International Perspectives on Multilingual Literatures

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From Translingualism to Language Mixing

Edited by

Katie Jones, Julian Preece and Aled Rees

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Dedicated to Carl Tighe (1950-2020)

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FOREWORD

DORIS SOMMER

This book will be celebrated by readers grateful for its erudition and for its fine close readings. Readers will also be moved by the profoundly democratic culture that *Multilingual Literatures: International Perspectives* acknowledges and thereby promotes. To collect this broad sampling of contemporary essays that may otherwise have been mistaken as marginal contributions to the conventional categories of 'natural' language traditions is to re-set the cultural compass. It is to recognize and to name literary arts as non-'natural' constructions that use available materials, such as languages, to make new things and to make things seem new. As migrations continue to complicate the colour and the sound of native lands, to ignore the strong current of multilingualism today amounts to a xenophobic purism whose political names are not pretty.

Colonial and post-colonial conditions are culturally impure, as are the experiences of migration in search of opportunity or just safety. And the accumulation of native, imposed, and adopted cultures takes the sound and the shape of layered languages. Good readers can hear one underneath the other. Good writers layer their style with enough foreignness to keep the text from congealing into something flat and easily assimilated. Assimilation here, and in general, means monolingualism which amounts to the defeat of nuance. That's why Julia Alvarez is troubled by *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* in the essay by Aled Rees. Foreignness, this volume reminds us through the practices of writing and reading, literally means estrangement. Stranger is a foreigner, even in English. Making the text both foreign and intimate is an aesthetic effect shared by the authors these essays read, a liberating effect for writers who appreciate the paradox of preferring an artifice over what comes naturally. It is liberating for readers too, once we discover that we cannot presume to understand everything we read. Multilingual writers are quite deliberate as artists; they are celebrants of the artificial. They strategize ways to remind their readers that borders exist between the writer and the reader, however close they may come; and there are borders too between natural feeling and simulated expression. This is not writing for entertainment but for engagement and reflection.

Toward the end of this collection, when Mona el Namoury quotes Libyan Hisham Matar, his comment reads like a leitmotif for purposefully perverse self-estrangement: 'I feel, by writing to another language, that there is this veil that exists between me and the thing and somehow this veil paradoxically makes me braver makes me more audacious to write about the things that really obsess me'. The motif has generated a neologism that serves Lúcia Collischonn to describe two poets' escape from the controlling mother tongue. Exophonic. It means the adoption of a new language-mother. The *Sprachmutter* gives a safe space for trial and error, for creative use of the language, for imperfection without judgement. Uneasiness is intentional. Michal Tal explores the flip effect of estranging oneself, the 'nonreciprocal affair with Japan and its culture' in the writings of Amélie Nothomb. How liberating that reading can be an act of love free from understanding! Christine Ivanovic develops these pleasures of simultaneous and non-coordinated aesthetics in poetry. And Rhys Trimble enjoys the perverse moves of 'Wenglish poetics' that interrupt the master's language with a minority language to purposefully 'unmaster' its rules.

Multilingual literature is nothing new, as Julian Preece points out with references to Anglophone Modernism. Modernism in Latin American Spanish and Portuguese takes multilingualism so for granted that the emblematic essay for the period is 'The Cannibal's Manifesto' by Oswald de Andrade. Post-colonial cultures have the unbidden benefit of being layered and complex; they are used to taking in what is foreign, identifying contradictions and living with them. As a general feature of literature Mikhail Bakhtin had named multilingualism polyglossia, though careless readers have assumed it is the same as heteroglossia, which refers to mixing distinct registers of one language. *Multilingual Literatures: International Perspectives* comprises lessons for more care in reading; this will mean, paradoxically, not understanding everything as if that had ever been possible. What is new and to be celebrated is this collection is the current centrality for writers and for attentive readers of what Preece calls 'Language-Switching'. His examples come from Yann Martel and Jonathan Franzen. With Martel, 'bi' takes on its sexual meaning, as it does also for Ali Smith in the essay by Katie Jones. Smith's bi protagonist is layered on several planes, both male and female, English and Italian speaking, contemporary and renaissance. The title of Smith's book about layering practically reads like a do-it-yourself manual: *How to be Both*. It invites readers to discover a path to complexity, and replace the stigma of perversion with the acknowledgement of creativity. *Multilingual Literatures: International Perspectives* is a multi-voiced and resounding invitation to pursue many paths, those traced by the brilliant essays which I have sampled here and those to be explored by inspired readers of this book.

INTRODUCTION: FROM WALES TO THE WORLD

KATIE JONES, JULIAN PREECE AND ALED REES

It is a paradox that multilingualism in literature should become a subject of growing academic interest across the world in the epoch of globalisation. Perhaps it is because the more the world homogenises, the more we are interested in what makes us different. Research in literary studies takes various forms in different national and trans-national contexts. There are international Internet publishing platforms and research centres devoted to multilingual writing; student textbooks also proliferate.[1] Yet the British German scholar Leonard Forster pointed out fifty years ago, in what now counts as a pioneering study, that it was once the norm for writers to be multilingual, to publish in more than one language, and for their knowledge of other languages to interfere with their diction and syntax.[2] The trend towards literary monolingualism followed the rise of national languages which coincided with the emergence of nation states in Europe in the nineteenth century.[3] The Japanese novelist Minae Mizimura, who studied French Literature in the USA, summarised the twin phenomena which prompted her influential investigation on the fall of national languages and the 'rise of English':

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[1] *Polyphony - Plurilingualism_Creativity_Writing* (http://www.polyphonie.at) is a publishing platform and online journal set up in 2012; *Polyphinie: Inter-university research center* is a collaboration between the universities of Genoa and Catania in Italy (http://www.lcm.unige.it/polyphonie); an example of a recent textbook is: Till Dembeck and Rolf Parr (eds.), *Literatur und Mehrsprachigkeit. Ein Handbuch* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2017).

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

[3] See David Gramling, *The Invention of Monolingualism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) and Brian Lennon, *In Babel's Shadow: Multilingual Literatures, Monolingual States* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

> The first concerns languages at the bottom of the hierarchy. These languages […] are becoming extinct at an alarming rate. Of the approximately six thousand languages on Earth, it is often predicted that more than 80 percent may disappear by the end of this century. In the course of history, many languages have come into being and disappeared, but today languages are dying at an unprecedented rate, just like the plant and animal species affected by environmental change. The second change in the global linguistic landscape concerns, of course, the rise of the English language. There has never before been a universal language that is not confined to any one geographical location, however vast, but sits atop all other languages and circulates throughout the entire world.[4]

Mizimura makes two big claims in this paragraph: that in linguistic history, we have never been here before, and that what is happening with languages links up with some of the effects of the global climate catastrophe, in particular the industrial and agricultural practices which are causing what many zoologists now understand as the 'sixth mass extinction' of species in the Earth's history. The shared idioms used to discuss language and ecology reveal something of how these ideas are culturally constructed. When we talk of language 'roots' and 'evolution', our transposition of organic metaphors is clear. Like pseudo-Darwinist conceptualisations of socio-cultural life, which impose the biological language of evolution onto social change, the configuration of language evolution as a natural process obscures the corporate and socio-political power structures that determine which languages survive and those that perish.

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[4] Minae Mizimura, *The Fall of Language in the Age of English* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), trs. Mari Yoshihara and Juliet Winters Carpenter, p.40.

Unlike extinct species of fauna and flora, dead languages, as long as they have left traces in the form of writing, can sometimes be brought back to life. New ways of using existing languages, whether at the bottom or the top of Mizimura's hierarchy, are constantly being invented by those who speak and write them. The global lingua franca evolves too and, of course, it absorbs. It also has a history of smothering its nearest neighbours, as Daniel Williams argues with respect to Wales' most famous English-language poet Dylan Thomas whose bilingual Welsh-speaking parents decided to bring him up speaking English only. In one of Thomas' early poems 'From Love's First Fever', speechlessness and erasure are foregrounded through his deployment of a single 'X' in the fifth stanza. The poem's biographical elements imply that the lost voice relates to the poet's father, who had been diagnosed with throat cancer, and yet through a postmodern lens and with reference to English / Welsh relations, the 'X' designates a point of cultural contestation.

The generation of British writers of English who preceded Thomas and were associated with the Modernist movement, in particular Eliot, Joyce and Lawrence, saw multilingualism as a literary opportunity and in recent years their multilingual work has been the subject of renewed study.[5] What for Thomas was 'language death', however, is an opportunity for the group of Welsh poets discussed by the scholar-poet Rhys Trimble. He plays with the numerous technical linguistic terms, from 'trans-' to 'pluri-' and 'interlingual' via 'di-' and 'polyglossic' to define his own distinctive 'Wenglish' poetics which, he argues, has informed practice for both English- and Welsh-language poets in Wales. Trimble reminds us that Joyce's use of English was informed not only by the speech rhythms of Irish

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[5] See Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (London: Palgrave, 2013) and James Reay Williams, *Multilingualism and the Twentieth-century Novel: Polyglot Passages* (London: Palgrave, 2019).

Gaellic but by the Welsh verse form *cynghanedd* and what Trimble calls ‘the masking of one language with another’. Poets who write ‘Wenglish’ may acquire knowledge of Welsh as adults out of interest for a lost heritage, such as the First World War poet David Jones, or because they move to Wales from other bilingual regions, such as the Canadian Peter Meilleur. Aspects of their practice are replicated by writers of minority languages in other parts of the globe, as other chapters in this book explore.

National languages in their standard variants compete with regional dialects in other European regions, as Francesca Ricciardelli argues with respect to Elena Ferrante’s recent *Neapolitan Quartet*, a trans-national best-seller. Ferrante explores split identities and dual allegiances through diverging language use. Ricciardelli begins her discussion with reference to Dante whose Florentine dialect was the foundation for the national language. She takes in debates surrounding the teaching of Italian through unification and the period of mass communication in the twentieth century. In Ferrante’s fiction, standard Italian belongs with prestige, social mobility, and professional success, Neapolitan dialect with emotion, sexuality, and authenticity. To get educated means to become bilingual and learn to switch codes according to the situation. Ferrante, a translator from German to Italian and the daughter of a German-Jewish refugee to Italy, is fluent in both idioms but usually renders Neapolitan in Italian, introducing passages of dialogue with the marker ‘in dialect’. She also translates the world of her own Neapolitan childhood into the language she has used in her adulthood and which is understood by readers across all the regions of Italy. Neapolitan thus has a similar function to Welsh but a different status. Ferrante, aiming for a mass international readership, shies away from including Neapolitan in her novels. Her English translator Ann Goldstein largely follows her original practice by glossing the fragments of

Neapolitan, largely swear words, but leaving them in the original.

Basing her conclusions on fieldwork in a nearby region of Italy, Evgeniya Litvin explores the techniques and strategies that speakers of the endangered minoritarian language Griko – a Greek dialect spoken in the communities of Apulia, Southern Italy – use to preserve and promote wider engagement with their language. Due to its principally oral tradition, Griko has a limited literary catalogue. It has also all but ceased to function as a medium of communication. Different generations of the small Griko-speaking community foster interest and emotional attachment to the language as they can. The performance of multilingual songs, poems, and theatrical recitals as well as the publication of literary works in which poetic self-translation and language mixing between Griko, standard Italian, and local dialect prevail all serve a didactic purpose, aiming to motivate others to learn Griko, which they do for reasons of identity and heritage.

Richard McClelland investigates a similarly contested region of Europe's language landscape, the Romansh-speaking canton of Graubünden in Switzerland, through the works of one its most prominent contemporary writers, Arno Camenisch. His trilogy of novels set in his native region negotiate three linguistic realities: Romansh, one of the four 'national languages' of Switzerland next to French, German and Italian; Swiss-German, which denotes a number of variants of Alemanic current in German-speaking Switzerland; and standard German or 'Hochdeutsch', the written version of the language which is understood across the German-speaking countries. Drawing on Deleuze and Guatarri's theory of minor literature, which is essentially exophonic because its exponents choose it over other languages or dialects in which they are fluent, McClelland shows how Camenisch disrupts multiple categories in playful but challenging ways.

Michel Tal concludes the section of the volume on the interaction between the major Western European languages (English, Italian, German) and a less powerful neighbour (Welsh, Neapolitan, Romansh or Swiss German) by exploring how a female French speaker who knows Japanese flounders in her negotiation of the male-dominated corporate culture of a Tokyo-based company. Tal draws on work by Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan, who both wrote about their experiences of travelling to Japan, to account for the fundamental difference of Japanese with its distinct grammatical structures and multiple writing systems. It challenges Barthes because it is ‘devoid of the very codes’ which he, like Amélie Nothomb’s narrator, is looking for. Japanese also undermines Lacan’s approach to psycho-analysis because there is no obvious subject. In other words, encountering Japan entails recalibrating fundamental Western assumptions about language.

In the next chapter, the accent is once again on the playful and disruptive. Christine Ivanovic is interested in how readers react to words and phrases they do not understand or to whole chunks of text in a scriptural form which is unfamiliar to them (such as Japanese). The effects can be radical and transformative, entailing ‘a new way of experiencing the self, and of positioning the speaking subject within various (lingual and cultural) contexts’. Ivanovic argues that there are multiple strategies which readers of poetry can adopt which oblige them to reflect on their habitual reading practice and that the incomprehensible can itself be a signifier. In compensation multilingual poetry turns out to be a highly visual art form. Ivanovic’s examples are drawn from the Japanese-German Yoko Tawada, who is internationally one of the most influential translingual or exophonic poets and also a theorist of her practice, the Maltese Antoine Cassar, and the German Uljana Wolf, a translator from English who has explored Poland and Polish in her work.

Allesandra Madella explores gender and queer aesthetics in relation to on-screen multilingualism in her chapter on cinematic Esperanto in Ulrike Ottinger's film, *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* (1984) / *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press*. Madella queries singularly positive understandings of multilingualism via her analysis of the villainous Frau Dr Mabuse, an evil polyglot who abuses her language skills to manipulate whole populations through her global press empire. However, the utopic vision of Esperanto is also troubled as it is connected to the homogenising power of Hollywood cinema. In each case, globalised corporate or institutional power corrupts potentially empowering ways of envisaging either multilingualism or lingua francas. The experimental film incorporates an operatic representation of the colonisation of the Canary Islands, set against a natural, unspoilt landscape prior to its corruption and destruction. While Madella does not explore the relationship between the ecological imagery and linguistic playfulness of Ottinger's film, this point reminds us of the shared terms and phrases used for conceptualising language and nature.

Like Ivanovic, Lúcia Collischonn also turns to Tawada and introduces a section of the volume devoted to translingual and exophonic authors. Collischonn takes her other examples from Chile via Argentina and the USA (Ariel Dorfman), from Turkey via Germany (Emine Özdamar), and Bangladesh via the UK, USA and Italy (Jhumpa Lahiri), invoking the notion of 'linguistic family romances' to explore Tawada's idea of a 'language mother' for writers who publish in a new language. What distinguishes the exophonic from the translingual is that these writers both choose their new language and embrace their distinctive use of it. Experimentation is encouraged, imperfection permitted. Language switching can be liberating.

The novelist discussed by Aled Rees writes in English for different reasons. For Rees, Julia Alvarez' *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* performs the effects of linguistic hierarchies through one of the novel's characters whose relationship to language is foregrounded through her fluent bilingualism and frequent loss of words, which Rees considers in relation to fragmentation and troubled identity. Taking a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, this chapter explores the intersection between gender hierarchy and linguistic hegemony in an American context and how the suffocating romantic relationship mirrors a stifled lingualism. Rather than the fluid movement between languages, Yolanda is trapped between two subject positions, raising questions with regard to the possibilities of bilingualism and bilingual identity in certain contexts, in this case the USA.

Luca Paci and Mona El Enamory present two writers of African descent who have switched to European languages after emigration. Paci's Somali-born Shirin Ramzanali Fazel self-translates between English and Italian and spices her invocation of her lost homeland with Somali and Arabic terms. While Fazel writes for a niche readership, the Libyan Hisham Matar, born in New York, brought up in Cairo and educated in England, has published several best-sellers drawing on his family's experiences of persecution by the Libyan regime, followed by exile and displacement. El Enamory shows how his memoir *The Return* while written exclusively in English incorporates a variety of translational practices from Arabic to English. She tracks down Matar's pronouncements on his language which he has made in numerous media and which indicate that he is thinking Arabic when writing English, more easily finding words for his feelings in his new language. Language is once again tied up with identity and emotion, his bond with his murdered father whose fate shaped the course of his own life.

Katie Jones extends the discussion of mothers and language in her reading of a contemporary British novel, Ali Smith's *How to be Both*. Jones is concerned with the relation between language and sexuality, and suggests that the multilingual aesthetics of *How to be Both* constitute a means to represent ethical interaction with the Other that is both political and erotic. The elasticity of language, and each language's connection to others, is drawn out through Smith's use of Latin and Italian, which English (the novel's predominant mode) echoes. Rather than fixity, words contain possibilities: one word leads to another. As one of the roots of English, Latin carries evolutionary connotations with it, foregrounding relationality and simultaneity, as opposed to either sameness or difference. However, as in Madella's contribution to this collection, communication is not only written or spoken, it is also visual, sensory and embodied.

Julian Preece closes the volume and the mini-section on multilingual writing by contemporary Anglophone native speakers. Yann Martel and Jonathan Franzen exploit some multilingual effects in signature works of fiction (Yann Martel's *Self*) or nonfiction (Jonathan Franzen's *The Kraus Project*). Unlike some Modernist Anglophone novelists, however, multilingualism is not evident elsewhere in their works. Reading *Self*, Preece suggests that Martel sexualises or genders language distance as the protagonist of the novel miraculously and involuntarily switches between sexes, with the male narrator utilising a plethora of languages while the female uses only English, which also becomes the language of violence in the novel. This chapter teases out the way in which the many languages used in *The Kraus Project* refer to European literary giants, and, as in *Self*, sexuality acts as a correlative metaphor to imply the mingling of languages and intertextuality. Ultimately, Preece argues that the other tongues suggest a confrontation with, and / or absorption of, Otherness.

A diversity of approaches which matches the proliferation of terms: writers who switch or who publish in more than one language; who experiment; or who understand other languages as a metaphor for sexual difference or varieties of gender identity. This collage of perspectives problematises and queries stable understandings of multilingualism. Read together, what follows constitutes a discordant polyphony of voices which acknowledge the troubling absences and silencing engendered by linguistic hierarchies, globalisation, and the marketisation of languages, while embracing the playful and ethical possibilities offered by multilingual approaches.

Most of the chapters were first presented as papers at a conference entitled 'Multilingual Literatures' held at the Gregynog Centre in mid-Wales in July 2019. The conference formed part of the project 'Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community' funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council through the Open World Research Initiative. It was supported too by the Learned Society of Wales. There were participants from five continents, the languages and dialects referenced were Arabic, Czech, Esperanto, French, German, Griko, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Maltese, Neapolitan, Japanese, Polish, Romansch, Somali and Welsh, all of which are discussed in the volume. Doris Sommer was to give a keynote lecture until circumstances intervened to prevent her from travelling. We are delighted that she has made a published contribution in the form of an intuitively appreciative foreword. We dedicate the volume to another keynote speaker, who spoke in Gregynog about a topic connected with his life's research, the contemporary literary scene in Poland. The gentle and erudite Carl Tighe died from Covid-19 on 8 May 2020 after a prolonged battle with the illness. The final stages of editing also took place during the pandemic when access to print resources was limited across the world. We hope readers will bear with us if references (for example, to primary sources on Kindle) sometimes lack page numbers or we switch suddenly from print to on-line versions.

DYLAN X:
UNIVERSALISM, LOSS AND LANGUAGE

DANIEL G. WILLIAMS

I

Dylan Thomas's early poem 'From Love's First Fever' traces an individual's journey from conception, and seems to focus in particular on the way in which language acquisition results in the 'one' of gestation becoming the 'many' of a world divided by words. This process is not presented as a fall nor as the loss of a pre-lapsarian existence, for the miraculous creative potential of language is emphasised: 'And to the miracle of the first rounded word […] Each golden grain spat life into its fellow'. A different and somewhat incongruous tone is struck, however, at the end of the fifth stanza:

> The root of tongues ends in a spentout cancer,
> That but a name, where maggots have their X.[1]

Here, the narrative trajectory of the poem seems to go into reverse, and rather than developing and pluralising, it returns to the 'root of tongues' to discover there a 'spentout cancer' leading to the annihilation represented by the seemingly terminal 'X'. It is a striking and, in its deployment of a single letter, unique moment in Thomas's *oeuvre.* The 'X' suggests that the festive linguistic creativity of the poem comes at the cost of erasure.

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[1] Dylan Thomas, *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas: The New Centenary Edition*, ed. John Goodby (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2014), p.45.

But what, exactly, is erased? The influence of his father on Dylan Thomas has been well established.[2] David John Thomas ('DJ' to many) was readmitted to hospital on 17 October 1933, following radium treatment for cancer of the mouth. Dylan Thomas copied the final section of the poem into his notebook on that day.[3] The 'X', then, represents the 'X-ray', while also suggesting that the poet may be facing the possibility of his father's death. ('DJ' would eventually recover from the operation). There are other intriguing aspects to these lines. Why, for instance, does Thomas refer to the 'root of tongues' as opposed to the 'tongue's root'? Is Thomas drawing attention here to his father's bilingualism? As is well-known, both Thomas's parents were Welsh-speakers with family connections in west Wales. His father, a graduate and secondary school teacher of English literature, lifted his son's (then, unusual) name from the Welsh medieval classic the *Mabinogi*. He made sure, however, that Dylan would know little Welsh and, due to elocution lessons, would speak English - the language of progress and social uplift - with resonant enunciation.[4] (Dylan never seemed to regret this openly, but would later lampoon the colonialist implications of his own upbringing, referring to himself reading 'grandly and solemnly, like a man with the Elgin marbles in his mouth').[5] The 'X' in this respect is how an illiterate would mark his or her name. Thus, if the poem as a whole is an exuberant celebration of the creativity of the English language, we might ask whether these lines suggest that poetic mastery has been gained at the cost of cultural disinheritance; the erasure of a spent tradition that exists residually in nothing

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[2] See, in particular, James A. Davies, '"Hamlet on his Father's Coral": Dylan Thomas and Paternal Influence', *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays* (1995) 1, pp.52-61.

[3] John Goodby, 'Notes to the Poems', *Collected Poems*, p.257.

[4] Walford Davies, *Dylan Thomas: Writers of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), pp.8–9.

[5] Dylan Thomas, *The Collected Letters: New Edition*, ed. Paul Ferris (London: J. M. Dent, 2000), p.803.

'but a name'? Is David Thomas's cancer of the mouth being evoked here in relation to language death?[6]

If that is so, then it may seem incongruous for me to focus my contribution to a book on multilingual literature on a poet who, by his own admission, was monolingual. Writing to Stephen Spender in 1952 in order to correct a misapprehension, Dylan Thomas noted unambiguously that 'I'm not influenced by Welsh bardic poetry. I can't read Welsh'.[7] Yet, in addition to his Welsh-speaking parents, Dylan, as David N. Thomas has meticulously documented, spent a significant part of his 'true childhood' among his aunts and uncles in Carmarthenshire: 'a rural community that was largely chapel-going and Welsh-speaking'.[8] During those visits he would attend Sunday school in Capel Smyrna, Llangain, conducted in Welsh.[9] The interviews that journalist Colin Edwards conducted in the 1960s with people who knew and interacted with Dylan often testify to his knowledge of Welsh. Elizabeth Milston recalled that 'he sang Welsh songs and he'd speak Welsh', Edward Evans said that 'it was amazing the knowledge he had of Welsh hymns', a view confirmed by Bill Green and Oscar Williams who 'heard him sing all kinds of Welsh songs'.[10] Even if we accept the inaccuracy of memory and dangers of oral history, it is fairly clear from biography and testimony that Dylan Thomas knew some Welsh. His close friend, the Gower poet Vernon Watkins - whose parents, like Dylan's, spoke Welsh but did not pass it on to their son - recollected that 'I only got a smattering' of Welsh, 'I hardly knew more than Dylan; perhaps I know a few hundred words'.[11] In a world of fluent Welsh-speakers such as Dylan knew intimately in Carmarthenshire, an individual claiming a lack of knowledge of Welsh might still be able to sing hymns and folk songs and to have a vocabulary of several hundred words. While some have, with varying degrees of success and persuasiveness, detected the influence of the metrical patterns and echoing consonants of the *cynghanedd* tradition of Welsh metrical poetry on Thomas's work, there is no doubt that, as several critics have also noted, as a 'first generation, post-Nonconformist, Anglo-Welsh writer' Dylan Thomas found himself in 'a kind of no-man's land between two languages – one dead, the other powerless to be born'.[12] Like many of his generation, Thomas did not embrace a majoritarian, monolingual view of language as unique and original, to be compared only to the world. As Barbara Johnson notes in an essay on translation, once a linguistic comparison is set up and one language is seen in the terms of another, then both languages are apprehended in

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[6] 'Tongues' are common in Thomas's poetry. Of relevance to this chapter are: the 'spider-tongued, and the loud hill of Wales ('Especially when the October wind', *Collected Poems*, p.68); 'the tongues of burial' ('I, in my intricate image', p.73); 'anchored tongue' ('I make this in a warring absence', p.93); 'bayonet tongue' ('O make me a mask', p.98); ' native / Tongue of your translating eyes' ('Unluckily for death', p.176). The short story entitled 'The Burning Baby' ends with the 'flame' touching the 'tongue' of the baby. Dylan Thomas, *Collected Short Stories*, ed. Walford Davies (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2014), p.41.

[7] *Collected Letters*, p.953.

[8] David N. Thomas, 'A True Childhood: Dylan's Peninsularity', in Hannah Ellis (ed.), *Dylan Thomas: A Centenary Celebration* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp.7-29 (here p.13).

[9] Ibid., pp.13–14.

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[10] David N. Thomas (ed.), *Dylan Remembered: Volume Two 1935 – 1953* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004), pp. 73, 97, 125, 127, 224.

[11] Ibid., p.63.

[12] Walford Davies, 'The Poetry of Dylan Thomas: Welsh Contexts, Narrative and the Language of Modernism' in John Goodby and Chris Wigginton (eds.), *Dylan Thomas: New Casebook* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp.106-123 (here p.110). M Wynn Thomas, *In the Shadow of the Pulpit: Literature and Nonconformist Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p.235. Tony Brown, 'The "Strange" Wales of Dylan Thomas's Short Stories' in Kieron Smith and Rhian Barfoot (eds.), *New Theoretical Perspectives on Dylan Thomas* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press,2020), pp.37-60 (here p.40).

'their systematicity' and in their material 'linguisticness'.[13] This is one source of the radical distinctiveness of Thomas's poetry in the 1930s, of his desire to work 'from words' not 'towards words', and of the attitude towards language expressed in his 'Poetic Manifesto':

> What the words stood for, symbolised, or meant, was of very secondary importance; what mattered was the sound of them as I heard them for the first time on the lips of the remote and incomprehensible grown-ups who seemed, for some reason, to be living in my world.[14]

If the 'remote … grown-ups' might have been 'incomprehensible' in speaking a language that the young boy did not understand, there are occasions in his later writings when Welsh is referred to or appears in the text. A hill called Cathmarw (dead cat or, perhaps more appropriately for Thomas, 'dead pussy' indicating the sexual impotence of rural society) appears in several of the early stories, as does the exclamation 'Ooh, there's a pig of a night!' which is a direct translation from the Welsh.[15] The broadcast 'Living in Wales' includes the 'sound of the colliers' voices at night left on the air above the crippled street: 'Nos da Will.' 'Nos da, Shoni.' 'Nos da, Evan.' 'Nos da.' 'Nos da."[16] His portrayal of the preacher cousin Gwilym in 'The Peaches' draws upon the world of the Welsh chapel in Llangain:

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[13] Barbara Johnson, 'The Task of the Translator', in Melissa Feuerstein et al (eds.), *The Barbara Johnson Reader: The Surprise of Otherness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), pp.377-400 (here p.392).

[14] *Collected Letters*, pp.147-8, 953. Dylan Thomas, 'Poetic Manifesto', in Walford Davies (ed.), *Dylan Thomas: Early Prose Writings* (London: J. M. Dent, 1971), pp.154-60 (here p.154).

[15] *Collected Short Stories*, p.63, p.339.

[16] Dylan Thomas, 'Living in Wales', in Ralph Maud (ed.), *Dylan Thomas: The Broadcasts* (London:
J. M. Dent, 1991), pp.202-6 (here p.204).

> I sat on the hay and stared at Gwilym preaching, and heard his voice rise and crack and sink to a whisper and break into singing and Welsh and ring triumphantly and be wild and meek.[17]

These are, on the whole, uses of Welsh in order to add an element of regionalist colour as opposed to the kind of 'ethnically marked' usage that Doris Sommer notes 'can sting readers entitled to know everything'.[18] The purpose of these examples has been to suggest that there is some legitimacy for discussing Dylan Thomas within the context of multilingual literature.[19]

It is timely to do so, for it may offer a corrective to the ways in which Thomas's life and work is often deployed within Welsh cultural studies today. The historian Dai Smith stated recently, for example, that in the 1990s Dylan Thomas 'appeared to have less and less to say in a climate of national essentialism where the language he did not speak had become the token badge of a simplified identity he did not share'. Detecting a 'sea-change' in recent years, Smith expressed his relief that Dylan could now be recognised as being 'fully representative' of a 'modern, hybrid, progressive society' which 'links his Wales […] to a wider world'.[20] Similarly, in lamenting the 'maze of vested interests' standing 'in the way of a reassessment of Thomas', John Goodby inadvertently made his own position within that maze patently clear when he described the Welsh Government's language policies (which may be viewed with some justification as timid by international standards) as a form of 'linguistic culturalism' that 'imposes the Welsh language from above'.[21] There is, Goodby argued, a 'non-correspondence between linguistic culturalism' and the 'incorrigibly mongrel Anglo-Welsh poetry' produced by a Thomas whose 'innumerable links to English poetry' are indicative of 'an uneven, transcultural, dynamic productive of hybridity'.[22] Given these pronouncements, it might be pertinent to record that all contemporary Welsh-speakers over the age of around five are at least bi-lingual, whereas the majority of English-speakers in Wales are monolingual.[23] Thus, in a Welsh variation on a pattern witnessed elsewhere, the discourse of multicultural hybridity is deployed by a majoritarian culture against that which is, in fact, the most 'hybrid' element within Welsh society: the Welsh language that is spoken by around 20% of the three million inhabitants of Britain's westernmost peninsulas.[24] Slavoj Žižek has noted the tendency by postmodern cosmopolitans to think of their own culture as hybrid and progressive, while dismissing minority cultures as inherently essentialist and racist. We should be careful when people emphasize their hybrid and universalist credentials, warns Žižek, for the key question is 'do these same

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[17] *Collected Short Stories*, p.133.

[18] Doris Sommer, *Proceed with Caution when engaged by minority writing in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.ix.

[19] For further examples and a discussion of this dimension of Thomas's work see Tudur Hallam, 'Curse, bless, me now': Dylan Thomas and Saunders Lewis, *Journal of the British Academy* (2016) 3, pp.211–53.

[20] Dai Smith, 'The fitting up of Dylan Thomas', *Times Literary Supplement Online* https://www.the-tls.co.uk/artiCollected Letterses/fitting-dylan-thomas/# (Accessed 1 June, 2020).

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[21] John Goodby, 'The Liquid Choirs of his Tribes: The Influence of Dylan Thomas', in Hannah Ellis (ed.), *A Centenary Celebration*, pp.205-21 (here p.220). Colin Williams, *Minority Language Promotion, Protection and Regulation: The Mask of Piety* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013) compares the 'rights based approach' adopted for French-speakers in Canada and the policy of voluntary institutional responsibility adopted for Welsh-speakers in Wales. See the conclusions on p.293.

[22] John Goodby, *The Poetry of Dylan Thomas: Under the Spelling Wall* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), p.31.

[23] https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Welsh-Language (Accessed 1 July 2020).

[24] See, for example, Senka Božić-Vrbančić's work on multiculturalism within Maori culture in New Zealand: Senka Božić-Vrbančić, *Tarara: Croats and Maori in New Zealand: Memory, Belonging, Identity* (Dunedin: Otaga University Press, 2008). I am grateful to Simon Brooks for drawing my attention to this work.