing demonstrates a mind still keen. *Strange Fruit* and *The Lazarus Poems* expose and disrupt the institution's malfeasance, innovatively employing book form to resist institutional ageism and racism. Brathwaite's Sycorax compositions become techno-magic pitted against devices that he suspects N.Y.U. has deployed against him: '**such AWEsome & All- | seeing SURVEILLANCE – phone-tap & micro-camera – that if we left the ap- | artment by itself for just 10 mins. you cd. be SURE that if they wish or need | it SOMETHING GONE**'.[790]

Brathwaite links harassment by N.Y.U. to wider patterns of racism in the U.S,: '**i call this "CL" – CULTURAL LYNCHING – a psycho-physical cultural slip- | knot assassination**'.[791] Further, the title *Strange Fruit* evokes Billie Holiday's eponymous, 1939 song about lynchings in the American South. Brathwaite explains the university's methods:

> **– a (successful) neurological &**
> **technological xperiment in post-9/11 metropolitan obeah – design not**

[789] Brathwaite, *Strange Fruit*, p.21.
[790] Brathwaite, *Strange Fruit*, p.20.
[791] Brathwaite, *Strange Fruit*, p.20.

> **only to destroy my personal ACHIEVEMENT CONTRIBUTION but to mek me a BAD XAMPLE in the eyes of my own people wo until this lynching wd ave 'looked up to me' as a GOOD NEIGBOURLY XAMPLE of how we cd 'get along' w/Prospero – GOOD RODNEY KING & CALIBAN – now suddenly & un-Xplainably the OPPOSITE –**[792]

'Obeah' denotes religious and magical practices brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans. Jerome S. Handler and Kenneth M. Bilby describe how 'the term was first used in an all-embracing, totally negative sense by whites/Europeans, probably in an early English colony [...] where it started being applied to a very wide range of African spiritual practices and ideas.'[793] Brathwaite himself works to rehabilitate obeah, emphasising how 'this "magic" was (is) based on a scientific knowledge and use of herbs, drugs, foods and symbolic/associational procedures' to pursue 'like medical principles everywhere, the process of healing/protection through seeking out the source or explanation [...] of the disease or fear'.[794] There is also a history of obeah accusations levelled not at marginalised practitioners, but against the powerful: Diana Patton describes how political leaders like Forbes Burnham and Eric Gairy (first Prime Ministers of Guyana and Grenada respectively) were labelled obeah-men by some opponents.[795] Brathwaite employs this tradition, turning the colonial apparatus (with its negative characterisation of obeah) against his oppressor. Since he understands obeah as 'scientific knowledge', it makes sense that these competing magics manifest technologically; elsewhere he calls his computer 'dis obeah blox'.[796] However, his resources are dwarfed by those of N.Y.U.'s high-tech obeah-men, whom he ventriloquises: '**how dare yu challenge w/yr NATION-LANGUAGE > | de top-notch status of the Prospero Plantation and ijs agent/agency THE BASILISK**'.[797] Brathwaite's poem 'The Basilisk' further details this mythical creature that kills with its gaze – in other words, by surveillance:

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[792] Brathwaite, *Strange Fruit*, p. 20.
[793] Jerome S. Handler and Kenneth M. Bilby, *Enacting Power: The Criminalisation of Obeah in the Anglophone Caribbean 1760–2011* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2012), p. 4.
[794] Brathwaite, *Roots*, p. 195.
[795] Diana Patton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah: Religion, Colonialism and Modernity in the Caribbean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 282–98.
[796] Brathwaite, *X/Self*, p. 81.
[797] Brathwaite, *Strange Fruit*, p. 21.

Sometime ago i don't kno when or how or why –
it born – probably in 9/11 –
in scorn & fear & hatred dread & terror racism – [...]

i plant a tree/you dig a hole a well . i gather up the plural fragrance
and you consume the whole . one orn emblazon ribbon'd w/CP
the other mark CL wic mek me sick and let me loose my job
. is how my latter life begin & end[798]

'C.L.' is 'cultural lynching' while 'C.P.' is 'Cow Pasture' (or 'Cow Pastor' in Brathwaite's nation language): his Barbadian home, meant for refuge and healing. Boria Sax describes how the basilisk 'was hatched from an egg laid by an old cock and incubated by a toad'; the creature sometimes appears with 'the comb, wattle and claws of a rooster'.[799] *Strange Fruit* marks the beast's return to Brathwaite's cosmos, after it first appeared in his poetry of the 1950s: 'The black cock crows | And lays his egg | The toad returns from stone | To break it'.[800] In origins and appearance, it is a horrid inversion of Legba, the Dahomeyan deity and Haitian *lwa* whose animal attribute is a cockerel. Brathwaite's writings frequently feature Legba as 'the crucial link between man and the other gods'.[801] Furthermore, Brathwaite views Toussaint Louverture (*c.* 1743–1803), the Haitian revolutionary leader whose surname literally means 'the opening', as incarnating this god: 'he was Legba [...] *loa* of thresholds and beginnings.'[802] Legba, like Louverture, opens his followers to alternative ways of thinking and living, while the basilisk locks victims into restrictive structures. Brathwaite sickens under its stare, but the primary threat is spiritual, not corporeal. The basilisk's gaze of 'cultural lynching' leads to 'social death', with Brathwaite becoming 'ritually incorporated as the permanent enemy on the inside', as Orlando Patterson puts it.[803] This status as internal enemy is forced upon Brathwaite by the university; considering Patterson's description, it is understandable that Brathwaite connects his own experiences to enslavement and lynching.

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[798] Brathwaite, *Strange Fruit*, pp. 33–34.
[799] Boria Sax, *Imaginary Animals: The Monstrous, the Wondrous and the Human* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), p.121.
[800] Brathwaite, *Sappho Sakyi's Meditations* (Mona: Savacou Publications, 1989), p. 12. The book reprints poems from the late 1950s.
[801] Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*, p. 273.
[802] Brathwaite, *X/Self*, p. 114.
[803] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 39.

Based on poet Vladimir Lucien's account of a later, failed attempt to meet Brathwaite in Barbados, it seems Brathwaite also referred to the basilisk in his personal life, as a force interfering with technology to close channels of communication with his allies:

> I explained that I had called but the phone had (sort of) 'rung out'. I can't remember his words, but he insinuated or referred to something he had previously spoken to me about: the basilisk and how it related to me not reaching him, as it had hindered other connections. I had trouble understanding at first: was it a thing he was talking about? A ghost or creature? Or was it merely a metaphor for what had been happening to him?[804]

How to defeat a basilisk? The medieval *Gesta Romanorum* describes how Alexander the Great slew this monster by following philosophers' guidance: '"Place a glass in an elevated situation between the army and the wall under which the basilisk cowers; and no sooner shall he behold it, than his own figure, reflected in the mirror, shall return the poison upon himself, and kill him." Alexander took their advice, and thus saved his followers.'[805] The fable concludes allegorically: 'look into the glass of reflection, and by remembrance of human frailty, destroy the vices which time elicits.'[806]

Strange Fruit mirrors back the basilisk's stare, aiming to 'destroy the vices' of N.Y.U. The effort succeeds as poetry; condemning institutional malice that beset Brathwaite, it movingly depicts his sorrows and search for solace. However, it has clearly not destroyed New York University, and proves ineffective as therapy. Brathwaite realises that the comforts of Barbados do not protect him from trauma. In the volume's concluding 'end poem poems', he confesses:

> no matter how i try to write-them-way like when the night sea
> draw an leave mwe here still hangin from te swingin tree […]
>
> devil Basilisk destroying all that i had an cudda be
> Where Billie sing my bones can barely lissen
> The grass below my feet is blood not dew-drop glissen[807]

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[804] Vladimir Lucien, 'Who has eyes to see: On Kamau Brathwaite's Art & Life, *P.N. Review*, no. 239, 2008, 40–41: 41.

[805] *Gesta Romanorum: Or, Entertaining Moral Stories*, 2 vols, trans. by Rev. C. Swan (London: C. and J. Rivington, 1824), vol. 2, pp. 205–206.

[806] *Gesta Romanorum,* vol. 2, p. 206.

[807] Brathwaite, *Strange Fruit*, p. 119.

He enters a 'silence that contains no birthmark now . no life . no prophecy'.[808] This 'remembrance of human frailty', though, offers beginnings of actual reflection, destroying not N.Y.U. but the basilisk inside Brathwaite, the condemnatory gaze internalised through cultural lynching. *The Lazarus Poems* reflects this gaze back onto the inner beast, enabling the poet's return from nullity. In his 'Introduction', Brathwaite's recovery emblematises wider efforts by African-Caribbean culture to escape social death:

> that this orisis crisis imposed upon tis body of the soul here at the beginning of the 21st century is > one more re-ply(yes)/replay/response to the catastrophe (e) of slavery – the most – *need i say it?* – comprehensi -ve & long-lasting traumatic event in (modern) human history.[809]

Lazarus recurs in the poems, his Biblical resurrection presaging Brathwaite's own, but not in a purely Christian sense. Brathwaite also invokes neo-African religious practices from the Caribbean, systems where boundaries between life and death are more porous than in Abrahamic creeds. Kumina is a Jamaican faith practised among descendants of Kongo people from Central Africa: 'unless the blood of Kongolese ancestors flows in the veins it is impossible to be of the Kumina world'.[810] In 'reBurial', Braithwaite depicts funeral rites in Kumina: the deceased is buried after nine nights and 'begins a journey of unMemory into **kalunga**, where the Person and the Persona [two aspects of a worshipper's 'soul'] pa | rt company at the CARREFOUR – at the crossroads of Time'.[811] Forty days after the burial, 'there is an eventual reunification of Person < | & Persona on the xtreme dark side of **kalunga**.'[812] The body is then exhumed for ceremonial reburial:

> The reburial allows the Person, w/*its* 'new' Persona, to be recognized as a Spirit ANCESTOR so that the reburial is in a sense a reBirth but in the Spirit World where CROSSROADS/CARREFOUR have become MIRROWS – mirrors of soft light you can

[808] Brathwaite, *Strange Fruit*, p. 120.
[809] Brathwaite, *The Lazarus Poems* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017). p. xi. 'orisis' seems a pun on 'orisha' and 'Osiris' (Kemetic god of the dead).
[810] Olive Lewin, *Rock It Come Over: The Folk Music of Jamaica* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2000), p. 219.
[811] Brathwaite, *The Lazarus Poems*, p. 5.
[812] Brathwaite, *The Lazarus Poems*, p. 5.

> walk through in both directions and not only self/self but also self into OTHER & vice versa, since you are now dealing w/DOUBLE RELEXION –[813]

These mirrors confound spiritual basilisks. The monster's gaze returns to it, while 'MIRROWS' let selfhoods proliferate. The reflective meeting with oneself, experienced by Brathwaite at *Strange Fruit*'s conclusion, no longer duplicates pain, but offers alternative directions for growth. Again, Legba oversees the process; in Vodou, this *lwa* oversees crossroads in his role as opener of ways.[814] Maya Deren anticipates Brathwaite's mirror imagery in portraying Legba as intermediary between life and death: 'Since he stands at the cross-roads, he has access to the worlds on either side, as if he were on both sides of the mirror surface which separates them.'[815] *The Lazarus Poems* charts Brathwaite's journey through the 'MIRROWS' and his reconciliation to becoming a 'Spirit ANCESTOR'; inhabiting his Lazarus persona to imagine annihilation and revival, he confronts old age and physical death, thereby overcoming death's social equivalent. Late in the collection, the poem 'Revelation' ends: 'closing my eyes in the darkness | to open the grave of this world' – and is accompanied by photography of underwater sculptures off the coast of Grenada, depicting faces with eyes closed as though resting.[816] This installation's sculptor, Jason deCaires Taylor, says his work represents 'how human intervention or interaction with nature can be positive and sustainable, an icon of how we can live in a symbiotic relationship with nature'.[817] However, Brathwaite captions the image as portraying 'drowned slaves', reading the statuary as memorialising Africans killed by European slavers on the Middle Passage.[818] The poem thereby imagines the resurrection of these dead. Since Brathwaite envisions present-day persecution of Black people in the Americas as a continuation of slavery, this revival applies spiritually to all descendants of the enslaved.

Sycorax Video-style's intense visuality, combined with incorporation of photographs and the networked interrelations between poems, means each volume resembles an online presentation in hard copy format. Unlike websites, though, these books resist disruption by

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[813] Brathwaite, *The Lazarus Poems*, p. 5.
[814] Deren, pp. 99–100.
[815] Deren, p. 98.
[816] Brathwaite, *The Lazarus Poems*, p. 110.
[817] Jason deCaires Taylor, untitled biographical statement, *Issues in Science and Technology*, vol. 29 no. 3, 2013, p. 6.
[818] Brathwaite, *The Lazarus Poems*, p. 110.

enemy techno-magic, while Brathwaite’s textual obeah tackles repressive institutions and resurrects him from ‘cultural lynching’. Brathwaite’s long-term thinking about Caribbean culture clarifies his methodology. Of particular relevance is his thinking about creolisation, where ‘**ac/culturation**, which is the yoking [...] of one culture to another (in this case the slave/African to the European); and **inter/culturation**, which is an unplanned, unstructured but osmotic relationship proceeding from this yoke.’[819] Acculturation is what N.Y.U. wanted from Brathwaite – that he become ‘**GOOD RODNEY KING & CALIBAN**’ – but it received interculturation instead, as his maronage challenged with ‘**NATION-LANGUAGE > | de top-notch status of the Prospero Plantation**’.

Applying Brathwaite’s creolisation onto the digital realm, online texts can be conceptualised as vulnerable to acculturation, relying on global institutions to provide infrastructure and access for the World-Wide Web. Henry Jenkins identifies how software, despite its vaunted interactivity, enforces corporate dicta more strictly than societal norms could accomplish: ’Code is technical data: the programming makes it impossible to violate its restrictions on use (even if those restrictions in practice exceed any reasonable demand).’[820] Brathwaite’s books, in contrast, benefit from word-processing software’s digital potential, while protecting his exact vision of its appearance in the public sphere. This could include the freedom to improvise a departure from the existing text in performance or during future revisions (all part of the protection he encodes into the poetry). Each collection is a Maroon entity, an island of text offshore of the online continent. In his poetic archipelago, Brathwaite’s obeah develops, preserving nation language’s folk roots as manifested through his Sycorax text. The ‘MIRROWS’, those ‘mirrors of soft light you can walk through in both directions’, lap like waves on the book’s shores, letting readers through but repelling the basilisk’s gaze. Brathwaite’s digital aesthetics thus remain free to offer a decolonising voice that disrupts linguistic and institutional hegemony.

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[819] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p.6. Brathwaite’s bolding.

[820] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York and London: New York University Press. 2006), p. 63.

4.6. 'dialeck for democracy': Dialect Technology in Bill Griffiths' Community Activism

Bill Griffiths' anti-authoritarian stance mirrors Brathwaite's suspicion regarding use of technology by police and the legal system; his opus therefore features instructive comparisons to Kamau Brathwaite's techno-magical poetics. Griffiths' cynicism about technological surveillance manifests in works like an untitled poem from *The Cuddy Anthem*, where a Geordie repeatedly calls Crimestoppers (a hotline allowing callers to report crimes anonymously) to report as theft the movement in 1022 of the Venerable Bede's bones to from Jarrow to Durham Cathedral.[821] There is also 'The Psychic Fifth', a short story in which human-seeming 'Robot Pro-Councillors' are constructed to spy on townsfolk, before learning actual humanity and turning against their creators.[822] However, unlike Brathwaite, Griffiths is sceptical about magical script, dismissing 'the idea that runes had primarily a magical role' in the Early Medieval period, and arguing that 'there is no reason to doubt that the appeal of runes (as of any alphabet to any people) was essentially practical.'[823] His reaction to information-gathering technology also differs from that of Brathwaite, who adopts a maronage of the book to defend his psyche. As early as the 1980s, Griffiths saw technological proliferation leading to demystification of the book, and thought that this could open new possibilities for publication formats:

> […] (Vikings took care to wash the writing off BOOKS in running water; the bolder ones kidnapped and ransomed BOOKS). But maybe there are signs of a shift in this orientation. Government no longer depends absolutely on the written, typed or printed word, but on the computer tape and broadcasting control. Perhaps a book is no longer seen as a threat, a parody of power, but can return to being simply the book again. Such a liberation should be a golden opportunity for little presses also to shake off THE BOOK (along with the typewriter, the symmetrical page, the book as hinged or bound entity).[824]

This leaves the question of what poets can do about 'computer tape and broadcasting control', among other technologies of surveillance and manipulation. An answer is to turn

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[821] Griffiths, *The Cuddy Anthem*, n.p.
[822] Griffiths, 'The Psychic Fifth', *The Penniless Press*, no. 13, 2001, 30–34: 32.
[823] Griffiths, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic* (Hockwold-cum-Wilton: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1996, 2003, p. 147.
[824] Griffiths, 'The Book', *Poetry and Little Press Information*, no. 4, 1981, 3–4: 4. Griffiths' capitals.

this technology against hegemonic systems of surveillance and control, by making it a vehicle for dialect. Griffiths did this with the Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group, which he co-founded in 1998, using online technology to research North East dialect.

The move expanded upon Griffiths' pre-existing engagement with anarcho-democratic politics as a form of total expression, of embodied, creative action within a community. During the 1990s, Seaham's local councils persisted with decisions that Griffiths saw as against the town's interests. Challenging this, he came close to gaining a position where he could have implemented his localism on a large scale. He failed, but nevertheless leveraged positive developments for his neighbourhood. In 1994, there was an announcement of 'grandiose plans for dockland redevelopment and new executive housing'. Griffiths' friend, historian Bill Lancaster, recollects:

> This 'wash and brush-up' of Seaham was seen by Bill as the gentrification of his coastal village and a personal threat as the demolition of his home was part of the scheme. Although new to Seaham he organized and led the protests against the plan, which culminated in him standing as candidate for the council. Labour's hold on Seaham was traditionally watertight and their candidates were usually elected unopposed. He came within a few votes of winning the seat, a shock to Labour who wisely revised the plan and left Bill's area as it was.[825]

Griffiths' efforts to enter and subvert the council hierarchy could be compared to the B.P.R. takeover of the Poetry Society in the 1970s; however, while his electoral campaign in Seaham won a reprieve from vertically-imposed regeneration for his neighbourhood, he failed to gain more direct influence over local decision-making, and consequently could not cultivate his poetics into political practice beyond the personal level. The collectivist ethos of his dialect research stems in part from desire for a group sharing his radically democratic position. Griffiths' development from political activism to collectivist dialect research is documented in, among other places, the poem 'On Vane Tempest Provisionally Shut, 23 October, in the Afternoon, 1992', whose opening was considered in this thesis' Introduction. The poem was found by Griffiths' editor Alan Halsey on a computer disc alongside the dialect poems of *The Cuddy Anthem* (1993), but did not appear in that booklet, and was apparently composed later, since it refers to D.C.C.'s regeneration efforts.[826] As discussed in

[825] Bill Lancaster, 'Bill Griffiths Northern Days', *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, vol. 6 no. 1, 2014, pp. 13–26; p. 16.
[826] Halsey, notes to Griffiths, *Collected Poems Volume 3*, p. 512–13.

the Introduction to this thesis, the poem depicts Satan destroying Seaham's last working colliery, Vane Tempest, by knocking it into the sea. The Devil, an arch-Thatcherite, then harangues redundant miners (including Griffiths' persona) to invest their redundancy payments in a newly privatised Hell, a post-regeneration Seaham where the Devil will 'landskip ye aal in kak'.[827] The speaker reflects:

> An' Aa stud in a stiumor.
> For whe knaws, i' true,
> What's plann'd?
> It's sittled
> An' leave us wi' nowt
> But dialeck for democracy.[828]

Like parliamentary and local democracy, shareholding in privatised industries bestows a mere illusion of control over the world; Seaham's actual future is already 'plann'd' and 'sittled' between the Council and its corporate allies, just as the 'Dis' of Brathwaite's Kingston runs as a conspiracy between politicians, police, and organised crime. In 'dialeck', personal choice persists in defiance of the Thatcherite Hell. Though dialect, too, is besieged by a hegemonic culture industry enforcing standard English, its potential is far from trivial. The poem concludes:

> Onyway,
> Aa had me environmentalist badge alang wi' me,
> and howk'd it oot, and confronted him wi'it,
> an' Satan bowked oot an awefu' pump,
> and lowped inti the hole
> the pit wiz yance,
> an' the sun cam spanglin' oot,
> an' someone somewhere
> gov the bishop a thanks
> as tho' any wun man can de owt
> thru power
> ti release ye.[829]

[827] Griffiths, *Collected Poems Volume 3*, p. 146.
[828] Griffiths, *Collected Poems Volume 3*, p. 147. A 'pump' is a fart – Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, p. 136.
[829] Griffiths, *Collected Poems Volume 3*, p. 147.

The poem stands at the confluence of environmentalism, political protest, and dialect research. Through dialect, the protagonist refutes Thatcherite control, hinting at such speech's tidalectic potential to subvert power. While Satan is banished, the final lines indicate that power itself persists: 'someone somewhere' still believes that the bishop could remedy injustice, although the ecclesiarch has failed to avert the pit closure, and has long collaborated with 'the pollis that bray'd the miners' during industrial action. Such subservience to power is foundational for all the teetering structures erected upon it. In response to this problem, Griffiths moved from electoral campaigning to another form of activism that, I argue, develops North East dialect as a means for speakers to win independence from linguistic domination.

In 1998, Griffiths' North East dialect research intersected with his collectivist ethos as, with friends in Seaham, he co-founded the Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group. He built for the Group a website that summarised their genesis:

> The Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group was formed in 1998 AD to promote the awareness of dialect English as spoken now and formerly in the North East. It grew out of research into local speech and literature carried out in the mid 90s, involving Bill Griffiths, Gordon Patrickson and Trevor Charlton of Seaham, leading to two initial publications, *North East Dialect: survey and word list* and *North East Dialect: the texts* (Centre for Northern Studies, University of Northumbria, 1999).
>
> A selection of the few hundred most current terms was made and issued as a dialect questionnaire, circulated with grant-aid from 'Tomorrow's History'. Over 500 responses were received from all over the region, many including extra words and information. Results were processed by Bill Griffiths, Trevor Charlton and Shim Hegedus and issued as a report in Jan 2002. It showed a wide knowledge and use of dialect vocabulary among older residents, interesting sets of local word preferences, a marked decline in use among younger respondents, but also evidence for the survival of a reduced core of dialect vocabulary in general use. [830]

A 2006 interview, recorded during wider research into North East dialect by B.B.C. Radio Newcastle, offers insights into the Dialect Group's structure. Griffiths is interviewed alongside colleagues Tom Richardson and Nicole Hopper. Asked for introductions, Hopper says 'I was born in Sunderland and I still live in Sunderland now', while Richardson proclaims 'Ah was born in Easing'on, jus' along th' road, and ah live in Seaham. Ah've lived

[830] *Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group*, archived website, London: British Library, 2005-03-22T12:00:00.

in Seaham on and off for for'y-seven and a half years.'[831] Their North Eastern, working-class accents are noticeable and, especially for Richardson, include pronunciation. Griffiths, in contrast, sounds middle-class, though the present company, and his time in Seaham, influence his pronunciation: 'Me nem, Bill Griffiths. I was born in Middlesex but lived in Seaham from nine'een nine'y on.'[832] His 't's are soft as the 'd' in Brathwaite's enunciation of 'cole' (for 'cold'; see Chapter 3.3), approaching the glottal stops that dot Richardson's discourse. Griffiths' pronunciation of 'name' echoes interviewer Jennifer Bartram, from nearby South Shields ('just sort'v say your nyem').[833] Tones inching northwards from Middlesex, he sounds like an educated Yorkshireman.

Bartram asks about the trio's experience of using or hearing dialect terms, and about these words' contexts within their personal activities. Griffiths' diffidence is noticeable. He happily supplies the group's research findings, or etymologies from his medieval studies, but his friends handle questions about personal use of dialect (Richardson proves especially loquacious). Griffiths' attitude is sensible: growing up elsewhere, he could not answer queries about, say, using Durham dialect during his childhood. It is nevertheless refreshing that, despite his accomplishments, he does not impose himself as leader or spokesman; he is instead a specialist within a collective whose other members' expertise is more pertinent to some matters. Even when Bartram enquires about Dialect Group activities, Griffiths asks 'Shall I do that?' and awaits consent from the others.[834] His answer discloses willingness to learn from folkic experience:

> **Griffiths:** [...] in 2001 we put out a questionnaire, quite a simple one, and that got a lot of responses, about 500 kem in, and we built on that to build up a dictionary, which is published now. And that's a mix of words from previous publications and all the words that were sent in. And people was very keen on it. We get words coming in every week, certainly, if not every day. There's a lot to collect still. […] One I hadn't heard before was 'pagged' for 'tired out'.
> **Richardson:** That one's been in common use for as long as I remember, yeah. But you've just added it to the list, haven't you?
> **Griffiths:** That's the first I heard it.

[831] 'Conversation in Seaham about Accent, Dialect and Attitudes to Language', B.B.C. 'Voices' Recordings, 2005, London, British Library, 00:00:35. All quotes from this source are my transcriptions.
[832] 'Conversation in Seaham…', 00:00:17.
[833] 'Conversation in Seaham…', 00:40:35 and 00:00:03.
[834] 'Conversation in Seaham...', 00:01:07.

Richardson: Yeah, maybe you should get out more, Bill?[835]

The Group's research operated in line with Griffiths' anarcho-democratic principles. The point was not to dictate a canonical repertoire of words, but to conceptualise the dialect as fluid and mutable, with different words current in different parts of the North East, and the continual potential for new words to emerge (or for existing words to attain new meanings).

The website boasted a page where readers anywhere in the world could contribute dialect terms to the growing corpus, effectively becoming co-authors of the vocabulary list – perhaps the ultimate extension of the collaborative practice that Griffiths had developed at Writers Forum and through his publishing projects.[836] Authorship became networked and decentred in a tidalectic archipelago of researchers. Collecting input from living speakers, the Dialect Group documented speech that is no mere 'essence, moving, apparently without change' (as Hall characterises essentialised nationhood), but that constantly adjusts to its environment.[837] Numerous 'dialect terms seem to have survived by a process of doubling-up, whereby the unfamiliar term is linked into a self-explanatory compound' – for example 'guissy-pig', where 'guissy' itself means 'pig'.[838] Also, established dialect words have taken new meanings:

canch (stony ridge) now used for 'kerb'
charver (young person) now used for 'club-goer'
duds (clothes) now used for 'boxer shorts'
dut (bowler hat or cap) now used for 'small woolly hat'
midden (rubbish tip) now used for 'dustbin'
skeets (boots) now used for 'football boots'
sneck (latch) now used for 'catch on a yale lock'
and from earlier sources: settle (bench) used (1938) for 'couch'.[839]

Both the Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group, and North East dialect itself, epitomise Griffiths' democratic anarchism. Like his 're-visioned' poems, or the provisional text of *A Note on Democracy*, dialect words' meanings change when introduced to new contexts, and

[835] 'Conversation in Seaham...', 00:01:09.
[836] *Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group*.
[837] Hall, 'Our Mongrel Selves', 278.
[838] Griffiths, 'Words with Edges', 49.
[839] Griffiths, 'Words with Edges', 49. Griffiths' underlining.

are subject to renegotiation through conversation. The Group exemplifies democratic participation where success depends on locally specific knowledge, and on willingness to concede the floor when one's knowledge is less pertinent than someone else's (as does Griffiths in the B.B.C. interview). The Group celebrates (in Hall's words) the 'dislocated histories and hybridised ethnicities' of their region, registering not only the modern dialect's flux, but that the dialect has never not been in flux. Griffiths' *Dictionary of North East Dialect*, this research's ultimate outcome, painstakingly catalogues etymologies; not only are there abundant legacies of Old English and Norse (which Griffiths suspects of having creolised together during the Early Medieval period), but loan-words are borrowed from throughout nearby regions and nations, and from peripatetic communities like the Roma (the abovementioned 'charver' has Romani origins).[840] Likewise, creolisation with standard English may take place without dialect being subsumed: 'Thus 'nebby' has come to mean 'nosey' after the example of slang based on standard English; and 'clart about' is used as an equivalent to standard English slang 'muck about'.'[841] Griffiths also rejects the racist trope that 'dialect signals ethnic descent.'[842] It is impossible to read the Dialect Group's research and come away, as Hall puts it, 'subsumed by some essentialist conception of national identity' for the North East. The best antidote to fascism is a good dictionary.

The background to this cultural openness is evident during a tense moment in the 2005 B.B.C. interview. Bartram asks how the interviewees use dialect differently depending on social context (essentially, asking about the local version of the creole continuum discussed in Chapter 2.2):

> **Bartram:** OK, and what about you, Bill? [Long silence] Do you change the way you speak?
> **Griffiths:** Probably, but, er… [coughs] Sorry. I've got a kitlish throat.
> **Bartram:** Kitlish throat?
> **Richardson:** I find it interesting wi' Bill 'cos you're mainly southern, en't you, really? You're just pretendin', pretendin' to be a Northerner?
> **Griffiths:** I knew Newcastle before you was even born.
> **Richardson:** He's getting defensive now. I like Bill's use of a lot of Northern phrases, isn' it, it sounds really good, […] He's obviously predominantly Southern, but he uses a lot of Northern terms.
> **Griffiths:** They're lovely words.

840 Griffiths, *A Dictionary of North East Dialect*, p.xiii; p. 30.
841 Griffiths, 'Retaking the Language', 130.
842 Griffiths, 'Words with Edges', p. 44.

Richardson: They're great, aren't they, aye.[843]

Richardson, despite his banter, clearly appreciates not only his friend's dialect knowledge, but the aesthetic effect when Griffiths' comparatively middle-class voice uses North East dialect. Griffiths' outsider status as a 'southerner' in Seaham relates to the Dialect Group's inclusivity. Lifelong locals might run a dialect research project that avoided pitfalls of ethnic or linguistic essentialism; but when the group is comprised of diverse residents, with 'insiders' and 'outsiders' bringing complementary experiences to the undertaking, then a tidalectic, open-bordered concept of dialect is even more likely to emerge.

A later poem by Griffiths demonstrates this principle in action. One of his Seaham friends and Dialect Group collaborators was Shim Hegedus, originally from Hungary. Griffiths' long poem 'The Violinist' grows out of this friendship, interweaving the histories of Hegedus' family and of Hungary itself.[844] During the poem's final part, which addresses equestrian traditions on the Hungarian plains, a section breaks into North East dialect:

Glittry een
o' siller CDs
twee
n yan i' me brow
Ti keek the doth'rin-way air-fronts

Then wi' me wand
Aa dad th' caad-wind
Intiv a nowt

To fetch th' sun's season

Say that Aa am:
Tall-hat Buso!

Lookstha!
My *buso* fences his stick
Jig-jazzes away
Winter undue
Tears down the star

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[843] 'Conversation in Seaham...', 00:53:13.
[844] 'Hegedus' means 'violinist', which licenses imagery from Hungary's musical traditions. Griffiths, *A Tour of the Fairground* (Exbourne: Etruscan Books, 2007), p. 85.

And sings the song of pastry shops[845]

A Busó is a performer in Busójárás, a carnival in the Hungarian town of Mohács; wands and horned masks are part of the costume. Different origin stories depict the Busós arising either to scare away occupying Ottoman forces, or as a fertility ritual to end winter. Ethnographer Tekla Dömötör views the former explanation as improbable, since the Shokacz (the ethnic group which originated Busó masks) did not arrive in Mohács until after the Ottomans left.[846] The rationale nevertheless has traction locally; Dömötör argues that this is an attempt to overwrite the ritual's erotic elements. Griffiths emphasises his Busó's intent to 'dad th' caad-wind | Intiv a nowt' ('beat the cold wind into a nothing'), but decolonial intimations are nevertheless present. 'Tear down the star' represents a battle-cry of rebels who attacked communist symbols during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, 'pulling down red stars from building tops'.[847] The anti-authoritarianism of Busójárás is thus turned against a police state that operated as an appendage of the U.S.S.R. The oppressive institution is metaphorised as winter. The Busó in 'The Violinist' engages in what, for Griffiths, is a global tradition of locally specific folk manifestations that undermine tyranny.

The 'Glittry een | o' siller CDs' do not reflect mask-making practices in Mohács; photography of Busójárás shows the eyes painted on.[848] The presence of compact discs is also anachronistic as regards the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the carnival's even older origins. C.D.s were, however, a widespread means of collecting music at the time of the poem's composition. The historical ritual hence emerges as constantly updatable in response to technological developments; analogous phenomena include the delivery of neo-African rhythms via Jamaican sound systems, or the Dialect Group's online platform for researching folk vocabulary. Incorporating such contemporary details, the poetry resists ossification into an idealised, historical form that might connote the cultural 'purity' of a nationalist agenda.

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[845] Griffiths, *A Tour of the Fairground*, p.104.
[846] Tekla Dömötör, 'Animistic Concepts and Supernatural Power in Hungarian Folk Narratives and Folk Customs', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, vol. 4 no. 1, June 1967, 127–137: 128.
[847] Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne and János L. Rainer, 'Part Two: From Demonstrations to Revolution: Introduction', *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, ed. Békés, Byrne and Rainer (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2002), pp. 191–216: p. 199.
[848] Henry Bourne, 'Portraits from Hungary's Busojaras Festival', *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, 16 March 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2017/03/16/t-magazine/portraits-from-hungarys-busojaras-festival.html> [accessed 16 March 2022].

The poem valorises Hegedus' participation in the Dialect Group; it also shows that North East dialect is available for use by immigrant voices, and that it can portray experiences from radically different cultures. Finally, by describing decolonial, anti-authoritarian characters and actions, the poem's nation language opposes hierarchies of power – not only local ones like Durham County Council, but internationally, learning from, caring for, and supporting resistance globally.

Through such poetics, Griffiths' cultural activism in Seaham, particularly around dialect research, remains a testament to the possibility of local resistance against the totalising influence of the nation and the County Council. It stands open to continuous renewal of language, and operates in solidarity with subaltern speech from different places and cultures. Finally, in Griffiths' poetry, it comprises the marginalised community's voice against the powerful, highlighting the latter's helplessness to grant freedom from the structures that create this power.

This chapter, then, has explored different technologies and techniques to carry nation language beyond oral performance. Brathwaite's Sycorax Video-style is full of potential for activating total expression through nation language performances on the page. This could involve bringing together two strands of Griffiths' influence that did not overlap strongly within his own output: his visual poetics and his dialect writing. Brathwaite's interest in medieval illuminated manuscripts suggests a historically English tradition that could be adopted as a rich genealogy for future projects in this vein. If Griffiths' hand-drawn lettering combined with Brathwaite's spatialized nation language and the richness of early medieval manuscript culture, the results could be spectacular.

Brathwaite and Griffiths make expert use of found, oral material in politically engaged, found poems. *Trench Town Rock* and *Star Fish Jail* suggest a methodology that could inform other works. Both poets are, in a sense, outsiders within their milieus, with middle-class roots and a keenness to speak for working-class interests: Brathwaite is a middle-class Bajan writing about working-class Jamaicans, and Griffiths is a White man from Middlesex advocating for a mixed-race South Londoner (or, elsewhere, celebrating North Eastern pit towns). They show it is possible to create nation language poetry in a voice not inherently one's own, so long as there is sympathy, deep knowledge, and (crucially) a sense of

permission involved. A poetics of found speech could thus excel at advocating for the community whose nation language is deployed.

Finally, any poetry advocating for marginalised communities today must consider technology's role in distributing, controlling, and harvesting information. Such systems can spread hegemony and suppress alternative cultures or politics. Kamau Brathwaite's last collections use modern book-publishing technology and the magic of his Sycorax Video-style to critique the U.S.'s racist surveillance state and resurrect himself, Lazarus-like, from the 'cultural lynching'. Griffiths and the Durham & Tyneside Dialect Group take a complementary approach, using the Internet's connective power to marshal a nation language community that transcends place while retaining roots in Northumbrian history. This allowed a worldwide community of North East dialect speakers to share their knowledge creolistically, while reinforcing their distinctive speech and culture through maronage. In the Dialect Group's open conduct and Griffiths' poetry, there is a refusal to let this nation language community be limited by bounds of geography or ethnicity. It is an inspiring example of how to constitute a nation language poetics without succumbing to reactionary myths of lost purity.

Conclusion: 'two journeys being now enmesh(ed) in interrelated memory'

> […] but not Kamau Brathwaite, he was not on the ark, instead Baba, the great teacher, had long since evaporated into air, into language, into sound, into the very sex fruit of poetry. Oil does not dry on his tongue, nor honey on the tips of his fingers.
>
> – Anthony Joseph, *The Frequency of Magic* [849]

> Thought of Bill, in purgatory the other day. An assumption he would hate. Were at the traveller's camp, with police, colleagues – to get the Romany to have the jab. Politely, they said no.
>
> – Doug Jones, *Posts* [850]

Kamau Brathwaite passed away on 4 February 2020, while this thesis was still in preparation. 'Passed away', suggesting movement and change rather than cessation, usually seems euphemistic, but here suits his belief in a nebulous boundary between life and death. Bill Griffiths – a poet of whom Brathwaite might have been unaware, but whose values, concerns and formal strategies reflect Brathwaite's own – predeceased him by some thirteen years. Despite their other similarities, the two men's beliefs regarding soul, spirit and afterlife differed radically. In Brathwaite's fusion of neo-African faiths, death allows recuperation from historical trauma, and hence permits spiritual liberation, so that (for example) in the Kumina religion's funerary rites, 'CROSSING THE WA | TER' represents 'the journey of the Spirit along the **kalunga** of the underworld – | as well as the MiddlePassage – the two journeys being now enmesh(ed) in interrelated memory'.[851] Meanwhile, for Griffiths the soul is a fiction compelling servility, leaving 'nothing to look forwards to but an increase in central power and an intensification of the patterns of power

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[849] Anthony Joseph, *The Frequency of Magic* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2019), p. 253. Joseph's novel was published before Brathwaite's passing.
[850] Doug Jones, 'from *Posts*', *Junction Box*, no. 16, 15 November 2021, p. 3. <https://glasfrynproject.org.uk/w/6763/doug-jones-purgatory/> [accessed 16 March 2022].
[851] Brathwaite, 'reBurial (1)', *The Lazarus Poems*, p. 8, 'kalunga' being the spirit's journey into the afterlife.

based on the idea of the soul.'[852] Distinctions between Brathwaite's 'spirit' and Griffiths' 'soul' are significant. Brathwaite's word-choice avoids evoking how the soul, in Christianity, is entangled in a power hierarchy that Griffiths sees as 'a vital component in fundamental political tenets, that seem unchanged in essential form from the first civilisation onwards. For the concept of authority is based on the creed that God created human life.'[853] In other words, Brathwaite's tidalectic movement of spirit rejects the master-slave dialectic that Griffiths disdains in the Christian worldview. The poets' divergent metaphysics are underpinned by a shared, liberatory impulse.

Despite this kinship, it is vanishingly unlikely that either poet envisioned encountering the other in the afterlife. The present thesis, though, arranges just such a conversation between the poets' bodies of work, to demonstrate what can be gained through cross-cultural listening and learning. Such learning becomes especially effective with a tidalectic model wherein ideas circulate without one culture becoming suborned to another in a master-slave dialectic of power.

Putting Brathwaite and Griffiths in dialogue, I have opened a discussion about how Caribbean nation language poetics might fructify Anglophone poetry beyond the Caribbean diaspora. Griffiths' innovative praxis, especially his work with North East dialect, suggests how Brathwaite's breakthroughs could inspire responses to the historic specificity of dialects or nation languages in England. This project could revivify the potentially distinctive poetries of English communities by redefining them against the monoculture and political centralisation associated with standard English. This shared difference from one another and from mainstream hegemony is itself a point of commonality among these plural communities. Such work might contribute to anti-racist and decolonial struggles, through recognition of writers in formerly colonised lands, and through shared opposition to metropolitan power hierarchies. Also, since many English communities, and the poets within them, are racialised as primarily White, by stressing fault-lines within hegemonic Whiteness, it is possible to honour the vision outlined in remarks by Stuart Hall:

> Whiteness is only a problem when it is invisible, when it is the naturalised norm; when it is not a colour but it is the norm against which all other colours are measured […] But whiteness

[852] Griffiths, *A Pocket History of the Soul* (Seaham: Amra Imprint, 1991), n.p., section 43.
[853] Griffiths, *A Pocket History of the Soul*, n.p., section 26.

> that recognises its own internal differences is a whiteness that we can of course negotiate with. […] We have to get them to try to deal with the complexity of how they became what they are – and, indeed, lost where they are.[854]

To consider how the poetry explored in this thesis might serve these goals, let us review the findings so far. This will establish how the avant-garde tactics discussed here could apply within England's present political circumstances.

In Chapter 1, the thesis investigated missed opportunities of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the Caribbean Artists Movement and the London nexus of the British Poetry Revival – milieus of Brathwaite and Griffiths respectively – operated in proximity, and shared many aesthetic and political values, yet enjoyed little collaboration or contact with each other. This resulted partially from the groups' mutually incompatible approaches to the literary establishment, with C.A.M. seeking to impress and gain aid from holders of power, while B.P.R. poets sought to take over the same institutions of power. These contrasting approaches, combined with a need to survive institutional ignorance or hostility, prevented the factions from appreciating their common concerns. However, more substantial sharing of ideas sometimes occurred later, a key occasion being the 1975 *Poetry of the Americas* conference, where Brathwaite outlined his concepts of maronage and creolisation. Bill Griffiths benefitted from this presentation, possibly hearing it himself, and if not, then hearing the conference's co-host, Eric Mottram, sympathetically summarise Brathwaite's arguments. Griffiths related the discussion to his translation practice, which preserved source texts' syntactic features such as word order, thus bringing across 'the contrast and the difference [...] not how I can make it assimilatable, how I can bring it into English or reduce it into English, but looking specifically for those differences.'[855] Preserving the *Weltanschauung* of each source language, Griffiths resists assimilation of translated texts into normative English, creating synthetic creoles which overlay English vocabulary on Old Welsh, Old Icelandic or Assyrian grammar. They are nation languages in search of nations to speak them. Griffiths' early translations hence share with Brathwaite's nation language poetics a desire to preserve difference and resist assimilation, as does Griffiths' later dialect work.

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[854] Chris Smith, Stuart Hall and Maya Jaggi, *Whose Heritage? The Impact of Cultural Diversity on Britain's Living Heritage, National Conference, Manchester, 1st–3rd November 1999: Keynote Addresses* (London: Arts Council of England, 1999), p. 24.

[855] 'Panel on Translation', Side A, 13:45.

Chapter 2 considered Brathwaite's tidalectics. This alternative to Hegelian dialectics, inspired by the Caribbean's archipelagic geography, emerges from interactions between maronage's resistance to hegemony, and creolisation's openness to sharing ideas between cultures. Instead of a totalising synthesis, tidalectics advocates a drift of ideas back and forth between cultures, whose members can pick up or return each concept as they see fit; in Mandy Bloomfield's words, 'Events do not pass into the past but recede and return in an endless recycling'.[856] This model enables flourishing differences, rather than subsumption into sameness. Furthermore, tidalectics is key to Brathwaite's account of Caribbean nation language's emergence, which was not simply a matter of enslavers imposing a language onto the enslaved, or a synthesis between European and African tongues, but a mode of resistance, via which African legacies were consciously preserved. Nation language flowed wavelike back and forth between colonised and coloniser, successively altering the speech of both. Brathwaite himself identifies related processes within the U.K., and in the North East in particular. While the Caribbean and Northumbria have different histories, there are enough connections for Brathwaite to proclaim Basil Bunting's 'Briggflatts' as a 'nation language (*jordie*) long poem'.[857] Bunting's depiction of Early Medieval Northumbria abounds in archipelagic imagery, references to comparatively decentralised power structures (like the Celtic Church), and the region's history of migration and creolisation. Such poetics, and their underlying history, justify calling North East dialect a nation language, and let Griffiths' writings in that mode stand alongside Brathwaite's.

Nevertheless, slavery's atrocities in the Caribbean outweigh any suffering in the North East's modern past, despite ongoing oppression against the latter region. Stuart Hall, John Rex, and Richard Moore provide a framework which positions marginalised communities within the U.K. as colonies, subjected to metropolitan exploitation at the same time as benefitting from how the 'mother country' exploits peoples overseas. Griffiths' poems like *Mr. Tapscott* demonstrate this non-binary understanding of colony and metropole. Griffiths focuses on how working-class, predominantly White communities can learn from Black and multiracial resistance movements, such as the 1981 Toxteth uprising.

[856] Bloomfield, p. 178.
[857] Brathwaite, *X/Self*, p. 128.

Chapter 3 examined Brathwaite's and Griffiths' performance poetics, since a vital aspect of Brathwaite's theory is 'total expression', a positive feedback loop of immersion that galvanises both poet and audience at a performance event – and which nation language works to establish. Performance footage of Brathwaite establishes his techniques for bodily engaging live audiences, and for deepening his texts' meanings. Brathwaite's total expression has equivalents in the embodied praxis of sound poetry by Griffiths, Bob Cobbing, and others at Writers Forum, where (as in Brathwaite's schema) quasi-religious experiences emerged through sonic effects, and audiences became collaborators in performance. For both Brathwaite and Griffiths, the poem creates its own community. In nation language poems, these tendencies manifest as political expressions of care, as seen in Brathwaite's 'Rites' and Griffiths' *The Coal World*. Both texts use nation language to suggest trust and mutual support (albeit short-lived in 'Rites') within homosocial environments.

Likewise, both poets frequently double the meaning of a single expression, balancing multiple discourses in one moment. However, historic differences between their linguistic resources means their approaches differ: Brathwaite's calibanisms undermine power relationships built into standard English, while Griffiths draws from Early Medieval literature a poetics of kennings, creating images that can also be read in divergent ways.

Chapter 4 explored how both poets use technology to render nation language visually on the page. Brathwaite's Sycorax Video-style uses fonts and page space to convey performance, developing total expression into a bodily engagement with readers via the book. His visuality involves several techniques shared by Early Medieval illuminated manuscripts, including those produced at Lindisfarne in Northumbria. Drawing on the same body of medieval textuality, Griffiths creates book-works such as *Forming Four Dock Poems* and *Morning-Lands*, which likewise engage haptically with formation and arrangement of words in page-space. Both poets create a visual equivalent to nation language's sonic resistance. Further, Brathwaite's Sycorax Video-style, as in *Trench Town Rock*, often reframes found, nation language material as documentary poetry, analogously to samples and dubbing in Jamaican music. Griffiths also uses found poetry extensively. He rarely processes this material as visually as does Brathwaite, but nevertheless uses documentary methods to represent nation language voices in rebellion against oppression, as in *Star Fish Jail*. Throughout his work, Brathwaite maintains a preoccupation with Vodou, Kumina, Obeah,

and similar bodies of magico-religious practice in the Caribbean. Sycorax Video-style's role as an instrument of such arcana is evident from the technique's name, but his last collections fully transition into magical devices to counteract the '**post-9/11 metropolitan obeah**' of neo-colonial forces.[858] Griffiths, conversely, turns the rituals and apparatus of power against the powerful by using technology to research, harvest and disseminate nation language. Such anarcho-democratic practices go beyond conventionally defined poetry, informing his political activities and dialect research. In poetry written in tandem with his Dialect Group activities, he uses North East nation language to explore cross-cultural connections, confirming that the Group's maronage need not entail exclusionary attitudes toward locals from migrant backgrounds, such as Group participant Shim Hegedus. Throughout his poetry, Griffiths explores nation language techniques as expressions of political energy, articulating communal resistance against power structures associated with conventional speech and writing.

This thesis, then, proposes several strategies, developed in the poetry of Kamau Brathwaite and Bill Griffiths, that might prove invaluable for unleashing the political potential of writing in England's nation languages. Tidalectic openness to other cultures enables sharing of ideas between nation language communities without a hegemony emerging. Nation language creates scenarios of 'total expression' that include audiences in performance. Furthermore, it binds together communities in resistance against the power structures implicit in standard English. The subversive doubling of meaning via calibanisms or kennings allows the conventional meanings of words to be questioned at the same time as they are expressed. A text's visuality can be deepened to convey the totality of nation language performance. Documentary approaches supply nation language testimony to aid the investigation of injustices afflicting communities. Nation languages' own magical potential can confound the bureaucratic surveillance that reinforces and is reinforced by standard English. And finally, research into dialect and nation language broadens the linguistic resources available to explore (through poetry or otherwise) a community's relationships to its political context, its environment, or its own members.

Throughout the project, archives have proven a vital resource. A common theme in all the conference transcripts, ephemera, sound recordings, videos, correspondence, and

[858] Brathwaite, *Strange Fruit*, p. 20.

publishers' proofs examined by the thesis is the sheer labour that it took to produce Brathwaite's and Griffiths' bodies of work. This is certainly true of their poetry: think of the late-night proofreading and manual manipulation of lettering while Brathwaite and Bloodaxe Books prepared his *Middle Passages*, or Griffiths' painstaking use of questionnaires and website design to harvest dialect terms that ended up in his glossaries and poetry. The point applies equally to their wider actions. Listening to the recording of Brathwaite at *Poetry of the Americas*, one must admire the skill, knowledge and care it took to deliver his improvised lecture to an audience that included people with covertly racist assumptions (as we saw with Eric Mottram). Likewise, Griffiths' letters show how his raising of subscriptions, book design, printing, and book distribution in support of Ray Gilbert and Delvan McIntosh were acts of care that upbraid an uncaring legal system. The labour of transcribing a radio interview or a conference recording may pale in comparison, but has nevertheless been instructive for the present writer, revealing networks of support (and sometimes tension or antagonism) that inform these men's poems.

The fruits of my research may prove particularly useful for poets seeking to address situations that have arisen in England and globally during recent years. Beyond Brathwaite's death, the period of the thesis' composition has seen other, major events that demand to be seen in the context of his thought and Griffiths'. For readers engaged with the Black Lives Matter movement, both poets offer much. Beyond Brathwaite's Blackness, there is his alleged surveillance by academic and federal institutions in New York, and his subsequent thinking about 'cultural lynching'. Meanwhile, the movement is congruent with Griffiths' long-term activism against racist violence in the UK's legal system, his support for persecuted, Black and mixed-race prisoners (like Delvan McIntosh and Ray Gilbert), and his disdain for homogenised White Englishness.

Not long after the 'Leave' campaign's narrow victory in the 23 June 2016 referendum on the U.K.'s European Union membership, the present author walked past Marble Arch in London, and witnessed a substantial, authorised rally of the far-right English Defence League (E.D.L.). The thesis was conceived soon afterwards. The E.D.L. has historically tried to present itself as non-racist, as though its publicly stated aim of minimising Muslim presence in the U.K. would make it much more sympathetic. At the rally, this guise was belied by chants openly advocating White Power, and celebrating the referendum result as

heralding removal of immigrants from England.[859] Far from all supporters of leaving the E.U. were motivated by racism, but this group of racists was clearly rapt at the idea that 'Brexit' might expedite persecution of people of colour. This seemed to epitomise the delusions of monolithic Englishness critiqued by Griffiths, Stuart Hall, and others cited throughout this thesis. It is hoped that the poetic nurturing of English dialects and nation languages might enable wider consciousness of nationalist narratives' falsehood. This could allow pride in a community's distinctive history, culture, achievements, and speech, while encouraging a sense of kinship with other groups through a shared difference from, or maronage against, hegemonic norms. It would aid the postcolonial conviviality described by Paul Gilroy, 'recognition of mutual worth, dignity, and essential similarity' that 'imposes restrictions on how we behave if we wish to act justly'.[860]

This is not to suggest that nation language poetics could somehow reverse the 2016 referendum result. Brathwaite and Griffiths are unlikely poets for that task. Brathwaite, understandably for a Caribbean poet, gives little thought to the E.U. When it does appear in his poetry, it is a continuation of Europe's colonial history, with his Christopher Columbus musing, '**I became what || EU | rope made me**'.[861] He frequently writes of Europe as a region of contiguous cultures, incarnated in the image of Mont Blanc:

So that **Kilimanjaro**
around which wheels 'Nature' […] is *suffering* because
- of the successful suffrage of the Other

While **Mont Blanc**'s
accretion - accumulation, in other words - means the diminu-
endo, the diminution, of another part and aspect of the
world's 'nature', the world's culture[862]

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[859] Footage of the rally is online: 'Noisy EDL hit London for national demonstration', *yahoo!news*, video, 16 July 2016 <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/video/noisy-edl-hit-london-national-160000517.html> [accessed 16 March 2022]. The E.D.L.'s intellectual failings seem concretised in the young man at 00:58, whose cranial tattoo reads 'England | no surrender' against a background of the Union Jack, the flag for the whole U.K.

[860] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Communal Culture?* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 4.

[861] Brathwaite, 'I Cristóbal Colón', 7.

[862] Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*, pp. 115–116.

The image, in which the European structure glorifies itself at the expense of Africa, applies to historical epochs of empire as well as the modern E.U. Meanwhile, Griffiths seems ambivalent about the European Union. Given the enthusiasm for freedom of movement expressed in his collection *Nomad Sense* ('The future belongs to those who are mobile', reads its epigraph from a 'communications advert') and his time as a guest worker in West Germany during the 1970s, one might assume him a natural supporter of the E.U.'s internally open borders.[863] There are certainly occasions when he solicits aid from European institutions; Luke Roberts identifies 'petitions to the European Parliament' from Griffiths about U.K. prison conditions, and posits 'EU conventions on Human Rights and justice' as a factor prompting the intensity of Griffiths' prison activism in the 1990s.[864] Conversely, European institutions are centralising powers, a problem they share with the U.K.'s own government:

> Most appeal systems are internal, but depend on some external element to give them a veneer of independence. […] But where does such a system of external supervision end? With the European Court of Justice keeping the British Government in line? Who then is to keep Europe in line? and so on. If there is no will to play fair, but only a concept of authority that puts self-justification first, then no system of appeal can, in the long run, help. […] we transfer power by vote, from very many to very few, and are rewarded with little accountability, little power over policy, and not much information on what is happening.[865]

Considering Griffiths' passion for hyperlocal democracy, it might not matter to him whether power appropriated from communities like Seaham is hoarded in Brussels, at Westminster, or in Durham's County Hall, when the salient fact is that it is not in the hands of the people impacted by decisions. From this viewpoint, the E.U. and the U.K. both deserve complete re-visioning (akin to how Brathwaite and Griffiths frequently re-imagine their poems), if not outright dismantling. By conceiving each European nation (and hence Europe itself) as networks of smaller-scale cultures, linked to regions like Africa and the Caribbean as well as each other, Brathwaite's monolithic Mont Blanc could be eroded, permitting a more egalitarian, tidalectic future.

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[863] Griffiths, *Nomad Sense*, front matter.
[864] Roberts, 'Grave Police Music', 3 and 10.
[865] Griffiths, *A Century of Self-Service?*, n.p., section 2.

Through such poetics, Griffiths' cultural activism in Seaham, particularly around dialect research, remains a testament to local resistance against the totalising influence of the nation and the County Council. It stands open to continuing renewal of language, and speaks in parallel with the subaltern speech of disparate places and cultures. Finally, in Griffiths' poetry, it comprises the voice of the marginalised community against the powerful, highlighting the latter's helplessness to grant freedom from hierarchies.

Reorienting language, culture, and politics towards an intensely local level need not involve surrender to parochialism. The nation language and dialect considered in this thesis disrespect rigid borders of geography or class, instead circulating tidalectically throughout their regions to inform the discourse (and writing) of anyone in need of these words. Think of the Jamaican Rasta term 'bald-head' finding a home in the repartee of a Bajan tailor in 'Rites', or Griffiths' research revealing how vocabulary from County Durham's farming communities entered nearby miners' Pitmatic lexicon, becoming redeployed to describe features of collieries. In the worldview developed here, the local entails the translocal, with language, poetics, concepts for political organisation, and acts of care being shared so that disparate cultures can learn from others in their own particular ways.

Pairing Brathwaite and Griffiths, and informed by thinkers such as Stuart Hall, this thesis suggests ways to read cross-culturally while avoiding ethical dangers. In the process, I have suggested new ways to consider connections between poets and between communities. The thesis will, I hope, help scholars and poets to think about not just the contemporary moment, but also the future: to find ways that nation language poetics may articulate resistance against oppressions to come, and employing the technical innovations, historical insights, and radical values of Kamau Brathwaite and Bill Griffiths to that end.

Bibliography

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