CHIRALITY AND THE POLITICS OF AUTHORIZED AND UNAUTHORIZED ENGLISH IN THE WORKS OF JOHN CLARE AND AMOS TUTUOLA

By

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine how notions of authorized and unauthorized English, or Standard and non-Standard English, were at the heart of literary aesthetics in Romantic Britain and Independence Era Africa and how they influenced the editing and reception of John Clare, a 19th Century "peasant" English poet and Amos Tutuola, a mid-20th Century African "native" writer. The descriptors "peasant "and "native" are not innocent - my project is in part an attempt to understand how their being a peasant and native --their biographies --functioned in the editing and reception of their works.

John Taylor, Clare's first editor and publisher, standardized Clare's English while retaining enough provincialisms and poor grammar to call attention to Clare's peasant background and poor command of the English language. Eric Robinson, a 20th century literary critic, has also published editions of Clare's work with minimal editorial interference. Similarly, Tutuola's editors at Faber and Faber only minimally interfered with his language so that his first published work, *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, is in Standard Six English – riddled with grammatical mistakes and misused and needlessly coined words. Early criticism followed their respective editors in using their poor command of English and their respective biographies of peasant and colonized native as the lens through which to analyze the content and aesthetics of their work. For both, their biography overwhelmed their art.

My dissertation highlights the parallels between Clare and Tutuola: their non-standard use of the English Language, the editorial decisions that accepted grammatical errors as part of their works' aesthetic appeal, and their reception by literary critics as writers who could be understood only within the context of their biographies and language use. Yet Clare's and

Tutuola's writings cannot be fully understood outside the specific sociolinguistic contexts of their respective eras. Clare is a product of the contradictions inherent in British Romanticism – a movement intended in part to liberate language from the straightjacket of Standard English, while at the same time denying major literary voice to the peasants. Tutuola is a product of the meeting between a colonizing English culture presented as a unified whole and a contradictory African response in which African languages were the casualty.

As products of these two disparate, yet closely related, historical phenomena, Clare's and Tutuola's works can be considered through the framework of *chirality*. This concept is adapted from physics, where chirality refers to the relationship between two objects that appear to be mirror images, yet cannot be superimposed. Chirality as applied in literary theory means that two aesthetic standards from different historical eras can be propelled by related but incongruent contradictions. The dissertation uses chirality to examine the English language standardization debate in 18th and 19th Century England, and in 20th Century colonial and independence era Nigeria. It establishes a chiral relationship between the editing processes and critical receptions that made Clare's and Tutuola's poor grasp of Standard English the center of their aesthetic appeal.

In the first chapter, I justify the adaptation and use of chirality over existing concepts in post-colonial theory. In hybridity, for example, the third space is privileged over the first and second spaces; understanding the contradictions within Romantic era England and post-independence era Africa would be secondary to an analysis of the negotiated third space. However, it is precisely the fissures and contradictions in each of these eras that allow for the formation of similar yet different literary aesthetics. I argue that chirality is a better concept

because it allows us to understand the multiple contradictory forces in each culture before considering them in relation to each other.

In chapter 2, *Clare, Standardization and Wordsworth's "Language of Men,"* I look at the growth of English Language and the philological debates about standardization that culminate in Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*. I look at Wordsworth's call for a language of men in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, a call taken up by the Cockney School to which John Keats and Leigh Hunt belonged, and the anger with which critics received their works, calling them a vulgarization of English. I conclude by looking at why John Clare and peasant literature were absent from the debate.

In Chapter 3**,** *Tutuola and the Question of Standard English in African Literature*, I explore how the language debate in Africa mirrors the debate in British romanticism. On the one hand, critics and writers such as Obi Wali and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o argued that African literature should be written in the languages of ordinary people. On the other hand, writers like Chinua Achebe argued that literature in African languages led to division, whereas literature in English led to more unity and communication within and outside of Africa and, further, that it was possible to Africanize English, thus conveying the African worldview. I conclude the chapter by considering why neither Tutuola's editors nor Tutuola himself raised the possibility of Tutuola writing in Yoruba and then being translated into English.

In the chapter 4, *Editing Clare: Creating the Genius Peasant*, I look at how Standard English influenced the editing of Clare's poetry. John Taylor, Clare's first editor, standardized much of Clare's English usage, while taking care to leave enough provincialisms and grammatical mistakes to recall Clare's peasant background. Eric Robinson in turn restored Clare's writing to the original with minimal editorial interference. In order to bring out the

differences between John Taylor's and Robinson's editing of Clare, I compare their two versions of *The Shepherd's Calendar*. Like Robinson for Clare, Allan Pringle, Tutuola's editor at Faber and Faber, adopted an editorial policy of minimal interference.

In Chapter 5, *Editing Tutuola: Creating the African Native Writer Genus* I looked at how Pringle used Tutuola's poor English usage to foreground his 'nativeness' in order to heighten the appeal of his novels. I consider the aesthetic costs and opportunities of minimal and interventionist editing in Tutuola's *Palm Wine Drinkard*.

In Chapter 6, "The Critical Reception of Clare: A Question of Translatability," and Chapter 7 "Amos Tutuola: The African "Native' Writer and Translatability" I look at how **t**he question of Standard English influenced the early reception of their works. Early criticism sees both Clare and Tutuola as wondrous children of nature who write spontaneously. It sees them as authentic chroniclers of peasant and native cultures, while at the same time doubting their originality. Critics also shared fascination with their physical looks and mannerisms to the extent of seeing them as shy, suspicious, diffident and uncomfortable when in the company of the elite.

20th century Clare criticism, such as that of John Barrel, attempted to rehabilitate him from anthropological readings by showing him as primarily a "poet of place." For Amos Tutuola later critics such as Brenda Cooper show him as a writer occupying a space between folklore and magical realism. My argument is that such readings deny both authors translatability, a term I borrow from Walter Benjamin to mean that they are denied that quality in literature that enables the reader to translate literature across boundaries of time, culture, time, gender, sexuality and class to have meaning in one's immediate environment. Clare can only talk to the reader about Northampshire while Tutuola can only tell folkloric stories – in both the content is the phrase – there is no metaphorical or philosophical value.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introducing Chirality in John Clare and Amos Tutuola

> The efforts of the uncultivated mind – the outpourings of genius unmoulded by the scholastic system and unimbued with scholastic lore must be interesting to the lover of literature and the observer of human nature.
>
> An unsigned 1820 review of Clare's Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery.[1]

> A literary Grandma Moses, Tutuola has a style all of his own, awkward, naïve, unpolished, yet somehow graphically compelling – even intriguing in its departures from our idiom.
>
> From a 1955 review of *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* by Cecil T. Lewis.[2]

Even though John Clare was an early 18th Century English poet and Amos Tutuola a mid-20th Century African writer, they are conjoined by their non-standard use of the English language, the decisions surrounding the editing of their works that accepted grammatical errors as part of their aesthetic appeal, and the critical reception that deployed their biography and their language use interchangeably and as departure points. Notions of authorized and unauthorized English[3] or Standard and non-standard English are at the heart of literary aesthetics and informed how both John Clare and Amos Tutuola were received.

In *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*, Olivia Smith argues that the standardization of English followed class lines. Those who came from the lower classes were understood to be speaking vulgar English and revealed the "inability of the speaker to transcend the concerns of

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[1]. Mark Storey. *John Clare: The Critical Heritage*. Routledge: London, 1995. 43.

[2]. Cecil Lewis. "Primitive Verbal Fantasy", Source: Phylon (1940-1956), Vol. 16, No. 1 (1st Qtr., 1955), 117-118

[3]. Another useful way of thinking through the language question is by deploying the concept of prestige to mean high and low and high languages. Henry Blumenthal and Renée Kahane write that:

> H(igh) and L(ow) - is the linguistic representation of a class system. H, the prestige language, is used by, and therefore becomes of, a sector of society which excels through power, education, manners, and/or heritage. L, the everyday idiom, is the language of the others, and is often used by H speakers in their non-H roles...Socio-linguistically, H is always close to a foreign language since it functions as barrier between H and L speakers (183).

the present, an interest in material objects, and the dominance of passions," while those who spoke 'proper' English were seen "as allegedly rational, moral, civilized, and capable of abstract thinking" (3). For example, Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) was in practice a codification of the view that language carried civilization. The higher classes and the English they spoke exemplified civilization while the lower classes were incapable of making unique contributions to English civilization. This was following the idea of "universal grammar [which] at that time stipulated that languages were fundamentally alike in that they represented the mind, and fundamentally different in the quality of the mind and civilization they represented" (Smith, 3).

In marking class where the elite could contribute to culture and the lower classes vulgarize civilization, the English language was also at the heart of an English identity in formation and opposition to other European cultures. Allen Reddick in the introduction to *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary* argues that:

> Johnson's Great Dictionary of the English Language, virtually from its inception, has represented a contribution not only to English letters and lexicography, but also to English literary and heroic myth. His bold effort to produce single-handedly the first English dictionary on the scale of impressive lexicons of the French and Italian academies…quickly identified the Dictionary as a matter of national pride and defense, a symbol of British individualism and strength. (1)

The dictionary was, in essence, a nationalist project. Samuel Johnson hoped that English would become a world language, a well from which other cultures could draw the best of what English culture had to offer. In his Preface to the *Dictionary*, he writes:

> In hope of giving longevity to that which its own nature forbids to be immortal, I have devoted this book, the labor of years, to the honor of my country, that we may no longer yield the palm of philology without a contest, to the nations of the continent. The chief glory of every people arises from its authors…I shall not think my employment useless or ignoble, if by my assistance foreign nations, and distant ages, gain access to the propagators of knowledge, and understand the teachers of truth; if my labors afford light to the repositories of science, and add celebrity to Bacon, to Hooker, to Milton, and to Boyle. (xxvi)

The dictionary was a contribution to the nation and to English to compete with other European languages. If, as he claimed, the "chief glory of every people arises from its authors," then the language they are using should be able to compete with others. To compete, it has to be at its national best - standardized and codified. He also hoped that English in the future would become the sole carrier and the teacher of that knowledge in near and far-flung places.

There was a political and literary response to the conservative and class nature of standardization. William Cobbett in 1831, for example, published, *A grammar of the English language in a series of letters. Intended for the use of schools and of young persons in general; but more especially for the use of soldiers, sailors, apprentices, and plough-boys. To which are added six lessons intended to prevent statesmen from using false grammar and from writing in an awkward manner.* As the title suggests, the book was an attempt to democratize language but without what Clare would effectively call the tyranny of grammar. [4] Speaking to his young cousin, James, he writes:

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[4]. See John McKusick. *John Clare and the Tyranny of Grammar* Studies in Romanticism Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer, 1994), 255-277

> …when you come to read the history of the struggles of our forefathers, by which those sacred laws have, from time to time, been defended against despotic ambition; by which they have been restored to vigor when on the eve of perishing; by which their violators have never failed, in the end, to be made to feel the just vengeance of the People; when you come to read the history of these struggles in the cause of freedom, you will find that tyranny has no enemy so formidable as the pen.[5]

Education and the ability to express oneself well were not only the best safeguard against tyranny, but also an effective ways of exacting "vengeance." It also meant that the 'vulgar' class had access to a history of resistance to despotism. The implication was that they would be harder to manipulate, as they would have been learning from this history of resistance.[6]

Clare's *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* published in 1820 was caught up in a long history of English language becoming the national language and a symbol of a singular English identity that could be exported and imposed on another people.[7] Indeed the question of language was at the center of Romanticism and Romantic literature. In the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads (1800)*, William Wordsworth called for a "language of men," saying that his objective in the collected poems was to:

> …choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect… (6-7)

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[5]. From the letter dated Dec. 6 1817, *North Hempstead, Long Island.*

[6]. Olivia Smith argues that for Cobbett, "the division between those who knew grammar and those who did not was…one of the primary means of class manipulation" (1).

[7]. I give a fuller treatment of English standardization in England and Nigeria in Chapter 2.

For Wordsworth, Standard English, codified as a language for the elite, had long lost touch with the English language as used by the people. For him, the ordinary was a good poetic source. But this was as long as imagination had been imposed on the ordinary and presented anew.

By the time Tutuola was going to school in the 1930's, colonialism in Africa and elsewhere had made true Johnson's dream that the English language would propagate Englishness. Where in England lower class English was vulgar, in Africa it was African languages that became vulgar. Standard English represented the modern, rational and philosophical, in essence, civilization. What Smith said of Standard English in relation to peasant English ended up being the relationship between African languages and English. African languages came to reflect, the "inability of the speaker to transcend the concerns of the present, an interest in material objects, and the dominance of passions," while those who spoke 'proper' English were seen "as allegedly rational, moral, civilized, and capable of abstract thinking" (Smith, 3). It was as if the standardization debate had come to Africa, with African languages taking the derided place of lower class English.

In British colonial Africa, the English language was developing through education at the expense of African languages. Tutuola's education,[8] like Clare's, was cut short due to lack of school fees, but for his contemporaries who continued on to higher education, the language of instruction was English. The official language was English. In short, English had become the language of success. However, English teachers and colonial officials viewed African languages as backward, incapable of carrying abstract knowledge. Charles A. Sauer, an American pastor,

[8]. On Tutuola's education, Donald Cosentino writes that, "He received an elementary education at the Salvation Army school and later at the Anglican Central School in Abeokuta, where he was a first-rate student. When his father died suddenly in 1938, Tutuola was forced to join the ranks of "school leavers." In all, he did not complete more than six years of formal education." *African Arts* Vol. 30, No. 4, Special Issue: The Benin Centenary, Part 2 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 16-17.

missionary and promoter of Christian education in his 1953 essay, “The Place of the Vernacular Language in Colonial Education,” argued that African languages ought to be taught but only in the elementary level of education. His reasoning was:

> When the student is dealing with his own culture there seems to be every reason why the vernacular should be used at all levels of instruction. The history and geography of the country, all studies regarding the games, costumes, occupation, handicrafts, customs, food, houses, etc. of the people involve a special local vocabulary which makes the mother tongue much better suited to be the medium of instruction than any foreign language might ever be. (181)

By geography, he could not have meant, introducing the young students to the science of the earth´s formation, or by history the learning of a long African past, he meant them in the narrowest sense. He argued that in the higher levels of education, English should be used because, “scientific and technical education in the vernacular language are often limited by lack of vocabulary. As a rule, native writers will produce texts in the social sciences long before they attempt anything in the general science fields” (182). In other words, the more complex learning was to be in English because, he implied, inferior African languages could not adopt words and concepts like civilized languages. In the end, Africans viewed their own languages as inferior and incapable of carrying science, philosophy or literature, while they viewed English as the language of serious thought. As Tutuola’s biographer Jare Ajayi notes, at the time when Tutuola started writing, “English was to be employed as a medium of expression if you wanted to be taken seriously” (x).

In both Romantic Britain and British Colonial Africa, education for the lower classes and races respectively was to create good Christian citizens that could participate in the lower ends of the economy and political machinery. On education in Romantic England, Smith writes:

> Students in dame schools, the most inexpensive form of fee paying schools, rarely learned to write more than the alphabet. Sunday Schools were jealous of how much they taught to whom. A free form of education which had spread rapidly since the 1780's, such schools taught students how to read in order for them to learn their duty. ..Students were carefully taught enough writing to be shopkeepers or servants. (13)

On the bible drills that came with teaching, Clare in his *Autobiographical Writings* was to write:

> …I think the manner of learning children in village schools very erranious, that is soon as they learn their letters to task them with lessons from the bible and testament and keeping them dinging at them, without any change, till they leave it A dull boy never turns with pleasures to his school days when he has often been beet 4 times for bad readings 5 verses of Scripture. (5)

He went on to make the point that this kind of learning ended up having the opposite, or depending on perspective, the desired effect – rather than making reading part of one's life, books become a "novelty" and the bible "looses its relish [and] laid by on its peaceful shelf" (5).

To continue, Sauer in calling for the use of English as opposed to African languages in secondary education, argued that:

> …it is from graduates of the secondary school that the government will recruit many of its minor officials. The government must have a select group which occupies an intermediary place between the foreign trained heads of departments and the common people. Many of these will of necessity be natives. They can fill the position only as they

> are masters of both the official language and the vernacular. For this purpose, training in the official language can hardly be adequate if it has not had the background of secondary education done in that language. (182)

With Clare and Tutuola educated in an education system that had no interest in training them beyond their status, their poor use of English in turn recalled their respective biographies of peasant and native. Their editors, through language, wanted to keep their biographies alive in the text and as part of the reading experience – that is, to have it central to their aesthetics. This was because, as I shall argue later, they had to meet what they perceived to be the aesthetic demands of peasant poetry and native literature. Alan Pringle wrote to Tutuola:

> About the text – we agree that your English is not always conventional English as written in this country, but for that very reason we think it would be a great pity to make it conform to all the rules of grammar and spelling. Just as no one but a West African could have had such a strange tale to tell, so your manner of writing has a charm of its own. (Lindfors, 1999; 118)

John Taylor shared a similar attitude toward Clare's use of provincialisms. He said of Clare that:

> He [Clare]…from his ignorance of grammar, he seems to labor under great disadvantage. On the other hand his want forces him to an extraordinary exertion of his native powers, in order to supply the deficiency. He employs his language under his command with great effect in those unusual and unprecedented combinations of words which much must be made, even by the learned, when they attempt to describe perfectly, something which they have never seen or heard expressed before. (Storey, 47)

Clare's bad grammar, his being "unlearned" might at first glance seem to be a disadvantage, but it is in fact an advantage. Necessity forces him to invent, and hence create newness. The claim

here is that John Clare's peasant roots and his use of language are not only an integral part of poetry, but also enhance it. Both Alan Pringle and John Taylor are saying that poor command of the English language by their respective writers is also part of their form and content. That is, to 'straighten' or to standardize their English would in fact take away from their literary works. John Clare the poet, is inseparable from John Clare the peasant, in as much Tutuola the writer is inseparable from Tutuola the Native.

Early criticism followed suit, but just like in the editing of their works, the question of Standard English was at the center of the early reception. Just as Clare's critics had "a reverence for standardized English and condescension for dialect forms" because of their "own education" (Robinson; xxi, 1984), so did African literary critics. The anger with which African critics received Tutuola's works recalls the anger with which English critics greeted William Wordsworth's call for a *language of men*, or the writing of Leigh Hunt from the Cockney school.[9]

Clare and Tutuola within a Literary Tradition

Even though to differing degrees, Tutuola and Clare critics have been faced with the problem of immersing and understanding both writers within a recognizable oral or literary tradition. Attempts to see Tutuola through the lens of European tradition, albeit a bastardized one, fail in the same way that attempts to place him squarely within a Yoruba and/or an African oral traditions find that he is amorphous. Similarly, as soon as one tries to locate Clare in a pastoral or peasant poetic tradition, his literary influences such as Milton come up. [10] And if one

[9]. In Chapter 4, I look at the early and later criticism of both Clare and Tutuola in relation to the language question.

[10]. Simon Kovesi for example argues that when it comes to Clare's poetry the "…erratic and creative inconsistency could reflect the language of oral culture. Like other labouring-class poets of the Romantic era, such

tries to locate him within a literary tradition, the question of orature arises – did his ballad collecting influence his poetry? In addition, what is one to make of the fact that he was influenced by gypsies or by his fellow peasants? Both Tutuola and Clare frustrate attempts to domesticate tradition, where it authenticates and defines a national literature.

Whereas for Tutuola the question is how the African oral forms and content meet and interact with European literary forms and content, with Clare it is a question of the place of peasant poetry in Romanticism – that is, does peasant poetry in its form and content objectively exist as a sub-genre within Romanticism, or was it a sub-genre created by reception? That is, is there any other reason for reading Clare on the margins of William Wordsworth other than because he was a peasant?

For Jerome McGann in *Romantic Ideologies*, Romantic poets (he gives the example of Wordsworth) transcend time and history precisely because they were immersed in their times – that is, the poems were local, but achieve their universal through the elision of that what is peculiarly local. A poem that gains its imaginative impetus from a single historical occurrence loses its localness to that event by eliding over it - it is the paradox of what makes something universal. It is so decidedly local that it speaks outside of its localness. He argues that Romantic poets were engaged in a "self-presentation" (583) that used history yet presented their poetry as outside of it, and critics make the mistake of essentially taking the poets at their word. Following him, there is an argument to be made that Clare gets marginalized because his 'self-presentation' is not acknowledged, his poems are what they say, or as John Barrel says, his

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as Robert Burns, James Hogg, Robert Bloomfield and Allan Cunningham, Clare was steeped in oral culture, with its folk tales and songs, story-tellers, fiddle-players and penny ballads. His primary literacy was not in print, but in the spoken word, in voice, in sound and song. Oral culture is the prime source of his 'erratic', wandering, nomadic and sociable aesthetic values" (71).

poems "have the content of themselves." For Barrel[11], Wordsworth's idea of nature was always more or less platonic, and the 'spirit' of a place was something, for him to be found by looking *through* the place itself" (182). On Clare, he writes that "the idea that Clare entertained of his 'knowledge', on the other hand, at once the place he knew and everything he knew, means that the sense of place he communicates in his poems becomes the entire content, from which no other abstract knowledge could be deduced" (182). Yet if we apply McGann's notion of concrete history as the setting of the Romantic poets that is then elided over to get to the universal, then Clare's poetry should also be part of the romantic cannon; and peasant poetry as a subgenre in Romantic aesthetics should be a contradiction in terms. Because, the peasant poet was taken to embody nature and therefore writing an autobiography and a biography of nature where both labor and class exploitation are naturalized, the poet could only produce a copy of nature – detailed, beautiful but with no metaphorical value – and no universal appeal.

In this reading, Clare was not able to transcend his localness and immediate history. Wordsworth on the other hand could and that in essence is the difference between peasant and romantic poetry. One that would allow Wordsworth on the one hand to speak for and about the peasants in philosophical and metaphorical terms – and on the other, peasants who, truthfully and faithfully, could only speak of and about themselves in nature. This dissertation is in part an attempt to show Clare as a romantic poet who wished to work within romantic aesthetics and traditions.

[11]. I look at the reading of John Clare as a poet of place via John Barrel's critical essay *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840; an Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* in Chapter Six, "Critical Reception of Clare: A Question of Translatability."

In a post Palermo University lecture interview[12], Prof. Claudio Grolier asked Tutuola a series of questions, "What does the word tradition mean to you? What is your relationship with tradition: How have you been faithful to your tradition?" Tutuola replied:

> When I wrote The Palm-Wine Drinkard, this was the main improvement with the book gave to our tradition. I mean, my writing also improved our tradition and customs much. Because so many in my town, so many Yoruba people like Wole Soyinka, Kole Omotoso, and so many writers like them began to write stories about our tradition, customs, and so on. So, by that time, our tradition continued to exist and maybe to improve. (Miao, 160)

Grolier did not mean literary tradition – and Tutuola was talking about tradition as culture, in an anthropological sense. However, at the same time, there is in the question and answer another register – one of a literary tradition; a tradition in which Tutuola sees himself as a central figure in that he influences writers like Soyinka, Omotoso and by extension, Chinua Achebe.

An African literary tradition emerges from both the African oral and European literary traditions. Colonial education presented African orature as part of an undesirable past and European literature as the desired modern future. But in real terms, cultures are elastic and the oral and literary co-exist and mingle; African writing would have been impacted by a European literary tradition itself with its own sets of questions, as much as by orature.

Ato Quayson, in *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, warns that attempts to find continuities between African orature and literary novels can "become amenable to a positivist anthropological harvest in which details are read directly from cultural backgrounds to

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[12]. See *Tutuola at the University: The Italian Voice of a Yoruba Ancestor* by Amos Tutuola, Alessandra Miao and Claudio Gorlier.

fictional world and back again" (2). Consequently African literature becomes "a receptacle or mirror of culture" (2). It becomes a case of authentication, a defensive maneuver that simply ends up defining African literature in opposition to European literature. At the same time there is the danger of totalizing African culture, something of which Tutuola himself was aware. Gorlier in the same interview quoted above asked Tutuola, "Do you consider Nigerian literature as epitomizing the rest of the African continent? I understand that this is a very general question. But when we, as outsiders, as Europeans speak of Africa, we often speak of it in as an abstract, very general notion. Do you think its legitimate to say 'Africa'? …In other words, do you look at Africa as a whole – as a whole of different realities, different countries?" (Miao, 157). Tutuola responded, "Oh yes. Yes. Well, I cannot say only Nigerians write stories, but each African country writes stories according to their surroundings, culture, or things like that. So we do the same thing in Nigeria" (Miao, 157). Even more so, it is possible to make the same argument for the different cultures within Nigeria. The point is not to authenticate African literature in opposition to European literature, or to seek uninterrupted "continuities between oral traditions and writing in English" (Quayson, 4), but to try and immerse Tutuola in a literary tradition that does not deny either influences from his Yoruba orature and English written literature as filtered, and distorted by colonialism in Africa.

Eliot's definition of literary tradition is useful as a point of departure precisely because it also the departing point for Ato Quayson's and Abiola Irele's discussion of African literary tradition and Amos Tutuola. T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" writes that tradition:

> … cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, [which] involves a perception, not only of the

> pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity. (38)

For Elliot, tradition is earned by present day writers immersing themselves in the works of previous generations, as each of those generations have done. Yet the present is not the sum total of the past, books get lost, original manuscripts burned, yet by virtue of having been read they remain active ghosts, contributing to the 'historical sense'. My understanding of this is that the past is the past, and yet it is contained in the present and writers have to be aware of both. It means that each generation of writers is not starting from scratch, and at the same time it frees enough from the past to create something new. A poet practicing a literary tradition means that tradition is not just in the past but in the present as well and at the same time setting the stage for the next generation – it cannot be complete or singular since by definition it exists as a debate between the voices of the present and those of the past.

Ato Quayson, sees Eliot's view of tradition as a contradiction in which on the "one hand the literary tradition is perceived as monolithic while on the other it is seen as open to change and mutation" (4). However, it does not to be a contradiction if we take a contradiction to be more than a statement sitting in opposition to become a dialectic containing opposing truths that need not be reconciled. I think it is true that just like aesthetics, what constitutes a literary

tradition can be pressured to appear monolithic – so we end up with minor and major literature. However, these designations cannot undo the existence of the tension between what is designated major and minor for example – a reason why Clare and Tutuola remain relevant today. Eliot writes, "We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (38). For Eliot, writers must not only produce in their present times, but also do it with an acute awareness of the past. Consciously or unconsciously, the writer cannot escape the present or the past for that matter. In a way, it is better for the writer to be conscious of both the present and the past to better manipulate them, but that writers are always part of a tradition is a given. The idea of a writer's tradition is therefore a paradox, one that gives freedom to create by keeping the work tethered to the past, or rather in conversation with past work. However, the writer writing in the present is not just mutating tradition into other directions. To write within a tradition is to not only give present writing historicity but also to give the past new meanings and originality. The present reveals more of the past. What is original is not necessarily new and the mutation is not only into the future, but also into the past. But the question remains, how in a situation where orature and literature meet is the critic not to seek out the "individual parts" in the work at hand in order to find where orature "assert[s] its immortality vigorously"?

One has to divest Eliot's useful definition of tradition from its European roots for it to become applicable to Tutuola, whose tradition is partly located in orature. Abiola Irele in the *African Experience in Literature and Ideology* argues that:

> The interest of the formal approach to the study of oral literature resides in the possibility it offers of establishing a valid typology of African oral literature, derived from internal evidence gathered from the representative texts across the continent, so that through such evidence we may arrive at some conception of an African literary aesthetic which not only informs the traditional literature but also exerts an influence, either directly or indirectly, on the new writing. (20)

In Tutuola, the influence of the Yoruba oral tradition is direct. In Tutuola perhaps more than in any other African writer, the oral tradition is being translated and improvised upon – the Yoruba oral tradition meets the European tradition proper – or rather, in Tutuola we see an attempt, to have a European form carry not only African content, but the form of orature as well.

Enclosures and Colonialism

Clare and Tutuola are also conjoined by the 19th century British political and economic domestic policies as well as 20th Century British foreign political and economic policies through colonialism. It is not a direct causal relationship; one is not simply domestic and the other the foreign counterpart. Clare, the peasant, was the product of an exploitative class system in Britain. Tutuola on the other hand was the product of an exploitative colonial system that demarcated itself along racial lines. Even so, the policies that kept the peasantry destitute were reproduced differently in Africa. For example, the enclosure acts in Britain and the colonial hut and poll taxes in British colonial Africa served to further pauperize the peasants and Africans respectively. Raymond Williams in *The Country and City* argues that:

> The social importance of enclosures is then not that they introduced a wholly new element in the social structure, but that in some of the most populous and prosperous

> parts of the country, they complemented and were indeed often caused by the general economic pressure on small owners and especially small tenants…it can be reasonably argued that as many people were driven from the land, and from independent status in relation to it, by the continuing process of rack-renting and short-lease policies, and by the associated need for greater capital to survive in an increasingly competitive market, as by enclosure. (97)

For Williams, population growth, which he links to the general modernization, is a factor in the movement of the poor from the country to the city.[13] The enclosures privatized free grazing and communal ownership of land, while the hut tax was designed to drive Africans from the rural areas to the city in order to do menial and domestic labor. Poll taxation in British colonial Africa meant that taxes were to be paid per head and in the case of a hut tax, per dwelling, a repeat of the unpopular poll, hearth and window taxes that led to peasant rebellions in Britain. The Hut Tax and Poll tax required a cash payment as opposed to other forms of exchange, forced the African peasant into the cities in search of jobs that trapped them in low wages. In the same way that the enclosures radicalized a proletariatization of the English Peasant that was already in place, so did the poll and hut taxes.

Colin Leys in *Underdevelopment in Kenya* writes that Africans had no incentive to work on the European farms since they had land of their own. The Europeans offered wages that had to be by definition low if they were to reap healthy profit margins from the labor and "therefore

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[13]. J.D. Chambers, in *Enclosure and Labor Supply in the Industrial Revolution* argues that "when improved farming techniques and railway transport caught up with the new farming practices" it was "then that the real flight from the countryside began" (338). For Chambers, there are other factors that explain the flight, which make the Enclosures of "secondary importance" (338). But for most readers of the period there is a general agreement that there is relationship between the Enclosure Acts, a pauperization of the already poor causing them to flock to the cities where they became part of a surplus labor.

Africans had to be compelled to work, partly by force, partly by taxation, and partly by preventing them from having access to enough land or profitable crops to enable them to pay taxes without working for wages" (Leys, 30). In Nigeria, prior to 1930, only men had paid the poll tax. In 1930, the colonial administration in order to raise more revenue decided to start taxing women as well. In a 1930 article for *The Crisis* titled, "Murdering Women in Nigeria," Ben Azikiwe, who later would become Nigeria's first president, wrote:

> The trouble in Nigeria arose over a poll tax, that is, a head tax which it was attempted to place upon women as well as men. The poll tax in Africa is a method of forcing the native to labor. The combination of confiscating the land and making the native pay $5 or $10 a year as tax in cash will often reduce a tribe to virtual slavery. (64)

And sounding like he was writing about the enclosures and the privatization of space in Romantic England, he goes to on to say that the traders on whom the tax was going to be imposed were women who:

> …for decades had made use of these markets without paying taxes for their stalls – indeed according to native law and custom, the market place was communal and could be used freely by those who wished. On the other hand, the British needed more revenue and ordered it collected. (68)

Colonialism alienated Africans from their culture and landscape in the same way the domestic class system in Britain alienated the peasantry from the production of culture. Both the English peasant and the African colonial subject were the uncivilized other whose labor was ultimately worth more than their minds, whether as miners and farmers, or working as shopkeepers. In the introduction *to John Clare in Context*, Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips write that the challenge represented by Clare's work:

> …[is one of a] life long struggle against the forces, which displaced and immarginated him within his own country, history and language. It can be argued that Clare is deeply anti-colonial poet, and that his beautiful repossession of the vernacular and local, across the length and breadth of his immense oeuvre, offers a liberatingly undomineering paradigm of poetic pleasure and of non-proprietal respect for the natural world. (26)

Almost a century later, Tutuola was displaced and cast into the margins in terms of "country, history and language." While he did not try to reclaim his language, he attempted to have the language imposed on him to carry his culture. Therefore, even though Clare can be said to be at the beginning of colonial expansionist capitalism that has a domestic policy to match, and Tutuola at the end of colonialism and its mutation to neocolonialism – the arguments and issues surrounding their literature have a direct historical relationship, and a common material base. British capitalism at home and imperialism abroad, and the contradictions of each, form the broad templates. The question of language and in particular Standard English is a stand in for these larger historical, political, and socio-economic templates.

Introducing Chirality

There are enough similarities between the editing and reception of John Clare and Amos Tutuola, as well in the effects of class, colonial and racial oppression to warrant a comparison. Clare was writing in 19th Century Britain and Tutuola in 20th Century Nigeria. Clare was a subject of English while Tutuola was the subject of the British Empire.[14] They are products of different times and different cultures yet trapped in the same continuum made possible by

[14]. Robert Young distinguishes between English and British by saying that, "Englishness is itself also uncertainly British, a cunning word of apparent political correctness invoked in order to mask the metonymic extension of the English dominance over the kingdoms with which England has constructed illicit acts of union, countries that now survive in the realm of football and rugby... 'British' is the name imposed by the English on the non-English" (3).

English peasant oppression in Britain and British colonialism in Africa. Particularly, Clare is a product of the contradictions inherent in British Romanticism – a movement in part to liberate language from the straightjacket of Standard English while denying a literary voice to the peasants. Tutuola is a product of the meeting between a colonizing English culture presented as a unified whole and a contradictory African response in which African languages are the casualty. Following the question of Standard versus non-Standard English through the editing of their works and reception will allow these contradictions to emerge.

In order for them to be manageable and limited, thus setting basis for comparison, a concept that allows us to collapse time and space, to fold time and space so that the two historical periods are facing each other as in mirror images, is needed. Chirality in physics describes a situation where an object cannot be superimposed over its mirror image; there is a mismatch between an object and its mirror image.[15] For Vladimir Prelog, chirality happens when an object "cannot be brought into congruence with its mirror image by translation and rotation."[16] (Prelog, 17) The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the meaning as something that is "asymmetric in such a way that the structure and its mirror image are not superimposable."[17] According to the OED, the term is derived from the Greek word**,** *kheir* which means, hand**.** An example often used to describe chirality is the impossibility of imposing the right hand over the left or vice-versa.

Chirality as applied in literary theory means that two aesthetic standards from different historical eras can be propelled by related but incongruent contradictions. This concept is

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[15]. The etymology of the word is Latin, for *hand*.

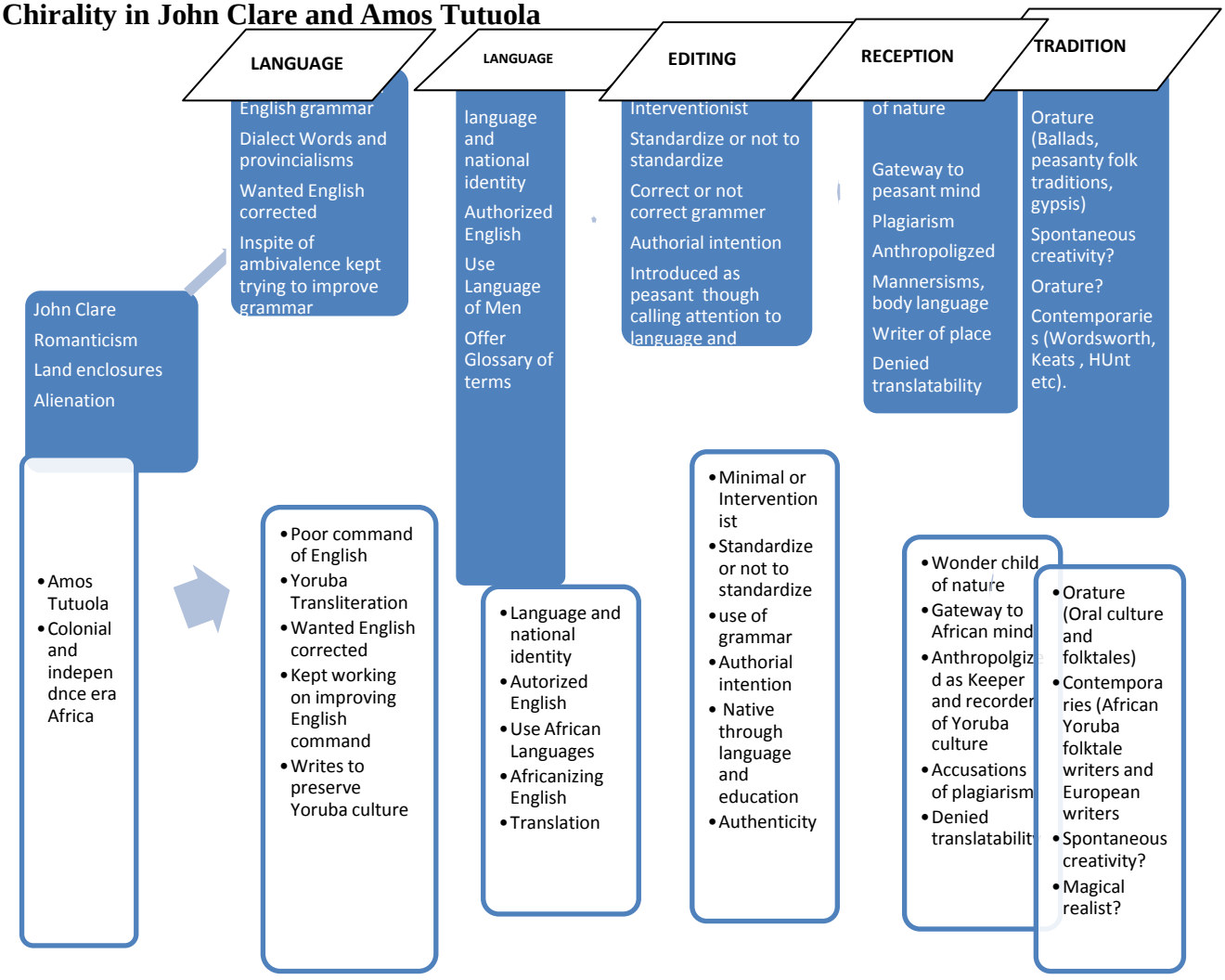
[16] . Prelog, Vladimir. *Science*, New Series, Vol. 193, No. 4247 (Jul. 2, 1976), 17-24

[17]. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Second edition, 1989; online version December 2011. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/31848>; accessed 01 February 2012

adapted from physics, where chirality refers to the relationship between two objects that appear to be mirror images, yet cannot be superimposed. Chirality from the onset sees each of the phenomena being compared as coming from cultures with their own distinct series of contradictions. It recognizes that each phenomenon, while having its own distinct sets of contradictions, is not wholly independent of the other. An understanding of the language question during romanticism for Clare and the colonial and independence era Africa for Tutuola is the first step toward establishing their chiral relationship. This allows us to see a chiral relationship in the debates and actions surrounding the editing of their works, their own relationship to Standard English, and in the critical reception which often was informed by where the critic stood on the role of Standard English in literary and cultural production.

SEE FIGURE 1 (next page)

Chirality in John Clare and Amos Tutuola



Why Chirality and not Hybridity?

One concept I could have used instead of chirality is hybridity. Hybridity is useful in as it recognizes that there are no single cultures – that English culture for example is itself a hybrid of Latin, Greek, French, Celtic, and many others; and that the search for stability and a singular

national identity always fails. For Homi Bhabha, when two cultures meet, the negotiation that ensues is:

> …is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an "interstitial" agency that refuses binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy: the outside of the inside; the part in the whole. (Bhabha, 1993)

Recalling the French colonial system of assimilation and the British system of indirect rule where local power structures were put in the service of British colonialism, Bhabha is right that assimilation and collaboration cannot lead to a hybrid state because the result is colonialism in both instances. But the alternative to assimilation and collaboration is not a resistance that seeks 'sovereignty', for Bhabha there is a 'third space' where both cultures cannot but form and inform each other, where hybrid agencies constantly undermine the single narrative of superiority and inferiority. Homi Bhabha argues that:

> Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the "authoritative" even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but articulation equivocal. (Bhabha, 1993)

Where the British elite wanted to see Standard English as the authoritative carrier and sign of English culture, Clare with his provincialisms, dialect, poor grammar, and peasant content and

Tutuola with his poor English and "native" content open up a space where it becomes possible to question singular authoritative English.

It is not surprising therefore, that hybridity is applicable to Tutuola and Clare. Michael Thelwell calls *The Palm Wine Drinkard* a "cultural hybrid, the child of the clash of the cultures" (Tutuola 187 - 188). Gary Harrison, writes that "Clare's position corresponds strikingly to the dynamic, fluid, and hybridized identities of the colonized subjects theorized in the works of Homi K. Bhabha [and] Clare's poetics of displacement derives from a historical position similar to, but not identical with, the disarticulated subaltern in the colonial condition" (147).

However, there were some severe limitations with hybridity that in the end made chirality a more attractive conceptual tool around which to organize a look at Clare and Tutuola. While Clare and Tutuola might exist in hybrid states in their respective individual contexts as English peasant and British colonial subject, it would have been to stretch hybridity to make it speak to the various layers of history and culture in different epochs, and to the aesthetic of romanticism and independence era Africa -- all in relation to each other. Hybridity does not immediately recall contradictions in each individual culture as independent before finding the negotiated third space. The third space is privileged over 1st and 2nd spaces.

If we are to understand Clare and Tutuola in relation to the societies they lived in respectively, in their times, and in relation to each other, a concept that allows us to see cultures as furious leaking and porous crucibles held together by an attraction and repulsion of multiple forces and that mirror each other without being the same, is needed. Understanding the fissures of English society in and of themselves and the fissures in colonial and post-independence African countries in and of themselves is the rail on which Chirality rests on.

Finally, the meaning of hybridity is elusive because it is possible to find it everywhere, thereby making it limitless. Robert Young states that "there is no single, or correct, concept of hybridity; it changes as it repeats, but it also repeats as it changes" (Young, 27). For Young, hybridity is the very phenomenon it is trying to help us understand, a concept that is also the thing itself, and an answer that is also the problem. So he argues that that hybridity in relation to challenging 'the centered, dominant cultural norms with their unsettling perplexities generated out of their 'disjunctive, liminal space', becomes "…a third term which can never in fact *be* [sic] third because, as a monstrous inversion, a miscreated perversion of its progenitors, it exhausts the differences between them" (23). In Young's sense, hybridity is definable only in operation; it can only be seen in operation – like a hammer that becomes a hammer only in the carpenter's hand and once back in the tool box ceases to be a hammer. Not only then does hybridity defy a stable definition, but it is also an infinitely self-replicating and mutating amorphous concept. To look at Clare and Tutuola, hybridity could not work because if I started with hybridity, I would only find hybridity. Chirality, a term with a limited definition working within clear parameters, is more useful.

In Chapter 2: "John Clare, Vulgar English versus the 'Language of men,'" I am interested in the debates surrounding authorized English in Romanticism and in independence era Africa - and where Clare and Tutuola fit in them. I argue that whereas the English language stepped onto the shores of Africa with confidence, its growth in Britain is fraught with anxieties as the British elite tried to define and differentiate it from Latin and French. I briefly look at the growth of the English language culminating in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*. I then look at Wordsworth's call for a language of men in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, a call taken up by the Cockney School to which John Keats and Leigh Hunt belonged – and the anger with which critics

received their works that were, according to them, vulgarizing[18] English. It is within that context that it becomes possible to look at the reasons behind Taylor's interventionist but not complete standardization of Clare's English.

In Chapter 3 "Tutuola and the Question of Standard English in African Literature," I turn my attention to Tutuola and the debate over the role of English and European languages in African writing. The language debate mirrors British romanticism in that on the one hand, there were those who wanted to use the languages spoken by the Africans, echoing the language of men, and those who wanted believed that the future of African literature was going to be in English. On the one hand, there were the critics like Obi Wali, later joined by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, arguing that African literature in English was heading towards a dead-end, and that literature should be in a language that ordinary people can understand. On the other, writers like Chinua Achebe argued that literature in English led to more unity and communication within and outside of Africa and literature in African languages to division – and that, it was possible to Africanize English, thus making it carry the African world view. I end by looking at the question of translation and ask why neither the editors nor Tutuola himself raised the possibility of his writing in Yoruba and then translating into English.

In Chapter 4: "Editing Clare: Creating the genius peasant" I look at how Standard English influenced the editing of Clare's poetry. John Taylor, Clare's first editor, standardized much of Clare's English usage, while taking care to leave enough provincialisms and

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[18]. For example, John Wilson Croker, in his review of Hunt's *Rimini* says that "…If there be one fault more eminently conspicuous and ridiculous in Mr. Hunt's work than another, it is, — that it is full of 'mere vulgarisms' and 'fugitive phrases' and that in every page the language is — not only not 'the actual, existing language' but an ungrammatical, unauthorised, chaotic jargon, such as we believe was never before spoken, much less written" (Croker, 475-81).

grammatical mistakes to recall Clare's peasant background. Eric Robinson in turn restored Clare's writing to the original with minimal editorial interference. In order to bring out the differences between John Taylor's and Robinson's editing of Clare, I compare their two versions of *The Shepherd's Calendar*.

I try to show that critics have been unfair to Taylor who had to create a peasant-genius theory through which Clare's writing ought to have been read. The theory rested on establishing his authenticity through background while attempting to locate Clare in the larger question of language and innovation by claiming his authorial license to coin words and use non-standard English. I argue that Taylor wanted to use biography as the Trojan horse containing in it Clare the artist, one whom Taylor genuinely believed was gifted.

In Chapter 5: "Editing Tutuola: The Nativization of his English" I consider the aesthetic costs and opportunities of minimal and interventionist editing in Tutuola's *Palm Wine Drinkard*. Like Robinson for Clare, Allan Pringle, Tutuola's editor at Faber and Faber, adopted an editorial policy of minimal interference. For Pringle, the distance from Standard English had to be maintained while at the same time foregrounding his 'nativeness' in order to heighten the appeal of his novels.

In Chapter 6: "Critical Reception of Clare: A Question of Translatability" and Chapter 7: "Amos Tutuola: The African "Native' Writer and Translatability," I am concerned with the early reception of Clare and Tutuola and the role that biography played. Because Tutuola's poor command of English and Clare's use of provincialisms and poor grasp of grammar call attention to their respective backgrounds of colonized native and peasant, early criticism sees their writing as earthy, primordial, of child-like innocence, and representative of the peasant or the native.

They are anthropologized with Clare seen as the gateway into the life of the peasantry and Tutuola as representing the African mind on page.

When editing Clare and Tutuola, Taylor and Pringle were aware of the expectations that peasant poetry and native literature were to meet: Authenticity via biography; rough texts with unpolished language; and if polished they had to retain enough provincialism to mark them peasant and native. Their texts were also expected to be clean as in lack of sex (at least in Clare's case) and political subterfuge– all in a diffident prose and poetry. Because of the editors, and the aesthetic demands of peasant and native literature, early criticism biography was the lens through which they were read to an extent that even their physical looks and mannerisms were often accounted for in reviews.

I then look at how the later criticism, even though the goal is to rescue both writers from extrinsic readings of their works, ends up cementing the two writers in the margins. Later criticism, in part, tries to rescue Clare from biography by casting him as a poet of place. This I argue has the unintended consequence of rendering him a poet of no metaphorical value, one who cannot transcend time and space and ultimately rendered and therefore readable only within the context of his village, Helpston. Tutuola on the other hand is rendered untranslatable by being cast as a culturalist bent on preserving folktales that have no metaphorical value beyond moralistic preaching – as opposed to a magical realist writer. I do a close reading of Clare and Tutuola to show their translatability.

CHAPTER TWO

John Clare, Vulgar English versus the "Language of men"

> I have been given the language, and I intend to use it - Chinua Achebe [19]
>
> One wonders what would have happened to English literature for instance, if writers like Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton, had neglected English, and written in Latin and Greek simply because these classical languages were the cosmopolitan languages of their times. Literature after all, is the exploitation of the possibilities of language – Obi Wali [20]

Introduction

John Clare was a 19th Century British Romantic poet and Amos Tutuola a 20th Century Independence Era African writer. But in one of the more fortuitous moments that conjoin them, Eric Robinson, a contemporary Clare critic, reviewed Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* in 1954. While finding merit in the novel and recommending it to the reader, he made the point that Tutuola's style of writing would not have longevity and therefore could not establish a literary tradition for West African, and by extension African, literature. Regarding Tutuola's poor command of English, Robinson argued that his language was "a very unreliable instrument but it has its gusto, and there can be no question that stories come over with a greater pungency in his two books than if his English had been 'correct' but lifeless" (Editorial, 30).

On Clare's poor command of English grammar and its impact on his critical reception, Eric Robinson argued that "perhaps more harm has been done by the blinkers imposed by modern critics' own education, which has produced in them a reverence for standardized English and a condescension to dialect forms" than the "preoccupation with his insanity and his moving life-story" (Powell and Robinson, xxi). In both Clare and Tutuola, Robinson found that their

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[19]. Achebe, Chinua. "English and the African Writer." *Transition* 75/76 (1997): 342-349

[20]. Wali, Obiajunwa. "The Dead End of African Literature." *Transition*, 75/76 (1997): 330-335

language use adds an intrinsic[21] aesthetic quality to their writing – a central quality so tied to their voices and vision that it would be destroyed if edited out. So in the introduction to *John Clare*, Robinson and his co-author David Powell take issue with Clare's previous editors who, they argue, in standardizing Clare's English, edited out his originality and unique contribution because his language "could not be divorced from his sense of place, from his part in a tradition, from his *growing* awareness of who he is" (Powell and Robinson, xxii). While Robinson does not directly compare Clare and Tutuola, it is hard to imagine that the 1954 debate surrounding Tutuola's English did not, in one form or another, influence his editorial decision to minimally interfere with Clare's English usage.

In order to establish points of chirality between Clare and Tutuola, I begin this chapter by briefly looking at the growth of English from the 13th Century, then consider the philological debates surrounding Samuel Johnson's codification of English in *A Dictionary of the English Language* and William Wordsworth's call for a "language of men" and consider Clare within the context of these debates. I then look at the introduction of Standard English in Africa through colonial education, and the philological debate[22] that surrounded the production of African literature in English at the expense of African languages. I specifically use Chinua Achebe's and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's reactions to Obi Wali's argument that writing in European languages would lead to a dead end and consider Tutuola within this context.

Clare and the Standardization Debate in England

[21]. I am indebted to Prof. Tejumola Olaniyan for the terms extrinsic and intrinsic, introduced in a class lecture on African literary theory.

[22]. Even though these are early arguments and translation later became a meeting ground for both schools of thought, these arguments are still important in understanding the role of English language as an active ingredient in the writings and reception of Tutuola.

Marnie Holborow in *The Politics of English* lists a number of myths surrounding the standardization debate that justify a single authorized English: 1) Society needs a language standard, otherwise no one will be able to understand anyone else and communication will break down (152). Therefore, anyone calling for multiple languages or dialects is inviting chaos – a tower of Babel – which makes society and, by extension, nation building, impossible. 2) Standard English arises from centuries of civilization and culture and is the repository of that which is English (153). In this regard, to threaten Standard English is to challenge English history and culture, to challenge an English essence. 3) Written English is the standard (154). The implication is that Standard written English is the norm and orature an appendage to the Standard. And 4) Standard English is an indispensable tool for social advancement (Holborow). The implication here is that upward social mobility is reserved for those who speak and write in the language of power. These arguments imply that Standard English is not just a matter of a standardized orthography or rules about borrowing words; it unifies the British people and carries English identity – and its mastery is the passport to becoming a thriving member of British society.

The irony is that before it was charged with the duty of carrying English identity, English was a language spoken by, and for, the peasants. For the elite, French and Latin were the languages of civilization. Melvyn Bragg in *The Adventure of English: The Biography of a Language* writes that when in 1215 the "barons rebelled against King John and presented their demands in the most famous document in our history, the *Magna Carta*, they had it drawn up in Latin. Latin was the language of God, the language of deep tradition, the common language of the Western civilized world, a sacred language" (54). In another rebellion by the Barons in 1258, the letter to King Henry III was in Latin "but they also sent a letter to the shires to tell the

people what they wanted, and that was written in English" (54). Latin was the King's language. English was the language of the people - the two languages marked class distinctions.

In his essay, "The Use of English: Language, Law, and Political Culture in Fourteenth-Century England," Mark Ormrod makes a similar distinction. He writes:

> The elite, represented by the royal family, the members of the central administration, the senior judiciary, and at least a proportion of the high nobility, all knew how to speak French in one, two, or (occasionally) all three[23] of its forms and continued to use it regularly as a means of oral communication until (and, for certain purposes, well beyond) the end of the fourteenth century. Conversely, the lower ranks of the polity, the gentry and bourgeoisie, had already become Anglophone by the end of the thirteenth century; their knowledge of French was now largely pragmatic, needed only for the purposes of understanding administrative and accounting documents and for occasional dealings with the enemy when they joined the king on campaign abroad. (753)

For the power elite, French or Latin was the language of choice, while the majority outside the halls of power spoke English. Yet over time, the power elite moved to English. English helped forge a national identity against the French and Germans in a time of war. Since English was spoken by the commoners, the monarchy was pressured to contend with the language when addressing riotous masses. In 1362, King Edward III passed a law in which English "was acknowledged as a language of official business" while replacing French as the language of instruction (63). The statute is explicit in its reasoning – It was so that "every man of the said realm may better organize his affairs without offending the law, and better keep, save, and

[23]. Ormrod gives the three kinds of French as, "the language in use in northern France and the southern Low Countries; the parallel but separate form of that language that had developed in England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, usually known as Anglo-Norman; and the technical language used in the senior royal courts from the thirteenth century, which derived in turn from Anglo-Norman but deployed such a range of technical vocabulary and discourse as to make it a discernibly distinct branch of the language known as law French" (753).

defend his inheritances and possessions" (756). Consequently, the King's laws could not exist in French: they had to exist in a language understood by the people. Still, the law was not a full recognition of English. The case was to be "pleaded, counted, defended, answered, debated, and judged in the English language; and entered and enrolled in Latin" (756). The plaintiff would not later have access to the records because they would be locked up in Latin. But at least procedurally, the plaintiff would have been participating. Ormrod however points out a nationalist angle to the Statute of Pleading:

> French military aggression was represented as a form of cultural imperialism: drawing on a discourse employed by Edward I, the Crown several times in the mid-fourteenth century claimed, for the benefit of political audiences in England, that the French intended to wipe the English language from the face of the earth…the royal declaration on the use of English was not solely or even principally about proper access to justice but rather about the reinforcement of a particular sense of political and cultural identity in a kingdom that had just emerged successfully from the throes of a major war with France. (780-781)

Language and nationalism, the idea that a government could not negotiate as an equal using the opponent's language was the official argument. However, if nationalism was a bulwark against French aggression, then it had to be solidified at home. The final endorsement was for English to become the language between royalty and subjects. In 1381, Richard II used the English language to address peasants revolting against serfdom (Bragg, 62). He needed to speak in a language that his subjects would understand. This was the first time a King had used English to address his subjects.

At the same time, Geoffrey Chaucer was writing in English. Bragg argues that Chaucer could "have written in Latin – which he knew well – [or] in French from which he translated and which might have given him greater prestige" but instead chose to write in his own "London based English" (66). Chaucer was aware of the various dialects and his characters employ them. But more than that, he was aware of the different 'Englishes' with their different class registers. Bragg writes that Chaucer:

> …brings on the stage the range of individually realized characters, high and low, broad and refined, of words apt for each, coarse and delicate, satirical and mock heroic, which signpost not only much of future English literature but much of English life. (66)

As English was becoming national, it was also following class and regional divides: unlearned English was spoken by peasants, while learned English was spoken by the elite. [24] As it replaced French and Latin, it still had to meet the same standards of poise and civilization – the English that would represent England against other nations had to be of the highest order. The language of the King had to be divested of its lowly roots. In short, the proliferation of English was positive, but the varieties of dialects were a problem.

Samuel Johnson and the Standardization Debate

With that brief background, it is now possible to turn to the standardization debate introduced by Samuel Johnson's 1755 *A Dictionary of the English Language*. For Johnson language standardization was not just a practical matter of orthography. Language, society and identity were tied together. Towards the end of his *Preface to the Dictionary*, he writes that:

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[24]. David Crystal makes a similar point when, in *The Fight for English*, he writes:
Some of Chaucer's characters comment in the opposite direction. One in The Merchant's Tale doesn't like what he calls *scole-termes* ('school words'). Another, in the epilogue to *The Man of Law's Tale*, says he has *but litel Latyn in my mawe* – 'I have little stomach for Latin Words.' In *The House of Fame*, a talking eagle – a companion of the god Jupiter – is proud of the fact he can speak in both styles, learned and unlearned. (9)

> I have devoted this book, the labour of years, to the honour of my country, that we may no longer yield the palm of philology to the nations of the continent. The chief glory of every people arises from its authours: whether I shall add any thing by my own writings to the reputation of *English* literature, must be left to time…I shall not think my employment useless or ignoble, if by my assistance foreign nations, and distant ages, gain access to the propagators of knowledge, and understand the teachers of truth; if my labours afford light to the repositories of science, and add celebrity to *Bacon*, to *Hooker*, to *Milton*, and to *Boyle*. (92)

His intention was to contribute to the honor, character, and virtue of England through the standardization of English. Through standardization, he hoped that language and literature as cultural products would not be dictated by other European countries. In addition, through standardization, English would not only have longevity but it could also be exported. Through its being exported, a hope later fulfilled by colonialism and globalization, other peoples could have access to the "teachers of truth" – a singular English truth. In short, his dictionary was a national and nationalist project.

Earlier, when explaining why the dictionary was necessary, Johnson argued that the English language was in a state of anarchy. Writers were expected to follow the rules of language, but the rules were ill defined; as such, they depended on the specific user:

> When I took the first survey of my undertaking, I found our speech copious without order, and energetick without rules: wherever I turned my view, there was perplexity to be disentangled, and confusion to be regulated; choice was to be made out of boundless variety, without any established principle of selection; adulterations were to be detected,

without a settled test of purity; and modes of expression to be rejected or received, without the suffrages of any writers of classical reputation or acknowledged authority. (4)

However, as one reads on, the restoration of order, the establishment of rules and principles, and a "settled test of purity" with input from writers with acknowledged authority all come to mean the standard being drawn along the divide between the elite and the peasants, the proper and the vulgar. Through classical reputation and authority, Johnson hoped that English writers would someday carry the same gravitas and be met with the same reverence that greeted Greek writers. English writers would become setters of a literary tradition as opposed to followers.

For Marnie Holborow, Johnson, "having himself received a classical education, outside the ranks of the landowning class, Johnson wanted to uphold a model of language which was also a means of class distinction. A sharp demarcation between the classes, between the mercantile middle class and the laboring poor, was the basis of social order, which a standard language should reflect" (162). The result is that in trying to set and define a standard, upper-class English had to be defended from the lower classes; thus, manner of speech would become a reflection of one's class. The elite would not stoop to speak lower class English, but the lower classes who wished to make it in business, hold government jobs, or write had to master standardized English.

Standardization was also a nationalist project interested in seeing English culture outlive the material nation. In his essay, "The Creation of a Classical Language in the Eighteenth Century: Standardizing English, Cultural Imperialism, and the Future of the Literary," Adam R. Beach considers how "cultural nationalism at 'home' complements the creation of a more ambitious cultural imperialism" (127). He looks at Thomas Sheridan, an influential eighteenth

century elocutionist who argued forcefully for the standardization of English. Beach argues that theorists such as Sheridan and Johnson:

> …imagined themselves transforming English, along with Greek and Latin, into the third "classical" tongue, essentially a standard and permanent language that could withstand change across vast expanses of time and space. This English "classical" language would be implanted around the world, becoming dominant wherever Britons colonized, displacing the so-called "primitive" languages spoken by native inhabitants. Just as the English people once were civilized and improved by both Latin and the Roman conquest, so too could Britain help other nations progress by the export of English to their colonies. (118-119)

Beach argues the end goal was not just a Standard English that served the nationalist and imperialist needs of a British Empire. Rather it was to create a “metaphysical empire,” a worldwide cultural empire that would outlast the material British Empire. He writes:

> If English could be standardized and codified, thinkers like Sheridan imagined it would become the building block of … a metaphysical empire, an empire of language and literature that would outlive the actual British Empire…While sometimes openly disavowing the martial nature of Rome, theorists could still wax eloquent about its metaphysical empire and the continued transmission and reproduction of Latin and of Roman letters. These epic metaphysical empires were a source of great inspiration to those thinkers who fantasized that British texts would eventually become "classics" to formerly colonized peoples. (Beach, 119)

This movement was not just about standard English serving as nationalist armor by protecting English identity from outside forces while keeping Britain a solidified whole. ‘Standardizers’

like Johnson and Sheridan were after history itself. They wanted English language, literature and culture to live on in perpetuity – to become the living metaphor, the future stand-in for the glory of the British people. At some point then, English would stop serving the immediate needs of a growing Empire and become a living growing entity of its own.

However, standardization does not mean that language should stand still. For Johnson it was inevitable that English would grow and borrow from others as Englishmen interacted with other cultures. Commerce was one area where by necessity contact had to be made and maintained. He argued that even though it would vulgarize the language through "mingled dialect, like the jargon which serves the traffickers on the *Mediterranean* and *Indian* coasts" it would in the end be "incorporated with the current speech." Language is only static in societies that are static, that are "raised a little, and but a little, above barbarity, secluded from strangers, and totally employed in procuring the conveniences of life" (Johnson, 87). To the contrary, the growth of a language is a mark of a dynamic society, a civilization making its way toward enlightenment.

For language to grow, the peasants and workers would have to maintain a class of intellectuals whose sole responsibility was to nurture culture. It is very clear for Johnson what the role of the peasants and workers is to be in philology – they could use the language, but they were not to contribute to it:

> But no such constancy can be expected in a people polished by arts, and classed by subordination, where one part of the community is sustained and accommodated by the labour of the other. Those who have much leisure to think, will always be enlarging the stock of ideas, and every increase of knowledge, whether real or fancied, will produce new words, or combinations of words. (Johnson, 87)

The irony is that it was the peasants who embraced English first and now, Johnson was arguing that in the same way peasants and workers sustained an upper class, which governed and controlled the economy, their responsibility was also to foster the language through labor. This

in turn would sustain a leisure class of philologers who would develop the language and, in turn, produce culture worthy of that language. As if speaking directly of John Clare, though most probably to contemporary peasant poets such as Robert Burns, Johnson declared that:

> The tropes of poetry will make hourly encroachments, and the metaphorical will become the current sense: pronunciation will be varied by levity or ignorance, and the pen must at length comply with the tongue; illiterate writers will at one time or other, by publick infatuation, rise into renown, who, not knowing the original import of words, will use them with colloquial licentiousness, confound distinction, and forget propriety. (Johnson, 88)

The enemy at the gate of the English language was the peasants and a class of writers who might emerge from them.[25] Indeed, as I show later, Eliza Emmerson and John Radstock, two of Clare's patrons, were especially concerned that Clare's poetry was bordering on the vulgar and insisted that he correct his poems so that they were morally and linguistically cleaner. Here, Johnson was also advocating for the development of a single national English language molded by the elite and the learned. However, as much as he appears to be a protectionist, he could still argue, albeit reluctantly,[26] for the inevitability of the English language growing because of interactions with the national and international vulgar dialects and languages.

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[25]. It was not just the illiterate writers at the gate: Johnson reserved a special thrashing for translators, arguing:

> The great pest of speech is frequency of translation. No book was ever turned from one language into another, without imparting something of its native idiom; this is the most mischievous and comprehensive innovation; single words may enter by thousands, and the fabric of the tongue continue the same, but new phraseology changes much at once; it alters not the single stones of the building, but the order of the columns. (90)

[26]. On the question of Johnson and his understanding of English and its inevitable interaction with other languages and borrowing from them, Beach argues that:

> Johnson's original dream for his work was that 'it should fix our language, and put a stop to those alterations which time and chance have hitherto been suffered to make in it without opposition.' While, in a famous passage, he admits that the play of signification of living languages cannot be totally hindered, this does not mean, as some critics have suggested, that Johnson gave up on the project of standardizing

William Cobbett and the Democratization of Learning

Where Samuel Johnson was talking about the English language as the property of the elite and its writers who also had the duty to not only contribute to its growth, but also protect it from foreign and domestic vulgarities, William Cobbett understood the language as belonging to all the citizens. He therefore sought to include the workers and peasants, those understood by Johnson as having nothing to contribute, in the language 'body.' For Cobbett, writing and speaking Standard English was a safeguard against tyranny and the key to a genuinely just society. In his preface that doubles as a letter to a young nephew, he wrote:

> …when you come to read the history of the struggles of our forefathers, by which those sacred laws have, from time to time, been defended against despotic ambition; by which they have been restored to vigor when on the eve of perishing ; by which their violators have never failed, in the end, to be made to feel the just vengeance of the People. (introduction)

David Borkowski captures the two different approaches in "Class(ifying) Language: The War of the Word" when he writes:

> Conservative thinkers, like Samuel Johnson, had decided that only the leisure class was worthy of setting and exemplifying linguistic standards because of their social rank. Conventional theories of language helped confirm class divisions that determined which members of society merited participation in public life. In contrast, Cobbett redefined the nature of language to expand the political rights of lower class, or "vulgar," speakers. (357)

English. Rather, Johnson implores his fellow citizens to 'make some struggles for our language'…If there cannot be a total suppression of fluctuation, Johnson does believe that the process can be slowed down. (126)

The elite and the poor were being educated differently – the former to become proficient in the sciences and philosophy, the latter just enough to function – to read the bible and do the lesser work of keeping the society running – shopkeepers, cobblers and servants. In other words, it was an education system designed to maintain the class structure as opposed to creating equal opportunities for all. Cobbett, however, was not arguing for the democratization of the language itself to include provincialism and dialect words, but rather proper standardized English made accessible to all. On the importance of grammar, he said to his nephew:

> The actions of men proceed from their *thoughts*. In order to obtain the co-operation, the concurrence, or the consent of others, we must communicate our thoughts to them. The means of this communication are *words*; and Grammar teaches us *how to make use of words*.[27] Therefore, in all the ranks, degrees and situations of life, a knowledge of the principles and rules of Grammar must be useful. (Introduction)

L. C. Mugglestone in "Cobbett's Grammar: William, James Paul, and the Politics of Prescriptivism," makes the point that:

> Cobbett's conception of grammar was…innately prescriptive, endorsing not the variation perceptible in actual usage over the country, but instead seeking to enforce the hegemonies of a non-localized, 'correct', and 'standard' English for all. (473)

But there was political reason behind this Mugglestone argues:

> Since problems of exclusion (and exclusivity) often surrounded access to the norms of 'standard' speech, Cobbett chose to offer a process of linguistic enfranchisement to the politically disenfranchised, and a process of linguistic empowerment to the politically

[27]. Italics his.

> disempowered. Linguistic education thus becomes a means to a political end, a fact particularly evident in Cobbett's belief that, in eliminating the repercussions of subjective inequality 'by the writing of a little book of grammar' (and thereby also eliminating the sociolinguistic shibboleths which characteristically hampered a just reception of the reformers' petitions), he 'might possibly be able to create numerous formidable assailants of our insolent high-blooded oppressors.' (475 – 476)

Thus, his democratization was not going to be of the various forms of English, but in opening up the language so that all could participate. Speaking and writing in proper grammatical English ensured political participation. For him, then, provincialisms and dialects were not going to be useful in the political liberation of the peasants and working class. What the Romantic writers were to argue, though, was that standardization was having the opposite effect, that in codifying English without regard to the language as used, the literature and therefore culture was going to suffer. For Olivia Smith:

> The Preface, in itself, disseminated conservative assumptions about language and its relation to class. There, Johnson maintains a clearly drawn distinction between the language of books and the language of the living; what was considered to be a distinction between a genuine and a corrupt language. (14)

The Romantic writers, exemplified by William Wordsworth and his call for a language of men in *The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, were in effect fighting against the idea that there could be a single Standard English, and one that ignored living language as well as the majority speaking in what for Johnson was a 'vulgar' English.[28]

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[28]. Olivia Smith on the effects of standardization writes that "The *Dictionary,* by its long-lasting and extensive distribution, gave to the conservative ideology of the 1750's an enduring and influential life. The evasion of the political, the belief that language pertains more to literary texts than to speech, and the demarcation of pure

Wordsworth and the Language of Men

For William Wordsworth, writing fifty or so years after Johnson's dictionary, standardization had gone too far. Despite Johnson's acknowledgement of the necessary dynamism of growing languages, English was not growing with the people. Changes were not going to be accommodated based on language in use as opposed to codified language. The elite had put English in a straight jacket, in the name of protecting it from vulgarizations. In *The Politics of Language in Romantic Literature*, Richard Turley writes:

> For Romantic observers, of course, the bid to 'fix' the English Language (after 'repairing' it with Latinate words) had produced a historical curiosity: a single 'authorized' poetic diction that was as uniform and instantly recognizable as it was unyielding and unchanging. Grammarians and dictionary makers had succeeded, Romantics complained, in preserving a poetic language that was outwardly dazzling, but ultimately lifeless, as insects trapped in amber. (37)

Whereas for Johnson, "all semantic variation since the time of Latin and Greek is summarily denounced as corruption" (Turley, 25), in contradistinction, Wordsworth was calling for a "language of real men" in which Standard English would draw from an everyday vulgar and corrupted language. Wordsworth saw the peasant as the holder and user of language – albeit in very condescending terms where the peasant used a purer language, timeless and efficient. So he favored the language used the "humble and rustic":

> because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness

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and corrupt usage along class lines became more commonly held assumption due to their currency in Johnson's *Dictionary"*(16).

> and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. (393).

For Wordsworth, the 'men' who use real language are closer to nature. The language they use is unencumbered with affectations, and they speak what they need. They have developed something very useful to the poet: simplicity and efficiency. Wordsworth continues:

> Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation. (393)

Centuries of expressing the very elementary needs have rendered their everyday language philosophical because through a judicious use of language by necessity, words and what they signify are in agreement. There is no jargon or anything obtuse between the signifier and the signified. Another way of saying this is that in the rural and rustic world, the poet finds a language that is not only efficient, but is already a metaphor.

Who are the poets that Wordsworth refers to? He could not have meant peasant poets – the peasant class uses language unconsciously, and poetry requires a sensitivity to the use of language. The poet has to be an outsider, not from this class which is incapable of organically producing a poet of its own. Even though Wordsworth connects the poet to the people, it is not for the people's sake as such, but for the sake of language. He is arguing that standardized

English will grow to the extent it listens to the peasants, without inviting them to become equal and active participants in the growth of the language.[29] Turley on this contradiction notes that:

> If the 'real language of men' produced poems that could be consumed, but whose creative origins could not be comprehended, and certainly not imitated by the very class of speakers who were supposed to speak and thus guarantee that language, then it is difficult to see in what way Wordsworth's philological vision can be said to be democratic. (45)

The irony here is two-fold. The peasants, as noted earlier, were the original English speakers, yet they were not expected to actively contribute to its growth. Wordsworth ends up being very close to holding Johnson's exclusionary principle when it comes to letting the peasant in. The peasant poets and intellectuals are not active partners in the growth of English for either philologist. This is not to say that Johnson and Wordsworth hold the same positions on language: for Johnson, Standard English is to be protected from the peasants, for Wordsworth the peasants are to be listened to without being invited in. Rather they are simply reflecting the contradictions of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Change, no matter the direction, was not to include the active participation of the peasants.

After Wordsworth came Leigh Hunt, John Keats, and the Cockney School that defined itself in opposition to the authorized version of English. Yet even the Cockney school did not take the language of real men literally: their argument for free English was more of a metaphor. Turley argues that:

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[29]. In the essay, "Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, and the Problem of Peasant Poetry Author," Scott McEathron writes that: "Wordsworth's silence on the topic of actual peasant and laboring-class writers is striking on its own terms, but even more so in light of the incisive, *au courant* cultural awareness that he claims for himself in the "Preface." (4)

> For Wordsworth and Hunt, the project of reclaiming an appropriate diction had very little to do with identifying anything that actually existed in a particular idiolect, be it that of a rustic, ploughboy, or milkmaid, it has much more to do with the positing of a general and thoroughly *ideal* discourse, one that could draw on philology to bolster its claims to authenticity, but one above all, that was conveniently empty of associations with neoclassical values. (79)

In other words, much like Wordsworth, the Cockney School reserved the manipulation of language into poetry for 'real' poets. The peasants' use of language was not poetry in itself, yet their everyday usage of the language captured the essence of language - and it was this essence that was needed for the English language to grow and unfetter itself from neo-classical literature that sought legitimacy from Greek and Roman literatures. Where literature from the Restoration period (1660–1700) derived legitimacy in imitating Greek classics, Wordsworth and later the Cockney School were arguing that the English language had to find legitimacy within itself.

Locating Clare in the language debate: A question of language and innovation

Aware of the Cockney School position on language, Clare's original editor John Taylor could have tied Clare to the larger discussion of "the true language of men" and portrayed him as one of the voices challenging the nature of the English language, and searching for poetic English outside the dictums of Johnson dictionary's proscriptions.[30] To do so would have come at a cost. Johanne Clare writes that, "if Clare's dialect-words gave offence to many of his critics it was not because they bespoke a sensibility that was too decidedly local or provincial, but because they conveyed the character, attitude, and situation of a poet who was too obviously, too unabashedly working-class" (127). It was not just about class but also a question of the very nature of Standard English as a constructed stand in for Englishness.

John McKusick in "The Tyranny of Grammar" sees Clare's provincial language challenging the very foundations of English identity by threatening to vulgarize Standardized English:

> It is the locality of Clare's dialect that irritates his critics; the Scottish dialect, having a distinct national character, poses no threat to England's national identity, but if the "rustics" of Northamptonshire, Lancashire, and Somersetshire are allowed to publish their local dialects, the cultural and linguistic hegemony of London will be exposed and eventually destabilized. (257)

With class and identity[31] already at the center of the language debate, to intentionally present Clare as a conscious user of the much derided "language of men" would have been to make his

[30]. Taylor did attempt to introduce Clare and Keats, but Keats died of tuberculosis before they could meet (Bate, 189).

[31]. Johanne Clare also notes that:

poetry even more vulnerable to attack. Taylor attempted to preempt this by trying to teach the reader how to approach Clare in his introduction to *Poems Descriptive*. As I argue in the next chapter, Taylor had to argue for an approach that balanced biography and poetic genius. To justify Clare's language use, Taylor had to immerse him in the debate surrounding language without appearing to do so, and he did this by making a case for Clare's innovativeness. Mark Storey in "Clare and His Critics" notes that "Taylor is in fact one of the few early editors to talk directly about language…He recognises that Clare is forced into linguistic and grammatical innovation of a kind that links him directly with all the best poets of the English tradition" (35).

Clare's biography would invite the reader in. Once inside his poetry, the reader was going to find bad grammar, coined words, dialect and provincial words. Taylor had to frame a theory around which the reader was to process Clare's language. So he argued that when writers come across images that are foreign to them and do not have the words or names to convey them; they have to create new words, phrases and concepts:

> On the other hand, his want forces him to an extraordinary exertion of his native powers, in order to supply the deficiency. He employs the language under his command with great effect, in those unusual and unprecedented combinations of words which must be made, even by the learned, when they attempt to describe perfectly something which they have never seen or heard expressed before. And in this respect Clare's deficiencies are the cause of many beauties, — for though he must, of course, innovate, that he may succeed in his purpose, yet he does it according to that rational mode of procedure, by which all languages have been formed and perfected. (xiv)

The terms with which Clare's dialect-words were attacked suggested that his critics saw little reason to deviate from Dryden's strictures that the language of the poet should be the language of a gentleman, and that "village words" were to be avoided because they "give us a mean idea of the thing." (127)

Clare's lack of learning forced him to innovate but to Taylor this was not a weakness but rather a strength because it forced his imagination to recast things anew. More than that, Clare was not doing anything other writers did not do. He was not making arbitrary irrational choices but following the conventions of language as it grows and acquires new words. After allowing Clare the same leeway as other authors no matter their backgrounds, he moved onto casting Clare within a philological debate about how language grows through innovation and coinage of words:

> Inseparably connected with the use of speech is the privilege to abbreviate; and those new ideas, which in one age are obliged to be communicated paraphrastically, have generally in the next some definite term assigned them: so legitimate, however, is the process of this, by reason of certain laws of analogy which are inherent in the mind of man, and universally attended to in the formation of new words, that no confusion can arise; for the word thus introduced into a language always contains its meaning in its derivation and composition, except it be such mere cant as is not meant to live beyond the day; and further, the correspondent word to it may always be found in other more perfect languages, if the people who spoke that language were alike conversant with the idea, and equally under the temptation of employing some word to signify it. (xvi)

By paraphrastically, Taylor meant that if a word as a sign does not exist for that which the author wishes to signify, then it has to be phrased or described out. However, in the next generation the sign that captures the phrase in a word could very well be found. Clare therefore could be the one finding the word that in the previous age had to be described. There is, Taylor argued, something innate in the human mind that draws analogies, which is to say meaning from

assigned words that allows the mind the ability to extract the meaning because the word was composed precisely to do this. To Taylor words are not arbitrary. Meaning is encoded in the process of word formation – in a way, a word is already a metaphor; it means to mean itself. Then he intimated that language is universal, and equivalents where same concepts exists, are universal. This is crucial because it means that Clare's coinage of words is not arbitrary, and he follows universal linguistic principals.

Taylor then spoke to Clare's use of provincialism and argued that in fact, some words that come across as recently created are actually old words, many of them to be found in earlier generations of writers. Most of those words, while long lost to the current generation of the makers of literary taste, still exist in the oral "popular voice" until a writer is in need of a specific word and comes across it. Consequently:

> Many of the provincial expressions, to which Clare has been forced to have recourse, are of this description, forming part of a large number which may be called the unwritten language of England. They were once, perhaps, as current throughout the land, and are still many of them as well-sounding and significant, as any that are sanctioned by the press. In the midland counties they are readily understood without a glossary; but, for the use of those who are unaccustomed to them, all such as are not to be found in Johnson's Dictionary will be printed at the end, with explanations. (xvi)

By arguing that some of the words that Clare used even though outside Standard literary English were still in usage and popularly understood, he was essentially calling popular usage of English legitimate. The problem was not with those using the provincial words, but those who did not understand them. He does not take the question of the "language of men" head on, but he is speaking to it. He does not condescend to the language of the poor by calling it vulgar, but says

in so many words that it is authorized and legitimized by popular usage. The glossary at the end of the book *Poems Descriptive* is not contradicting-Johnson's dictionary but rather amending it.

Taylor wanted to reassure the reader that in Clare the reader was going to find authenticity, originality and intimate honest portrayal of nature and poverty from a gifted and peasant poet who did not harbor, anger, bitterness. He did not contaminate his poetry with behaviors associated with his class:

> And all this is found here without any of those distressing and revolting alloys, which too often debase the native worth of genius, and make him who was gifted with powers to command admiration, live to be the object of contempt or pity. The lower the condition of its possessor, the more unfavourable, generally, has been the effect of genius on his life. (xxvi)

He did not mean that Clare did not speak his mind, but that he took his work seriously enough not to ruin it with "revolting alloys" – by bringing in behavior expected of his class, whether political, social or moral. Here, in trying to reassure the reader, Taylor reveals his class anxieties regarding the poor, but even then, he does it within a theory of presenting Clare as a poet to be read and taken seriously – one with important contributions to make to English literature – and language.

There was still the question of grammar. Taylor argued that writers were primarily concerned with conveying and speaking to the imagination and did not see words as forming grammatical sentences. Rather words could be broken up and mixed up to convey images. He essentially argued that words for a writer create a whole image - and it was the image that mattered. He wrote that for "Clare, as well as many other poets, does not regard language in the same way that a logician does. He considers it collectively rather than in detail, and paints up to

his mind's original by mingling words, as a painter mixes his colours" (xvi). But he could not ultimately dismiss Clare's lack of grammar so easily. He conceded it a defect, but "never so great as to give any real embarrassment to the reader" (xvi). If one were to dismiss Clare because of his use of language, then he or she would be missing that which made Clare singularly unique - an originality that came through his use of language. So Taylor wrote that "Clare's deficiencies are the cause of many beauties, — for though he must, of course, innovate, that he may succeed in his purpose, yet he does it according to that rational mode of procedure, by which all languages have been formed and perfected" (xiv). However, although he claimed Clare as an authentic voice, he stopped short of suggesting Clare used the "language of men" which would have immersed him in the larger question of philology. He argued that Clare's innovativeness followed the laws of growing a language, but he did not attribute this to conscious choice, instead stressing the influence of Clare's peasant background. For Taylor, Clare was an anomaly from a class that did not produce or consume culture. In the end, Taylor portrayed Clare as a unique, unconscious, innovator with nothing to contribute to the language debate.

There is also the question of whether Clare saw himself as part of the larger questions around language. James McKusick writes that "Clare finally discovered a grammar-book that he could admire; it was by William Cobbett, a self-educated radical pamphleteer whose lower-class origins conditioned his sense of linguistic identity. In a letter of circa 1831-32, Clare asks his friend Marianne Marsh for her opinion of "the best part of Cobbets Gramer," and in a letter of January 1832 to the same correspondent he praises Cobbett as "one of the most powerful prose writers of the age" (271).

McKusick goes on to make the point that, “Clare shares Cobbett's contempt for classical learning and his linguistic ideology, based on the norms of spoken vernacular and attentive to regional varieties of usage” (271). He quotes Clare on Cobbett:

> Those who have made grammar up into a system and cut it into classes and orders as the student does the animal or vegetable creation may be a recreation for schools but it becomes of no use towards making any one so far acquainted with it as to find it useful it will only serve to puzzle and mislead to awe and intimidate instead of aiding and encouraging him therefore it pays nothing for the study …And such a one as Cobbett who has come boldly forward and not only assailed the outworks of such a pedantic garrison but like a skilful general laid open its weakness to all deserves more praise for the use of his labour than all the rest of the castle building grammarians put together for he plainly comes to this conclusion that what ever is intellig[i]b[l]e to others is grammer and whatever is commonsense is not far from correctness. (271-272)

For McKusick, “this is a fairly accurate description of Cobbett's Grammar, which seeks to demolish the pretensions of the traditional grammarians” (272). However, Clare was misreading Cobbett. Cobbett wanted to democratize English learning, and therefore part of his agenda was to get rid of the extrinsic aspects of grammar, the classism that came with moral and intellect judgments, but he still believed that democratization of English hinged on learning grammar. He did not wish to demolish the rules of grammar; he wanted them learned by all. For the Romantic language liberators, while they could sympathize with Clare and his learning, they would have been appalled at Taylor’s suggestion to Clare, when it came to grammar to “keep as you are.”

Clare defended his language use, and understood it as part of the aesthetics of his writing – as his language, but in terms of nature as opposed to a political right to language. Johanne Clare writes:

> In his letters to Taylor, Clare expressed irritation over the fact that many of his dialect-words were altered, and from his reaction to these alterations we can conclude that at an early stage in his writing career Clare understood that his use of dialect was in some sense integral to the fabric of his poetry. He was committed to his dialect-words even though he was forced to recognize that without these words his first volumes might have had smoother passage… (119)

However, his defense of dialect and provincial words was always in relation to intrinsic qualities, to the inner workings and uses of language in the peasant voice. His word choice and use of dialect and provincial words had more to do with his poems being true to where they were coming from, than with making a point about the politics of language and language development. To Taylor he wrote:

> Bad spelling may be altered by the Amanuensis but no word is to be altered "Eggs on" in the "Address to a Lark" whether provincial or not I cannot tell but it is common with the vulgar. The word "twit-a-twit" (if a word it can be called) you will undoubtedly smile at but I wish you to print it as it is for it is the Language of Nature & that can never be disgusting.[32]

Here, he is making a distinction between grammatical mistakes, which he concedes could be corrected and provincial words, which to him were not arbitrary, or corrupted names from

[32]. Quoted by John McKusick in “Clare and the Tyranny of Grammar.” McKusick surmises that: Clare's fidelity to what he calls the "Language of Nature" and his resistance to substantive editorial alterations frequently recur throughout his editorial correspondence, indicating his enduring allegiance to a defiantly "vulgar" conception of language (259).

Standard English, they are part of language. By "language of nature," he means language not learned or constructed but language as organic to nature as trees. Clare was aware of the philological debate about the nature of language, but he lay outside the debate's theoretical parameters, by virtue of being a peasant wanting to remain to true to his language.

This goes to the very heart of the contradictions within Romanticism. Romanticism was revolutionary in that its project was to free language from the constraints of upper-class elite nationalism and to develop a more organic, elastic and inclusive English. But it was the Romantics who were to speak for the masses and not the masses for themselves. Wordsworth could write a poem about peasant farmers, but peasant farmers could not write about themselves. To Wordsworth, the peasants used language, but they did not wield it consciously, they did not manipulate it with symbols and metaphors to create art or beauty – they spoke the immediate and true language of nature. Wordsworth's language of men was going to be studied and extracted from this language of nature. John Clare's language was his raw material. This, in essence, was the central contradiction of Romanticism.

CHAPTER THREE

Tutuola and the Question of Standard English in African Literature

> The basic distinction between French and German literature for instance, is that one is written in French, and the other in German. All the other distinctions, whatever they be, are based on this fundamental fact. What therefore is now described as African literature in English and French, is a clear contradiction, and a false proposition, just as 'Italian literature in Hausa' would be – Obi Wali [33]

The Question of Standardization and Colonial Education

The same arguments used by the English to fight for the survival of their language from the 13th through the 19th Centuries were deployed both in favor of and against the use of English in colonial and decolonizing Africa. If we hearken back to Marnie Holborow's myths surrounding the standardization debate in England, we find them all also justifying the use of English over African languages in colonial and post colonial Africa – English would unify an otherwise diverse people speaking multiple languages; English is the carrier of a rich culture and civilization and therefore more desirable than African languages; and English is indispensable to upward social mobility. At the same time, the debate over languages in Africa repeated the class dimension of the debate in England: Standard English was becoming the language of the elite and African languages spoken by peasants and the poor. Furthermore, English was the official language of the government, the courts and education.

On the other side of the debate the same arguments used to advocate for English becoming the language of the English people over Latin and French were mirrored by those advocating for the use of African languages: A national literature cannot be in a language alien to that culture, particularly when that language has been imposed through conquest. By extension, decolonization in the language of the colonizer would be a contradiction. Literature and the

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[33]. Wali, Obiajunwa. "The Dead End of African Literature." *Transition.* 75/76 (1997): 330-335.

official businesses of government ought to be in a language the majority of the people can understand.

Standard English was introduced through the colonial educational system. Colonial-educated Africans were alienated from their languages. In this context, Africans yearned to embrace their languages, yet viewed them with condescension. At the same time, they wanted to hate English but were attracted to it. The colonial system produced Africans who were attracted to and also repulsed by both African and European languages, a situation in which a complete negation of one language or the other was impossible. Colonial European and African languages were all sources of tension.

Colonial education was not designed to produce African intellectuals equal in philosophy and science to the Europeans. It had the express purpose of producing Africans who would function as junior partners to Whites in running the colonial machinery. In his essay "*Educating the "Native": A Study of the Education Adaptation Strategy in British Colonial Africa*, 1910-1936," Michael Omolewa writes:

> [T]he foundation of the Western education in Africa was laid by Christian missionaries who were eager to use literacy training to introduce Christianity and win converts to their religion. The missionaries also used Western education to train Africans as catechists, messengers, and other positions needed to assist them in realizing the social and economic development and transformations desired by the European missionaries and their agents. Merchants and traders also required qualified personnel to handle their business transactions. (268)

However, the educationists[34] did not see themselves as creating an educational system that would contribute to the exploitation of Africans; to the contrary, the Africans were being given the kind of education that suited their level of civilization. It was taken as a given that Africans were to be weaned from an inferior civilization. But it could not be done all at once. Colonial education was supposed to produce Africans in balance with their primordial culture and the modern civilized world.

One driving force for this educational mission was the Phelps-Stokes Fund. In a 1923 essay, "The Phelps-Stokes Fund and Educational Adaptation," W. Carson Ryan, Jr. summarized the educational philosophy of the Phelps-Stokes Fund this way:

> Next to agriculture the commission places as the most important activities for education the "simple handicrafts required in the kraals and villages." Every teacher is to be taught the special forms of hand skill required for his community, not merely for economic ends, but because of the necessity of hand training for all. "The primary handicraft needs of the natives of Africa are those that will prepare every teacher and native worker to go out into the little villages and teach the natives how to make better use of the wood, clay, cane, hides, iron or other products which may be discovered in sufficient quantities to be useful." *Preparation for home life and for recreation, recognition of the language rights of the natives and of the need of a medium of inter- tribal communication* [emphasis mine], adaptation of the conventional school subjects to the needs of the environment, and the use of the movable school, farm demonstration, and other devices that have

[34]. Frederick D. Patterson, who in 1954 was the Director of the Phelp-Stokes Fund also noted the missionary origins of the colonial education system in his essay *Education in Nigeria*:

> Practically all primary level education of the Western type is under the supervision of the Christian missions….The continued extensive participation of the missions in primary education reflects the early development of education in Nigeria, where the missions were solely responsible for initiating, financing and managing all education available to Nigerian youth. (98)

> proved valuable in American efforts at educational adaptation, are also stressed by the commission. (281)

Education therefore was seen as functional and not meant to fulfill existential needs of the mind. Schools were for producing agriculturalists who could do maintenance work around the villages while maintaining a healthy level of hygiene. African languages were not meant to carry learning; they were not to carry math, physics or philosophy, they were to facilitate functionality and remain purely communicative. In his essay "The Adaptation Concept in British Colonial Education" Udo Bude discusses two 1920s commissions financed by The Phelps Stokes Fund to assess the colonial educational systems in Africa. The commissions called for the adaptation of "the Western education to meet local needs" including:

> …individual housing and living conditions; the use of local resources for agriculture and handicrafts; the organisation of leisure time. *Special attention was to be given to the use of African languages as media of instruction in school and the teaching of rural or agricultural science* [emphasis added]. School farm work and training in local crafts formed a key element of the reform concept. (342)

The point to note here is that African languages were expected to be part and parcel of the larger question of how to balance a European educational system against African cultures.

The fear that Africans would feel alienated from Western culture was a central concern. Thus, in a later essay on colonial education, but one that captures the principles and arguments over African languages, "The Place of English in African Education," Norman H. MacKenzie could call for the teaching of vernacular languages because to fully immerse Africans in English without the anchor of their mother tongues would lead to alienation. He argued that, "however diligently [Africans] work, they are like a man with a grafted skin, where the delicate sensitivity

of the nerves has not yet grown again, so that his contact with his surroundings is uneasy and coarsened. (221) He was not calling for a bi-lingual education, but rather one in which English was generous enough to allow Africans to feel a sense of continuity with their culture. He argued:

> …[if] the study of vernacular languages in secondary schools is indeed providing a strong tap root for our African pupils, then it is at our peril that we sever it. Whatever place we allot to English, it must not insulate the African from his native soil. As teachers of English we must therefore take it upon ourselves to discover whether in fact the vernacular studies in our schools are being as salutary as they could be, whether they are serving to show the pupil that his school education is not a preparation for certificates but for society. (222)

There is no mistaking that for him African languages were junior partners. African languages were not going to be taught because of their own intrinsic worth, or for Africans to be bilingual, but rather to facilitate a smoother transition to English. African languages like education were being discussed within the framework of functionality – to the extent they aided or hindered the acquisition of functional English. In a way, colonial education was running afoul of Samuel Johnson's dream of an "epic metaphysical empire" in which British texts would eventually become "classics" to formerly colonized peoples (Beach, 119). The metaphysical empire was predicated on the natives mastering not only the language but also its texts.

Language and Social Mobility

Attempts to use African languages in the classroom were greeted with suspicion by Africans. For one, it was clear from the beginning that English was the language of upward social mobility. English, and the education that came with it, was the only way of getting

something out of colonialism. Oyekan Owomoyela in *Amos Tutuola Revisited* argues that, "fluency in the colonial language was arguably the most persuasive [way] of demonstrating one's qualification for elite status in the colonial scheme. It also was an emblem that announced one's insider status with regard to the culture of the masters" (3). It was the Europeans who did not want to see alienated Africans that were advocating for African languages to have a (somewhat minimal) role in the educational system. Africans, by contrast, wanted full English immersion. They wanted to master English because it was only out of poverty and an inferior culture and into a superior culture and way of life. And even though Owomoyela does not explicitly state it here, there was a political dimension to the demand of full immersion - mastering the language would allow them to fight for their freedom in terms that both they and the colonizers could understand.

But the colonial educationists justifying the use of adaptation did not see it as a political question. MacKenzie, for example, advanced the argument that it was because Africans knew their languages were inferior that they preferred to learn the more superior and useful English. He did not consider the larger political issue of the colonizer and colonized, engaged in a struggle of subjugation versus independence. He wrote:

> Think of this for a moment as it affects the young African, growing up in a world in which the Nature which his tribal elders respected and feared is being unceremoniously driven towards serfdom. He is eager to take his place as a junior leader among his own people. At school a study of his vernacular will lead him backwards into a past with which he has generally scant sympathy, the very vocabulary and style having changed since the dignified days of his grandfather. In literature it has little of distinction to offer him…Through English, on the other hand, he can have access to innumerable sources of

> vital knowledge - on politics and health, on scientific and technical matters (manuals about horse-power instead of legends about hares), - and a religion which will at any rate stand modern investigation better than his own. No wonder the impatient African scholar calls out for more and more English, and Africans tend to regard any fostering of the vernaculars as a cunning political plot to fence them off from the broad streams of knowledge, wealth and power which issue from the perpetual springs of the great languages. (217)

The idea that English was the passport out of an inferior African culture was a cornerstone of colonial education. It was an idea that was actively promoted and used to justify why African languages, though not to be completely abandoned, were ultimately not as useful as English.[35] MacKenzie was arguing that Africans were in agreement with this premise and therefore saw the adaptation of African languages in schools as an attempt to deny them a full education.

MacKenzie also raised the question of whether Africans should write in their own languages or in English. On the meeting between African and Western languages, he argued for English being the language of African literature for a number of reasons:

> …lucrative jobs are open to a man whose native speech does not tether him to his own impoverished environment. Secondly, publishers cannot afford to provide extensive literatures in five hundred distinct languages, in each of which the demand will not even guarantee a recovery of printing costs. Moreover small tribes cannot hope to find within their meagre membership (so few of whom have had the best education anyway) the

[35]. Later as we shall see, some African writers adapted MacKenzie's argument. For example Achebe argued that English was a world language that would produce world literature as opposed to African languages that would only produce ethnic literature.

> numbers of authors or even translators who could provide first-class material for the publishing houses. In English we can draw upon a wide and varied field. (217-218)

In seeing English as the language of employment and social advancement, as serving to unify Africans across different ethnicities and languages, and that those ethnicities without large numbers would be without resources with which to develop their languages, he anticipated the arguments that would be deployed by Africans advocating for English to remain the language of African literature after decolonization.

The Makerere Conference: African Literature in European or African Languages?

In June 1962 a watershed African writers' conference, "African literature in English Language," was held at Makerere University in Uganda. This was the first major conference on African writing, attended by African writers including Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka, who would later become major voices in African literature. Following the conference, an essay titled "The Dead-End of African Literature," written by Obi Wali, was published by *Transition Journal*. In the essay Obi Wali contended that African literature should be written in African languages, otherwise it risked becoming an appendage to European literature. The debate that ensued can be divided into two sub-streams, one calling for writing in English and the other in African languages – with Ngugi Wa Thiong'o agreeing with Obi Wali in the call for writing in African languages and Chinua Achebe making a case for writing in English.[36]

Obi Wali's opening gambit was to ask why Amos Tutuola, a major African writer, was not only not invited, but not even discussed in the plenary sessions. He suggested the reason was

[36]. While others such as Ken Saro-Wiwa, Asia Djebar, Daniel Kunene, and Dumbudzo Marechera later contributed to the language debate, Ngugi, Achebe and Obi Wali are convenient starting points.

"partly because [Tutuola] has gone out of line winning acclaim overseas for using that kind of English expression that is non-Ibadan, and non-Makerere" (281). That is, his usage of English, embarrassing and uneducated, did not reflect the goals of the educated writer well versed in standard acceptable English.

Obi Wali went on to assert that because African writers have borrowed from the European tradition both in form and content, "African literature is a mere appendage in the main stream of European literature" (282). It had become European literature with African themes. He also argued that the majority of Africans were locked out of the enjoyment of works in European languages. Wali argued that "less than one per cent of the Nigerian people have had access to, or ability to understand Wole Soyinka's *Dance of the Forest*. Yet, this was the play staged to celebrate their national independence, tagged on to the idiom and traditions of a foreign culture" (282). Wali had raised a central question, which would later resonate with a young Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: for whom was the African writer writing? Obi Wali was aware of some of the problems articulated by those like MacKenzie who felt that African languages could not provide a growing future, one that would ensure a literary tradition. He argued that "of course all the old facile arguments would arise again - the multiplicity of African languages, the limitation of the audience to small patches of tribal groups, questions of orthography, and all the rest of them" (Wali, 283). But to him these were not reasons to abandon African literature; they were challenges that could be overcome.

> Yes, but why not? I believe that every language has a right to be developed as literature. There is no part of the world where a false literary unity has been attempted in the way that we are doing today in Africa, not even in Europe. The problem has always been met

> by the technique of translating outstanding literary achievements into other languages, especially the more widespread and influential languages of the world. (Wali, 283)

For him it was in the meeting of those challenges that a literary tradition would grow. Invoking the fight for English by English writers, he mused:

> One wonders what would have happened to English literature for instance, if writers like Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton, had neglected English, and written in Latin and Greek simply because these classical languages were the cosmopolitan languages of their times. Even though a man like Milton could write even more easily in Latin and Greek, he did his major works in his own mother tongue without playing to the gallery of international fame. Literature after all, is the exploitation of the possibilities of language. (283)

In the eyes of Wali, if African literature were to grow, the only viable language for the African writer was an African language. Otherwise, even attempts to Africanize European languages so that they carried an African world view would lead to a dead end; it would be African European literature. Wali also argued that if African writers should write in African languages, so should African literary critics.

> What I am advocating here is not easy, for it entails a good deal of hard work and hard thinking, [and] It would force some 'leading' critics to go in for the hard school of African linguistic studies, a knowledge of some of the important African languages, before generalising and formulating all kinds of philosophical and literary theories. (283)

If literature and its criticism are symbiotic, one cannot survive without the other. For Wali, African literature in African languages could not thrive if its criticism was in European languages. The question of African criticism and language had not yet become a central issue

amongst African literary critics, but if more and more literature were to be written in African languages, criticism in those languages ought to follow.

Chinua Achebe on Tutuola and Africanizing English

Where Obi Wali called for an African literature in African languages, Chinua Achebe argued that there were benefits to writing in English. In *The African Writer and the English Language*, written in response to the Makerere conference and Wali's essay, Achebe argued that English served as a national language, facilitating conversation across many ethnic groups.

Echoing MacKenzie, Achebe argued that writing in African languages could only lead to ethnic literature feeding the imagination of specific ethnic groups while writing in English would feed the imagination of the whole nation. He put it plainly: "the national literature as I see it, is the literature written in English, and ethnic literatures are in Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba…" (343). Paradoxically, for African nations in search of an identifiably African identity, or at least one not defined by the departing European colonizers, use of the colonizer's language was the vehicle to a national identity.

Achebe called for a pragmatic approach. The reality was that English was at the helm. Asking "what are the factors which have conspired to place English in the position of national language in many parts of Africa?" He argued that "[q]uite simply the reason is that these nations were created in the first place by the intervention of the British, which, I hasten to add, is not saying that the peoples comprising these nations were invented by the British" (344). Throw in social mobility, atrophied and weakened African languages due to lack of use in schools, courts, business and government offices – in all political and social institutions - and English was the sole language of power.

On the question of audience, Achebe argued that English would allow an African writer to reach a worldwide audience whereas writing in his or her own language would mean reaching only those belonging to that particular ethnic group. However, there was a problem in terms of English carrying an African experience. Achebe argued that "[t]he African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language so much that the medium of international exchange is lost" (347). In other words, English could be Africanized.

Achebe saw Tutuola as a practitioner of an English language forced to carry African experiences, but his condescension toward his precursor could not be missed. Regarding Tutuola and Africanizing English, he argued:

> …Amos Tutuola is a natural. A good instinct has turned his apparent limitation in language into a weapon of great strength—a half-strange dialect that serves him perfectly in the evocation of his bizarre world. His last book, and to my mind, his finest, is proof enough that one can make even an imperfectly learned second language do amazing things. In this book, *The Feather Woman of the Jungle,* Tutuola's superb storytelling is at last cast in the episodic form which he handles best instead of being painfully stretched on the rack of the novel. (348)

Achebe was using the same condescending language as European critics to describe Tutuola – a natural using a half-strange dialect to carry his bizarre[37] world. In arguing that Tutuola is best at writing in episodic form, he was saying that Tutuola the writer could not imaginatively handle the form of a novel, that he was handicapped by a poor command of the language he was using. In order to draw a distinction between language handled by "a natural" and that of the conscious

[37]. Bizarre is also one of the condescending words that Dylan Thomas used to describe *The Palm Wine Drinkard*. I discuss Tutuola's critical reception in Chapter Five.

writer, Achebe offered an example from *Arrow of God* where one of the characters, The Chief Priest, is explaining to his son why it was necessary "to send him to church." The Chief Priest says:

> I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow. (348)

In his essay, Achebe then went on to render the passage in language that had not been used consciously – that is he offered a free rendering of the passage without consciously trying to Africanize the English language:

> I am sending you as my representative among these people—just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight. (348)

The new rendering is notably dry. It lacks the heavy tone of the first and the proverb with the intriguing image of a *dancing mask.* But the point is that the two passages cannot be compared. They are written by the same author who has a preconceived notion of what he negatively views as unconscious writing. In the same way one cannot prove that *Things Fall Apart* would have been better or worse in his mother tongue Ibo, the passage, once Africanized cannot be de-Africanized to show one rendering of the African world-view as better than the other. It is possible to write well and capture experiences without resorting to language that makes the speakers sound old and archaic.

In addition, Achebe would have had to prove that Tutuola did not consciously manipulate language for effect. To me, that Tutuola's writing is highly descriptive cannot be an unconscious act. Tutuola might not, after the fact, account for all the choices he makes, but then again few writers can when they are in that frenzy of the first draft where the imagination lets out a flood of words. In *Amos Tutuola*, Harold Collins recalls that Tutuola wrote the first draft of *The Palm Wine Drinkard* "in a two-day burst of work" and then spent three months revising and adding to it (19). Yet whether the revision process lasts three months or a year, writers cannot be their own editors, because imaginative bias causes them to see what is in their heads, as opposed to what is written down on paper. Achebe did not account for the kind of painstaking deliberateness that a good editor imposes on the writer – the kind of editor that Tutuola was lacking due to the decision by his publishers, Faber and Faber, to leave his English unedited.

Achebe concluded the essay by arguing that for him "there is no other choice" but to write in English. It looks like a "dreadful betrayal" and it "produces a guilty feeling" but:

> I have been given this language and I intend to use it. I hope, though, that there always will be men, like the late Chief Fagunwa, who will choose to write in their native tongue and ensure that our ethnic literature will flourish side by side with the national ones. (348)

There is condescension in Achebe's argument that, while writers who embrace English can produce a national literature, those writing in African languages can keep the fire of 'ethnic' literature burning. Ethnic and national literatures, no matter the pretense to a comradely keeping alive of both literatures, are not equivalents terms.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: African languages as a tool in the liberation project

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o opened his 1986 essay "The Language of African Literature" by hearkening back to the Makerere conference. Calling the conference title, **"**African Literature in English," already exclusionary of African writers writing in African languages, he argued that speaking of an African renaissance in European languages was a contradiction of terms (286).

Ngugi argued that before someone attended a colonial school, "there was no disjuncture between the language he spoke and his environment." But at school the language was English, and if one was found talking in an African language, he or she was made to wear a sign that said "I am an ass." And if "you failed English, no matter how well you did in other subjects, you would not get accepted to the University" (291). The end result was that that one became literate in English, while remaining illiterate in his or her mother tongue. Colonialism could not eradicate African languages, but it broke the link between spoken and written language. New technologies and philosophies are locked up in English, while the African language ceases to develop. The mother tongue consequently stands still and begins to atrophy from lack of use (290).

Ngugi asked, if there is economic and political neocolonialism, shouldn't it follow that there is cultural neocolonialism that is being fed by those writing in European languages? (301). For writers working against neocolonialism, for whom writing is part and parcel of a liberatory project, writing in African languages has to be seen as an integral part of that struggle. Writing in African languages, writers and their intended audiences are in tandem. In this way, history and philosophy contained and carried by African languages are not lost, nor are new forms of knowledge, science, philosophy or political theory.

Ngugi made several points that Achebe did not consider. Language is not merely for communication but also carries knowledge "accumulated in language handed down from generation to generation (accumulation of values)" and that in the "process of inheriting language, identity is born" (294). Language also has a material basis, as it develops along with a people as they interact with their environment – as they extract raw materials and use their labor, develop tools and science, this is done through language. In a way language becomes a people's mirror: they recognize and find their history and identity encoded in language. For Ngugi then, imposing a foreign language leads to breakdown in the harmony between identity formation and the African child (294). Orphaned from their languages, African children could only end up developing an inferiority complex, and become alienated from their cultures.

Tutuola in the African Language Debate

Tutuola, if we are to extend Ngugi's argument, would be the epitome of an African alienated from his or her culture through language. And for Owomoyela, Tutuola was the kind of African that colonialism wanted to produce. He argued that:

> In many regards, Tutuola is a triumph of the European missionizing and civilizing enterprise in Africa – that is, of the impulses directly responsible for the present African condition. His opting to write in English despite his better facility with Yoruba is a measure of his captivation by European or Western values and habits. (12)

Owomoyela was right in that the end result of colonial language policy would have led Tutuola to become enthralled with English at the expense of English. But one has to take issue with the presumption that it was simply a question of opting for Yoruba or English. To opt makes it an easy choice, a choice between two languages, in which case Tutuola's alienation from his language and culture would have had to be complete. But alienation under colonialism could not

be complete. Complete alienation would mean a total separation from one's culture - an impossibility if one still remained part of a community that held onto some aspects of its culture, and still spoke an African language. This is in the same way that complete assimilation is impossible if we take assimilation to mean the complete erasure of one's past and a whole acceptance of another's culture.

Tutuola's dilemma was that he did not have full literacy in English and he lived, at the time of writing the *Palm Wine Drinkard*, in a world that did not value writing in African languages. Furthermore he himself would rather have written in English since this is what had been inscribed in him in school and by a colonial culture in which African cultural production had no intrinsic or monetary value. He could not fully actualize Achebe's mastery of the language in order to bend it to the will of the African experience, nor could he fully actualize Ngugi's call for writing in African languages, because psychological, social and economic handicaps stood in his way. Writing from this half-way place, writing from the space between the two cultures[38] where none has been fully actualized, came with cost. On Amos Tutuola and his command of English, Irele in *The African Imagination*: *Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* writes that:

> [O]n the specific point of language, the limitations of Tutuola are limitations and constitute a real barrier, sometimes even a formidable one, both for him as an artist, and for his readers. Tutuola obviously does not dominate his linguistic medium and there is no pretending that this is an advantage. The truth is that we arrive at an appreciation of

[38]. This space is not a hybrid space from which agency can be found. In the case of Tutuola, this is a literal space. In a figurative in-between space, Tutuola should have been able to draw from both and even multiple cultures, himself becoming a cosmopolitan symbol challenging single definitions of culture. But in this literal space of half-knowing the master's language, his Yoruba culture is lost.

> Tutuola's genuine merit, in spite of his imperfect handling of the English language, not because of it. (183)

This is quite a different statement from earlier critics who saw Tutuola as a native-child genius. For those critics, Tutuola wrote in spite of his native background, and it was because of this that they appreciated his writing. Irele was simply arguing that Tutuola's use of English actually stood in the way of his writing. And not just for the reader, but also for Tutuola as a writer. His imagination did not benefit from wrestling with English; rather the expression of that imagination became dulled.

For Irele, it is pointless to argue over what Tutuola's writing would have looked like or how it would have been received had he written in Yoruba. Irele's main concern is that:

> The very pressure of the Yoruba language upon the peculiar idiom which Tutuola wrung out of the English language may have a fascination for some of his foreign readers, but it is not, to my mind, a satisfactorily creative tension between the two languages that it produces, but rather an imbalance, and a resultant break between the content of his work, and its medium of expression which must be considered a serious shortcoming. (183)

In *Things Fall Apart*, one could argue that Achebe's use of English is in a "creative tension" with Ibo language and culture. His English, inflected with proverbs, which he calls "the palm-oil with which words are eaten," contribute to a tension of the English language carrying Ibo culture. *Things Fall Apart* is in essence written in "Africanized" English, one that is attempting to carry a world-view that it ordinarily does not carry. But in Tutuola's case, the tension that might have arisen between Yoruba and English had he been deliberately "doing violence" to English is lost to his inability to imaginatively impose himself over English. His poor command of English ran too much interference to the extent that artistic deliberateness and choice are not discernible.

Conclusion

Clare was writing in 19th Century Britain and Tutuola in 20th Century Nigeria. He was a subject of England while Tutuola was the subject of the British Empire.[39] They are products of different times and different cultures yet trapped in the same continuum made possible by the oppressive internal class structures in Britain and British colonialism in Africa. Particularly, Clare is a product of the contradictions inherent in British Romanticism – a movement in part to liberate language from the straightjacket of Standard English while denying a literary voice to the peasants. And Tutuola is a product of the meeting between a colonizing English culture presented as a unified whole and a contradictory African response in which African languages are the casualty.

As a result, they end up in a chiral relationship where the debates surrounding their work and language use echo each other across different times and space. And the same myths that buoyed the standardization of English in England are used to justify the imposition of English in Africa. Whereas in England there was at least some form of debate over provincial or regional Englishes, in Africa it was a foregone conclusion that Standard English would also be the language of the civilizing mission and cultural production. But aesthetic standards in both Romantic England and Independence-era Africa assumed Standard English to be the language of literature.

[39]. Robert Young distinguishes between English and British by saying that: 'Englishness is itself also uncertainly British, a cunning word of apparent political correctness invoked in order to mask the metonymic extension of the English dominance over the kingdoms with which England has constructed illicit acts of union, countries that now survive in the realm of football and rugby... 'British' is the name imposed by the English on the non-English. (3)

CHAPTER FOUR

Editing Clare: Creating the Genius Peasant

> Tell Clare if he has still a recollection of what I have done, and am still doing for him, he must give me unquestionable *proofs*, of being that man I would have him to be—he *must expunge*!
>
> - Lord Radstock to Clare[40]

Introduction

If Tutuola and Clare were contemporaries perhaps, there would be direct comparisons as opposed to criticism that circles and echoes across time and space through questions surrounding the standardization of English. Instead, what we have are infrequent passing references. For example, African literary critic, Emmanuel Obiechina in *Language and Theme: Essays on African Literature* argues that while Tutuola's language is "highly idiosyncratic"[41] he has the ability to write "something original, graphic, and quaint" (61). In addition, he argues, Tutuola's publishers:

> … ought to have corrected the more glaring of his grammatical and spelling mistakes, as they did they nineteenth-century English "peasant" poet John Clare, who had his spelling and punctuation made "genteel." The use of words like "deads" and "alives," which contribute to a fuller realization of his world and art, ought to be left alone in spite of their seeming quaintness. (61)

Obiechina then goes on to draw a conclusion that recalls Clare. He writes that while "fastidious grammarians would not agree with this view, [it] should at least be recognized that Tutuola is essentially a storyteller, not a grammarian" (61). Obiechina stands somewhere between Taylor

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[40]. Storey, Mark. *Clare; the Critical Heritage.* London: Routledge & K. Paul. (1973): 61

[41]. Robinson also uses the word idiosyncratic to describe *The Shepherd's Calendar.*

and Robinson – he wants to see glaring mistakes corrected, but at the same time Tutuola's creativity and energetic coinage of words, left alone.

Robinson does not make direct references to Tutuola and Clare, but what he values in Tutuola is what he wants to preserve in Clare. In a reaction to his review of *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, Babasola Johnson accused Robinson of endorsing *Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and not recognizing that the novel would have been better in Yoruba or "West African Patois" or not written at all rather than appear in Tutuola's "strange lingo." Robinson argued back saying that it was not "the critic's function to dictate to the author what mode of language he shall employ. The basis of judgment is surely whether the language used is a sufficient instrument for the writer's purposes."[42] Robinson further defended Tutuola and said that his "language is often clumsy and often repetitive, but it is remarkably vigorous at its best" (Lindfors, 1975; 33). Robinson's editorial principles and concerns mirror those of Tutuola's editor, Allan Pringle at Faber & Faber, who published Tutuola with minimal editorial interference.

There are some major differences between the two. Whereas Tutuola does not use any Yoruba words in the *Palm Wine Drinkard*, Clare uses a lot of provincial/dialect words and local expressions from Northampshire (Clare, Oxford, xx). Secondly, English was John Clare's first language whereas for Tutuola it certainly was not his first. For Clare then, his mistakes were grammatical whereas for Tutuola with his limited knowledge of English, his mistakes were both grammatically and semantically wrong. Clare had a better grasp of the language whereas Tutuola's was limited. Pierre Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power* argues that:

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[42]. Clare had made a similar remark regarding his relationship to grammar. In *Autobiographical Writings*, he narrates how on being told by a friend that without proper grammar one could not write a letter or "even a bill of parcels" he bought the "Universal Spelling Book" (15), but it was too obtuse. He decided that if "I could talk and be understood, I thought by the same method my writing might be made out as easy and as proper" (15) and he resumed writing as he knew how.

> by trying to understand the power of linguistic manifestations linguistically, by looking in language for the principle underlying the logic and effectiveness of language, one forgets that authority comes to language from outside [and] language at most represents this authority, manifests and symbolizes it. There is a rhetoric which characterizes all discourses of institution, that is to say, the official speech of the authorized spokesperson expressing himself in a solemn situation, with an authority whose limits are identical with the extent of delegation by institution" (109).

His argument is that it is not enough to look at constituent words in order to get to the meaning; the meaning of a word changes depending on who utters the word and to whom in what social situation. That is, we speak language as authorized by our 'stations' in life. He adds "...the use of language, the manner as much as the discourse depends on the social position of the speaker, which governs the access he can have to the language of the institution, that is, to the official, orthodox and legitimate speech" (109).

I am arguing along these lines to say that by looking at the editorial choices, and the relationship of those choices to 'authorized' English, we can see how Standard English marked Clare and Tutuola Peasant and Native. Tutuola's editors, by deciding not to edit his grammatical mistakes marked him native. This is in the same way that Eric Robinson's minimalist editorial intervention in Clare's writing results in each grammatical mistake recalling his lack of education and his biography. Where Taylor standardized Clare's writing, he then used Clare's biography to keep the reader conscious of Clare's lack of education. These editorial choices would later have a profound impact in the way the critics received them and at the same time contribute to the aesthetics of peasant poetry and native literature as sub-genres.

There have been three types of editorial interventions in Clare's poetry: by John Taylor, who wanted to retain the peasant marker while at the same time respecting the demands of Standard English; by friends and patrons namely, Lord Radstock and Eliza Emmerson, who forced edits on Clare in order to keep his poetry politically safe and morally clean; and by Eric Robinson, who argues that John Taylor over-polished Clare's work and has as a consequence restored his writing to their pre-Taylor unedited state, with minimal editorial interference from himself.

Editing John Clare: John Taylor's Language and Peasant Poetic Genius Theory

Some critics have seen Taylor as an editor who for the sake of selling books used Clare's biography rather than his literary talent as the buttress thus actively setting the stage for Clare the peasant to stand in for Clare the poet. Elizabeth Helsinger for example in "Clare and the Place of the Peasant Poet" argues that the introductions to the first books of poetry by Clare and Robert Burns (a peasant poet who preceded Clare) came:

> …with a request that the peasant poet, an artless singer and a child of nature invisible to the audience the book addresses, may be granted recognition--may be heeded. For both Burns and Taylor, the request is hedged with apology; it carefully lays no claims to power on the part of the poet (who is inspired by Nature's powers, not his own), and it promises that if recognition is denied, the poet will be content to remain in obscurity. (512)

For Helsinger, Taylor presented Clare as a wonder child of nature – there was no distance between Clare the poet, the man and nature. However, on paying closer attention, Taylor's introduction to *Poems Descriptive* is a well-calibrated invitation to Clare's poetry that uses the

biographical details as Trojan horse to seduce the reader in before revealing Clare the poet. John McKusick notes as much and says that in the introduction:

> Taylor draws a somber portrait of Clare's humble living conditions and acute poverty. Although Clare's circumstances were indeed desperate, Taylor's depiction is partly a marketing strategy intended to attract the interest of a sentimental reading public. Primarily, however, Taylor's Introduction serves to justify Clare's abilities as a poet, to account for "his evident ignorance of grammar" and to celebrate his use of dialect, what Taylor calls "the unwritten language of England" (*Critical Heritage* 47-48). Taylor concludes that Clare "is most thoroughly the Poet as well as the Child of Nature"; and this view of Clare as an ignorant Peasant Poet, thoughtlessly warbling his woodnotes wild, has conditioned many subsequent critical responses. (255)

To present a convincing introduction that was going to use biography while calling attention to Clare's poetry, Taylor had to develop a theory that would explain Clare to the public – a theory that looked at language use in peasant poetic genius. Therefore, he immediately opened his introduction by declaring both Clare's biography and his poetry as co-dependents.[43]

Taylor wrote, "The following Poems will probably attract some notice by their intrinsic merit; but they are *also*[44] entitled to attention from the circumstances under which they were written" (Clare, vii 1820). He was careful not to categorically state that the poems will attract attention based on their "intrinsic merit"; rather, he said they *probably* would. Rather than following this up by saying the author's biography would call attention to the poems, he added that the poems "are also entitled to attention from the circumstances they were created in" (Clare,

[43]. The question, which will come up when I am looking at Clare's reception, is why the early critics latched onto one-half of Taylor's presentation, the half that deals with his biography.

[44]. Italics mine.

vii 1820). In the first half of the sentence, he tells the reader that even if he or she does not find merit in the intrinsic value of the poems, he or she shall certainly be interested in the poems due to the "circumstances under which they were written."

There is a subtle turn that hinges on the word "also." The use of the word "also" makes the two things in comparison equal. If Clare's poems are without a doubt entitled to attention because of their author, then it retroactively follows that they are also deserving of attention because of their merit. Taylor subtly replaced what the word *probably* took away by the use of "also." The certainty, the categorical nature of "they are also entitled" takes away the hesitation in the first part.

Mark Storey in "John Clare and his Critics" also calls attention to Taylor's opening gambit. He writes that while Taylor's introduction "might seem, initially, to be hedging its bets rather cunningly, with an opening sentence of veiled ambiguity…he presents a persuasive case for his poet, making something of a virtue out of the potentially awkward, if necessary, connection between life and work"(35). This sort of balancing act, at once effacing and humble and at the same time reaffirming Clare's genius was necessary if Taylor was going to lower the defenses of the readers so that he could teach them how to read Clare. He could not suggest outright that Clare be read like Wordsworth for example, because for one, Clare's biography does really count since his life and immediate environment inform his poetry. And had he made the suggestion, he would have been met with resistance from a literary establishment that wanted literature in Standard English as codified by Samuel Johnson. Reactions to any calls for a use of language that deviated from the standard were swiftly condemned. On the Cockney School, Richard Turley writes:

> For card carrying agents of conservative ideology, Cockney 'principles' implied a flood tide of obscure dubious words, dubious coinages and non-standard usage like "whiffling tones of rills' and 'quoit-like' steps. By threatening the notion of refined language, such phrases also threatened the very foundation of 'good' literature, 'good' taste and the corollary of this, 'good' culture." (85)

Indeed looking at a review of Hunt's *Rimini* reveals just how deeply embedded the idea that deviation from Standard English was vulgarization of literature and by extension, good culture. A review[45] in the *Quarterly Review* read in part:

> …if there be one fault more eminently conspicuous and ridiculous in Mr. Hunt's work, than another, it is, - that it is full of *mere vulgarisms* and *fugitive phrases,* and that in every page the language is – not only the actual, existing language, but an ungrammatical, unauthorised, chaotic jargon, such as we believe was never before spoken, much less written. (4)

In an even more class charged criticism by another reviewer this time in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*:

> Mr. Hunt cannot utter a dedication or even a note, without betraying the *Shibboleth* of low birth and low habits. He is the ideal of the Cockney poet. He raves perpetually about the 'green fields,' 'jaunty streams,' and 'o'er-arching leafiness,' exactly as a Cheapside shop-keeper does about the beauties of his box on the Camberwell road…he would fain. (Bate, 225)

It is likely that had Clare received the same treatment right from the start, his career would have been derailed. Taylor in a way was trying to give Clare's poetry a way into the literary world,

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[45]. John Wilson Crocker. "Leigh Hunt's Rimini." *Quarterly Review* 15.28 (Jan. 1816): 475-81.

confident that those who will read him as a peasant would find enough intrinsic merit in his poetry itself – and that in the end, intrinsic value would carry the poems more than biography. Even so, Clare's language was still attacked along the same lines. Johanne Clare[46] sees Clare's language use and criticism in light of protectionism of Standard English and writes that:

> The terms with which Clare's dialect-words were attacked suggested that his critics saw little reason to deviate from Dryden's strictures that the language of the poet should be the language of a gentleman, and that "village words" were to be avoided because they "give us a mean idea of the thing." (Clare, Johanne 127)

To read Taylor's introduction is to see a publisher trying to establish a systematic approach to reading "peasant" literature. This entailed establishing Clare's authority by declaring his authenticity via biography while at the same time not sublimating his artistic talent to that biography.

John Taylor argued that because Clare wrote of what he himself had experienced, his poetry was authentic. Unlike other Romantic poets who wrote about the poor without being poor, Clare was both a witness and victim. He was a victim of the poverty he wrote about turned witness through his poetic genius. In the introduction to *Poems Descriptive*, he says that Clare:

> …utters " no idly-feign'd poetic pains:" it is a picture of what he has constantly witnessed and felt. One of our poets has gained great credit by his exterior delineations of what the poor man suffers; but in the reality of wretchedness, when "the iron enters into the soul," there is a tone which can- not be imitated. Clare has here an unhappy advantage over other poets. The most miserable of them were not always wretched. Penury and disease were not constantly at their heels, nor was pauperism their only prospect. But he has no

[46]. No relation

> other, for the lot which has befallen his father, may, with too much reason, be looked forward to as his own portion. (Clare, ix 1820)

The poet he refers to here without naming is quite possibly Wordsworth, who in adopting language as used, also wrote about the poor but from an elevated viewpoint. Wordsworth and Romantic poets might have been witnesses but they wrote from the outside. The challenge here was simple – if readers found literary merit in the imitations, were they not at least duty-bound to read the original? Conversely, if they did not find literary merit in the imitations, might it not be because they were not reading an authentic poet?

Once again invoking Wordsworth, who lamented over the absence of new image[s] of external nature, he declared that within Clare's limitations "…no poet has more completely devoted himself to her service, studied her more closely, or exhibited so many sketches of her under new and interesting appearances" (xx). Clare was "most thoroughly the Poet as well as the Child of Nature" who "looks as anxiously on her face as if she were a living friend, whom he might lose; and hence he has learnt to notice every change in her countenance, and to delineate all the delicate varieties of her character"(xxii). Here, Taylor was arguing that Clare, even though a child of nature, did not wander in it in oblivious bliss. Rather, nature to him was a living thing that could also die; it could be happy as well as be in pain. It was his being "thoroughly the poet" that allowed him to convey this intimate and ultimately honest sense of nature.

Thus, foregrounding Clare's biography was not a call for a pity reading, rather; his biography made his poetry original and authentic. Taylor underlined this at the end of the introduction. He welcomed help for Clare but defiantly:

> In the real troubles of life, when they are not brought on by the misconduct of the individual, a strong mind acquires the power of righting itself after each attack, and this philosophy, not to call it by a better name, Clare possesses. If the expectations of “better life," which he cannot help indulging, should all be disappointed, by the coldness with which this volume may be received, he can "put up with distress, and be content.”(xxvii)

Taylor here was saying that in spite of his hardships, Clare would endure, or at least his poetic imagination would not die. He would like to climb up the social ladder, but through his poetry. Should this not happen, Clare having lived his life without doing wrong to his society would derive strength from having a clean conscience. Taylor continued to say:

> To see a man of talent struggling under great adversity with such a spirit, must surely excite in every generous heart the wish to befriend him. But if it be otherwise, and he should be doomed to remediless misery,
>
> "Why let the stricken deer go weep.
>
> The hart ungalled play;
>
> For some must watch, while some must sleep, —
>
> Thus runs the world away." (xxvii)

Clare was writing in an age when writers, even with all things being equal, needed benefactors to survive. So Taylor and by extension Clare were both expecting help as was the norm. However, here Taylor quotes Hamlet to say that should fame and fortune not come his way, Clare would know that it was the way of the world that some should suffer through life, while others thrived -- that one only weeps over circumstances of his or her making. Clare did not create the circumstances in which he lived. The ones to worry about their consciences were those who

watched as he struggled in "great adversity." All in all, help was welcome but that was not the reason why Clare wrote. He wrote because he was a poet.

Taylor's gambit to use Clare's biography as the Trojan horse for his poetry failed. Early criticism emphasized Clare's biography over his artistry, but it was more a case of Taylor's strategy going wrong, rather than intention. The critics, as I argue in the next chapter, would have foregrounded Clare's biography regardless of what Taylor said or did not say by virtue of Clare being a peasant, and because the sub-genre of peasant poetry had aesthetic demands that Clare would been forced to meet regardless of content, of the intrinsic qualities of his work. This is not to say that Taylor does not harbor class anxieties and that at times he does not condescend to Clare. However, it was always through his understanding that Clare was a talented poet with a unique contribution to make to language and poetry. Considering that in the introduction he tried to immerse Clare in the larger question of philology[47] and he highlights his biography as much as he does his literary talent, Taylor deserves more sympathy from contemporary critics.

Clare's Patrons as Censorial Editors

Editorial decisions were not just being debated between Clare and Taylor. Clare's poetry was also being filtered thought his wealthy patrons such as Baron Radstock, and Eliza Emmerson. Baron Radstock was a retired governor, an Evangelical Anglican who also helped the poor.[48] Eliza Emmerson was the wife of an art dealer who was to become what Dorothy Wordsworth was to William Wordsworth and Fanny Keats and John Severn were to John Keats. These were people who were poetic and intellectual enough to be sounding boards for ideas, who through dialogue or listening to the poets somehow sparked their imaginations. With Clare's immediate family being illiterate, and his friends with an

[47]. See previous chapter where I show that Taylor uses existing philological arguments in support of Clare's language use.

[48]. See Bate, 153.

exception of the Lord Milton's servants not being literary, the person who came close to playing his imagination's confidante was Eliza Emmerson.[49]

Both Radstock and Emmerson suggested and demanded editorial changes. They were not necessarily concerned with the overall structural integrity of the poem, the inside workings of the poems, but rather more about reception filtered through the eyes of the upper class. They were protecting the day's political and moral sensibilities. And in demanding that Clare show his gratitude by changing some parts of his poems so that they became less political and less class conscious, they were protecting the status quo. Johanne Clare argues that Radstock "…appears to have had an obsessive interest in ensuring that the working class poet he patronized expressed the quiescence, deference, and sense of unquestioning duty suitable to his humble station in English Society" (18). Radstock was very condescending toward Clare. For example, he had suggested to someone who wanted to give Clare money that it "might have a bad effect" and that "a rent-free cottage, a cow and two pigs" were preferable" (Bate, 163). Clare was Radstock's philanthropic project, and he wanted Clare to behave and write in ways that would reflect well on him. In a letter to Emmerson, he sounds genuinely pained by what he saw as Clare's rebelliousness:

> It has been my anxious desire of late, to establish our poets character, as that, of an honest and upright man—as a man feeling the strongest sense of gratitude for the encouragement he has received—but how is it possible I can continue to do this if he suffers another Edition of his poems to appear with those vile, unjust, and now would be ungrateful passages in them?—no, he must cut them out; or I cannot be satisfied that Clare is really

[49]. On Emerson's importance to Clare, Bate writes that:
Drury and Taylor were his important collaborators, but his lost letters to Eliza Emmerson were packed with musings and debate about the art of poetry. Tantalizing fragments, such as a discussion of the importance of *'breaks and pauses'* in poetic writing can be reconstructed from her surviving replies. Difficult as it was for Clare to accept criticism, he wanted to improve the technical master of his work. (206)

> as honest & upright as I could wish him!—tell Clare if he has still a recollection of what I have done, and am still doing for him, he must give me unquestionable *proofs*, of being that man I would have him to be—he *must expunge*! (Storey, 61)

By Radstock claiming that he wanted to establish Clare's character as that of "an honest and upright man" he was in effect seeing Clare through a stereotypical lens – peasants are not be trusted because they will lie at every turn. Honor or morality were not associated with poverty. For the help that Radstock had given him, he expected loyalty from Clare's imagination and pen. He "must expunge" is a command and threat.[50]

Radstock invoked class to say that it was the elite patrons and readers who lifted Clare from the peasant troughs full of immoral behavior. The lines to be expunged are in the poem *Helpston*:

> Accursed wealth o'er bounding human laws
> Of every evil thou remainst the cause
> Victims of want those wretches such as me
> Too truly lay their wretchedness to thee
> Thou art the bar that keeps from being fed
> And thine our loss of labour and of bread
> Thou art the cause that levels every tree
> And woods bow down to clear a way for thee (126 – 134)

The above lines come after 125 lines describing in great detail the beauty and bounties of Helpston. Then the turn happens with line "But now alas those scenes exist no more." And Clare then went to describe a changed Helpston: "As blooms those Edens by the poets sung/now all laid to waste by desolations hand/whose cursed weapon levels half the land…" After the reader has identified with Helpston's beauty, the turn sharpens by contrasting the landscape before and after the crime of the Enclosure Act. After the relentless description of a beautiful

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[50]. Radstock also accused Clare of biting the hands of "the very persons, by whose truly generous and noble exertions he has been raised from misery and despondency of pride, cruelty, vices, and ill-directed passions" (Storey, 61).

Helpston, the sudden turn and realization that the pursuit of wealth was responsible is even more forceful.

Emmerson did not defend Clare to Radstock; instead she fully agreed with him. She was invested in protecting the public image of Clare as the genteel wide-eyed peasant poet genius. She wrote to him to say that:

> There are 10 lines in the 'Helpstone' beginning with 'Accursed wealth'—and also one sadly disliked in your beautiful poem on 'Genius' — 'That necessary tool to wealth and pride'. I ventured to write a line in the margin to substitute this—& I thought it connected the subject very well—if you will indulge me by adopting this line, no person can ever know it, or indeed any other alteration I presumed to suggest in my marginal notes…. And now let me tell you, that I have ventured to *pledge myself* to our noble friend!—that you will readily make the alterations required. (62)

In suggesting a line to Clare with which to substitute for the offending ones, and saying it could be their secret, Emmerson revealed that to her, Clare's social standing was more important than his imaginative work. As the poet's confidant, she was overstepping her boundaries – this suggests that as opposed to Keats's relationship with Fanny, Emmerson saw herself as being superior to Clare- where Clare was her genius peasant protégée who needed a gentle guiding hand.

Another poem to irk Radstock was "My Mary." It seemed to remind him of the immorality and impurity of the peasantry, and it appeared to him as a failure on Clare's part to wash himself clean. The poem is quietly politically subversive – while it appears to be making fun of peasant woman, and making light of the poverty, it indicts, in very uncomfortable terms the upper classes for whom women like Mary worked as maids and servants. Given the

colloquial language, the naughty tone, and moral and political subject matter, it is not surprising that Radstock objected:

> Who bussles night and day in short
> At all catches jobs of every sort
> And gains her mistress' favor't
> My Mary
>
> And who is oft repaid wi' praise?
> In doing what her mistress says
> And yielding to her wimmy[51] ways
> My Mary

Mary works day and night doing whatever job her mistress assigns her. However, her payment is often in praises as opposed to fair wage. Her tasks and their severity depend on the mistresses' mood swings. The mistress here is the caricature of the overbearing cruel, idle, and rich wife. But even more damning and disturbing for the elite is the idea that Mary might not be who she appears to be:

> Who when the baby's all besh-t
> To please its mama kisses it?
> And vows no Rose on earths so sweet
> My Mary
>
> But when her mistress is'n't nigh
> Who swears and wishes it could die
> And pinches it to make it cry
> My Mary

The poem at least in these two stanzas is not just about Mary but for those whom she works for. Mary is conscious of her exploitation and destitution – a destitution the poem starkly points out as the speaker described her as living "a humdrum life" and with pigs, "ducks and geese." Mary is not supposed to be aware of her condition in much the same way that the mistress exploits without being aware of it – whimsically, airily and innocently. But the moment when Mary

[51]. Robinson renders the word wimmy to mean: full of whims, fancies and changeable (Robinson, 2003, 706).

kisses a baby that is all soiled and proclaims it sweeter than a rose, because the gesture is so extreme, the disgust is redirected to her mistress – It's a subversive kiss confirmed in the next stanza by the pinch to make the baby cry. Lord Radstock objected to the poem and it was removed[52] from the third edition (Robinson, 489; 1984).

In short, Radstock saw Clare as a peasant first and a writer second, a peasant he was trying to save from the depravities, immoralities really, that come with poverty. Radstock wanted an "honest & upright" man, and Clare was proving him wrong. As Radstock saw it, Clare's ingratitude was not a result of political or even philosophical disagreement, or a belated attempt at artistic integrity; it was the result of a fundamental failure to turn from the "misery and despondency" of the peasantry and acquire noble virtues.

Clare agreed to the changes. Johanne Clare notes that even though he was "appalled by the self-serving demands of his patrons," he agreed because"[h]e knew that failure to meet these demands could cost him the support of his most active and influential patron" (19). Poor and therefore unable to defend and promote his own voice, he had no choice. It was either write what he wanted in obscurity or trade a bit of his writer's integrity in order to be published and supported. On May 16, 1820, he wrote to Taylor suggesting that in addition to leaving out the eight lines from Helpstone, Taylor should leave dashes to replace the words as a way to register protest:

> Being very much bothered latley I must trouble you to leave out the 8 lines in 'Helpstone' beginning 'Accursed wealth' and two under 'when ease and plenty'—and one in 'Dawnings of Genius' 'That nessesary tool' leave it out and put _ _ _ _ _ to fill up the blank this will let em see I do it as negligent as possible D-n that canting way of being

[52]. In the second edition, besh-t was changed to read as *unfit*, (Bate, 164) before the poem was left out all together in the third edition.

> forced to please I say—I cant abide it and one day or other I will show my Independence more strongly then ever you know who's the promoter of the scheme I dare say—I have told you to order and therefore the fault rests not with me while you are left to act as you please. ("Critical Heritage," 62)

There is hopeless defiance here. He recognizes the unfairness of the demands but his only recourse cannot amount to more than a gesture of defiance – that is in asking Taylor to use dashes in order to show them that he is following the command as negligently as possible. Clare's hope was to show his independence later, presumably when he was well established. James Hessey, Taylor's publishing partner weighed in on 11 "July"1820 and argued that writers have to make concessions when the choice is not to be read at all:

> If we are satisfied that in the Society which we frequent certain subjects must not be even alluded to, we must either conform to the rules of that Society or quit it. An author in like manner is expected to concede something to the tone of moral feeling of the Age in which he lives, and if he expects or wishes his works to be popular, to afford amusement, or convey instruction; he must avoid such subjects as are sure to excite a Prejudice against him & to prevent his works from being generally read. And, after all, there is no hardship in all this. ("Critical Heritage," 63-64)

For Hessey, a writer's first responsibility is in being heard and reaching as many as possible. But when one asks whom the lines to be expunged were going to offend, it becomes clear that he is not referring to the poor and those objecting to the status quo but rather to those with the power to censor, and to determine what was aesthetically correct. It is clear he was hiding behind the argument of reaching as many people as possible.

Taylor on his part registered his protest, but he too had no choice. On 27 September 1820 he wrote to Clare saying that as much as he found the changes "needless" they should go ahead and make them knowing that, "When the Follies of the Day are past with all the Fears they have engendered we can restore the Poems according to the earlier Editions."[53] He was in a way anticipating Eric Robinson, who would reverse practically all his editorial decisions. In the end, Taylor refused to make the overtly politically censored changes to "Helpston" in the third edition of *Poems Descriptive*, but he omitted "My Mary"and "Dolly's Mistake" on the grounds of moral taste.

Taylor was not in league with Radstock and Emmerson and he should not be interpreted as editing Clare for elite political and aesthetic tastes. He made pragmatic concessions, in this instance, he kept the political in "Helpston" and conceded the moral in "My Mary." So when Robinson argues that that "by middle-life Clare had had too much of editors" and without distinction groups Taylor with "Mrs. Emmerson, Van Dyk and all the others who had brought his poems to publication" (Robinson, 2003:140) he is being unfair to Taylor. There is no reason to believe that Clare saw his patrons' editing interference as being the same as Taylor's. The patrons' main concern was to keep Clare safe from radicalism and morally clean. Taylor on the other hand had real editorial concerns, from grammar, diction, to over-detailing and cataloguing.[54] At the same time, he had to balance Clare's biography and his artistic talent so that his being a peasant would not work actively against him, either politically or in the literary world.

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[53]. Critical Heritage, 64.

[54]. This a term used by Sara Guyer in a class seminar to describe Clare's tendency to describe nature in such great detail that he might as well be cataloguing it for future generations. Robinson writes " [Clare's] contributions to ornithology, his observations of insects, flowers and animals, his recording of customs, music, and dialect as well as his political and social observations, show him to have been a man of rare insight and (dare one say it?) broad education" (xx – xxi; 1984) -- and he works all of them in to his poetry.

Editing Clare: Eric Robinson versus John Taylor

Robinson edits Clare while also trying to exorcise Taylor's editorial ghost and in so doing ends up giving the reader a pre-Taylor, largely unedited Clare. He is not just unhappy with Taylor but also with modern day 20th century critical appreciation of Clare. Reflecting on the role of biography and language, Robinson and fellow Clare editor David Powell argue that:

> Though the preoccupation with his insanity and with his moving life-story has done much to divert attention from his true achievement, reflecting our modern avidity for the sensational, perhaps more harm has been done by the blinkers imposed by modern critics' own education, which has produced a reverence for standardized English and condescension for dialect forms. (1984: xxi)

The assumption that good literature has to be in Standard English and any deviation intentional and temporary (as in a character using dialect form within a narrative in Standard English) has meant that a peasant writer like Clare who used non-standard English ends up in the margins of the cannon. He cannot be read alongside Wordsworth and Keats. The answer for Robinson however is not in standardizing Clare. In fact, for him editing Clare further and further away from his language as used is to alter his poetry. A word is not just a word, but rather something that carries how culture was experienced by peasants living in Helpston. Whereas Wordsworth could have set his poetry anywhere, Clare's poetry could only emerge from Helpston. In justifying their restoration of pre-Taylor Clare, Robinson and Powell argue that "[a]t its best, Clare's language cannot be divorced from his sense of place, from his part in a tradition, from his *growing* awareness of who he is (xxii)." Therefore:

> To adhere faithfully to his own way of writing is not, as some have suggested, to condescend to him but to respect him, except, paradoxically, that to retain all his redundant punctuation when he was first trying to conform to the educated world or to preserve the proprieties thrust upon him by his publishers and patrons is to misrepresent his intentions, better reflected in his manuscripts. (xxii)

There are two arguments here. One is that to publish Clare's work produced through enticement or coercion is in fact to condescend to him. To get to his intentions, the editing of his non-standard English has to be minimal and border on no editorial intervention at all. Robinson and Summerfield encapsulate their reservations about Taylor's editing in the essay, "John Taylor's Editing of Clare's The Shepherd's Calendar." They argue in part that for Taylor:

> Either the subject-matter was too 'low', too much concerned with sensual pleasures or other incorrigibly physical aspects of rural life (this being one of the features because of which Clare's earlier poetry had earned the disapproval and censorship of his patron, Admiral Lord Radstock); or the implicit attitudes, social and political, bordered too close on discontent and radical disaffection (another reason for Clare's having fallen foul of Radstock); or the language and syntax were provincial and so, in Taylor's view, too uncouth for publication. These three characteristics lie, of course, very close to the essential nature of much of Clare's best poetry, and one is forced to conclude that Taylor's text is too often a travesty, not only quantitatively but also qualitatively, of Clare's poems. (Robinson, 1964: 365)

In claiming that Taylor does quantitative and qualitative injury to Clare's poetry, what Robinson and Summerfield are in fact saying is that Taylor's subjective editorial tastes such as in the creation of tone are questionable. But more than that, even in objective criteria like counting

meter and rhyme schemes, Taylor did not do justice to Clare. In other words, Taylor edited both content and form to a point where accounting for subjective and objective aesthetic editorial standards break down when one looks at the poems Clare gave him and what he ended up publishing.

Jonathan Bate takes exception to the idea that Taylor was an overbearing editor and that Clare's poetry is at its best when left unedited:

> The orthodox view in the second half of the twentieth century was that Clare was a perpetual 'victim' - first of interfering editors, then of ignorant doctors. A belated attempt was made by modern scholars to 'free' him from the control of Taylor. It was proposed that the best way of doing justice to the 'rude way' of his poetry was to publish it in the unpolished form in which it appeared in his original manuscripts – unpunctuated, unedited, highly irregular in spelling and punctuation. Yet it would never have occurred to Clare that his poetry should be published in that form. He expected his editors to insert punctuation and insert spelling. And he actively sought advice with regard to every aspect of his writing. (205)

For Bate, Clare had agency. He was acted upon by circumstances but he also acted back. He was not just a grateful peasant writer who took all of Taylor's editorial interventions as coming from a higher mind that knew what was best for his poetry. Bate is also making the point that Clare would have been embarrassed to have his work published without being edited – with all the mistakes for critics and readers to see.[55]

Robinson and Summerfield do not pay attention to the political economy of publishing during Taylor's time and instead conclude that it was by individual choice and taste that Taylor

[55]. This commonsensical approach is the one that Bate uses in his own editing of John Clare's poetry. See his introduction to *"I Am": The Selected Poetry of John Clare*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

stopped finding merit in Clare's poetry and consequently stopped publishing him. They argue that:

> The root of the misunderstandings between Taylor and Clare is to be found, we suggest, not in the unsatisfactory state of Clare's manuscripts, but rather in a crucial failure of sympathy. Taylor…was, it seems, undergoing two important changes of heart: his interests in publishing were moving away from poetry; and his taste in poetry was becoming less sympathetic to the kind of achievement that *The Shepherd's Calendar*, in its own idiosyncratic way, was. The waning of his interest in publishing poetry may well be seen as a natural outcome of that strong didactic streak in him which had been there from the beginning and which was now gaining in strength, and the poor sales of most volumes of poetry doubtless confirmed this tendency. (Robinson, 1963: 363 - 364)

Robinson and Summerfield do make it clear why Taylor's didactic streak manifested only then and not earlier. More specifically, a change of heart in regards to the kind of "achievement that *The Shepherd's Calendar*, in its own idiosyncratic way," is too vague. "Change of heart" also makes it sound like it was Taylor's choice alone to abandon Clare without any mitigating circumstances. The more pragmatic reason of poetry having stopped selling is more convincing and should perhaps stand alone. Poetry publishers simply had to find other means to cater to the market if they were to remain in business.

This is an argument made by Elizabeth Helsinger and Michael Suarez in their essay "John Clare's Career, 'Keats's Publisher,' and the Early Nineteenth-Century English Book Trade" in which they look at the political economy of publishing poetry. They make the argument that Taylor's editorial decisions "scrutinized by critics solely on aesthetic grounds--must also be understood in economic terms [and] Taylor was compelled to deal with market

factors that were both imposing and unavoidable. For one there was the cheap book movement and literary annuals and periodicals coming to dominate the poetry market" (Suarez, 382). Taylor, understood not just as an editor but also a publisher with a business to run, did not abandon Clare. He abandoned publishing poetry all together because the reading public had.

There are two main issues tied to the question of editing Clare. Is Clare simply a chronicler/transcriber of peasant life or does his poetry carry within it philosophical questions about nature and humanity? How should Clare's poetry be edited in light of his poor grammar and use of colloquialisms, provincial and dialect words? To each question, Eric Robinson has found Taylor's response to have been heavy-handed.

The Question of Content: High or Low Philosophy?

Eric Robinson tries to show Taylor as trying to change the content of Clare's poetry from detailing peasant life to becoming more philosophical. On the editing of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, Robinson writes that:

> …despite advice from Taylor to 'raise his views' and 'speak of the Appearances of Nature each Month more philosophically' and from Mrs. Emmerson to prove himself capable of higher subjects than talking of Birds and flowers, Clare increasingly went his own way, testing his poetry on the ears of his parents and his tried friends, handling the subjects about which they and he felt deeply, drawing strength from his local idiom. (Robinson, xix: 1984)

But Robinson has taken bits from the whole of Taylor's advice and used them selectively to make a case that Taylor is gentrifying Clare.[56] Taken in context, what Robinson sees as

[56] . In *John Clare in Context*, Seamus Heaney does the same abstraction and argues that Taylor was being "neither exploitative nor insensitive, but simply acting as a mouthpiece for received ideas about correct poetic behavior" (Haughton, ed.; 136).

evidence of Taylor trying to force Clare to conform to the norms of romantic poetry (Robinson, xix: 1984) is Taylor asking Clare to move from the merely descriptive. Taylor wants the essence of poetry, he wants metaphors, the part instead of the whole – he wants poetry that tries to say something beyond itself, to move beyond the purely descriptive. Quoted at length, Taylor's March 4, 1826 advice reads as follows:

> I have often remarked that your Poetry is much the best when you are not describing common Things, and if you raise your views generally & Speak of appearances if Nature each Month more philosophically (if I may say so) or with more Excitement, you would greatly improve these little poems; Some parts of November are extremely good. Others are too prosaic – they have too much of the language of common every Day Description; - faithful I grant they are, but that is not all….You wish to make it a complete Record of Country affairs. I would have you make a Selection of the Circumstances that will best tell in Poetry. (Storey, Critical Heritage, 198)

Taylor wants Clare to be more discriminating. He is arguing that even though what Clare is producing is authentic to the circumstances, the point is not to reproduce reality, grass blade by grass blade but to use images and metaphors or other devices that allow language to represent a part to question the whole. Taylor was suggesting that Clare needs to represent anew "common every day description." Even though from the quote it might appear that Taylor advising Clare to write like Wordsworth or Keats, he had expressly advised Clare against imitating Wordsworth in a letter dated February 18th, 1822:

> What you ought to do is to elevate your view, and write with the Power that belongs to you under the influence of true Poetic Excitement - never in a low familiar Manner, unless at the Time some strong Sensibility is awakened by the Situation of the Writer or

> those he writes about. For this Reason I cannot quite admire your Imitation of Wordsworth, though it is very clever - to him it is out of the Way to write on the familiar Topics of humble life - His education has made a retired, a proud philsophic Poet of him, and he chuses a Simple Theme, it is interesting to see how such as Man will treat it. But it has a poetry also then, from various Singular Associations which are unexpectedly conjoined with it, which it cannot have when actually written in Simple Life - it seems then too real to be very poetical - You should write as you would suppose he would think, to be even with him when he writes as he imagines you would think… (Storey, 190)

Taylor wants Clare to write about nature and peasant life from an insider's perspective – that is to use his poetic imagination to convey what others cannot – with the *Power* that belongs to him. Whereas Wordsworth could write simply about "humble life" and get away with it because of his class, because it will interest the reader just to see how Wordsworth deals with it, for Clare it would simply have been seen as bad poetry. He wants Clare to philosophize in his poetry, to draw larger questions from the landscape he grew up and lived in, not to abandon it. He therefore entreats Clare to write as Wordsworth "would think" Clare would write - in other words, he wanted Clare to impose his imagination over Wordsworth, to turn his gaze on him and then write as Clare the poet would. Understood in the context of times, it is nothing short of revolutionary advice.

Question of Grammar

Robinson's and Powell's general approach to editing Clare in the 1984 Oxford edition was to intervene as little as possible, arguing that because "Clare's language cannot be divorced from his sense of place, part of tradition and *from* his growing awareness of who he is" the best way not to condescend is to let his writing "retain all his redundant punctuation." His

unorthodox spelling and punctuation are to be corrected only when they interfere with the reader accessing the meaning. In their introduction to *The Shepherd's Calendar*, Robinson and Summerfield write that the reader will "soon adjust himself to Clare's idiom and lack of punctuation, and will not be much troubled by Clare's spelling if he reads the words aloud" (Robinson, 1964; xiii – xiv). It is less controversial to argue for less interference with the author's idiom if it has a specific aesthetic function be it inflecting the poems with 'sense of place' or marking the speaker a certain way. But keeping misspellings and punctuation errors that can be easily corrected without losing authorial intent or aesthetic qualities is less justifiable. Haughton and Phillips in their introduction to *John Clare in the Context* write that:

> There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that Clare, despite his distrust of grammar…conventional spelling and genteel poetic culture wanted his manuscripts published in the 'raw' form adopted by recent editors, a form that apotheosises his status as textual outsider. (Haughton, 18)

The result is that Clare's authorial intentions are not respected. At the same time, whereas the intention of modern day critics is to have Clare read as a Romantic poet at the center of the debates about language and aesthetics, the effect of publishing him unedited is that it further glorifies him as an exile of romanticism.

Clare intended for his grammatical mistakes to be corrected. However, it still does raise a question of whether they have aesthetic value and are therefore worth preserving. On Clare's rejection of the "tyranny of grammar" Johanne Clare sees value in the mistakes:

> …the willfulness of Clare's refusal was the willfulness not of principle but of indifference. He intended nothing by his grammatical errors. He simply made them because he had not bothered to follow the sort of regimen in grammatical self-

> improvement which Cobbett[57] had advised. But in discussing his grammatical errors, we can speak albeit with a shadowed confidence, of their unintended affective qualities. (Clare, Johanne 127)

The risk of preserving mistakes for aesthetic reasons has an unintended consequence of always recalling Clare's biography. If the objective as Clare himself said was to be read as a poet and not a peasant, poor grammar will serve as a constant reminder of his peasant background. While it is virtually impossible to remove biography from reception, what is gained by preserving his poor grammar is lost because Clare's skills as a poet are filtered through his biography. The reader will always be reading thinking of *Poor Clare.* In any case because his particularity as a peasant living in Northampshire is his subject matter, his use of provincial and dialect words means that poor grammar is a redundancy as far as marking him a peasant. By constantly recalling his lack of education, his background, his biography remains inscribed in each sentence.

Clare was ambivalent toward grammar – he wanted his English to be corrected, but at the same time hated doing it himself. On this question, he wrote to Taylor and said that, "I may alter but I cannot mend grammer in learning is like Tyranny in government--confound the bitch Ill never be her slave & have a vast good mind not to alter the verse in question--by g-d Ive tryd an hour & cannot do a syllable so do your best or let it pass." [58] John McKusick in *John Clare and the Tyranny of Grammar* uses the quote as an example of Clare's "most outspoken resistance to grammatical correction." What McKusick does not consider is that Clare is objecting to making

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[57]. William Cobbett argues in *A Grammar of the English Language* "that in order to be able to write correctly, and to be sure that one does write correctly, a fair knowledge of well-defined principles is necessary; that the study of these principles, rightly pursued, is not only necessary to enable one to speak and write correctly, but is useful as a discipline of the mind and as a means of general culture" (III).

[58]. Quoted from McKusick, John. *John Clare and the Tyranny of Grammar* Studies in Romanticism33, 2 (Summer, 1994):255-277

the corrections himself as opposed to the corrections being made by his editor. There is a big difference between him making the argument that he will never be her slave and therefore his work be left as is, and defiantly raising his hands in defeat and asking his editor to do his best. He has, he told Taylor tried making the corrections for an hour with no success, and so Taylor was welcome to do his "best or let it pass" (260). McKusick goes on to make the point that:

> Despite his overt resistance to Taylor's alterations, Clare recognized their shared responsibility to produce a marketable volume, and in most cases he grudgingly accepted Taylor's revisions, especially in the early part of his career when he was still struggling to master the literary language of his poetic precursors. On several occasions during the composition of his first volume, he instructed Taylor to do whatever he liked with the manuscripts; and he actually invited editorial correction in a letter of 1823: "If there is any bad grammar in the rhymes tell me. ... I shall give my reasons as a critical Bard (not as a critical wolf who mangles to murder) to attempt correction. (260 – 261)

It is therefore fairer to say that Clare had a love-hate relationship with Standard English. So even though he appears to hate grammar, he does at the same time wish to be fluent and have his mistakes corrected. As a peasant at a time when deviations from Standard English were considered vulgar, proper grammar would have been important to him. He wanted his grammar corrected and at the same time resisted the authority, implied or real, behind those corrections. For Johanne Clare:

> Clare's rejection of authorized grammar is not complete. He in fact tries to improve his command of standard English and in one such attempt over-punctuates his poems prompting his editor, John Taylor to tell him "Keep as you are…your education has

> better fitted you for a Poet than all [the] School Learning in the would be able to do." (Clare, Johanne, 119)

In this love-hate relationship, there was also a part of Clare that wished to write well using educated English. Taylor sensed this and saw the danger of Clare concentrating more on the mechanics of English grammar rather than using the language holistically. There is a tinge of condescension in Taylor telling Clare to keep as he was, and sincerity in telling him that "school learning" cannot take the place of his education through experiencing life. The implication is that Clare should write what he knew, and Taylor would take care of the mechanics.

The tendency has been to conflate matters of deliberate use of literary devices with grammatical mistakes. McKusick for example equates editing grammar with editing out deliberate use of dialect words for example. He writes that, "Taylor edited Clare's first volume with a heavy hand, correcting grammar and spelling, supplying punctuation, and removing most of Clare's dialect words; the few nonstandard words that remained were defined in a glossary at the end of the book" (256). Yet there is an argument to be made that Taylor was simply doing the editor's work of correcting grammar and spelling. Correcting unintended grammatical mistakes cannot be called heavy handed. But the point is that he does not distinguish between grammar and the editing out of the more important dialect words. McKusick goes on to argue that on:

> *The Village Minstrel* (1821) and *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827), [Taylor] was even more intrusive, entailing not only the rigorous standardization of Clare's language, but also the ruthless cutting of passages or entire poems deemed tiresome, repetitious, hopelessly ungrammatical, or offensive to good taste. (McKusick, 256)

It is not unusual that in the editing process passages and even whole poems are tossed out. Different editing decisions are also conflated here: the editing out of repetitious lines or redundant poems is not the same as censoring passages for "offensive taste." The former are intrinsic to the text and depends on how Taylor read the poems and saw them as a whole. Censoring is extrinsic – it is the political coming from the outside to determine the content of the poems. They are not the same thing because while Taylor might have been right about the intrinsic, he could be wrong about the censorship, or vice-versa.

Dialect and Provincial Words

Whereas Taylor's instinct was to standardize Clare's dialect and provincial words, Robinson's instinct is to leave Clare to his own devices ostensibly to allow the reader to read Clare as he wrote. This is not to say that Taylor got rid of all of Clare's dialect and provincial words. After all Clare's poetry had to remain authentic in content and in English usage. As a matter of theoretical principle, Taylor explained to the reader that, Clare just like any other poet used his license to create new words. But he had to be careful so that Clare the peasant was seen as aspiring to Standard English rather than challenging it. McKusick captures the contradictory pressure that Taylor faced – on the one hand wanting to present an authentic Clare and on the other being mindful of the political and class nature of the English language. On London reviewers seeing Clare's use of dialect in *Poems Descriptive* and *Shepherd's Calendar* as vulgar, McKusick writes that differentiated:

> …between the dialect of Scotland, supposedly characteristic of the entire country, and the dialect of Northamptonshire, local to "a small district." The threat of "legitimization" posed by the publication of Clare's local dialect is stated in overtly political terms: it is threat of the canaille (or "rabble") entering the discursive arena hitherto restricted to those

> who have mastered the standard language of educated gentlemen, the social class that comprises the literary elite of London. (McKusick, 256)

Publishing Clare's dialect and provincial words was not an innocent gesture but one that challenged literary tastes as understood and set by the "elite of London." Yet, while I am arguing Clare's grammar should be corrected, Robinson's and Summerfield's conclusion that Taylor's "errors" in editing Clare "may best be explained by Taylor's haste, by his failure to appreciate the nuances of Clare's use of dialect, and by his apparent neglect of contextual meaning"[59] has a lot of merit. For while Clare intended nothing with his grammatical errors and they detract from his aesthetics more than they enhance, his usage of dialect words and provincialisms was central to the aesthetic qualities of his poetry. Robinson and Summerfield[60] provide examples where Taylor edited out Clare's intention by replacing the right word with the wrong word, or by misunderstanding the context. They give several examples such as when *unfrozen seat* is edited to become *frozen seat*; *Joining* becomes *Journeying; startling* becomes *starting* and *streaking* becomes *stretching* (Robinson, 1963: 359).

To draw out the contradictions in Taylor's and Robinson's editing of Clare, "July" in *The Shepherd's Calendar,* is a good starting point because their two divergent styles in how to approach Clare's content and the questions of sensuality, philosophy versus *literalization*, metaphor versus the descriptive, grammar and dialect-provincialisms are all present.

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[59]. Robinson,1963; 360

[60] . Robinson and Summerfield in a rare moment of generosity acknowledge that Taylor's "task was not easy" because "Clare's grammar often failed to agree with educated usage, and some of his manuscripts are admittedly difficult to read" but even there is still the issue that when "all appropriate allowances have been made, Taylor cannot be judged a consistently reliable editor (Robinson, 1963:361). See also Eric Robinson's "Editing Clare: Words" where he acknowledges failing to give "proper credit" to the earlier editors.

Editing Sensuality and philosophy in Clare's July

Robinson's "July" is at once sensual whereas Taylor's is more masculine. This raises the question of how the contrasting editorial styles allow Clare's treatment of peasant labor to emerge. In Robinson's, right from the start, "July" is a woman, a "daughter of pastoral smells and sights/And sultry days and dewy nights who has a milking maiden face" (Clare, 1964, 70). A few lines later the laborers appear. They are not yet distinct from the landscape until they disrupt the scene by sending flocks of now disturbed "swains" to look for grounds that are more peaceful. After that we now see the boys and men working "as maidens drag the rake behind wi light dress shaping to the wind/And trembling locks of curly hair/And snow white bosoms nearly bare" (71). A few lines down, the men make *rude jokes* and the women blush and playfully pretend to ignore the men. The opening of Robinson's "July" is beautiful, playful and sensual. True, these are peasants at work, true they are exploited and this is back breaking work, but they are human beings and they flirt, play and enjoy each other's company. Peasants are not supposed to be seen as actors in nature – they are part of nature.

In contrast, Taylor's version opens with a general "July" where "summer's prime, a busy time in which scythes tinkle in each grassy dell/where solitude was wont to dwell/And meadows they are mad with noise/Of laughing maids and shouting boys" (131). In Taylor's version the peasants are happy go lucky, they are frolicking along; and are at work in a state of nature. They are not working the land as in Robinson's version; their labor is part of nature. The "laughing maids and shouting boys" are described in the same breath as the "very insects on the ground that [seem to be] partakers in the toil" (131). The shepherd is also not distinct from nature, he is not working the sheep as in Robinson's version; instead he is taking a nap under a tree. In Taylor's version, it is painfully clear that after he rejected the initial "July," Clare in the rewrite is writing to meet Taylor's standards. He is trying to write as he thinks Taylor would want him

to write, as opposed to the original "July" where it is just him and his pen trying to paint his world. Taylor's version takes Clare away from himself.

Robinson and Summerfield call most of Taylor's "excisions" "unintelligible" (x). Looking at Taylor's opening and the way that it alters the poem's tone, appears justified. But it is not a case of either/or, rather each approach has its merits and demerits. The restored Clare gives us an inside-out look, whereas Taylor's gives an outside-in glimpse of the peasants at work. What Taylor's version loses in tone and the positioning of the peasant, it compensates by allowing us to ask larger philosophical questions of the relationship of nature, labor and human beings.

> Some little things of other days
> Saved from the wreck of time – as beads
> Or broken pots among weeds
> Of curious shapes – and many a stone
> Of roman pavements thickly sown
> Oft hoping as he searches round
> That buried riches be found (131 – 132)

The physical action is one of tilling and finding things such as broken pots discarded as rubbish. One cannot help thinking that there are some things that time cannot erase. They cannot be preserved in entirety, time wrecks them, but there is no complete erasure. They are riches from the past. Even though the peasant mistakes them for clues to buried treasure, the broken pots are the treasure. Taylor's editing interferes with Clare's voice, and in the rush to turn him into a poet speaking to universal issues as opposed to peasant issues ends up allowing the stereotypical happy go lucky peasant to emerge as seen in the opening of July. But it is not because Taylor is against Clare's "criticism of social structure" afraid "it might offend his conservative customers" (xi). Taylor wants Clare's poetry to speak beyond the details. At the heart of the contention between the two approaches to "July" is detail versus image, and fact versus metaphor.

Clare uses so many details that they do not have an opportunity to turn into an image. They leave the reader breathless. The poem is not allowed to take place in the reader's imagination – it is literalized on the page. His desire to represent the physical world where each word has a corresponding thing it is carrying is not a negative device by its own. But at the same token, this cataloguing[61] of details if not used strategically can be overwhelming. Robinson, does not edit down the catalogue because with the loss of the painstaking details, what Clare has painted on the page becomes duller. However, for Taylor, too many details create a canvass in which nothing stands out. Where Taylor cuts out huge chunks of "July" because when not working as images they become repetitious, Robinson restores them.

The result is that the restored version of "July" becomes too long. We meet the personified "July," described in detail - the farmers, horse boys, the cattle, an aged horse, hedges, a flirtatious shepherd and maid, the sheep tended by the shepherd, a lamb, bees and honeycombs, a gypsy fiddler, shepherd's dog. We follow a sunbeam surveying the fields, and the shepherd from the start of his day to late evening. We see the dog at play with the boys as it runs after "pelted stones." Clare details the life around a brook where linnets "dip their bills" before flying off. Farmers plant turnips and in the afternoon the horses cool down with a drink at the brook and finally in the evening, the boys call in the cattle to be milked. Nightlife enters, maids dream of love, foxes bark, haymakers steal peas, dogs bark rudely, nightingales sing and poems continues on. It is too much of beautiful poetry -- moving cyclically as we meet the actors over and over as the day progresses.

Taylor's version is much shorter and much swifter. It comes at the cost of Clare's vision in which peasants are acting upon nature as opposed to being part of it. It comes at the cost of

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[61]. This argument comes in part from John Barrel's *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730 to 1840* and in part from a reading given by Prof. Sara Guyer in a John Clare Seminar I took with her in 2006.

the peasant's humanity – one in which the peasants labor but at the same time drink their ale, and flirt with each other and young boys play. The restored version returns to the reader Clare as he saw his world, but the lack of editing and the rapid details leave the reader outside of the poem -- there is no room for the reader's imagination.

Conclusion

In the end, Taylor's failure is not Robinson's success. Citing the *Shepherd's Calendar*, Haughton and Phillips argue that while under Robinson's editorship it "emerged like a freshly restored painting once the editorial accretions and deletions of John Taylor were removed" there remained:

> …the unfortunate side-effect of making Clare's writing, in all its freshness and idiomatic energy, less accessible to the reader. Less readable in fact. On the page, Clare's poems in the new editions look dauntingly peculiar and difficult. On the page, they look more like experimental modernists works than the poems Clare is more likely to have imagined he was writing, or would have expected to see in print. (20)

With a judicious editorial eye, Robinson could have built on the strengths of Taylor's editing of "July." Taylor's version gives up sensuality and the position of the peasant in relation to labor and nature for the philosophical benignly universal question of time and permanence. Yet, his is a more readable and accessible poem than Robinson's. In Robinson's "July," the reader is overwhelmed with the details. Where the poet intended for an image to stand out, it gets buried into the background by the next image.

Both Taylor and Robinson end up denying Clare his voice and vision, Taylor by taking away the peasant's agency, Robinson by making it invisible in the minutiae of detailing. It is as if they make opposite mistakes – Taylor universalizes by taking away the local, Robinson's

localizes by denying the poem metaphorical meaning. If Clare's poetry is to be read as he intended it, then he needs to be edited like every other poet – for the intrinsic value and maximization of the poem's affect.

CHAPTER FIVE

Editing Tutuola: The Nativization of his English

> I am rather apprehensive of Mr. Tutuola's turning out a Problem Child. He promises a sequel…I fear [however] that the public appetite for this line of fiction may be satisfied with one book - T.S. Elliot.[62]

> We do, of course realize that it is not quite as good as it ought to be, but it is the unsophisticated product of a West African mind and we felt there was nothing to be done about it except to leave it alone - Peter du Sautoy.[63]

Introduction: Anthropology and Authenticity

In the same way that it was important to show *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* as the genuine "efforts of the uncultivated mind" through Clare's biography, Faber & Faber wanted to authenticate *The Palm Wine Drinkard* as the genuine product of an African. Once Faber & Faber established that the PWD was the work of an African, authenticity was to be maintained by retaining and highlighting Tutuola's poor English usage. In attempt to make sure that the book was genuinely 'African,' Geoffrey Faber wrote to Daryll Forde, an Africanist anthropologist at University College, London:

> We have had submitted to us a highly unusual MS. about which we are anxious to get a line from an anthropologist familiar with the workings of the West African imagination…we should like to know whether it has its roots in the common West African mind.[64]

For Gail Low in "The Natural Artist: Publishing Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in Postwar Britain" Faber's letter "represented the manuscript's anthropological value in no

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[62]. Lindfors, Bernth. *The Blind Men and the Elephant and Other Essays in Biographical Criticism*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999.

[63]. Lindfors, 2010: 32

[64]. Lindfors, 2010: 21

uncertain terms [and] portrayed *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* as offering metropolitan readers extraordinary insights to the West African mind" (22). That is, Faber wanted it certified that not only did a West African write PWD, but that it was also representative of the culture and psychology of the African – as perceived by the Westerner. Low concludes that, "Faber saw their publishing investment as essentially of anthropological value" (22). Along the same lines, in a letter to Jocelyn Oliver,[65] Ann Faber wrote in part, "We have talked back and forwards about this story and have taken the trouble to discover whether it is likely to be genuine. We think it is and we are keen to take a chance on it."[66] PWD was genuine to the extent it is an artifact from African anthropology.[67] Faber and Faber were approaching questions of authenticity using a paternalistic, if not racist, lens. They had an idea of what African culture was like, alien, terrifying, and superstitious, and they wanted PWD to confirm that. PWD was, right from the beginning, not taken as a piece of fiction but rather a cultural artifact clothed in the literary form of the novel.

Grammar and authenticity

If establishing PWD's content as authentically West African was critical, so was preserving Tutuola's poor grammar. In the letter to Tutuola in which they told him of their decision to publish him, they referred to PWD as *The Palm Wine Drinker*.[68] However, Tutuola misspelled "Drunkard" as "Drinkard" in the body of the text and they made an editorial decision

[65]. Jocelyn Oliver was a book editor at Lutterworth Press, owned by the United Society for Christian Literature, where Tutuola first sent his MS.

[66]. Lindfors, 2010: 22

[67]. Ironically, had they found it to be solely the product of Tutuola's deliberate artistic imagination, PWD would have lost its literary merit in the eyes of Faber & Faber.

[68]. In the letter referenced earlier from Geoffrey Faber to Daryll Forde, Faber refers to the MS as "The Palm Wine Drinker and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads-Town" (Lindfors, 1999: 116).

to rename it *The Palm Wine Drinkard* "because it was more colourful to use in the title" (Low, 23). [69] Changing the title from a grammatically correct rendering to one derived from Tutuola's misspelling in the text of the novel stresses the degree to which Faber & Faber wanted to establish PWD as a text written by an African native who had yet to fully learn English.

When in 1952 an editor at Norton rejected PWD because "it was not worth the confusion" presumably because of Tutuola's English use, its style and structure, Peter du Sautoy, a director at Faber &Faber wrote back. As quoted in the second epigraph of this chapter, he said:

> We do, of course realize that it is not quite as good as it ought to be, but it is the unsophisticated product of a West African mind and we felt there was nothing to be done about it except to leave it alone. When I say unsophisticated, that is not altogether true, since Tutuola has been to some extent been influenced by at any rate the externals of Western civilization…Its interest is more anthropological than literary, but apart from being in the end a little tedious, it has got a certain quality as piece of unusual writing. (32)

Good publishers interested in the intrinsic value of the novel would have tried to polish that "certain quality" so it became central to the novel. However, to du Sautoy, any part in PWD that shows sophistication was a result of "Western civilization" while the anthropological was the result of African culture lacking civilization.

Tutuola himself wanted to write in Standard English and wished his English to be corrected. He wrote to Faber and Faber saying that "I shall be much grateful if you will correct my "WRONG-ENGLISH" etc and can alter the story itself if possible, of course it is not

[69] This raises the question of whether Tutuola is a reliable chronicler of events – The original title was the *Palm Wine Drunkard*. Talking about his writing process, he said that the title is one of the first things that he creates. "Then, having completed the story, I gave it the title: The Palm Wine Drinkard" (Miao, 49).

necessary to tell you as you are an expert in this work."[70] But in a 21 June 1951 reply, Faber and Faber responded:

> Perhaps you would let me know, when you write, if you would wish to send printer's proofs to you in case you have any corrections to make; if so, it would be important that your corrections should be as few and as small as possible, owing to the expense of shifting type. (Lindfors, 1999; 118)

On the face of it, Faber and Faber's response is standard – once the type has been set, it is expensive to make changes. However, the question is whether the editors should have been making allowances for Tutuola's unique and rather powerless situation. There is an argument to be made that in changing the title, and in seeing anthropological value in both the content of PWD and its language use, the editors were already recognizing the unique position of their writer – a position they were using to their advantage. They could choose when to treat Tutuola as a regular writer working on a standard contract, and when to treat him as a writer whose value lay in being a marketable African native. It made sense, then, for them to argue that Tutuola's mistakes were part of the aesthetic appeal. But in reality, his poor grammar was doing the work of authenticating his work as that of an African coming into English and civilization and it was best to leave it as it was. On 21 June 1951, Alan Pringle wrote to Tutuola in regards to editing:

> We propose therefore that our reader should go through the manuscript before it is set up in type, correcting what are evidently copying errors, accidental omissions, confusions or inconsistencies, but leaving intact all those expressions which, though strictly speaking erroneous, are more graphic than correct expressions would be. You can depend upon it

[70]. Lindfors, 1999; 117

> that we have the success of the book at heart, and we hope you will be content to leave the matter to our judgment. (Lindfors, 1999; 118)

Looking at the facsimile of an original page from Tutuola's handwritten manuscript and the changes the editors made, Pringle did not keep the end of his bargain. He left the misspellings, "accidental omissions, confusions or inconsistencies" for the most intact in the typeset.[71] Tutuola replied on June 27. After thanking Pringle for his letter, he wrote:

> I am very glad to read in your letter that you will publish the M/S and also the letter points out about the correction of my wrong English etc., in conclusion, I leave everything for you to do as how it will profit both of us, and is no need of sending me the printer's proofs for corrections as you an expert in this field. (Lindfors, 1999; 119)

Right from the beginning, Tutuola as a colonial subject, had less power in his relationship to the international Faber & Faber. Secondly, aware of his own lack of education, he was not confident enough to make editorial demands. When asked by Pringle to sort out punctuation and syntax in the editing of *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle*, Tutuola replied:

> To the point you raised . . . as far as you know, I am not capable of writing English correctly and that I do not know so much where the commas and the full-stops should be, I am pleased how you put everything in good order. (Low, 23)

Tutuola, self-conscious of his poor command of English, was unwilling to assert his authorial rights. Therefore, he ended up abdicating them, giving room for Faber and Faber to leave his work deliberately uncorrected.

Tutuola and English Literature influences

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[71]. See Appendix 1.

Part of what du Sautoy calls the "externals of Western civilization" was colonial education, the main reason Tutuola was trying to write in limited Standard English[72] as opposed to Yoruba. The majority of Africans were not being educated to become thinkers and have a full command of English language and culture, but rather to enable the smooth functioning of the colonial machinery. Just as peasant education in Romantic England produced good workers and Christians, colonial education produced Christian Africans who knew their place.[73] Full education was not a priority in what was a bottleneck educational system that by design produced more writers like Tutuola with only a partial grasp of English, and fewer writers like Achebe who had mastered English. Tutuola, true to the nature of colonial education, ended up working as a blacksmith in the British colonial army during the Second World War, and later became an office messenger.

The point here is that because he was a product of a colonial education in which only Standard English and all the examples of English literature he would have come across would have been in Standard English. Lindfors in "Amos Tutuola: Debts and Assets" writes:

> Tutuola claims that he read only textbooks while in school but some those would have been literary works. It is known, for example, that Aesop's fables were read in Nigerian schools in the 1930's and that John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* was available in Nigeria in a simplified version as early as 1937…he also told Eric Larrabee that he enjoyed reading Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* and Edith Hamilton's *Mythology.*…(294)

By simplified Lindfors means that the English was standardized and the book abridged. John Bunyan, who wrote in everyday, colloquial English was at first seen as vulgar but the later

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[72]. See Chapter 2, "John Clare, Amos Tutuola, the "Language of men" and the Politics of Standard English" where I look at the colonial education system and functionalism.

[73]. See Michael Omolewa in "Educating the "Native": A Study of the Education Adaptation Strategy in British Colonial Africa, 1910-1936"

'metaphysical Empire' saw value in literature carrying Englishness. Even though he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678, almost one hundred years before Samuel Johnson's dictionary, his book came to represent Johnson's nationalist and imperialist dream of the English language carrying the best of English culture. Isabel Hofmeyr in "How Bunyan Became English: Missionaries, Translation, and the Discipline of English Literature" argues that this was because the role philologists had played in promoting the English language as carrier of culture had been replaced by literary critics who argued that literary works, widely read and accessible, were better suited for promoting Englishness:

> Despised in the eighteenth century as vulgar and un-English, Bunyan's language gradually became the desired model of Anglo-Saxon purity. This shift is apparent in changing editorial practices. Some eighteenth-century editions, for example, edited Bunyan's language to make it more polite. Hence, in one instance the phrase "O, they say, hang him, he is a turn coat" had been deemed to be too robust and was changed to "They tauntingly say, that he was not true to his profession." Nineteenth-century editions reversed these circumlocutions and reinstated Bunyan's original language. Critics also lauded the language of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as pure and accessible …This view of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a book whose language was accessible to all classes [] chimed in well with nationalist interpretations of English literature as a unifying factor and promoter of national consciousness. (135)

The Pilgrim's Progress, already widely read, debated and translated into many African, Asian and European languages, was rehabilitated from being an exemplar of vulgar English to a carrier Englishness. The edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* that Tutuola would have read was taught as

a carrier of Englishness.[74] But it did not come with the history of contestation that surrounded the book, or that surrounded philological discussions around standardization. If Bunyan influenced Tutuola, then Tutuola would have been emulating the standardized, cleaned and pious Bunyan.

Tutuola when asked by Gorlier whether he studied English literature in school and whether that "influenced" his writing replied:

> Well, of course I can't say yes. The time that I attended school we did not know what was called literature" (Miao, 165). Along the same lines on whether he read Fagunwa he says "His town is far away from my own. Even when I was young like this [] when I saw his book at the school. They brought the book to the school, I read only one page. Then I gave it back to the owner. (Miao, 165)

Yet most critics, including Lindfors, Owomoyela and Collins, agree that his debt to both Fagunwa and Bunyan is obvious. However, it is more complicated than simply a question of influence: Bunyan might have influenced Tutuola, but Tutuola also Africanized Bunyan in style, content and belief. Hofmeyr argues that because many of the colonized societies would have had similar quest stories such as Bunyan's *The Pilgrims Progress*:

> ...the plot-which involves a movement from this world to the next-would probably have seemed unremarkable. In addition, it might have appeared as a failed half-story since it ended just at the point where the protagonist entered the next world and things promised to get interesting. Normally, in the West African tradition, the most exciting events would unfold here as the human hero pitted his strength and wit against that of the spirits,

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[74]. Isabel Hofmeyr in "How Bunyan Became English: Missionaries, Translation, and the Discipline of English Literature" writes that:

> In Africa, the book undoubtedly had most influence in those parts of the continent where English-speaking missions worked under British colonial rule. Such translations (along with the English version) made their way into school syllabuses, in which they exercised considerable influence (109).

> ancestors, and gods of the next world. Evidence of these types of interpretations can be seen from two West African novelists- D. O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola-who put matters right when they "completed" Bunyan's story in their novels by embedding it in a tale that moves from this world to the next and back again. (96)

The editors, by seeing Tutuola as simply writing folk tales, failed to see that he was in conversation with the very nature of Englishness, and that he was extending and improvising over texts at the heart of the colonist's culture. This might not have changed their editorial desire for a native text, but at least they could have alerted the reader to the inter-textuality of PWD. Then it would have been more difficult to dismiss Tutuola as "unsophisticated" - a code word for half-civilized. At the same time, it would have been more apparent that if a central text in English literature influenced Tutuola, he would not have wanted his work in anything but the best grammar. That is, while Tutuola wanted to carry African content, he did not want that content carried in ungrammatical English. African and Africanized content had to be in Standard English.

Though standing squarely on the side of a superior English languages over African 'dialects', Mackenzie touched on the question of Africanized English versus Africanized English grammar and syntax when he compared Tutuola and Achebe:

> In English literature people like Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian novelist, have emerged from University Colleges in British territories and have begun to write of African themes in an English manner. But the British public has shown more interest in the work of Amos Tutuola whose highly imaginative books…are couched in the pidgin English of Nigeria…It is true that the unaccustomed themes drawn from the teeming folk-lore of West Africa are excitingly fresh to British readers, and that the strange style, with its

> child-like repetitions and incessant ambiguities, lulls them into the suspension of disbelief…We can only hope that African writers will not adopt some debased form of English in an effort to titillate the British palate. (220)

The "English manner" MacKenzie refers to could also be a matter of form, the realist fiction tradition as opposed to the folkloric superstition riddled tradition of Tutuola and he was unhappy that English readers had not been more critical. But it was the language use, which he called "debased" that he found most offensive. He applauded Achebe for writing in the tradition of Standard English and derided Tutuola for writing in what he calls Nigerian Pidgin English.

Tutuola's ambition was to preserve, carry and practice a Yoruba essence in the same way missionary teachers presented Bunyan as preserving, carrying and practicing an English essence. The contradiction was that he wanted his Yoruba essence preserved in the English language. Tutuola was aware of his limited command of English. Eric Larrabee in a review of the PWD writes that:

> After much thought, Amos has decided to attend evening classes to "improve" himself, so that he may develop into what he describes as a "real writer". "I am not telling the story as it is in my head all the time, but I cannot speak good English for them yet" is his moving self-condemnation. (Lindfors, 37; 1975)

Most writers talk about improving technique, experimentation or other aspects of their writing – but not of improving the command of the language itself. For example, one can imagine Joseph Conrad telling a friend he is working on improving his English when he is unpublished and young, but not after he is established and world-renowned. Here Tutuola, a world-recognized author published by a top publishing house, is saying he needs to go back and learn to speak and

write in Standard English.[75] With that kind of self-consciousness, he would not have the basis or confidence to argue with his Editors or to participate actively in the editing of PWD and subsequent works.

At the same time, Tutuola came to see his work of preserving African culture as more important than grammar. Or more correctly, he saw his language use as secondary to the more important and urgent work of maintaining an African culture under threat from Western civilization. He argued:

> So far as I don't want our culture to fade away I don't mind about the English grammar. Even my publishers tell that I should write as I feel. I should feel free to write my story. I have not given my manuscript for anyone who knows grammar to edit. Only my publishers do everything relating to Editing. (Lindfors, 1999; 143) [76]

Since his publishers had promised to take care of his grammar, he was free from what Clare had called the tyranny of grammar.[77] Tutuola also did not see his limited education as necessarily a good or a bad thing, but as a handicap that had become part of his aesthetical appeal. A little later, he says:

> Probably if I had more education, that might change my writing or improve it or change it to another thing people would not admire. Well, I cannot say. Perhaps with higher education, I might not be as popular a writer. I might not write folktales. I might not take it as anything important. I would take it as superstition and not write in that line. (Lindfors, 143)

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[75]. That Larrabee does not correct Tutuola's English mistakes in the interview; a standard practice also goes to show how much his English usage had become both his signature and cause for spectacle.

[76]. Lindfors is quoting from an article by Awoyinfa, Mike. "Amos Tutuola: Nigeria's Nobel Literature Laureate Who Never Won." *Weekend Concord*, 21 June 1997:2.

[77]. See McKusick, John. *John Clare and the Tyranny of Grammar* Studies in Romanticism.33.2 (Summer, 1994):255-277.

There are two things here in this self-evaluation. One is that for him his limitations are strengths as well as weaknesses. He has no reason to improve his education in such a way that it takes him away from his writing style. Secondly, he sees the pitfalls of education – it could very well distance him from his Yoruba culture from which he draws his inspiration, and which he hopes to preserve. Where another publisher might have pushed Tutuola to finish unrealized aspects of PWD hence generating re-imaginations over the plot or character development, Faber and Faber had essentially told Tutuola that his language flaws were part of his aesthetic appeal. Tutuola too came to see his minimal education and poor command of English as possible assets.

Editorial Choices: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Effects:

The editing decisions or lack thereof had immediate intrinsic (metaphors and images and other literary devices) and long-term extrinsic (reception, aesthetics and context) effects on Tutuola's writing. While the extrinsic may vary depending on the context in which the book is read, the intrinsic losses are a constant. These include inaccessible meaning because of grammatical mistakes that hinder meaning; lost authorial intention because deliberate use of language cannot be discerned from mistakes; and a narrative style that remains opportunistic resulting in too much linearity and a narrator and characters that all sound the same.

The following passage from the section, *A Complete Gentleman*, will help illustrate the intrinsic losses and justify my notion that the editors should have at a minimum corrected Tutuola's grammatical mistakes and standardized his English:

> I could not blame the lady for following the Skull as a complete gentleman to his house at all. Because if I were a lady, no doubt I would follow him to wherever he would go, and still as I was a man I would be jealous him more than that, because if this gentleman went to the battle field, surely, enemy would not kill him, or capture him and if bombers saw

> him in a town, they would not throw bombs on his presence, and if they did throw it, the bomb itself would not explode until this gentleman would leave town, because of his beauty. (Tutuola, 1994; 207)

To the above excerpt from a facsimile of the original editing reproduced in PWD[78], the editors say they made only minimal changes. They changed *atal* to *at all*; collapsed *where-ever* to *wherever*; added *went* and *did*; and changed *see to saw*. For the most part, they left awkward phrasings, wrong word order, and run-on sentences intact. My argument is that the beauty of the passage is not rendered through the foreignness of his English, but in the semantics – a beauty that is so visceral that it creates ceasefires as well as undermines masculinity. The narrator later consoles himself with the knowledge that the Complete Gentleman is after all an evil skull:

> After I looked at him for so many hours, then I ran to a corner of the market and I cried for a few minutes because I thought within myself why was I not created with beauty as this gentleman, but when I remembered that he was only a Skull, then I thanked God that he had created me without beauty, so I went back to him in the market, but I was still attracted by his beauty. (Tutuola, 207)

The word choice of beautiful over handsome in the passage highlight a beauty that is flawless - a beauty forged by nature. The Complete Gentleman is a flawless force of nature; even bombs will wait for him to pass before exploding. It is not feminized beauty – his is a sublime beauty. This sublime beauty contains the duality of being perfectly good and evil.[79] However, the reader by

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[78]. See Appendix 1

[79]. Immanuel Kant, in *Essays and treatises on moral, political, and various philosophical subjects* writes that:

> The sublime moves or touches, the beautiful charms. The mien of the person, who finds himself in the full sentiment of the sublime, is serious, sometimes fixed and astonished. On the other hand announces itself the lively sentiment of the beautiful by a sparkling glory in the eye, by lineaments of smiling, and

this time has been trained to be constantly in doubt of what Tutuola means and he or she can easily read *beauty* as meaning the lesser *handsome*. The complexity is lost.

Not only is authorial deliberate use of language undermined, but meaning is obscure leaving the reader to make educated guesses. For example, the Drinkard narrates, "if I were a lady, no doubt I would follow him to wherever he would go, and still as I was a man I would be jealous him more than that, because if this gentleman went to the battle field *surely, enemy would not kill him…"*(Tutuola, 1994; 207). What is the meaning of "and still as I was a man I would be jealous him more than that?" One reading is men go to war expecting to die or survive based on their fighting prowess. But the Drinkard feels that it is unfair that the Complete Gentleman's beauty guarantees his survival. In other words, he is jealous of the exceptionalism that greets him wherever he goes. Just like with the sublime beauty, this reading is not immediately apparent. The "I would be jealous him more than that" is just plain confusing. Rather than put in extra work just to learn that the Drinkard begrudges the Complete Gentleman his beauty for complex reasons, it is easier to keep reading.

Authorial irony is also lost on the reader. The *Complete Gentleman* is far from complete as all his body parts save for the skull are borrowed. Tutuola uses the word complete to describe something that has all its part intact and at the same time, given the ensuing loss of parts, to undermine the completeness. In the absence of a reading that allows for the contradiction of being perfect and flawed at the same time, irony is lost. For it to be more visible, Tutuola would have had to deliberately call attention to it. Given that anything and everything can have metaphorical significance in PWD, deliberate highlighting or emphasis cannot be visible.

> frequently by loud merriment. The sublime is of a different nature. The feeling it is sometimes accompanied with dread, or even melancholy… (6).

He concludes in part that "dreadful or terrific sublime" can be accompanied by dread or even melancholy.

Harder to quantify is the relationship between the reader and the text. Suspense of disbelief for example is predicated on the reader being immersed in the text without leaving the text to wonder after what the author is actually trying to say. The experience of a constant stop and go while reading PWD takes the reader out of the flow of the novel. That leads to the author as opposed to his narrator being read as unreliable. In other words because the flaws are so apparently not intended and serve no larger purpose rather than showcasing Tutuola as a native novelty, the unreliability becomes Tutuola's and not the Drinkard's.

Yet, more deliberate use of conventional stylistic devices, varying sentence length and strategic repetitions would have worked better. It is my contention that Tutuola's language use would have been equally if not more captivating when standardized. Here below is my rendering of the same passage used above in 'straightened' English:

> I could not blame the woman for following the Complete Gentleman home. If I were a woman, I would have followed him to the ends of the earth. Even though a man, I was jealous of him. He was so complete, so perfect that even in battle, his enemies would not take him prisoner, much less kill him, bomber planes would not drop bombs. And if they did, the bombs would not explode until he left town. He was a complete beautiful gentleman.

Tutuola's use of images makes his language so physical, graphic and startling that there was no need to publish him unedited in order to call attention to his work, or even his Africaness. He does not need the adornment of nativeness. His imagination, rendered in a language that lets it through rather than stands in the way, would have been 'novelty' enough for those looking for a native writer and literary enough for those who wanted to engage with good writing. In a vivid passage found *In the Bush of Ghosts,* three ghosts are competing for the narrator:

> So as he lighted the flood of golden light on my body and when I looked at myself I thought that I became gold as it was shining on my body, so at this time I preferred most to go to him because of his golden light. But as I moved forward a little bit to go to him then the copperish-ghost lighted the flood of his own copperish light on my body too, which persuaded me again to go to the golden-ghost as my body was changing to very colour that copper has, and my body was then so bright so that I was unable to touch it. And again, as I preferred this copperish light more than the golden light then I started to go to him, but at this stage I was prevented again to go to him by the silverfish-light which shone on to my body at that moment unexpectedly. (Tutuola, 1994; 24-25)

The language here is very physical. There are no internal thought processes and one can imagine an editor asking him what was going through the Narrator's mind. However, the loss of the narrator's inner thoughts or consciousness is compensated for by the sheer beauty of the different competing ghosts that try to entice him through their colors after an earlier attempt to get him through competing cuisines. A little later, the three ghosts immobilize him when they shine their lights on him at the same time. It is a vivid and arresting scene but the power is lost, not enhanced, by the interruptions caused by poor grammar and needless repetition. Tutuola's writing remains powerful in spite of his editors as opposed to because of them.

There is however an argument to be made that the editors at Faber &Faber were, at the moment they received and decided to publish PWD, condemned to err on either forcing Tutuola to write in an "English manner" or nativizing him. Having Tutuola first write in Yoruba and then translating him would have solved the question of grammar and authorial intention.

Conclusion: The Question of Translation

As I have argued, for Tutuola, English was the language of power. He had come to believe in the superiority of English over Yoruba. Jare Ajayi in *Amos Tutuola: Factotum as a Pioneer* quotes Tutuola as telling him "I write for foreigners and for my town's people who can read me" (Ajayi, 159). At the same time, his publishers preferred his own brand of English rather than the standardized English that would emerge from a work professionally translated from Yoruba. The result was Tutuola writing in the best Queen's English he knew. When asked why he did not write in Yoruba and instead used English, Tutuola answered:

> I did not write in Yoruba because when I started writing, we did not take our language and our custom seriously. Anything that is good in the farm is *Onyibo.* You have Ope Onyibo (Pineapple), emo ebo (rabbit) etc, etc. No I prefer my own culture." (Ajayi, 158)

He had imbibed the colonial lesson in which African languages could discuss the mundane day-to-day living but not carry on serious discussions.[80] Equally important is that colonial education also drove a wedge between writing and speaking African languages. Ajayi argues that another reason for Tutuola's reluctance to write in Yoruba was that even though fluent in spoken Yoruba, "he had not fully mastered its literary nuances enough to pursue a writing career in it – his scuttled education and little teaching of Yoruba at school then being responsible" (159). The question however, remains - would it not have been easier to struggle in a language in which he was orally fluent and intimate with rather than one from which he remained alienated in terms of speaking and writing?

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[80]. Ajayi gives another instance where Tutuola portrays English as the language for serious matters and Yoruba as the language of play:

> …in Italy when he told his interviewer that in those early days "we'd take English to read something important – or what people who could speak English thought to be very important. That influenced me to write my first book in English"(X).

The question of Yoruba language, although always present, either in his transliterating into English, or in translating back into Yoruba, was tangential rather than central. Beyond his determination, it is clear that he was already translating from Yoruba to English, only the original was not set down on paper but coming directly from his mind. He tells Ajayi, "English give me a lot of problem. But I did not let it disturb (hinder me). I always have Yoruba-English dictionary with me when I am writing my stories" (Ajayi, 159). The question of translation did come up when a Nigerian Deputy Director of Education asked Tutuola to translate *The Palm Wine Drinkard* into Yoruba so that it could be used as a school text and for general interest. In a letter to his publisher Tutuola stressed that the Yoruba translation would not "affect the one published in English etc., in any way as there would be no single word to be used in it in English as it is for those who cannot read English" (Lindfors, 1999; 122). Yet the idea of Tutuola first writing in Yoruba and then having his works translated into Standard English did not arise for his publishers. Faber & Faber would not have wanted to lose his 'broken' English – the marker of his nativeness.

Tutuola did write *Ise Baba Osi* in Yoruba, which he himself translated into English to become *Pauper, Brawler, and Slanderer,* published in 1987 by Faber and Faber. However, there is no question that his preferred language was English -- not Standard English but rather his English, as he wielded it. Yet, translation would have solved all the English language problems while allowing for Tutuola to be a deliberate writer as opposed to being as unreliable as his narrator.

CHAPTER SIX
Chirality in the Critical Reception Clare: A Question of Translatability

> I found the poems in the fields/and only wrote them down - John Clare.[81]

> In the first place, Tutuola does not think of himself as the creator of his stories. Stories exist objectively; he merely sets them down. When I asked him if he planned to write more, the question had no meaning to him. "But there are many stories," he said.[82]

Introduction

Because Tutuola's poor command of English and Clare's use of provincialisms and poor grasp of grammar call attention to their respective backgrounds of colonized native and peasant, early criticism understood their respective writing as earthy, primordial, of child-like innocence, and representative of the peasant or the native. They were anthropologized, with Clare seen as the gateway into the life of the peasantry and Tutuola as representing the African mind on the page. To know Clare's writing was to know life as a peasant and to know Tutuola was to see African culture and the African mind at work.

When editing Clare and Tutuola, their editors Taylor and Pringle were aware of the expectations that peasant poetry and native literature would need to meet: Authenticity via biography, rough texts with unpolished language and apolitical content and, if polished, needed to retain enough provincialism to mark them peasant/native. The critics followed suit. As I will argue, both the editors and the critics were following the aesthetic demands of the sub-genres of peasant poetry and native literature. The writing had to come from the peasants and natives, it had to carry their 'world view,' distinguishable from literary writing through content and

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[81]. Storey, Mark. *John Clare: The Critical Heritage*. Routledge: London, 1995. 302.

[82]. Larrabee, Eric. "Amos Tutuola: A Problem in Translation" Chicago Review, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring, 1956): 40-44.

language, and it needed to mark class and racial differences while asking, on behalf of the poor writer, patronage from the elite reader.

Biography therefore ended up being the authenticator, further solidified by a fascination with the authors' physical looks and mannerisms that found them both to be self-effacing, shy and "diffident." Later criticism, such as that of John Barrel for Clare and Brenda Cooper for Tutuola has been fairer and has dealt more with the content of their writings than the extrinsic questions of reception. Yet, this criticism has served the opposite purpose – in judging John Clare a "Poet of Place "where his poetry has no meaning beyond itself and is primarily concerned with the particularity of life and nature in his village, his poetry ends up lacking metaphorical value. Tutuola suffers the same fate and ends up being read primarily as a folklorist in form and content with 'episodic' stories, the content of which does not go beyond itself.

Where in the early criticism exemplified by Octavius Gilchrist and Dylan Thomas, Clare and Tutuola were genius wonder-children of nature, in latter day criticism, they are true to place, local traditions and customs. The critics who imprison them in the local end up denying them that quality of literature that makes it possible for literature to be experienced across cultures, classes, and indeed, across time and space. By localizing and insisting that Clare and Tutuola do not have content that can be metaphorized, or go beyond itself, both the early and later-day critics can be said to be denying their writing translatability. Walter Benjamin, in "The Task of the Translator," writes:

> Translation is a form. To understand it as such means going back to the original. Because the original, in its translatability, contains the laws that governs the translation. The question of a word's 'translatability' is two-fold. It can mean: will the work ever find its proper translator among all its possible readers; or – and more to the point, does it, by its

> nature, permit translations and therefore, given the significance of the form, demand it? (298)

For Benjamin, translation as form means that it [translation] has its own sets of rules and aesthetic goals. The first concern is more about the process, the effort of finding the translator best equipped to translate a particular work. His second concern is more about the content and form of the original – does the original contain within it qualities that make it translatable? As Benjamin explains:

> The less the quality and dignity of its language, the greater the element of communication, the less it offers to translation. A text that offered nothing but communicable sense, far from providing the occasion for a model translation, would defeat translation all together. The higher the nature of the work, the more translatable it is even at the most glancing contact with sense. (306)

I want to take his concept of translatability and apply it to literature from different cultures, historical periods, and even classes, yet written and read in a single language - English.

Roman Jakobson in *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation* uses "intralingual translation or rewording" to mean "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language" (331). However, intralingual does not quite capture the relationship between Clare, a peasant using provincial and ungrammatical English and critics using Standard English and elite notions of aesthetics to receive his works. Nor does it capture Tutuola who, fluent in Yoruba, mentally translates into his 'broken' English only to be denied meaning and locked back into what the critics erroneously see as Yoruba culture and world view, as if Yoruba ontology consisted solely of folktales. Nor, furthermore, does it capture the standardization of English in 18th Century England, the contradiction that came with it, and its eventual forceful

implementation in African cultures through colonialism. Linguistically, it is the same English, yet different.

I prefer to use translatability of the text as opposed to universality because the universal often comes at the expense of the local. Translatability incorporates the localness of the text so that its nuanced cultural context is also conveyed,[83] while at the same time, the meaning of the text extends beyond itself and the local context, so that it can speak to the reader across cultures, time and space. As opposed to a universalist reading where the ties that bind humanity have meaning, translatability allows for the local to be part of the reading experience, influencing the meaning of the text for the reader, without losing the heroic and epic struggles to which anyone can relate.

This is in the same way that Clare's localness through his use of provincialisms ought to get transported across cultures, time and space, alongside with the philosophical questioning of his poems. By localizing Clare or Tutuola and denying them metaphor, they cannot be seen as transforming either the local or the foreign, that which exists outside their locales. It is as if their writing can only reflect back on them, on their cultures, on 'place,' as opposed to permeating through and reflecting back on the reader and the reader's culture.

My ultimate argument then in the following two chapters is that that the critics denied Tutuola and Clare a very important component of writing – namely, for others to read themselves in the writing, as opposed to always reading the writers and their cultures in the literature. What is at stake here, in looking at the chirality of their reception and the denial of their translatability,

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[83]. The OED renders translate, in part, as follows:
- To bear, convey, or remove from one person, place or condition to another; to transfer, transport
- To carry or convey to heaven without death; also, in later use, said of the death of the righteous
- To turn from one language into another; 'to change into another language retaining the sense' (Johnson).

Oxford English Dictionary. Second edition, 1989; online version December 2011. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204841>; accessed 25 January 2012.

is how we read literature perceived to be 'foreign' because of language, class, race, culture, historical period and other markers of difference.

Creating John Clare, the "Northamptonshire peasant"

An essay titled "John Clare: Peasant and Poet" appeared in an 1890 issue of *All the Year Round: A Weekly Journal*, a journal founded by Charles Dickens in1859 but run by his son, Charles Dickens Jr., after Dickens' death in 1870.[84] The author of the satirical essay looked at how the words peasant and poet interacted, often in diametrically opposed terms, in the appreciation of Clare and took issue with the way 'Clare the peasant' triumphed over Clare the artist. On the reception immediately following the release of *Poems Descriptive*, the author of the review noted that, "Clare became the rage - "the nine days wonder." So gifted, yet so poor! A poet - and yet a peasant! The shadow of poverty and low estate made all the brighter the gifts and genius of the man…The "Northamptonshire peasant" was the "talk of the town"" (565). The novelty of Clare the peasant became more important than Clare the poet. The author imagined a satirical scene in which a "trembling" Clare stood before his patrons in order to receive their money gifts (566) and, after being told before his first visit to the city that London was a place of terror where traps suddenly opened up in the streets, he, the hero, bravely left behind a weeping wife. On Clare's immediate reception, and the patrons falling over each other to help[85] Clare, the author further satirized that:

> The peasant, in their minds, overshadowed the poet. They decided to help the one; they forgot that the methods they adopted would wound the susceptibilities of the other. He,

[84]. As was the journal's tradition, the contributors were not individually named; authorship appeared under a collective author, Charles Dickens. I therefore refer to the author of the essay as anonymous.

[85]. An integral part of the early reviews of Clare was a call for help – that is, pleading with the reader to support Clare financially. There is condescension in this, because the reviewers assumed they knew what was good for Clare, but again they were working with a trope.

> on his part, endeavored to explain his feelings in the matter; but only succeeded in giving offence - a not uncommon result. (566)

The point the essay makes repeatedly is that in seeing Clare the poet through the lens of Clare the peasant, his critics, patrons and readers were doing a disservice to Clare the artist - And they were conspiring to keep Clare the man down the lower rungs of the social mobility ladder. The essay in many ways anticipated 20th Century criticism that was to take exception with the way Clare's biography was privileged over Clare's artistry by his fellow Romantic critics.

In *Accounting for Clare* Sarah Zimmerman argues that as opposed to "canonical poets" who are well served by the "conviction that the literary work is of primary interest, with the text's stature overshadowing even the poet's own commentary…"

> Working-class writers, women writers, and poets traditionally viewed as "minor" have, in contrast, more frequently needed others to champion them, a disadvantage with lasting consequences for these writers' latter-day reception in the form of a persistent focus on their lives in criticism of their works, for their lives and not their works were deemed of interest. (318)

In the same way that Peasant poets generally needed patrons to support and champion their work, they also needed patron critics – critics who used their biography to whip up interest in their poetry.

Biography[86] can be useful in the critical appreciation of a poem. As Jerome McGann argues in *Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism*, biography and history are part

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[86]. Biography is such an integral part of his poetry that even contemporary critics who decry the use of biography have hearkened to it. In her essay *Accounting for Clare*, Sarah Zimmerman[86] first argues that:

> A strong biographical impulse in Clare criticism has had two main consequences: first, a temptation to psychologize the poems by reading them through the lens of the life; and second, an accompanying impulse to interpret the life by reading Clare himself according to the poems' model of subjectivity (320).

and parcel of a poem's meaning and so what the critic needs to do is "weigh […] the problems of how best and most fully to elucidate the poem's (presumed) networks of social relations" (989). So "just as a person is not identical to his particular human body, so neither is a poem equal to its text" (992). The problem with Clare though has been lack of balance between the intrinsic (literary) and the extrinsic (biographical)[87] factors, so that the extrinsic questions have always outweighed the intrinsic.

In his essay, McGann further argues that authorial intention when made public can "modify, more or less seriously, the developing history of the poem." And the "poem's critical history" can in turn "modify the author's purposes and intentions, sometimes drastically, and they remain part of the processive life of the poem as it passes on to future readers" (903). This raises another problem.

Clare himself actively courted the image of the peasant poet. For example, Taylor did not write the introduction to *The Shepherd's Calendar* as he did to *Poems Descriptive.* This is consistent with his idea of Clare's biography as a Trojan horse – Clare had an audience and his poetry could stand on its own. Instead, we meet a confident Clare addressing his public:

> I leave the following Poems to speak for themselves, - my hopes of success are as warm as ever, and I feel that confidence in my readers' former kindness, to rest satisfied, that if the work is worthy the reward it is seeking, it will be meet it; if not, it must share the fate

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But she also finds that in spite of the pitfalls of using biography as a lens, Clare criticism must begin with recounting his biography:

> It is ironic that I feel the need to begin an argument for tempering a biographical impetus in Clare criticism with a brief account of his life, but he remains just new enough to many readers to benefit from yet one more introduction (320).

[87]. To a degree, especially for the concerned scholar, biography is read as contributing to the art and becomes part of the aesthetic appeal. So it is inescapable for Wordsworth's *Prelude* to be read with consideration of his actual journey to France in 1791. But even so the *Prelude* stands as a piece of work with the biography being supplemental. By contrast, Clare's biography has been central to interpreting his work.

> of other broken ambitions, and fade away. I hope my low station in life will not be set off as a foil against my verses, and I am sure I do not wish to bring it forward as an excuse for imperfections that may be found in them. (Clare, viii)

Unlike in Taylor's introduction to *Poems Descriptive* where he asked the readers to take into account Clare's biography; Clare was asking the readers to use merit alone. However, Clare was at the same time asking that his audience take his biography into account because once he invoked his "low station in life" readers would not but recall it. In private, he expressed his discontentment with the trope of peasant poet. For example, he wrote to Eliza Emmerson to say, "All I wish now is to stand on my own bottom as a poet without any apology as to want of education or anything else & I say it not in the feeling of either ambition or vanity but in the spirit of common sense" (Storey, 218). But as Suarez and Zimmerman argue:

> Clare adopted the protocols of the marketplace to promote himself well before [his editor] Taylor packaged the poet for popular consumption. Concerned about the response that his poems would meet, Clare prefaced them with an introduction, written in the voice of another, styling his writings as "the simple productions of an Unlettered Rustic" and claiming that "the humble station of life in which providence has placed him has ever debarred him from Reaping that advantage of extending his knowledge by reading of Books." (389)

In promoting Clare the peasant to sell Clare the poet, they find that Taylor "substantially embellished the myth of the peasant poet that Clare himself had inaugurated" (Suarez, 390). Whereas Clare and Taylor understood that behind the biography there was a poet artist at work, Octavius Gilchrist's write-up actively and irresolutely subsumed Clare's poetry within his being the peasant. As the title promised, in *Some Account of John Clare, an Agricultural Labourer and*

Poet, he was writing about Clare first as a laborer and then as a poet. The introductory paragraph confirms the twin aesthetic standard of peasant and genius:

> Examples of minds, highly gifted by nature, struggling with and breaking through the bondage of adversity, are not rare in England; but privation is not destitution; and the instance before us is, perhaps, one of the most striking, of patient and persevering talent existing and enduring in the most forlorn and seemingly hopeless condition that literature has at any time exhibited. (7)

For Gilchrist, Clare was both exceptionally destitute and talented. In addition, it was a testament to Clare's genius - it survived and thrived in such destitution. Most of the early write-ups follow the same lines, with the introductory paragraph lamenting Clare's destitution and praising his genius. Clare's absolute poverty was the defining feature that separated him even from his fellow peasant poets. So a review in the *London Magazine* started with an argument about why Clare and fellow peasant poet Edward Burns were not comparable because Burns:

> …was placed amongst intelligent and thoughtful persons: the powers of his mind were excited by grave and sublime themes, which occupied much of the conversation that passed in his hearing; and he possessed from his youth a general knowledge of the events of the day, and of the contents of history, as well as of literary incidents and characters. (323)

In contrast, the reviewer argued, "John Clare's situation has been more untoward…no one has ever worshiped the Muse with zeal, in despite of a greater number of painful circumstances, caused by poverty and distress, weighing on, and depressing, his spirits" (323). Poverty and destitution were the ultimate distinguishing features of Clare's poetry from the poetry of others in his class who were slightly better off. There was a political dimension as well. Referring to

Octavius Gilchrist's introduction to Clare, Suarez and Zimmerman in the essay *Marketing Clare* argue that:

> Like Taylor's Introduction, this article was calculated to increase the public's admiration, to forestall criticisms of Clare's defects, and to mask his ambition to become an independent man of letters. It is significant that Gilchrist, too, perceives the need to obscure Clare's hopes to use his poetic talents as a way up and out of his highly marginal social and financial situation--a desire repeatedly reflected in the poet's Autobiography and in his private correspondence. (391)

That social positions were not to be disturbed is something that Anonymous in the *All Year Round* anticipated. According to Anonymous, Clare wanted to own a "cottage or small house" that would have cost 200 pounds. However, none of his patrons wanted to help him acquire his own property. They did not "understand how ardently he longed to be independent of them. They thought he should be satisfied with his position. Was it not enough to profess poetic genius without aspiring to the higher level of landed proprietor?" (566). Yet most of the early reviewers also went to considerable length, or at least attempted to discuss Clare's poetry, not necessarily as products of poverty, but on their own intrinsic worth and terms. They still failed and fell back on biography, but the attempts are there.

In the London Magazine, the reviewer argues that, "An intense feeling for the scenery of the country, a heart susceptible to the quietest and least glaring beauties of nature, a fine discrimination and close observation of the distinguishing features of particular rural seasons and situations, and, a melancholy sense of the poet's own heavy — and as he has had too much reason to consider it, — hopeless lot" (325). For the reviewer, Clare's genius can measure up against that of Wordsworth and others. That the early reviewers were interested in Clare's

poetry on its own terms suggests that there was more to their reading than mere condescension. So rather than argue against the literary criticism that sees the early reviews as using biography to elicit sympathy or to create soft political landing spots for Clare's poetry, I want to extend that view.

I argue that to understand the role of biography in the critical reception of Clare, one has to consider peasant poetry to be a sub-genre of poetry in general, with its own aesthetic standards. That is, peasant poetry was viewed to be different enough from the 'high' poetry of John Keats or William Wordsworth that it had its own aesthetic standards. A major requirement was that peasant poetry be written by peasants. So biography ended up playing two roles: it authenticated the poetry as the product of a peasant mind and it became part of the aesthetic appreciation. Biography became the prologue without which the poetry would have lost meaning and beauty. The poet could not just declare, *here is my poetry*! The poet had to say, *I am first and foremost a peasant, and with that in mind, here is my poetry*.

Rightly or wrongly, biography gave the poetry an indispensable contextual wrap. In the essay *Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, and the Problem of Peasant Poetry* Scott McEathron writes that, "Authenticity was the *sine qua non* of the hypothetical peasant poet…Biographical representations typically stressed the poets comprehensive poverty of means [and that the] true rustic savant should have an absolute minimum of formal education and should be demonstrably engaged in ignoble labor" (7). This is what Taylor's introduction to *Poems Descriptive* accomplished. Clare himself also chimed in to ask that "his humble situation" be considered in the face of "imperfections and inaccuracies" in his poems. They were playing to the gallery of readers and critics. It was part of the genre.

In 1836, *Lives of Uneducated Poets, to which are Added Attempts in Verse*, was produced with its authors listed as John Jones ("an old servant" also appearing alongside the name) and Robert Southey. Jones was the author of the poems, and Southey, under whose patronage the book was published, the author of the lengthy introduction. Unlike Taylor's introduction that sought to establish Clare as an innovative genius and used his biography as a Trojan horse for Clare the artist, Southey's introduction used Jones' biography to authenticate him as poor, and therefore a producer of lower class/peasant poetry.

Whereas Taylor's introduction deliberately blurred the lines between peasant and high-class poetry, Southey's introduction emphasizes and demarcates the lines. Southey's introduction is therefore useful in showing the aesthetic parameters of peasant poetry in contra-distinction to the high-class poetry of Wordsworth for example. Southey argued that the poems by John Jones, a plebian poet, would not have been possible in earlier times because there were no class distinctions made visible by the English language. This was because English existed in one condition – vulgar:

> It is evident that there could be no versifyers of this class in early times. The language of a Saxon thane was not more cultivated than that of the churl on his estate; indeed, the best as well as earliest of our Anglo-Saxon poets was in the lowest condition of freemen, and was employed as a night-herdsman when he composed his first verses. The distinction between the language of high and low life could not be broadly marked, till our language was fully formed, in the Elizabethan age: then the mother tongue of the lower classes ceased to be the language of composition; that of the peasantry was antiquated, that of the inferior citizens had become vulgar. It was not necessary that a poet should be learned in Greek and Latin, but it was that he should speak the language of polished society. (13)

For Southey, English was rescued from its early speakers by the elite who separated the wheat from the chaff, the clean from the vulgar, and the civilized from the barbaric. The civilized then further developed the language so that it could carry high art while the "lower classes" continued with the vulgar English. Now that English had a standard, the poor could aspire to writing literature in English. In short, without a high-class English language to aspire to, attempts that fell short would not have been possible. The point here then is that peasant poetry had another function – to differentiate, to serve as a marker of difference between high and low literature, and the different 'English's.'

In addition to authentication, the peasant poet biography had a political function vis-à-vis British order. Rebellions in England, resistance to the Enclosures, and the revolution in France and subsequent terror, created a situation in which the political elite would be sensitive to a peasant poet championing the peasants as a class. Elizabeth Helsinger in her essay, *Clare and the "Place of the Peasant Poet"* writes that:

> On the one hand, a clearly understood hierarchy was the form of social stability that rural scenes staged for their urban middle-class audiences… On the other hand, however, the countryside was precisely where the erosion of the hierarchical relations of deference and responsibility was particularly noticeable, and disturbing, in the years after 1815. Sporadic outbreaks of protest against low wages and unemployment in 1816, 1822, and 1830 realized dramatically for the middle and upper classes what one might call a rural version of the process Marx was later to term alienation. (511)

Her argument is that while the peasants wanted the elite to believe that they too saw social hierarchy as the natural order of things, they were simultaneously challenging those same

hierarchies through protests and rebellions. She concludes that, “the language of class risked rejection as politically (and sexually) subversive. Especially in an already politicized rural scene, the peasant poet could not be a neutral figure” (512). For the critics, Clare the peasant poet, in such explosive circumstances, had to be explained. Therefore, in the same way that Taylor would try to create a balance between language that was subversive just by nature of being expressed by a peasant while at the same time leaving enough markers to sustain the divide between classes, the reviewers too had to “stage” the same balance. The peasant was to be welcomed as long as the economic and political order was not disturbed. This was predicated, at least as far as the critics were concerned, on the peasant accepting the social order as natural even though lamentations were to be expected. The divide between ‘high’ and ‘low’ poetry was to remain intact. Suarez and Zimmerman argue that:

> The construction of Clare as ignorant of the ways of the London book trade is crucial to reassuring the critics that he will not use their praise to rise above his proper station in life. The Gentleman's Magazine stresses that Clare is "a man of vivid perception and strong feeling," but that his abilities are directed solely toward the depiction of natural scenes; he is "unacquainted with the art and reserve of the world, and with the riches, rules, and prejudices of literature." (395)

What all of the above meant was peasant poetry was not really just poetry written by peasants – it was genre with accepted or at least expected rules, circumscribed ambition and lowered aesthetic standards to be met.

The Natural Unconscious Poet

Peasant poetry by definition also had to be close to nature – it had to be expressing nature unmediated by conscious thought. An unsigned 1820 review of *Poems Descriptive* in *Gentleman's Magazine* started by declaring the collection of poems, "The efforts of the uncultivated mind – the outpourings of genius unmoulded by the scholastic system and unimbued with scholastic lore must be interesting to the lover of literature and the observer of human nature" (146). In a sentiment echoed by reviewer after reviewer, the reader was told that Clare was simply a conduit. The poems came to him as he worked out in the fields. And if one wanted to get to know primordial man's unadulterated appreciation of nature, the first impressions of an original uncivilized imagination, then Clare's poetry was a must:

> We have seldom an opportunity of learning the unmixed and unadulterated impression of the loveliness of nature on a man of vivid perception and strong feeling, equally unacquainted with the arts and reserve of the world, and with the riches, rules, and prejudices of literature. Such a man is Clare. In moments snatched from labour by which he earned a scanty subsistence, with no other writing apparatus than his hat, a scrap of paper, and a pencil, he eagerly endeavored to express the thoughts which crowded upon his mind, or to describe the objects around him which delighted his fancy. (146)

As noted earlier Clare, Taylor and Gilchrist had all actively cultivated the idea of Clare as an untutored genius, a man whose genius was pure and so free from the restricting conventions of standard English and literary rules, that nature could sing through him. In another anonymous review of *Poems Descriptive*, but this time in *The Monthly Review*, the reviewer argued:

> The pictures of rural life which Clare has drawn are true to nature; so true, that he frequently introduces images which, according to our preconceived notions can scarcely

> be called poetical:-but notions like these are acquired by studying the works of poets who have *generalized* [sic] the beauties of nature. (297)

The reviewer also made the argument that with Clare, "there is no *aristocracy of beauty*, but the hog, the weed and the flower, find an equal place in his work" (297). It is hard to tell whether the reviewer sees this as positive or negative, but it is nevertheless a sentiment that is echoed through much of the early and, I as argue below, contemporary, criticism via the argument that he is a 'poet of place.' He has been seen as one who merely records and describes;[88] he is truthful and factual but incapable of what the above reviewer called "more refined sentiments" (297). In this way, Clare has been denied metaphor, seen as merely reproducing nature in loving detail – as if he was transcribing nature without filtering language through his imagination.

Literary Criticism through Verse

The early criticism also produced appreciation of Clare through verse that harped on his being a child of nature. Amongst the first to appear was Eliza Emmerson's 1820 poem titled "Lines presented with a Volume of Clare's Poems to a Noble Friend"[89] in the *Morning Post.* The poem in addition to asking Lord Radstock to "become the friend of genius" (Storey, 57) accomplishes in verse what other critical reception did in prose – to paint Clare a child of nature:

> There Nature's dictates, unadorn'd by art,
> He sweetly tells; and powerful, doth impart
> Those moral precepts — in such simple strain
> We read — we wonder — and respect the swain.
> Oh! nurse this minstrel! Nature's simple child,
> "That he may sing his wood-notes sweet and wild,"

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[88]. Even the ungrammatical language was only further proof that Clare was reporting nature. The reviewer writes that "the unaffected and even rude style in which the poems are composed is a strong proof that the writer has been more wrapt up in his feelings than in his mode of expressing them; and we are convinced that the victory has been not of the poet over the muse, but of the muse over the poet" (*Monthly Review*, 297).

[9.] The poem was written to accompany *Poems Descriptive*, a from gift Eliza Emerson to Lord Radstock (Storey, Critical Heritage, 57).

To charm the ear, to glad the feeling heart,
And to the mind new beauties to impart;
Let not such talent pine in shades away—
Oh, call the labourer forth to brighter day!
But should, alas! such succour not be lent,
"He'll put up with distress, and be content."

The “We” in the poem does not refer to a general readership, it recalls the elite who then in turn “respect the swain,” meaning that they end up respecting their servant, John Clare. The poem mirrors the reviews: It refers to him as “Nature’s simple child” and at the same time asks for patronage on Clare’s behalf.

Emmerson was not the only one sufficiently moved to respond to Clare in verse. A second response in verse was from J. Harper, a journeyman printer (Storey, 58) with his poem “"Sonnet to Mr. John Clare."

What was it moved thee, say, friend Clare,
When nipping winds made Nature bare,
To woo the smiling Maids of Song,
And dare on Pegasus to trot along?
Bold Child of Nature! thus to steer,
Safe thro' the wide Poesian sphere,
And gather from the Muses’ bower
Full many a sweetly-scented flowe!
Yes – thou hast formed the rosy wreath,
Which braves the wintry blast of death.
Thy thoughts on Virtue's pinions fly,
Round Nature's vast immensity!
Mild be the sun of life to thee,
The Child of rural Minstrelsy.

Again, Clare is a child, albeit a bold one, of nature. Winds have blown over nature to reveal itself to Clare. Equally important, Clare has no literary tradition: in addition to being a child of nature, his poetic tradition stems from village performances- a notion also expressed by Emmerson in her poem.

Rev. Chauncey Hare Townshend, himself a poet also wrote a sonnet that appeared under the title “This Gentleman's rare poetic talents have been long known to the world” in the *Morning Post* (Storey, 57). The poem covers the same terrain as Emmerson’s. The poem starts:

> There is a vivid lightning of the breast,
> Flash'd from a spark of kindred poesy,
> Which Poets only know, when rapt they see
> Some hidden thought — some feeling unexprest
> Upon the pages of the bard impress'd,
> In all the warmth of Nature's energy.

A poet, Townshend is saying, responds differently from the non-poet reader when they see genius on the page: genius cannot be expressed by words; it too is a spontaneous flash of emotion, which if we hearken back to Wordsworth, is recollected in tranquility. In reading Clare, this emotion was evoked:

> Oh, CLARE! such answering electricity
> Darts from thy numbers to my soul addrest.
> Thou hast read Nature with a Poet's eye,
> Thou hast felt Nature with a Poet's heart;
> [Not the broad page, which all expansed descry,][90]
> But the fine secrets which poetic art
> Alone unravels — can alone impart—
> And to which none but Poet's souls reply.

Rev. Townshend does not deny Clare a poet’s agency; he recognizes that Clare, through the “poet’s eye,” has imposed his imagination over the images he sees. In this regard, he does better than Emmerson, but at the same time, he ties Clare irresolutely to nature. He does not see Clare as speaking to the human condition; he is a poet of nature.

Clare and Body Language

The early critical responses also shared an obsession with Clare’s physical looks and mannerisms – and just like his language and class were evoked to differentiate the peasant and

[90] Brackets in original.

the elite, so were his looks evoked to say he did not have a 'Gentleman's carriage.' Gilchrist, writing of an 1820 meeting with Clare, describes him this way:

> Nothing could exceed the meekness, and simplicity, and diffidence with which he answered the various inquiries concerning his life and habits, which we mingled with subjects calculated or designed to put him much as this ease. Nothing, certainly, could less resemble splendor than the room into which Clare was shown; but there was a carpet, upon which it is likely he never set foot; and wine, of which assuredly he had never tasted before. (Storey, 37)

John Clare met Taylor and Gilchrist in the latter's home, so Gilchrist in reality was also telling the reader how well he lived. He cannot know that Clare had never seen a carpet. He cannot be sure that Clare had never tasted wine. Furthermore, he pretended to know Clare's mind and tried to put him at ease through "subjects calculated" to do so. Gilchrist expected a diffident peasant poet, and that is what he found. Storey comments on this encounter and says that "Clare's shyness was, perhaps, a convenient mask…and one no doubt that Clare wanted him [Gilchrist] to see" (131). Edmund Drury describes Clare along the same lines as Gilchrist, "He is low in stature - long visage – light hair – coarse features – ungaitly – akward – is a fiddler – loves ale – likes the *girls* – somewhat idle, - hates work" (Robinson, xx). It is as if he is describing a stereotype of the poor peasant rather than an individual. In the same way Clare's biography differentiated high and low class poetry, his physicality differentiated the carriage of the elite from the carriage of the poor.

Leveling Clare in Contemporary Criticism – No "aristocracy of beauty"

In contemporary Clare criticism, there is agreement that he was primarily a poet of place – meaning that his writing cannot be divorced from his immediate environment. For example,

Elizabeth Helsinger sees Clare as a poet who, "writes of a profound attachment to a particular rural locality and he writes of the pain of displacement, attributed to and figured as enclosure" (509). Unlike other Romantic poets such as Wordsworth who were not in their "own or other's eyes…fixed in one place except by choice" Clare was "identified with the social as well as the geographical place that was his subject" (509).

Contemporary criticism goes a step further and argues that he was a poet of place who also wanted to recover though his poetry the landscape that was rendered unrecognizable though the early 18th Century enclosure acts. John Barrel, in *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare,* describes a land before enclosures marked by an "open-field sense of space" (103). He then renders that space as characterized by:

> …compulsory rotation and the distribution of holdings among the various fields of the parish [which] encouraged the concentration of houses and farms at the center of the parish, with the fields – two, three, or sometimes four – spread our around them and all equally accessible. Furthermore, the practice of grazing all the cattle together in the same area of the parish made it possible for the whole herd to be entrusted to one herdsman, who would lead them together to wherever it was permitted for them to graze at this time or that; and this too encouraged the concentration of farms at the center of the village, where the cattle could be easily assembled each day. (100)

The result of the enclosures was that Clare's hometown of Helpston was that "at the center of the parish, where the three fields of the parish come together: they form around the settlement a rough circle, which represents the area in which the villagers work and move. Around the village at the center the crops rotate, and indeed it is fair to say that fields, too rotate about the hub of the village" (103). The enclosure acts laid waste to the open space. While Clare grew up

and labored in open fields with an "open-filled sense of space," he found himself suddenly in a reordered space with borders around private spaces. Barrel writes that the "land in the parish was divided into square parcels, which were quickly fenced and hedged, and then allowed to be put under any course of husbandry that the owner of each might choose" (109). He concludes that Clare's, "writing after 1821 or so is increasingly preoccupied with being 'local', and he is concerned with one place, Helpston, not as it is typical of other places, but as it is in individual; and individual not because it is different, but because it was the only place he knew" (120). In a way, in his poetry, Clare was trying to recapture in detail what was lost. Thus, calling him a poet of place captures his intent of replacing that which he lost through his poetry.

There are several problems with understanding Clare primarily as a poet of place. For one, it denies him metaphor, that is, it denies him the work of a poet, which is to mediate between the subject and imagination using language, and ultimately denies his work translatability from one setting to another. By connecting Clare the poet and Clare the man to the landscape, and by connecting his language directly to the local nature around him, each one can become the stand-in for the other. Thus it becomes possible to conclude that his poetry was trying to capture that which was lost in great detail, as opposed to the capturing the spirit of that which was lost. The danger of this analysis is a suggestion that Clare is too descriptive,[91] providing that do not turn what they are trying to signify into a metaphor – a tree is simply a tree. Barrel anticipates this criticism and counter-argues that:

[91]. It does not help that the title to his first collection of poetry is *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery.*

> [W]e should be wary of the assumptions behind criticism of this kind; and particularly the assumption that for a descriptive poem to have content, it must pass beyond[92] itself; into meditation or whatever. The poems of Wordsworth and of Keats, against whom Clare is being measured, do obviously pass beyond themselves in this way; and although we are right to admire the 'organic unity; in their poems, the way in which image and idea coalesce, it is nevertheless true that there is always part of their content which is separable from the images that have rise to it. (180)

A little later, using the example of Clare's poem, *Winter Fields*, he says:

> But Clare's purely descriptive poems do have content, I want to suggest, which, although it is hardly at all separable from the description in which it inheres, is nevertheless perhaps evidence that Clare 'thought about' what he saw – if it thus that content arises. The content of 'Winter Fields' is precisely the accuracy of the description, the richness and completeness of it, understood in this particular way, that it is a body of knowledge, a set of details, that Clare has arrived at in this particular place, and not elsewhere. (181)

Then Clare's experiences can only be unique to him. It is only a small movement from wonder poet of nature to poet of place. While the former is condescending and does not take into account Clare the artist, seeing him only as a conduit of nature's genius, the latter sees Clare as an active participant in the writing of nature, but it also localizes him, as Barrel does, in a way that makes his experiences unique only to Helpston, without any universal undercurrents.

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[92]. "There the phrase went beyond the content – here the content goes beyond the phrase," Karl Marx writes of the 17th and 18th Century revolutions in respect to the ideal 19th Century revolutions in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." I take this to mean that when the phrase goes beyond the content, the material conditions of class for example are lost to slogans. When the content goes beyond the phrase, it means that political theory has been left behind by events. There is an echo of this in John Barrel's argument that in Clare's poetry, the content is itself - that is, the phrase is the content, the content the phrase. It means that Clare's poetry does not go beyond itself, it has no metaphorical value and hence it does not speak outside its place. If it cannot speak outside of itself, then it is not translatable to experiences outside of it.

Arguing for Clare as a sense-of-place writer closes the lid on the poem becoming translatable outside of Helpston.

There are alternative readings to the poems accepted as descriptive. Here below I use *Winter Fields* because it also the poem that Barrel uses to show Clare as a poet of place. The full text of the poem is as follows:

> O for a pleasant book to cheat the sway
> Of winter -- where rich mirth with hearty laugh
> Listens and rubs his legs on corner seat
> For fields are mire and sludge -- and badly off
> Are those who on their pudgy paths delay
> There striding shepherd seeking driest way
> Fearing nights wetshod feet and hacking cough
> That keeps him waken till the peep of day
> Goes shouldering onward and with ready hook
> Progs oft to ford the sloughs that nearly meet
> Across the lands -- croodling and thin to view
> His loath dog follows -- stops and quakes and looks
> For better roads -- till whistled to pursue
> Then on with frequent jump he hirkles through

The opening line, *O for a pleasant book to cheat the sway/Of winter* tells us that the speaker in the poem wishes and longs to get lost in a good book that, in contrast to winter, offers joyous happiness. The reader of the good book is not an active participant, and the speaker, while calling for the book, sees it [the book] as a place of negative refuge. Someone or something *Listens and rubs his legs on corner seat*, a negative image that evokes a dog rubbing its hind legs together.[93] It is actually not clear who is doing the laughing, whether it's the book personified, or the reader of the book, or even winter itself enjoying the safety of being indoors. The dash in the second line elides over who is doing the laughing. For McKusick, "Mirth is the possession

[93]. In this section, I also look at his Gypsy Poems where Clare does not portray dogs positively.

of the idle rich who have money and leisure to spend on books" (274) so one assume along with him that it is the wealthy who are enjoying what for the poor is torturous winter's day.[94]

What is clear though is that the shepherd and the dog are suffering through the cold stormy weather. The shepherd has a hacking cough and as he struggles against nature, his starving dog is trailing him hunched over with cold. The dog keeps stopping to look for better roads, but not intelligently enough because the shepherd has to keep whistling to beckon it along, and it trails unevenly on. The shepherd and his dog are not heroic figures, but rather two miserable figures acted upon by nature. They are not part of nature, but rather its victims. The poem is asking a question – is the world of the pleasant book better than the real world of being a shepherd out in a winter storm?

The question is not resolved; but the reader or wisher for the good book, winter itself, the shepherd and the dog are not sympathetic figures – winter is cruel, and all those caught up in it are pathetic figures. McKusick offers a different reading. Where I see the poem condemning the reader, in the poem as well the one holding the poem (idle rich for McKusick) while casting the shepherd and his dog as pathetic figures being acted upon by nature, he argues that, "Clare implicitly contrasts the narcissistic individualism of the literate class with the communal solidarity of the laboring class, here again expressed in robust dialect words such as "hirkles," which in this context refers to the jerky, uneven motion of the dog as it jumps from side to side" (275). The point is that whether one gives the poem a decidedly political reading, or one that sees it more as a poem suggesting the futility of both learning and action, it is hard to imagine this poem as a poem of place. This poem effortlessly goes beyond itself and speaks to a world beyond the localized winter in Helpston as experienced by Clare.

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[94] . McKusick immediately reads it as poem that offers an ideological critique of classes (see page 274).

Zimmerman recognizes the danger of Barrel's singular reading of Clare as primarily a poet of place – Helpston, the place, takes the place of biography and becomes the lens through which his work is read:

> Vestiges of these accounts of a poet who subordinated himself to nature survive even in groundbreaking critical work, such as John Barrell's studies of Clare. Barrell is responsible for a paradigm shift in Clare studies: he challenged a tenacious attention to the late, philosophical poems at the expense of the earlier, richly descriptive verse. Yet he did so by offering a new biographical portrait of Clare and a new model of identity drawn from the poems: both poet and poems are characterized by a single salient characteristic, a profound "sense of place." (325)

The result for Zimmerman is that "a familiar portrait of the poet as overly receptive to his natural environment continues to haunt even the most provocative work in Clare studies" (326). Whereas poetry functions as a metaphor, thus giving content beyond itself, poets of nature and place are simply chroniclers, anthropologists, ornithologists and botanists.

The Translatability of Clare's Gypsy Poems

For most critics, Clare was political but beyond that, there is very little agreement on the nature of his politics[95] – was he a radical opposed to the further pauperization of the poor through enclosure acts? Alternatively, was he a conservative happy to bide his time to climb up

[95]. Sarah Zimmerman warns that Clare has been seen as, "either a "peasant poet," modest to the point of self-effacement and content to serve nature by presenting her chaste beauty to readers, or he is an embattled working-class man, a figure of resistance embroiled in a long, futile struggle with his antagonists, who include his patrons, publishers, a fickle reading public, and repressive social forces" (319). Yet, even with that warning, it is possible to say that Clare was undeniably politically aware of his times. For example, Bate writes that Clare, "took an interest in the anti-slavery campaign and on one occasion promised to write a poem for an anthology on the subject. "Slavery is an abominable traffic', he wrote, 'and they who sanction it cannot be Christians for it is utterly at variance with religion and nature'" (339).

the social mobility ladder? And more importantly, to what extent are his politics or the politics of the day carried in his poetry? How central are they to his aesthetics?

Not surprisingly, John Barrel ties Clare's politics directly to his being a poet of place. He argues that Clare's "sense of place, was inevitably opposed to the ideology of enclosure, which sought to de-localise, to take away the individuality of a place" (122). In this sense, Clare could not help being political because Helpston, the place he wrote about, was under siege from the enclosures. If he was going to be true to place, then rallying against the encroachment was only logical – his politics were organically tied to place.

John Lucas sees Clare as essentially growing into becoming an ambivalent, or more precisely, a divided political poet embodying two competing interests. Clare, he argues:

> …begins as poet by imagining, as a prevailing commonplace about the identity of 'The Poet' made possible for him to imagine, that he is the most impossibly privileged of beings: an entirely free man. He very soon discovers this to be an illusion because many of his poems are made out his experience of being a rural laborer and those with the 'intellectual means of production' simply prevent him from saying what he wants to say…He can escape from this predicament only by conspiring to become a 'peasant' – that is, a specific literary 'type', or by identifying with values opposed to the interests of the class from which he comes. (Storey, 153)

The result is that Clare's prose and poetry betray the dilemma of having to "align himself with a process that denies him his voice as a day-laborer and the experiences that belong to his Helpston life" yet he can only "join the literary culture" as a peasant poet. In other words, it is as if he must become a peasant poet without the substance of class and enclosure politics. He is expected to play the role of a peasant without peasant politics. For Sarah Zimmerman in

Romanticism, Lyricism, and History, "there is nothing inherently political about Clare's treatments of loss, even in poems that address the alterations wrought by enclosure. When an agent of change is identified as "inclosure," or "wealth," then the poems take on overtly political overtones. Yet, in a poem like "Helpston," it is difficult to assign blame because the causes of change are two-fold: the poet's own maturation and the processes of enclosure" (153). For Zimmerman, the politics of longing in John Clare's poetry can be attributed to the nostalgia that comes with growing and looking back. With or without the enclosures, and with change being inevitable, the act of looking back, the longing for an unchanged fixed environment, will be political if it also entails a rage against those changes.

However, Clare's poem *The Mores* is a political poem to the extent that it is not just looking back at what once was, it is also speaking to the continuing effects of the enclosure. In other words, the memory of what was before the enclosure of Helpston is juxtaposed with the present day effects of the enclosure. It is a poem of a memory of something that is also present. The swamp plains were:

> Still meeting plains that stretched them far away
> In uncheckt shadows green brown and grey
> Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
> Nor fence of ownership crept in between
> To hide the prospect of the following eye
> Its only bondage was the circling sky (5-10, 167)

Unbounded freedom here seems to me to have two meanings – the first one is the more literal in that there was nothing to hold one back from wandering across the vast moors. However, because unbounded freedom translates to freedom that is free, and words like ownership and bondage follow, I suggest that, right from the beginning, the poem is also talking about human slavery and freedom. Indeed the human players and costs soon follow:

> Inclosure came and trampled on the grave

> Of labor rights and left the poor a slave
> And memorys pride ere want wealth did bow
> Is both the shadow and substance now (18-21, 168)

The enclosures further pauperized the poor, hence the movement from being poor to being a slave. Now memories are both the remembrance of life before the enclosures as well as the thing itself that has been taken. Memory is, physically, the moors. The poem then kicks into a high political gear by condemning the greed that pauperizes:

> Mulberry bushes where the boy would run
> To fill his hands with fruit are grabbed and done
> And hedgrow briars – flowers lovers overjoyed
> Came and got flower pots – these are all destroyed (40-45,168)

Those that enclose are not just after labor, but are also plundering fruits that previously grew in nature for anyone's plucking. The enclosures reflect the state of mind of those doing the enclosing, "*In little parcels little minds to please*" (50, 168). The enclosers are the philistines:

> Each little tyrant with his little sign
> Shows where man claims earth glows no more divine
> On paths to freedom and to childhood dear
> A board sticks up to notice 'no road here' (66 – 70, 169)

The physical path that might have wound around the mores is privatized and gated. However, the physical path is also a symbol of freedom. The little tyrants are enclosing physical roads, symbolic of freedom. The poem continues:

> This with the poor scared freedom bade good bye
> And much the[y] feel it in the smothered sigh
> And birds and trees without a name [75-89, 169]

The enclosers cannot name that which they do not know or care to know and therefore nature ends up being nameless. The poor acknowledge their lost freedom with a sigh – the poor cannot even have full expression. The poem ends by raising the specter of resistance:

> All sighed when lawless laws enclosure came
> And dreams of plunder in such rebel schemes

Have found too truly that they were but dreams (79-80, 169)

The logic of enclosure is one of law and order – but in reality, it foments resistance by creating the conditions that make it necessary. At the same time Clare does not support the 'rebel schemes' – in as much as the enclosures are misguided and devastating to both nature and the already poor, resistance is just a dream.

"The Mores" is political without being a political poem, just as it is a poem about place without making Clare a poet of place. That is, it is not an ideologically consistent poem that takes a stand with the peasants even as it rallies against enclosure. Nor is it a poem that sees nature as innocent and static. Rather, it is a question about the nature of that change – is it one that renders birds and people nameless things or one that respects their freedom? What is interesting is not whether Clare was political or not, but rather how he was political, or more precisely the contradictions of his politics.

The best way of drawing out his contradictory political view is by looking at his ambivalent voice and asking the question, from where does he speak? Helsinger on "The Mores" argues that he "couches that protest in the language of the middle-class viewer" (515). I argue here that Clare's ambivalence, or what Barrel called divided response, where on the one hand he wants to be a Poet without being a peasant, but on the other hand can only be let into the literary world as a peasant poet, is best expressed in his Gypsy Poems. The Gypsies provide him with a site where he can practice his Englishness – by pointing at the gypsies, Clare's identity as an Englishman is affirmed, and his being a peasant subsumed under the larger and more coveted English national identity. In these poems, Clare adopts the persona of the elite literary poet and looks down upon the Gypsies as he dissects their lives. He regards the Gypsies as the upper

class regards the peasant – vulgar, uncultured and part of nature. [96] The poem, *Gipseys Camp*, begins:

> How oft on Sunday's when Id tramp
> My rambles led me to a gipseys camp
> Where the real effigies of midnight hags
> Wi tawny smoaked flesh and tattered rags
> Uncooth brimd hat and weather beaten cloak
> Neat the wild shelter of a notty oak (1-6, 47)

On Sunday, the day of rest, after presumably having a productive six days, the speaker decides to go for an aimless walk. Tramp and ramble are synonyms for aimless, except that it is midnight, giving tramp an added meaning of what today we would call *slumming* - the speaker is tramping about in search of a good but unusual time. It is also interesting that even though it is the speaker doing the aimless walking; the words tramp and ramble are attached to the gypsies. It is like a horror show coming to life as the effigies become animated by old hags. The gypsies do not have anything of importance to say; the speaker listens to a *gibberish tale so quaintly spoke* (14, 47). The speaker in the poem draws the Gypsies as caricatures:

> She furious stampt her shooless foot aground
> Wipd be her sut black hair wi clenching fist
> While thro her yellow teeth the spittle hist
> Swearing by all her lucky powers of fate (24-28, 48)

The *old sybill,* the oracle or prophet, is shoeless and her hair is as black as soot - a description that associates her not only with poverty but also with filth. Soot (*sut)* as a poetic image becomes a by-product of consumption, vulgar or lowly consumption. She has yellow teeth and believes in fetishes. This is not a place of rationality, and given the controlled voice narrating the poem, she is the anti-thesis of a rationale mind. In essence, Clare's gaze is one of a

[96]. See, Trumpener, Katie. "The Time of the Gypsies: A "People without History" in the Narratives of the West." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Identities (Summer, 1992):843-884.

condescending fraternity, the same gaze the English peasant would have cast on peasants relaxing on a Sunday after a long week in the fields.

The closely named *The Gipsy Camp,* also runs along the same lines of fraternal condescension:

> The snow falls deep; the Forest lies alone:
> The boy goes hasty for his load of brakes,
> Then thinks upon the fire and hurries back;
> The Gipsy knocks his hands and tucks them up,
> And seeks his squalid camp, half hid in snow,
> Beneath the oak, which breaks away the wind,
> And bushes close, with snow like hovel warm:
> There stinking mutton roasts upon the coals,
> And the half-roasted dog squats close and rubs,
> Then feels the heat too strong and goes aloof;
> He watches well, but none a bit can spare,
> And vainly waits the morsel thrown away:
> 'Tis thus they live – a picture to the place;
> A quiet, pilfering, unprotected race.

The gypsies are living in isolation, out in the forest in a "squalid" camp. Squalid recalls "Naturally foul and repulsive", "loathsome," and "morally repulsive or degraded.[97]" The mutton is rotting and the dog, by the fire is masturbating, but it gets too hot so he goes off to a distance and alert and dejected waits for one of the gypsies to cut him a piece, to no avail. The word pilfering is used as one of unwarranted judgment – in the poem we do not see the gypsies stealing. They are a "picture of the place" meaning that they are one with nature, part of the natural scene. Most importantly though, the gypsies lack agency. That they are quiet has two meanings: out in the forest no one can hear them, and they are politically without any sense of protest. The speaker emphasizes their vulnerability – they are without state or societal protection.

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[97]. Oxford English Dictionary. Second edition, 1989; online version December 2011. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/188128>; accessed 24 January 2012.

Because the actions in Clare's Gypsy poems take place at night, they generally lack a richness of details found in his other poems. The boy is just a boy. No details are offered and we do not get a sense of him as a character. The Gypsy in the poem is just a Gypsy and the dog just a dog. Clare does not look at them long enough to make out their distinct features – the poem is not about the gypsies but about Clare wielding the gaze of the English in order to subsume his pleasantness under the larger national identity.

In "The Gipsies Evening Blaze," unlike in some of the other gypsy poems, Clare does not make a moral judgment. Instead, he uses the scene in front of him, that of Gypsies by a fire, to reflect on himself:

> To me how wildly pleasing is that scene
> Which does present in evenings dusky hour
> A Group of Gipsies center'd on the green
> In some warm nook where Boreas has no power
> Where sudden starts the quivering blaze behind
> Short shrubby bushes nibbl'd by the sheep
> That alway on these shortsward pastures keep
> Now lost now shines now bending with the wind
> And now the swarthy Sybil kneels reclin'd
> With proggling stick she still renews the blaze
> Forcing bright sparks to twinkle from the flaze
> When this I view the all attentive mind
> Will oft exclaim (so strong the scene prevades)
> 'Grant me this life, thou spirit of the shades!' (9)

The gypsies have found a place where Boreas, the god of wind and winter, has no reach when suddenly a burst of wind finds its way and animates into movement both the shrubs and Sybil, the old prophetess who prods the fire back to life, allowing the speaker to see a few beautiful images as sparks fly. The poem is about the speaker using the scene for reflection. The speaker discovers, through his "attentive mind," that he wants the life before his eyes, the simple life of a gypsy.

The Gypsies are, to use a term from Hannah Arendt, “a minority without a state” (Arendt, 276) -- a people with a distinct culture and language not recognized by the state. Where Clare, hounded by enclosures and a society that viewed peasants as a ‘vulgar’ class, could have seen them as natural allies, he distances himself from them by adopting a middle-class gaze, as if the more he adopts a gaze that looks down upon them, the less he becomes the ‘vulgar’ peasant.

Conclusion: Clare’s Ambivalence

If we grant Clare translatability, it becomes possible to allow his poetry to speak metaphorically on the human condition, on philosophical and politics questions. It becomes possible to talk about his ambivalence toward the Gypsies. He is in relation to the Gypsies, a double mimic. By this, I mean that in relation to the elite, he is a powerless peasant who adopts their gaze in order to look down upon the gypsies. Homi Bhabha in “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” describes mimicry as:

> …the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers. (126)

Clare’s gaze mimics that of the elite. At the same time, a peasant calling gypsies a vulgar and a pilfering race undermines the class structures as Clare acts them out. More to the point, Clare’s view of the gypsies is an ambivalent one. Robert Young *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race* teases out the meaning of ambivalence and says that:

> Ambivalence is a key word for Bhabha, which he takes from psychoanalysis where it was first developed to describe a continual fluctuation between *wanting one thing and its*

> *opposite (also 'simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action')* [italics mine]. In making ambivalence the constitutive heart of his analysis, Bhabha has in effect performed a political reversal at a conceptual level in which the periphery – the borderline, the marginal, the unclassifiable, the doubtful – has become the equivocal, indefinite, indeterminate ambivalence that characterizes the center. (Young, 161)

The Gypsies repulse Clare to the extent that one feels there is an active hate – again, they are vulgar, they are dirty, their skeletal dogs masturbate, they have yellow teeth and the hags are fortune- tellers. At the same time, he is attracted to the Gypsies – he keeps coming back to them. He learns from them songs and sees nature through them. He admires their simplicity and laments about their lack of protection by law and society, he wishes for their life. If Clare, in relation to the Gypsies is claiming the center for himself, and in his disavowal of the Gypsies he appears to be equivocal, he is just as equally, unsure, and ", indeterminate" because he of his attraction to them.

Clare cannot be just a "poet of place," but rather must be seen as a poet who occupies an ambivalent space, at once political without ideological commitment and at the same time longing for upward social and literary mobility in a class-structured society. He protested the enclosures because they further excluded him. The gypsies gave him the opportunity to be included, and he took it. The references to enclosures and particularity to Helpston make Clare's poetry unique to him, yet the ambivalence expressed in his poetry is translatable across space and time. If we consider the effects of colonialism on African landscapes, the concepts of private property and pauperization, then not only is his experience translatable, but so is his poetic response. In this way, Clare can be in conversation with Tutuola, as are their critics.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Amos Tutuola: The African "Native' Writer and Translatability

Introduction

The critical reception that greeted Amos Tutuola's *Palm Wine Drinkard* revolved around several articulated and unarticulated concerns. The literary novel was being adapted from the West to carry African aesthetics – would its form be pliable enough? Related to this was the question of what role the African writer was going to play in the decolonization of Africa – and whether Tutuola's writing was part of the problem or the solution. The question of literary tradition was another central concern – Could Tutuola and his poor command of the English language lay a solid foundation for a literary tradition or was it, hearkening back to Obi Wali, leading to a dead end?[98]

In addition to the extrinsic questions that were more concerned with Tutuola's relationship to European and African aesthetics, there were intrinsic questions that emerged from the *PWD.* Was he merely chronicling Nigerian cultures by translating Yoruba folktales into English? Was *PWD* the work of a writer conscious of himself as a writer or the work of, echoing John Clare, a child of wonder? Was he a magical realist writer, or a folklorist? And to what extent was his English a detraction from or enhancement to aesthetics in *PWD*?

The traditional approach to analyzing Tutuola has been to divide literary criticism between European and African critics. For example, Bernth Lindfors in *Early West African Writers* argues that for Western critics:

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[98]. Harold Collins in his preface to *Amos Tutuola* captures the myriad of issues around Tutuola: What should a Nigerian English language for serious fiction look like? What should be the relations between the rich oral literatures of the African tribes to the new African literature in English? How should the European novel tradition influence the developing Nigerian novel? How should the modern Nigerian novel come to terms with the African past, especially the "superstitions" and the atrocities? (vii-viii)

> …the *Palm-Wine Drinkard* was a highly original work written by an untutored but extraordinary genius [while] many educated Nigerians looked down upon Tutuola and fretted that his imperfect control of English would come to be regarded by the outside world as typical of Nigerian speech and writing. (53)

This division between the two streams of criticism hearkens back to colonial education.[99] The colonial educationists saw African languages as necessary accessories to the teaching of English so the African students would not become alienated from their cultures. Africans, on the other hand, viewed the teaching of African languages as detracting from the real work of mastering English because as the language of power it was the only way up the social ladder. Many found pride in their mastery of English and for them, to display Tutuola's poor grasp of English to the world as an example of Nigerian literature was a source of shame. Tutuola was aware of this feeling of shame from the Nigerian educated elite in relation to his work, and he explains some of the negative criticism this way:

> Before, I don't know whether those people who were well educated were ashamed[100] of their own heritage. I wonder why they not want to write anything concerning their tradition. Even when the publisher passed the manuscript to the Yorubas who were in London by that time, to comment, or recommend, or say whatever they liked about the book, some said, "No, this is nonsense! They should not publish it". Yet some of them recommended that they should publish it – so many did…Now the people who

[99]. In the chapter, "Chirality and the Question of Standardized English in the Works of John Clare and Amos Tutuola," I look in depth at how colonial education shaped the African literary tradition.

[100]. Bernth Lindfors, *in Early West African Writers* writes about how S.O Biobaku, a postgraduate historian in London who was asked to comment on PWD's authenticity and he confirmed that it was indeed written by a Western African. (22)

> disrecommended this story are at the Universities of Lagos, Ibadan, Ife, and in the Eastern region. (Miao, 53)

Colonial education also portrayed African cultures as inferior, with nothing of aesthetic value, at least in relation to Western cultural production. African aesthetics were the byproduct of functionalism – masks were for ceremonies, drumming for communication and dances and music were ceremonial as well. Folktales had the express purpose of teaching moral lessons to the young. Oyekan Owomoyela, writing on the Western versus African reception of *PWD*, spells it out this way:

> Nigeria and West Africans were confounded for yet another reason, that the praises showered on Tutuola were inconsistent with what they had been taught – often by the same Westerners whose selected authors included the likes of Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Milton, Moliere, Dostoevsky, and Arthur Miller – about what consisted good literature. They had been led to believe that creative writing required a mastery of language, adeptness at plotting, ability to create believable characters, and a clear idea of the theme(s) the work will convey. (102)

The educated African elite greeted the elevation of *PWD* to the level of literature with derision because it violated, in content, form and language, aesthetic standards. To portray *PWD* as an aesthetic masterpiece was taken as further condescension of African people by Westerners. Steven Tobias also draws a line between Western and African critics, arguing that whereas the Western critics "initially reacted quite favorably towards the book and praised it for its rich, albeit "primitive," adherence to Yoruba oral folk traditions, African critics were generally less favorable (Tobias, 66)." The Nigerian elite were unhappy because:

> a "primitive" book, written in broken English by a lowly messenger, was being lauded in European intellectual circles as the pinnacle of Nigerian culture. In particular, with Nigerian political independence nearly in sight in the early 1950s, Tutuola's world of bogey-men was one that most educated Nigerians would have liked to purge forever from global perceptions of their country. (Lindfors 344)

In addition to language and content, there was the issue of decolonization. Nigeria was supposed to be moving to modernity. Nationalism in practice meant westernization that worked for Nigerians as opposed to benefiting the British. Tutuola was a throwback to the past that Nigerians were trying to leave behind.

Therefore, there is a solid base for dividing the African and Western criticism not only because they are coming from two different cultures but also because culture was a battlefield between the colonized and the colonizer. However, I prefer to approach the criticism thematically because, firstly, the critical reception, whether African or Western had two concerns as the starting point – Tutuola's use of English, and his 'bizarre' content. Through him, critics erroneously assumed that what was at stake was African history, its role in the present, its authentic portrayal of the African mind and the future of African literature.

Secondly, the divide between African and European literary critics is misleading: African critics did not all agree with each other about the reception of Tutuola, nor did the European critics always agree. Ultimately, what mattered was where each critic stood on the question of Standard English. For most critics, Standard English was the future; differences arose over how to make Standard English carry African content. The future was in modernization and westernization; the differences were over the role of African cultures within westernization.

Criticism of Tutuola therefore can be organized around several themes: The extent to which he was a conscious writer, the African writer as a political agent, the language of African literature, the extent to which Tutuola was laying a foundation for an African literary tradition, and eventually Tutuola's style. On each of these concerns, Tutuola like Clare ended up being denied translatability - but with a twist. Not only was he not translatable to the Westerners engaged in anthropological readings of his work, he was also untranslatable to the African elite.

Tutuola as an authentic unconscious writer

When it was first published, Tutuola's *PWD* was read as a piece of anthropology or as forensic evidence to show the state of African psychology and linguistics.[101] To those critics, his writing did not have literary merit or any intrinsic aesthetic dimensions to it: Tutuola was not a conscious writer; he simply transcribed oral stories to capture the real African mind and imagination. Cecil T. Lewis in his review of *Life in the Bush of Ghosts* tells his readers to:

> Take a modern Nigerian. Give him six years of formal education. Let him with rampant and febrile imagination enclose within a rudimentary fictional framework his tribal lore – a lore in which mythology and reality are often indistinguishable for those whose culture itself is a mélange. Result: a coupling of the predominantly primitive with outcroppings of sophistication in a book to delight the ethnologist, the psychologist, the theologist, the linguist. (116)

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[101]. As with Clare, Tutuola's editors had made this reading possible through their editorial choices and wanted him to remain the native, as opposed to a literary writer. Gail Low in "The Natural Artist: Publishing Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in Postwar Britain" writes that:

> In a letter dated July 6 1961, Pringle [Tutuola's publisher] revealed that his personal preferences were for Tutuola's first two books, which were in his view more "purely African" than his later work. Whereas in an earlier phase the publisher, reviewer, and critic could capitalize on the discursive ambivalence that characterized the natural artist, the distinction between the anthropological and the literary seems to have widened. The more literary Tutuola became, the less his works were valued and the more irksome his failings became. (Low, 30)

Lewis is not alone in seeing Tutuola's work in purely functional terms. Geoffrey Parrinder, in his introduction to *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts,* declares that the "anthropologist and the student of comparative religion will find here much of the unrecorded mythology of West Africa. There are themes running through the book, as to the nature of death, fear and disease" (Tutuola, 13). In the larger colonial framework, white people generally saw Africans as lacking in civilization and being child-like.[102] For example, Selden Rodman in a 1953 *New York Times* review of *PWD* wrote:

> If you like Annia Livia Plurabelle, Alice in Wonderland and the poems of Dylan Thomas, the chances are you will like this novel, though probably not for the reasons having anything to do with the author's intentions. For Tutuola is not a revolutionist of the word, not a mathematician, not a surrealist. He is a true primitive. And the pleasure of a sophisticated reader will derive from his un-willed style and trance-like narrative is akin to the pleasure generated by popular painters like Rousseau or Obin…"…only a dullard who has trapped his childhood under several mountains of best-selling prose could fail to respond to Tutuola's naive poetry. (15)

For Rodman, [103] the joy of reading Tutuola is in the unconscious writing. Tutuola has no writer's agenda, no style or viewpoint he is trying to get across, he just slips into a trance and transcribes words onto a page. To appreciate Tutuola, readers have to tap into their inner child. "Naivete" and "child-like," suggesting an unconscious writer, are staples in Tutuola's early criticism. This

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[102]. For example, Antony West in a 1953 New Yorker review wrote that Tutuola is a "natural story-teller" and his "principle strength" is in "the lack of inhibition in an uncorrupted innocence" (17).

[103]. After telling his readers that Tutuola has "no connection at all with the European rational and Christian traditions," Seldon concludes that, "It is only possible to envy Mr. Tutuola his good luck in being a castaway on a little island in time where he can be archaic without being anachronistic" (18). For him, if one is writing without being unencumbered by rational thought and deliberateness, then what is being produced is unmediated, close to nature – primordial.

line of criticism ended up legitimizing the colonial project, just as Clare's early criticism sought to naturalize class structures.

The misreading of Tutuola as an unconscious writer was a result of using a European aesthetic standard to critique African aesthetics. Eric Larrabee in "The Palm-Wine Drinkard Searches for a Tapster" took the Eurocentric aesthetic standard of literature a step further and questioned whether Tutuola could be called a writer at all:

> As an exercise in imagination, try to conceive of an author who (1) probably has never met another author, (2) owns no books, (3) is not known to his daily acquaintances as an author, (4) has no personal contact with his publisher, (5) is not certain where his book is on sale, and (6) does not think of himself as an author. (13)

This assumption is erroneous on several levels. If Tutuola's sources are in orature, and if it is true that, as Tutuola himself acknowledged, a kernel of what was to become the *Palm Wine Drinkard* was narrated to him by an old man[104] (a Palm Wine Tapster himself), then we can say that he was in contact with an artist of orature. Larrabee did not consider folk-tales and the art of storytelling as valid source material for the written text.

Indeed, for many critics, closely related to the question of whether Tutuola was a conscious writer was the extent to which his writing was original or plagiarized. There were two strands: That he copied or transcribed from oral stories and therefore should not claim sole authorship, and that he plagiarized stories written in Yoruba by Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa.[105]

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[104]. In reference to this, Bernth Lindfors writes, "The trouble with his new job was that often there was nothing at all for him to do. So to keep himself busy during office hours, he started to write down on scrap paper the stories he heard on Sundays from an old man on a palm plantation." (Lindfors, 1970)

[105]. At the University of Palermo, Italy, Tutuola was asked by Prof. Goller: "How do you relate to Fanugwa?" And he responded:

> His town is far away from my own. Even, I was very like this [gesturing] when I saw his book at the school. They brought the book to the school, I read only one page. Then I gave it back to the owner. (Miao, 165)

For Harold Collins, Tutuola "adapts his folk material freely for his own purposes (54)." Collins demonstrates this using the episode of the *Complete Gentleman*, arguing that while it is true the story exists in various forms in other cultures:

> Tutuola has contributed a great deal elaboration on the willful beauty's fascination with the handsome stranger and that stranger's extraordinary beauty… [The] Drinkard's careful "investigation to the skull's family house," the conditions of the lady's imprisonment, the exciting rescue with its transformations and Drinkard flying through the air with her, the subsequent removal of the noisy cowrie from the lady's neck, and the cure of her dumbness and lack of appetite. (55)

It seems to me that Collins is right in seeing him as adapting[106] *PWD* from already existing stories. That is, Tutuola takes the oral story and improvises over it. It becomes an inspiration. Bernth Lindfors in *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola* writes that Tutuola "admitted that he always enjoyed hearing and telling folktales" (279) and quotes Tutuola on various occasions telling interviewers that "stories exist objectively and he merely sets them down" and after feeling "written out" he planned to return to his hometown "to rest and draw fresh inspiration from listening to old people re-telling Yoruba legends" (280). It is undeniable that he is greatly indebted to Yoruba folktales. This does not constitute mere translation, or plagiarism, because he imposes his imagination over the folktales to create a work different in form and content.

Larrabee's suggestion that a man who owned no books could not be a writer was, again, a narrow application of European aesthetic standards. Tutuola, in contrast, was aware that orature could serve as a literary source. When Prof. Gorlier, in the interview following Tutuola's 1990 Italy lectures, asked him whether he "studied British literature at school" he responded:

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[106]. Eric Robinson, in response to Babasola's charge that Tutuola was merely copying from oral stories and more specifically from Fanugwa, argued that, "It is no detriment to Mr. Tutuola's world that he has woven well-known stories into this his own version of a spiritual pilgrimage. Many of Chaucer's fabliaux were equally well known in his own time." (Robinson, Editorial, 33) While this is no adequate defense, Chaucer was himself accused of plagiarism, it does raise an important question in terms of the extent to which writers can use or reference existing popular stories, fables, and myths in their own writing.

> Well, of course I can't say yes. The time that I attended school, we did not know what was called literature. Though we pupils told folktales, whatever we knew….Not only European literature teaches to write, or to become a writer. Not at all. (165)

Yet even with that claim, Bernth Lindfors argues that Tutuola, both in school and much later, would have come across western writing[107] that would influence his own style. In the essay *Amos Tutuola: Debts and Assets*, he states that:

> Tutuola claims that he read only textbooks while in school, but some of these must have been literary works. It is known, for example, that Aesop's fables were read in Nigerian schools in the 1930's and that John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* was available in Nigeria in a simplified English version as early as 1937. It is also known that at least twenty-six school books classified as 'General Literature' were published in Yoruba between 1927 and 1937, and that many others have been published since. Moreover, in recent years Tutuola has acknowledged that there are many stories like his written in Yoruba and has admitted in a letter that he read *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Arabian Nights* in 1948, just two years before *The Palm Wine Drinkard.* (323)

A little stretch of imagination, or even a little generosity, on the part of critics such as Larrabee would have allowed them to take into account that the standard of authorship they were using was not universal but rather rooted in a European tradition.

Whereas in the earlier essay his argument was that Tutuola was not an artist by virtue of having no exposure to literature, Larrabee in a later essay, *Amos Tutuola: A Problem in*

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[107]. Steven Tobias in "Amos Tutuola and the Colonial Carnival" also sees Western influence in Tutuola writing. Specifically his use of:

> …capitalized chapter headings such as "THE INVESTIGATOR'S WONDERFUL WORK IN THE SKULL'S FAMILY'S HOUSE"… also hints at a Western influence. Tutuola probably derived this practice either from reading boy's adventure books or eighteenth-century novels, or quite possibly from reading English-style newspapers. The headings, as well as much of his phrasing throughout the book, without question possess both the appearance and tone of tabloid headlines (Tobias, 70).

Translation, maintained that Tutuola had no notion of himself as a writer. He wrote, "Tutuola simply does not see himself as we see him as a recognized writer or even, in our terms, as a writer at all" (41). He continued on to argue:

> Though we, in this country, can speak of the alienation of the artist, it is difficult for us to imagine an alienation so complete that the artist does not even know that he is an artist. In the first place, Tutuola does not think of himself as the creator of his stories. Stories exist objectively; he merely sets them down. When I asked him if he planned to write more, the question had no meaning to him. "But there are many stories," he said. In the second, he has no internalized standards by which to measure his own virtues; he does not "know" what it is he seems to us to know. We attribute merits to him on which he cannot very well congratulate himself, since neither he nor those whom he normally encounters are aware of them as merits. (Larrabee, 42)

For Larrabee, Tutuola is a conduit through which oral stories are set down in writing. Tutuola is not conscious of himself as a writer and he does not consciously manipulate language. Talking with Tutuola about his critical reception and the praise of his technique has no meaning to Tutuola because his labors are natural. And Tutuola does not exercise his imagination over the folktales, instead just transcribing them.[108]

At the most basic level, Larrabee's charge that Tutuola did not think of himself as an author has no meaning unless critics are to take authors as the final authorities of their work. Tutuola's own statements directly contradict the suggestion that he did not think of himself as a

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[108]. Eric Larrabee writes that Tutuola asked him for books ,"A survey of Economic Education" and Aldous Huxley's *Devils of Loudun* and "…other books which contain stories like that of the P.W.D…which are written by either West Africans, White men or Negroes, etc." [40-41]. Why is Tutuola asking him for books comparable to P.W.D.? Does he consider them peers? Is it so he can learn from them? Larrabee does not stop to ask any of these questions.

writer. Like most writers, Tutuola had a creative process that he followed. In his second lecture in Italy, he said:

> Now, if I want to write a book first of all, before I start, I collect materials. I sit down and think, for many days: how or what can I write? By the way, what title should I give my story? I will think all that. Then, I being to make a sketch. Sometimes I cancel that sketch. Another idea will come to my mind. Then I write another sketch, until I get to the words that I require. (Maio, 49)

Here, he was describing the process of writing, from research, to brainstorming, to working through multiple drafts. Later in the lecture, he was more precise about the creative process:

> If you want to become a writer, you should be able to endure the hardships of it. To begin a story is very, very difficult, because you do not know what to write immediately. You'll be confused. Sometimes I stand up, begin to walk up and down, thinking in memory what to write. And then I sit down, raise up my head. What will I write? How could I begin this story? With what? Then, later in a week or two, the idea will come to my mind. Once I form the first page of the story, then everything is okay. What will come to my mind is just like a vision, as if I am seeing what I am writing. And by that time I'll go ahead. So, writing needs strong imagination and endurance. If you cannot endure, I don't think you will be a good writer. (Maio, 52)

Equally important to having a strong imagination is a writer's ability to endure. I do not think Tutuola was referring to physical deprivations – he meant the ability to go through the difficult process of germinating an idea and the torture of using one's imagination to turn that germ into a story. In other words, writing is hard work – both mentally and imaginatively.

The African Writer as a Political Agent

Tutuola is very clear about why he started writing – he did not want the Nigerian youth to forget their past; he wanted to keep the past alive. In the second of six University of Palermo lectures in 1990, he told the audience that:

> I noticed that our traditional instruments of amusement were abandoned by young people. But they showed much interest in the foreign instruments which were just brought to the country at that time – instruments like organ, radio, TV, piano and so forth...Well, when I noticed our traditions were dying down, then it came through my head, my brain, and moreover, I wasn't happy to let our tradition die away like that! – then it came to my mind to write some of those folktales in form of a story, with my imagination. (Maio, 48)

He stood on the side of African culture against the growing influence of Western culture. Yet, generally speaking, when the nationalists referred to the "past," it was not the past of ghosts and palm-wine 'drinkards;' it was a decidedly political past. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* outlines several stages that the African intellectual would have to go through in order to become useful in the anti-colonial struggle. The first stage was complete identification with colonial culture. (222) The second stage finds the intellectual trying "to remember what he is." (222) In the last stage "which is called the fighting phase, the native after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people" (222). African intellectuals contemporary to Tutuola considered themselves in the fighting stage, whereas Tutuola was somewhere between the first two stages. His decision to write in 'broken' English cast him in the first stage. His decision to write Yoruba content put him in the second stage. In the second stage, the dissociation starts and the intellectual:

> …sets up high value on the customs, traditions, and the appearances of his people; but his inevitable painful experience only seems to be a banal search for exoticism. The sari becomes sacred, and shoes that come from Paris or Italy are left in favor pampooties. (Fanon 221)

Tutuola's past made no direct comment on the politics of the day. His was restoration of a past culture without any call to political consciousness, or to cultural and political insurgency. Nevertheless, to him, he had fulfilled his stated mission. A little later in the Palermo lecture, he said that:

> Since then we all – especially young people – have much adopted a European way of life. But since I wrote my book and younger people read it, it woke them up. They all started to write this, to write that, which means I called attention back to our tradition, and it worked well. I can just mention Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. There are so many now! I've read some, not all of them. So, now everybody is just trying to bring out our tradition things. If you go to Wole Soyinka's house, or Achebe's house, you'll see everything. If you want to drink, you drink from calabash. You sit down on the mat, as our old people did in those days. That means, well, that though my book is small, but it revived our young people. (Maio, 49)

There is irony that Tutuola cast Soyinka and Achebe solidly in the second phase. Here, Tutuola was making two bold claims: that he had influenced the content of emerging literature to carry African traditions, and that he influenced the younger westernized Nigerians to go back to some traditional practices. Citing Achebe and Soyinka, giants of Nigerian literature at the time of his lectures in 1990, he claimed that he had returned them as writers and citizens back to their culture.

Yet most of Tutuola's contemporary Nigerian (and, more broadly, African) writers and intellectuals felt that the novel (and novelists) in Africa had a lot of work to do beyond Tutuola's vision of renewing African traditional practices. The novel, and novelists, had to do the work of decolonization by contributing to national consciousness and by carrying African culture while simultaneously presenting Africans to European readers. In this fighting stage, the writer had the duty to "shake the people." No matter where one stood on the question of writer as a revolutionary versus writer offering a mirror to society, it was a given that literature as well as the writer had a socio-political role to play.

In his essay *The Novelist as Teacher*, Chinua Achebe argues that for him, his role as a writer is to "help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (Achebe, 105). A little later, he argues that the "writer cannot be excused from task of re-education and regeneration that must be done" and then concludes that:

> I would be satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I have set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections- was not one long night savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. (105)

In other words, for Achebe rolling back the myths used to justify colonialism was an integral part of the African writer's mission. The writer in short had a duty to speak out against the sort of internalized racism and belief in cultural inferiority that Africans had inherited from colonialism. Colonial education made possible by Christian missions had savaged the African culture and history. The writer had to restore the past. Achebe's mission sounds a lot like Tutuola's yet he is judged differently because he is taken as a writer who is conscious of his own writing, one who is educated, writes realist fiction in standard English albeit Africanized, and is conscious of his role as a writer in the larger political process of decolonization.

In *Writing Against Neocolonialism,* Ngugi Wa Thiong'o argues that African writers had gone through "the age of the anti-colonial struggle; the age of independence; and the age of neocolonialism." The African writer

> …was born on the crest of this anti-colonial struggle and world-wide revolutionary ferment. The anti-imperialist energy and optimism of the masses found its way into the writing of the period…It was Africa explaining itself, speaking for itself, and interpreting its past. It was Africa rejecting its past as drawn by the artists of imperialism. The writer even flaunted his right to use the language of the former colonial master anyway he liked. No apologies. No begging. The Caliban of the world had been given European languages and he was going to use them even to subvert the master. (158)

In this context, Tutuola was not a political writer – he did not write against colonialism or imperialism. Tutuola with his 'broken' English could not even flaunt his right to use the colonizer's language, because the kind of flaunting that talked back required mastery of the language. In this sense of a writer with a clear stated political mission contributing to a literature of protest, Tutuola was simply off the radar.

The Question of Language - Yoruba in English?

Criticism around Tutuola and his non-standard English revolved around whether he was writing in Nigerian pidgin, transcribing Yoruba into English, that is, transposing Yoruba linguistic rules to English grammar, or whether he was attempting to write in proper English and fell short. In *Amos Tutuola: Debts and Assets*, Bernth Lindfors[109] sees Tutuola's English as being deeply influenced by Yoruba. He writes:

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[109]. Lindfors, Bernth. *Amos Tutuola: Debts and Assets.* Cahiers d'Études Africaines, Vol. 10, (1970), 306-334

> Unorthodox constructions such as "I had no other work more than to drink," "I could not do any work more than to drink," "he had no other work more than to tap," and "we did not know other money, except COWRIES" are taken directly from Yoruba. (Lindfors, 316; 1970)

Johnson Babasola in a 1954 letter to the editor disavowed Tutuola accusing him of "largely translating Yoruba ideas into English in almost the same sequence as they occur to his mind (Lindfors, 1975, 31). Rejecting the idea that Tutoula is writing in pidgin or a dialect, A. Afolayan in a 1971 essay, "Language and Sources of Amos Tutuola" argues that Tutuola's language was Yoruba English, "in the sense that it represents the expression of Yoruba deep grammer with English surface grammar o Yoruba systems and/or structures in English words" (Afolayan; 194). Indeed, in the 1962 Makerere Conference one of issues on the table was how to carry African thought and culture from African languages into European languages. The conclusion reached according to Obi Wali was that an African writer should "think and feel in his own language and then look for an English transliteration approximating the original" (283). But, Wali, argued that transliteration will lead to a dead end because the:

> …'original' which is spoken of here is the real stuff of literature and the imagination, and must not be discarded in favor of a copy which as the passage admits, is merely an approximation. (283)

Tutuola however was not thinking about moving from an original to a copy, he understood his process as one in which the original was also the copy, or rather where the original was in the copy – he understood his process as literally creating an English Language that was also Yoruba. In this way, he would be able to preserve the original Yoruba meaning and flavor. To explain his "changing the Yoruba dialect into the English language" he said:

> I use the way the Yoruba speak their language in English as well, though it is wrong to use it in English. Though it's not good, or correct grammar, but I use it like that. For example, in English, they say, "When I saw that I could not go…" But you know when the Yoruba say something, or look at something, or think to do something, we say, "When I saw that I would not be able to go…" That is wrong in English for those who are well educated. It is wrong, they won't use it like that. But that is the Yoruba dialect, the way we speak. It is wrong, but I use it. They understand what I mean by that. (Miao, 50)

However, the problem is that he did not know enough English to make this happen. In the example he gives above, I do not see much difference between - "When I saw that I could not go…" and "When I saw that I would not be able to go…" He sees the former as the correct English version and the latter as the non-standard Yoruba rendered English. As fragments, pending context, there is nothing fundamentally different between the two.

Unlike translation where meaning or rhythm might be lost, in transliterating, Tutuola argued that he could stay as close to the Yoruba original as possible. An audience member in his Eighth Lecture at the University of Tulin asked him - "But do you have a problem of how English can express what you are saying?" Tutuola responded:

> Look we have so many takes and other stories, which if you would tell them in English wouldn't be good at all. Just like Fagunwa's stories. Fagunwa was a M.A. in English. Yet he wrote all his books in the Yoruba language. After than, one man, Wole Soyinka, trying his best, translated one book into English, but it was not good. The taste had been lost…so, well, I try my best not to affect my stories in English. Though its not my own

> language I adopted, I try my best to use it in a way that it does not affect my story. (Miao, 148)

In translation terms, what Tutuola is doing is creating a trot where the words and sentence structure in the source language are matched in the same order as in the target language. It is from the trot that the translation can then be done. Taken this way, Tutuola's writing functions like incomplete translation

Afolayan is closest to giving a more basic key to Tutuola's English when he argues that "Tutuola's English is 'Yoruba English' in the sense that its representative of the English of Yoruba users at a point o the scale of bi-lingualism" (Lindfors, 1975, 194). Because of his interrupted education Tutuola's English in PWD is that of a "user with about Secondary Class Two education.[110] Here in is Tutuola's problem: He knew enough about the movement from Yoruba to English to know that nuances would get lost in translation. But he did not know enough of the target language to consciously and effectively manipulate it so that the Yoruba original was not lost in translation.

Reading Tutuola through his physical looks and body language

As with Clare, Tutuola's early critics, mostly Western, were obsessed with the physical demeanor of the writer. Harold Collins titled the first chapter of his otherwise serious treatment of Tutuola "The Shy Yoruba." He described him as looking "rather like our Afro-Americans" and added that it should not be "surprising since many of our black Americans have Yoruba ancestors" (23). In a swift move, Collins glossed over the violent slave trade that disrupted African societies while at the same time revealing his audience to be white Americans, hence

[110]. Tutuola like Clare continues working on his grammar and language use and Afolayan argues that in the later novels, his English has improved to that of a "user with Secondary Class Four education" (Lindfors, 1975:199).

"our Afro-Americans." Here, Collins was telling the Western reader that the shy Yoruba, writing "devilish tales" in strange English was already familiar if read through the filter of "our Afro-Americans." Tutuola's physical looks as deployed here were not mere descriptors; they established racial hierarchy in the same way that Clare's physical looks were used to rank him within the British class system.

The Nigerian Correspondent[111] whom Collins relied on to draw his composite said that Tutuola "looks like a thousand other junior government clerks. He seems much younger than his thirty-four years. His speech is slow and diffident, and his manner shyly polite" (35). For the correspondent, Tutuola was not an individual, but rather a Type of African – his age could not be deciphered, and he was easily lost in a sea of colonized workers. Is it possible that his speech was slow and lacking confidence only when speaking English? The Correspondent did not tell the reader. On Tutuola's shyness, Larrabee said the following:

> I had asked to have an interview with the author at the U.S. Consulate, which may have been a mistake, for he was painfully shy and probably suspicious of my motives. The conversation was uncomfortable and inconclusive for both of us. It only occurred to me later that he might never have been interviewed before, and I wonder what he made of it all. (Lindfors, 13)

It did not occur to Larrabee that he might have been a terrible interviewer – instead the blame for the painful interview is on Tutuola alone. Secondly, at the height of British colonialism and Nigerian nationalism, interviewing him in the U.S. Embassy should have been reason enough for

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[111]. Collins relies on *"Portrait: A Life in the Bush of Ghosts" by an anonymous writer* simply referred to as a Nigerian *Correspondent. See, Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*. Ed. Bernth Lindfors. Washington: Three Continents. 1975:35-38.

Tutuola to be suspicious of his motives. As an interviewer, Larrabee also failed, in that he did not put his subject at ease. To conclude his portrait of Tutuola, he wrote:

> I went to the Labour Department later, to get him to sign my copy of his book, and found him seated in a corner in his loose-fitting uniform, asleep. I had to get to him past row on row of bespectacled Nigerians, sitting at their desks in bureaucratic self-satisfaction and palpably annoyed at the breach of decorum in a white man's calling on a messenger. He asked me what I wanted him to write and then, after signing the inscription he said: "I think, when you reach there, the U.S.A., you write a letter to me." I said I would, but why did he want me to? "So I know you not forget me." (Lindfors, 14)

Larrabee is conscious of his whiteness as a symbol of power in a colonial setting and this reads like a white man's fantasy of a first meeting with Africans. He walks across a sea of Europeanized Africans, all of them eager for his attention and annoyed when he instead chooses to recognize the lowly messenger boy. Of course, the messenger boy in his native bliss, in a "loose fitting uniform," is fast asleep. It is interesting that for such a detailed passage Larrabee did not tell his reader what Tutuola inscribed. Instead, what he chose to tell the reader was that Tutuola wanted a letter from the West so as not to be forgotten. The way the passage is constructed, Tutuola is a child begging for recognition from a parent. A child is shy, so is a native, and so is a peasant in the face of an adult from the superior race and class. Shyness, self-effacement, diffidence are not merely descriptors of Tutuola as an individual, but words that capture the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the powerful to the less powerful. At the same time, they tell us how the colonizer viewed the colonized.[112]

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[112]. In a May 19th 1953 letter to Tutuola that shows just how little Eric Larrabee (then an Associate Editor at Harper's Magazine) was conscious of the larger colonial question, he writes:

> Since returning to this country, I've also had a pleasant conversation about you with Mr. Reginald Barret, of the British Embassy in Washington, who said he had talked with you when he was in Lagos a few

Brenda Cooper, Achille Mbembe and the question of Magical Realism

Whereas for Clare later criticism revolved around whether he was political and the extent to which he can be seen as a poet of 'place,' later criticism of Tutuola concentrated on the extent to which he was steeped in the African oral tradition and, closely related, whether he was a magical realist or merely a folklorist.

Lindfors on the question of Tutuola and orature concluded that *PWD* has "been greatly influenced by the oral tradition" but by "keeping one foot in the old world and one in the new while translating oral art into literary art, Tutuola bridges two traditions. Here in lies his originality" (61-62; 2010). He went on to say that "Tutuola is the kind of artist who can blend two traditions without feeling uncomfortable. Whatever he borrows or adapts soon becomes his own. His fertile imagination, never fettered by logic or common sense, begets incongruous, the unorthodox, the unexpected, the bizarre" (60; 2010). And in "Debts and Assets" he argued that Tutuola innovated over the oral stories and in fact "deserves to be called the father of experimentation in Nigerian fiction in English" (306). Experimentation and innovation are crucial words because they lead to the question of his style: Is it folkloric or magical realist? What does it mean it to call his style folkloric or magical realist in terms of his being a conscious writer or transcriber of orature? And, how do these questions relate to Translatability?

Brenda Cooper in *Magical realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third eye* concludes that Tutuola "stands at the border of West African magical realist fiction writing and does not enter the heart of this country" (Cooper, 47). Using Achille Mbembe's *Life, Sovereignty, and Terror,* I will argue that Tutuola meets all the counts Cooper puts forth as

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months ago. He seemed to me a very sympathetic and understanding man, and a good representative for Nigeria to have in the United States. (Ajayi, 74) That Larrabee does not see the irony of telling Tutuola that the ambassador of the colonial power is a good representative for the Nigerian people captures the lens through which he saw Tutuola.

constituting magical realism. These include disruption and suspension of linear time and hybrid characters that inhabit third spaces between humans and animals.

Brenda Cooper gives a materialist definition of magical realism. For her it "thrives on transition, on the process of change, borders and ambiguity. Such zones occur where burgeoning capitalist development mingles with older pre-capitalist modes in post-colonial societies, and there is the syncretizing of cultures as creolized communities are created" (15). It is not enough that there is constant change. A culture changing only within itself, that produces its own dynamicity through friction between genders or age groups for example, cannot produce magical realist writing. It must be in contact with other cultures in order to create communities that are not what they were before and yet not assimilated into the other.

Borders and other markers of identity such as language become blurred. Magical realist writers want "to demonstrate, capture and celebrate ways of being and of seeing that are uncontaminated by European domination. But at the same time, such authors are inevitably a hybrid mixture, of which European culture is a fundamental part" (17). Magical realism is produced by spaces that are themselves without clearly demarcated boundaries. She concludes that:

> In the ideal magical realist plot, there is no gothic subject, no dark space of the unconscious, no suppressed libidinous attic space, in which a mad woman is concealed. The mysterious, sensuous unknown and unknowable are not in the subtext, as in realist writing, but rather share fictional space with history. The alternative histories, the mysteries, dreams, pain, bewilderments and nightmare labyrinths, struggle to be visible inscribed within the text's surfaces. (36)

However, it seems to me that her conclusion is not about magical realism but a rejection of psychoanalysis – she rejects the unconscious, the hidden in literature. If we accept her premise, then magical realism would be read as a text that already says everything, and that does not need critical analysis. She ends up being didactic, reinforcing the same borders she is critiquing. In taking a materialist approach, she falls into the trap of rejecting other possible readings (such as a psychoanalytic one) that might have yielded a different interpretation of Tutuola.

Specifically on Tutuola, Cooper says that in addition to his use of mythic time being incompatible with magical realism, he is also not a hybrid and operates in a world of monoculture that is bent on preserving itself. So even when things from another world are introduced in *PWD*, they are to make them behave like things from the monoculture. Using the example of the Television-Handed-Ghostess, she argues that:

> Tutuola's television does not represent the intrusion of a Western scientific worldview; the River Gods are strengthened by absorbing Christ's attributes; certainly, the supernatural myths of Christianity are not incompatible with an indigenous world-view, as they are steeped in the same paradigm of supernatural power and miraculous cures and feats. The point is that there is no perception here of the transformation of cultures into hybrid newness. (44)

Here I argue that there is no reason why hybrid newness cannot come about through absorption – there is no halfway point, a bridge where cultures meet and intermingle, or a specific location where hybridity takes place.[113] In a way, hybridity is failed absorption – the god of Christianity

[113]. Homi Bhabha in "Cultures in between - Concept of Culture" writes: "in my own work I have developed the concept of hybridity to describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity. Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the "authoritative" even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but articulation equivocal" (167).

cannot be fully absorbed by the Yoruba gods, European culture cannot be absorbed into African cultures, because at a fundamental point, one feels superior over the other and they both define themselves to the extent that they are different. It is this failure to become hybrids that for Cooper dooms Tutuola to folklore.

> These devotees and story tellers have not been torn from their societies in the manner of those modern writers whose village is now global. They have not distanced themselves from their belief in the supernatural, and therefore do not need to qualify their depictions with the irony of the magical realist. Their fiction is mythical, supernatural, allegorical and epic; it is not the fiction of magical realism. (44)

Dramatic irony for Cooper can only be achieved by the Europeanized hybrid. She does not consider that dislocations can also be horizontal; where people are forced to mingle because of war between ethnicities, pooling or fighting over meager resources, intermarriages and cultural festivals. At the same time, Cooper wants to see hybridity as possible only between monolithic African culture and an equally monolithic European culture.

> [T]hese postcolonial, culturally displaced migrants, who write magical realist novels, or who celebrate these fictions in their criticism, share some common features. Specifically, these writers are quite distant from their mass of poor, illiterate peasants and workers that populate their countries of origin. (18)

For Cooper the poor, illiterate peasants and workers cannot produce their own writers. And poor and peasant writers themselves cannot produce magical realism without becoming privileged. Privilege is important because it allows an individual to be away from home. Yet, one can

counter that one need not go abroad to be culturally displaced; a writer who moves from a village to the capital city enters a form of exile. Cooper continues:

> Obviously, the social position of relative privilege that characterizes these writers [Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Kwame Anthony Appiah] determines, at least to some extent, the nature of their politics – the ambiguity of being both opposed to cultural imperialism and also aloof from any organized political engagement, of being implicated in the outlooks of the ordinary people back home and also alienated from them culturally and distanced from them by privilege and global experience. (19)

For Cooper, the ideal magical realist is a "third world cosmopolitan," well educated, and at a distance from the peasantry. The result is that writers like Tutuola do not have the necessary ironic distancing:

> Ironic distancing is a crucial feature of the magical realist narrative point of view. Magical realists strive towards incorporating indigenous knowledge, in order to interrogate tradition and herald change. (49)

In lacking such a distance, one can only try to go back into the past because a hybrid present and future is not comprehensible. This leads to the celebration of "the fiction of cultural nationalism, which employs myth and legend, deities and spirits, rituals, proverbs and injunctions. This is in distinction to one of magical realism's defining features, its hybridity that contests boundaries and violates them" (49). Cooper writes:

> It is obvious that only a writer who has travelled away from indigenous ways of life and belief can develop this ironic distancing. In their comprehensive retention of belief in magic and in the penalties inherent in disobeying rules, writers and storytellers like Fanugwa and Tutuola cannot write within magical realist mode (49).

The Drinkard believes in magic and juju. But it cannot be said from reading *PWD* that Tutuola believes in magic and juju – and to make this claim insinuates that Tutuola believed the adventures of the Drinkard to be true. She fails to separate the persona from the writer.

Ultimately, for Cooper, Tutuola is a cultural nationalist, or going back Fanon, stuck between the first and second stages of intellectual growth. As such, he ends up promoting conservative mores and celebrating boundaries. Cooper writes, "Perhaps the most significant Tutuolan boundary, the one that structures all the others, is the conservative moral code which results in the punishments of those who infringe it" (47). Cooper goes on to argue that in the "Complete Gentleman" and others, "we have to acknowledge that one of the most powerful moral urges in these stories is to control women and prevent them from contesting patriarchy (49)."

What is most vivid to me, however, is the revelation that the Complete Gentleman's beauty was the sum total of rented body parts, parts he returns as he makes his way back home from the market. An alternate reading is one where masculinity is undermined – where boundaries dissolve in private as the Complete Gentleman is only a skull by the time he gets home.

If the warning to women is that boundaries of the village and the forest, the domestic and foreign, the safe known and dangerous unknown are not to be transgressed, it is only because the boundaries do not exist as they seem. The other half of the warning is that those who peddle and celebrate boundaries are chimeras, themselves existing in different pieces – and the glue holding them together is hidden from view by the glitter of boundaries. This warning reminds not just women but society that the boundaries that seem attractive do not exist.[114]

[114]. Or one can also choose to see "The Complete Gentleman" as speaking to colonialism – follow the colonizer at your own peril, the colonizer borrows body parts in the form of your labor, culture and raw materials –

Making a Case for Tutuola as a Magical Realist Writer

Where Cooper rejects a psychoanalytic model in favor of a material approach, Mbembe, using a psychoanalytic model and Hegelian dialectics, reaches different conclusions on the central questions of time and linearity, boundaries and transgressions. Mbembe does not make a case for Tutuola as a magical realist writer. He is primarily interested in the questions of how lines within and between humanity (the corporeal and the spiritual), animals, nature and the gods are blurred by Tutuola through porous boundaries. He inadvertently makes a case that Tutuola is a magical realist. In addition, his essay provides insights that diffuse Cooper's assertion that Tutuola "stands at the border of West African magical realist fiction writing and does not enter the heart of this country," (47) in support of my argument that Tutuola is a magical realist writer as opposed to a folklorist.

Time and linearity function differently in magical realism than in realist fiction. In realist fiction, linear time can be disrupted by the use flash backs, by different narrators representing different time tenses (past, present and future), and by flash-forwards. However, these disruptions only reinforce the linear trajectory since the story itself unfolds in real time, moving from dusk to dawn or year-to-year. The story itself is linear, although the storytelling may not be.

In magical realism, something happening in the future can happen simultaneously with an action in the present. In magical realism, Cooper argues that "[t]ime itself is hybrid [and] magical realist time tries to be neither the linear time of history, nor the circular time of myth."

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without the colonized the colonizer has nothing. In other words, there are other possible readings as opposed to just one that offers a feminist critique.

(33). For her, Tutuola does not achieve this because he was caught in the "circular time of myth." But on this same question of time and linearity and Tutuola, Mbembe writes that:

> In the ghostly paradigm, there is neither reversibility nor irreversibility of time. There is only unfolding and folding over anew [deroulement/enroulement] of experience. If stories and events have a beginning, they do not necessarily have an end, properly speaking. Indeed, they may be interrupted. But a story or an event may continue in another story or in another event, without there necessarily being a causal relationship between one and the other. Conflicts and struggles may be taken up again at the point they were stopped. But they can also be interrupted or resumed without the need for continuity. Furthermore, the same event can have more than one distinct beginning. (23)

In *PWD*, the movement of the story is not powered by linear time, but by experience. Yes, the Palm Wine Drinkard is on a journey to find his dead palm wine tapster, so there is a beginning and an ending, but the reader is not asked to remember dates, specific times or even changing seasons of the year to mark linear time The end result is that time in *PWD* is suspended in the same way it gets suspended in magical realism – today can literally be yesterday, one can grow old by getting younger, or age in a day. For example, the Drinkard's wife develops a sore thumb that was:

> …swelling as if it was a bouy but it did not pain her. One day, she followed me to the farm in which I was tapping the palm-wine, and to my surprise when the thumb that swelled out touched a palm-tree thorn, the thumb bust out suddenly and there we saw a male child came out of it and at the same time that the child came out from the thumb, he began to talk to us as if as he was ten years old. Within the hour that he came down from the thumb he grew up to the height of about three feet…(214)

The child grows on to become a gluttonous terror. Time is secondary to the experience, or more precisely, it has been suspended. The question of time versus experience in turn raises the question of whether non-linear movements of time in *PWD* feel disruptive and forced or if they are logical within the illogical nature of magical realism. Part of the answer will depend on whether *PWD* is a unified whole or simply a series of episodes opportunistically linked together. On the structure of *PWD*, Lindfors writes:

> The Palm-Wine Drinkard's neat cyclical superstructure rests on a very loosely coordinated inner structure. The hero is involved in one adventure after another, but these adventures are not well integrated. Like boxcars on a freight train, they are independent units coupled with minimum of apparatus and set in a seemingly random and interchangeable order. There is no foreshadowing of events, no dramatic irony, no evidence of any kind that the sequence of events was carefully thought out. Tutuola appears to be improvising as he goes along and employing the techniques and materials of oral narrative art in his improvisations. (57, 2010)

The superstructure of the Drinkard's search for the dead tapster buoys the reader's suspension of belief. For example, if in *The Complete Gentleman* the reader has accepted that within the logic of the episode a human being can rent out body parts and return each and one of them till only a mean spirited skull is left, he or she will enter the next episode already primed for the same suspension of realist rules. On the superstructure, the reader will be operating on suspended rules of time and linearity. If the rules of time and realism are suspended, then anything becomes possible and the reader operates as he or she would in the world of magical realism.

Cooper sees Tutuola as reinforcing boundaries because, as noted earlier, the characters are punished for their transgressions. Therefore, the boundaries remain intact. In spite of the

fluid morphing of things into other things, at the end of the day the Drinkard remains who he was, the ghosts remain ghosts, the animals remain animals, patriarchy and other forms of power relations remain intact. (47) For Mbembe, the boundaries do not remain standing, rather it is the memory of them, and what's more, this memory of boundary is a necessary anchor for the Drinkard. Without the memories of boundary, he will be sucked into a black hole with no way of making it through the labyrinth of terrifying dead and live forms. Mbembe argues that in Tutuola's writing:

> The wandering subject has neither a unique form nor a content that has been shaped definitively. Form and content change constantly, depending on life's events. But the deployment of existence can occur if the subject leans upon a reservoir of memories and images that are never fixed definitively. He leans upon them at the very moment that he transgresses them, forgets them, and places them in dependence upon something other than themselves. The work for life consists, consequently, in distancing oneself each time from memory and tradition at the very moment one is depending upon it to negotiate the twists and turns of life. (24)

For Mbembe, the wanderer is fueled forward by the contradiction of having to find a foothold in the very same memories and traditions that one has left behind. That is, the wanderer must have a starting point, a referent point. However, there is no going back, and that referent point becomes important as the journey progresses. Cultural nationalism is a false attempt to go back to a past that never was. Cultural serenity and purity are myths of a perfect equitable past – ironically, a claim to a borderless world.

At the same time, if there is no going back to the original there is no being fully embraced by the new. This is in the same way that magical realism cannot be completely

divorced from realism – it needs the reader to have the memory of a world of cause and effect and linear time if it is going to disrupt them. One needs a boundary in order to transgress it. On the borderless corporeal and the conscious Mbembe writes:

> The remembrance of the mutilated organ responds, as if in echo, to the violence of decapitation: the head-the visible seat of identity-passes into the void. It has fallen under the enemy's blow. Mutilation does not translate here as an open wound. Another bodily structure and another organization of the sensorial apparatus are added on to the trunk of the body. The head continues to speak, but in a disorderly manner. Every notion of the secret and of privacy is abolished. The subject lives with a sense of being perpetually spied upon. The joining of one's own body to a head that belongs to someone else renders the self a locus of uncontrollable speech. Words are spoken in place of a self that does not recognize the statements uttered as its own. Both the body and the self are enslaved to the conditions of the symbol. (7)

Tutuola creates a world where borders are crossed, allowing an intra and interspecies exchange in the most intimate of ways – and intimate need not be a positive or negative. A chimera's body is one of intimate spaces since each body part is harvested from another – and at the same time an embodiment of a world in which boundaries have no meaning. If as Mbembe contends the "notion of secret and privacy is abolished," the creatures in *PWD* are an embodiment of being without border.

In a scene in *PWD*, we come across drums that play themselves and because they are playing themselves, they can do more with sound that human hands can. At the same time, personified Dance dances itself and Song sings itself (263). Mbembe writes:

> All three of these entities together produce a concatenation of sounds, rhythms, and gestures. They give rise to a demi-world of specters and reveal the other side of the absolute: the return of the dead. Sounds, rhythms, and gestures are themselves infinitely multipliable. Sounds especially, through their unique means of being unleashed and wrapping themselves within other sounds, one upon the other, one into the other, have a power to take flight that links them to winged matter. (13)

In *PWD* they are liberated to sound like they wished human hands and voices would represent them. The world the "three entities" conjure is a terrifying and beautiful one where, in the "concatenation of sounds," they lead the listener through the borders of the real world, through cause and effect into the other side where anything is possible. Tutuola is asking the reader to take this leap into a "dreadful or terrific sublime."[115] This can only be done through magical realism, which allows us to follow the drum that drums itself through the boundary of human limitation into another one where perfection of sound is possible –for better and worse.

Magical realism is also about style for the sake of style. Cooper does not address this aspect of Tutuola's writing, where language itself, the sheer joy of telling a story where anything goes, and where beauty of language is as important as the scrambled signifiers and 'signified' it carries is the point. In a vivid passage *In the Bush of Ghosts*, three ghosts are competing for the narrator to become a servant. This is before the narrator ended up in the surreal world as he fled from war, crossed the border through a bush, and found himself in the bush of ghosts. Tutuola renders that scene in such poetic terms that the pleasure of language and of imagination trump content:

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[115]. Kant, Immanuel. *Essays and treatises on moral, political, and various philosophical subjects. By Emanuel Kant, ... from the German by the translator of The principles of critical philosophy.* ... Vol.:2. London, 1798-99. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

> So as he lighted the flood of golden light on my body and when I looked at myself I thought that I became gold as it was shining on my body, so at this time I preferred most to go to him because of his golden light. But as I moved forward a little bit to go to him then the copperish-ghost lighted the flood of his own copperish light on my body too, which persuaded me again to go to the golden-ghost as my body was changing to very colour that copper has, and my body was then so bright so that I was unable to touch it. And again, as I preferred this copperish light more than the golden light then I started to go to him, but at this stage I was prevented again to go to him by the silverfish-light which shone on to my body at that moment unexpectedly. (24-25)

The language here is very physical. There are no internal thought processes and one can imagine an editor asking him what was going through the narrator's mind, but that loss is compensated by the sheer beauty of the different competing ghosts that try to entice him through dazzling and painful beauty that risks tearing him into three pieces. At the same time, this particular section calls attention to its content as metaphor when a little bit earlier, we learn that the copperish ghost is trying to entice with African food. (26) The copperish-ghost wins because as the Drinkard narrated earlier, he loves his "food native most" (24). That the narrator is won over by African food at the risk of servitude does tell the reader something. That while one should be attracted and pulled by his or her own culture, caution should be exercised least it is a trap. It is, at the risk of stretching the content too far, the tale of African countries emerging from colonialism only to be plunged into neocolonial dictatorships.

Tutuola and Translatability

In the more literal sense of the word, Tutuola's editors denied him translatability by insisting that he write in ungrammatical English, as opposed to first writing in Yoruba and then

having his writing translated English. But as with Clare, it was Tutuola's early critics who denied him metaphorical translatability, regardless of whether they were applauding or deriding him. As a native writer, he was anthropologized as representing both the African mind and African cultures. Reading Tutuola was therefore an exercise that never reflected back on the reader. In addition, by being denied political metaphor, he was seen as having nothing to say outside of transcribing Yoruba stories. Yet, to ask his fellow Nigerians to take a second look at their cultures was important because at a minimum it raised the question of what role African cultures were going to play in decolonization.

Naming Tutuola a folkloric writer as opposed to a magical realist writer undermines his translatability. It becomes possible not to see his disruptions of linear time and the ways in which his characters challenge physical and moral borders. When Drum drums itself, Song sings itself, and Dance dances itself, they open a portal into a nightmarish world, thus showing the terrible cost of seeing and hearing perfection. "The Complete Gentleman" also asks the most fundamental question in aesthetics: What is beauty? Tutuola, therefore, allows us to look and hear Kant "dreadful and terrific sublime," or at least feel its echoes. To deny Tutuola translatability, as with Clare, is to read literature with one eye closed, as opposed to opening that "third eye" that Brenda Cooper evokes to argue against Tutuola's magical realism.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion: From Chirality to Translatability

What I am saying really boils down to a simple plea for the African novel. Don't fence me in –
Chinua Achebe

Biodun Jeyifo in "The Nature of Things: Arrested Decolonization and Critical Theory" rallies against a dichotomization or binary of either/or in African literary criticism where African literature belongs to Africans and literary criticism to Western critics. In the essay, he is contending with "the clearly emergent subsumption of all criticism and scholarship on African literature into two basic, supposedly distinct camps: first, the foreign, white, European or North American critic or scholar and second, the native, black African "counterpart" (434).

For Jeyifo, "critical discourse not only assures the survival of literature, it also determines the condition in which it survives and the uses to which it will be put" (433). What is ultimately at stake in my project is the condition and uses of African literary criticism. Will it open to its Western influences through the study of the contradictions in the production of Western literature? Can it at the same time reach into African culture and originate literary theories that can then be used to read not only African literature but other literatures as well? For this reason, my dissertation is in many ways an extension and practice of Jeyifo's argument. The solution for him lies in literary scholars reading and learning from other critics who have confronted the question of nationalist reading of literature:

> The "Africanist" fetishization of professionalism and the "Nationalist" occlusion of technical, formalistic concerns, in the abstract, idealist constructions of these schools, could be corrected by drawing upon the work of literary scholars in other societies, other periods, other discursive spaces, scholars who have brilliantly synthesized attributes separated in the false binarism that keeps the best features of "Africanist" and

> "nationalist" schools apart – scholars like Samuel Johnson, Mathew Arnold, Eric Auerbach, Ernst Fischer, Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams. (441)

In this dissertation, I have drawn heavily on scholars who in their own way have dealt with literature and nationalism whether it is in entrenching it further into national culture, or in revealing the fissures and contradictions in the formation of national culture. Samuel Johnson through the standardization of English and its codification in his dictionary contributed not only to literature in English becoming an exemplar of national culture, but to the "metaphysical empire" that now exists in former colonies.

However, Johnson was trying to end the hegemony of French and Latin over English and he acknowledged the dynamic nature of language, even though that dynamicity also opened the language to vulgarisms through borrowed words and translation. I have used Raymond Williams to talk about the enclosures and Walter Benjamin to talk about literary translation as well as translatability between cultures. This is because not only are scholars like Johnson important in their own right, but they have also contributed to the questions in African literary scholarship. Johnson's standardization efforts and attitudes toward 'barbarian' languages find their way into Africa through colonial education. The arguments around language by writers such as Ngugi, Achebe, Wali and Tutuola himself are chiral responses to the effects of Johnson's efforts, for example.

Chirality as a literary concept made possible what would have otherwise been a disparate, if not desperate, comparison. Thus, in Chapter 2, it allowed me to look at the standardization debate in England and colonial and post-colonial Anglophone Africa. In the 14th Century, English was the language used by the peasants while French and Latin was the language for the elite. English was the vulgar, coarse language. In British colonial Africa, English took the place

of French and Latin and African languages took the place of English and became the vulgar and unscientific languages. English became the language of the elite and African languages became identified with peasants and illiteracy. When we apply chirality to this relationship, debates in Romantic England and post-colonial Africa that mirror each other without being the same emerge. Wordsworth in Africa becomes Ngugi in that they both call for the language of literature to become the language spoken by the people. Samuel Johnson and Achebe mirror each other in that for them English is a unifying national language. However, for Achebe, it is standardized English carrying African culture and knowledge as opposed to English culture.

Chirality allowed for a literary criticism that rests on the contradictions of British capitalism that pauperizes the already poor through taxation and British colonialism that pauperizes the African peasants by taxation and appropriation of fertile land. Karl Marx in the "18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" writes about the material history in relation to the culture it produces:

> Men make their history, but they do not make it just they please; they do not make under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such moments they conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time honored disguise and this borrowed language. (Marx, 595)

This is what T.S. Elliot's definition of tradition echoes. The makers of history, like writers, do not simply build on the past, rather, they are in conversation with the past. However, there is

also a warning – the past weighs down on the present because of the seductiveness of nostalgia, and it can be used to obfuscate the present day conditions and needs. Therefore, Marx is not just referring to material history, but also the culture of change where each generation wants to cast the past behind, by mythologizing it. Chirality leaves very little room for the sort of nationalist reading that leads to the smoothing over of contradictions in favor of a seamless history or literature. This is because it calls for one to follow the multiple threads of British capitalism at home and imperialism abroad, and British and African contradictory responses first individually and then in relation to each other through language and literature. Therefore, following the chiral contradictions inherent in the standardization of English in Britain and the contradictions in the response to English in post-colonial Africa calls for an examination of:

a) the material conditions of British industrialization and imperialism, and African resistance.

b) colonial education and African knowledge systems and philosophy, African and European languages;

c) an African literature formed by an uneasy relationship between African oral traditions and Western literary traditions;

d) The responses by European and African editors, critics and writers, to the language question and the production of culture.

Unlike Chaucer and Wordsworth, who are part of the British national culture, in the same way that Achebe and Soyinka are part of Nigerian national culture, Clare and Tutuola are marginally present in the canon because of language use, their biography and ultimately, the content of their works. Clare remains outside the canon of Romantic poetry. Tutuola remains on the margins of the canon of African literature: despite having published PWD and *Life in the Bush of Ghosts*

before Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart," it is Achebe who has been accorded the title "father of modern African literature."[116, 117]

In editing and introducing Clare, Taylor attempted a balancing act in which, on the one hand, he standardized as much as he could of Clare's writing, while leaving enough provincialisms and dialect words to authenticate him as a peasant. On the other hand, he wanted to show Clare as a genius poet despite his poverty. In his introduction to "Poems Descriptive…" he deployed Clare's biography, but only to highlight how gifted as an artist Clare was. He failed, and critical readings of Clare-the-man triumphed over Clare the poet-artist. In the 20th Century, Eric Robinson overturned Taylor's editing and restored Clare's original language, grammatical mistakes, provincialisms and dialect words. This, I argued in Chapter 4, ended up keeping Clare's biography at the center of present day critical reception, because his language cannot but recall his peasant biography for the reader.

In Chapter 5, therefore, I looked at Tutuola in relation to the canon of African literature and argued that because the language of Anglo-African literature was standardized English and content was expected to be not only political but also oppositional, he is not considered a central figure in the growth of African literature. Wole Soyinka in *Myth, Literature and the African World,* argues that African literature has been more concerned with what he calls social vision rather than literary ideology. He writes that:

> The writer [African] is far more preoccupied with visionary projections of society than with the speculative projections of the nature of literature, or any other medium of

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[116]. A description of Achebe by Nadine Gordimer. Pilkington, Ed. "A Long Way from Home." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 07 Sept. 2007. Web. 09 Mar. 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/jul/10/chinuaachebe>.

[117]. Achebe graciously declined this title saying "I don't want to be singled out as the one behind it because there were many of us – many, many of us." Flood, Alison. "Achebe Rejects Endorsement as 'father of Modern African Literature'" *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 12 Nov. 2009. Web. 09 Mar. 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/nov/12/achebe-rejects-father-modern-african-literature>.

> expression. The ontology of the idiom is subservient to the burden of concerns; yet there is no record of periods of total literary atrophy in societies that board a recognizable literary tradition. (64)

For Soyinka, the African writer has been more concerned with the novel as a weapon to be used against any number of ills in African societies, more than abstract philosophies of being. That is, for the African novelist, the form itself, the existence of the novel as novel, is secondary to the social vision. He explains what he means by a literature whose end is not "literary ideology":

> A creative concern which conceptualizes or extends actuality beyond the purely narrative, making reveal realities beyond the immediately attainable, a concern which upsets orthodox acceptances in an effort to free society of historical or other superstitions, these are the qualities possessed by literature of a social vision. (66)

There is a danger in such a prescriptive definition of the African novelists' concerns. Writers who are themselves interested in the "ontology" of the text, in form and aesthetics, where the novel exists for the sake of the literary, can easily be defined against the canon of social vision literature. At the same time, writers like Tutuola who are taken to be exploring myth and superstitions, and who say, as Tutuola does, that "I believe that ghosts exist, if they did not, there would be no name for it"[118] also get excluded.

In the end, what both writers were denied by an editing and critical reception that foreground their peasant and colonized native biography, is translatability. It resulted in critical readings that utilized Jeyifo's false binary of us-versus-them, but at many more social registers.

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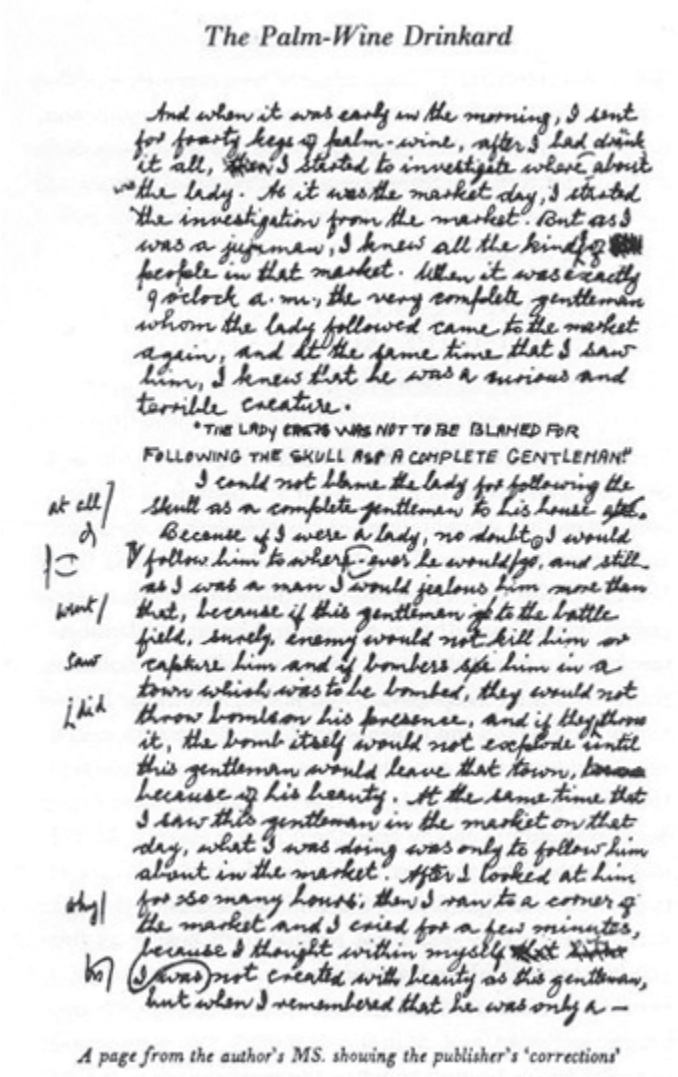
[118]. Robert Elliot Fox. "Tutuola and the Commitment to Tradition." Research in African Literatures, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Autumn, 1998):203-208.

To those for whom Clare and Tutuola were outside their race, culture, nation and class, their writing ended up being about “them” and never translated back into the lives of the readers.

Appendix 1



The Palm-Wine Drinkard

And when it was early in the morning, I sent for fourty kegs of palm-wine, after I had drunk it all, then I started to investigate where about the lady. As it was the market day, I started the investigation from the market. But as I was a juju man, I knew all the kind of people in that market. When it was exactly 9 o'clock a.m., the very complete gentleman whom the lady followed came to the market again, and at the same time that I saw him, I knew that he was a curious and terrible creature.

"THE LADY CRIES WAS NOT TO BE BLAMED FOR FOLLOWING THE SKULL AS A COMPLETE GENTLEMAN"

I could not blame the lady for following the skull as a complete gentleman to his house at all.

Because if I were a lady, no doubt I would follow him to wherever he would go, and still as I was a man I would jealous him more than that, because if this gentleman went to the battle field, surely, enemy would not kill him or capture him and if bombers spit him in a town which was to be bombed, they would not throw bombs on his presence, and if they throw it, the bomb itself would not explode until this gentleman would leave that town, because of his beauty. At the same time that I saw this gentleman in the market on that day, what I was doing was only to follow him about in the market. After I looked at him for so many hours, then I ran to a corner of the market and I cried for a few minutes, because I thought within myself that I was not created with beauty as this gentleman, but when I remembered that he was only a —

A page from the author's MS. showing the publisher's 'corrections'

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