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Dr Juliette Taylor-Batty
Senior Lecturer in English
Leeds Trinity University
j.taylor-batty@leedstrinity.ac.uk

‘Everything’s been done before’: Jean Rhys, translation, and the politics of originality¹

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Abstract

This article explores questions of ‘originality’ and textual ‘ownership’ in the work of Jean Rhys and argues that her fiction presents a pervasive and unsettling challenge to the post-Romantic notion of ‘original’ literary production as organically ‘rooted’ in ‘national’ culture. I first focus on Rhys’s treatment of questions of authorship and appropriation in ‘Again the Antilles’ and ‘Let Them Call It Jazz’ in the light of archival documents which indicate a pervasive anxiety of originality. I then move on to examine the relationship between authorship and translation that is revealed in an early typescript draft of Rhys’s only explicitly ‘derivative’ text, ‘The Chevalier of the Place Blanche’. If ‘Let Them Call It Jazz’ can be seen to present the power of a nomadic, anonymous art that resists and destabilises the system of cultural capital and authorial ‘ownership’, a story like ‘Chevalier’, I argue, begins to gesture towards such an art.

Keywords

Jean Rhys, translation, authorship, originality, modernism

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‘Everything’s been done before’: Jean Rhys, translation, and the politics of originality

In 1976, Jean Rhys published a story, ‘The Chevalier of the Place Blanche’, with a note describing it as a ‘much-adapted translation of one written by Édouard de Nève’.² This is Rhys’s only explicitly ‘derivative’ story, but it is no anomaly within her *oeuvre*. It forms a part of Rhys’s engagement with translation throughout her career; it also reflects a longstanding, if subtle, subversion of conceptions of ‘authorship’ and ‘originality’ that underpins her writing.³ In my recent archival research within the Jean Rhys archive at the University of Tulsa, I encountered a number of documents that suggest pervasive anxieties of authorship. Indeed, Rhys wrote directly about questions of authorship and appropriation, particularly in two stories that span her career: the early ‘Again the Antilles’ (*The Left Bank*, 1927), and the later ‘Let Them Call It Jazz’ (*Tigers are Better Looking*, 1968). In this article, I will examine these stories alongside ‘Chevalier’ in the context of relevant archival documents. I will argue that Rhys’s work reflects much more extensive authorial anxieties than have hitherto been acknowledged – anxieties that we can relate to the thorny question of ‘belonging’ that also runs throughout her fiction.⁴ Ultimately, as I will show, ‘Chevalier’ is symptomatic of an aesthetic that systematically unsettles ‘origins’ – authorial, textual and national.

‘Everything’s been done before’

Discussions of cultural appropriation in Rhys have tended to focus on the politics of ‘writing back’, particularly in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The valuable debates that have ensued have highlighted the complex racial politics of Rhys’s work and her relevance to postcolonial debates. They have not, however, taken full account of questions of authorship and

² Jean Rhys, ‘The Chevalier of the Place Blanche’, in *Sleep It Off, Lady* (London: André Deutsch, 1976), pp. 111–22 (p. 111). Subsequent references will appear in parentheses with the abbreviation SL.

³ I have written about the role of translation in Rhys’s *oeuvre* in *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 80–112.

⁴ Rhys describes her own lack of belonging in *Smile Please*: ‘I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it [...]. I am a stranger and I always will be’. Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Deutsch, 1979), p. 124. The relationship of this sense of ‘homelessness’ to Rhys’s own Caribbean identity and its complex manifestations in the fiction have been productively discussed by critics. See, for example: Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 192–219. Deborah L Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 132–48. Anna Snaith, *Modernist Voyages: Colonial Women Writers in London, 1890-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 133–51.

originality in Rhys, particularly within her earlier works. The Jean Rhys archive at Tulsa suggests a recurrent anxiety in this regard, from her earliest collaborations with her first husband Édouard de Nève, right through to her posthumously published autobiography, *Smile Please*. On the title page of an early typescript of 'The Chevalier of the Place Blanche', probably dating from the 1920s,⁵ Rhys has typed 'by E. de Nève freely translated by Jean Rhys' but subsequently crossed out the words 'by E. de Nève freely translated', reinstating the name 'E de Nève' in pencil twice, above and below the typed attribution.⁶ Is Rhys trying to remove the de Nève attribution, then regretting it and reinstating it? Or is she emphatically stating a collective authorship (that the story is by E. de Neve and Jean Rhys), or collective translation (translated by E. de Nève and Jean Rhys)? No source text by de Nève survives, giving 'Chevalier' the curious status of a translation without an 'original'. As a result, the actual degree of Rhys's professed 'adaptation' can only be conjectured. Another unpublished text from the late 1920s, 'Vengeance', is even more problematic: its cover page tells us that it is 'by Jean Rhys, author of *The Left Bank*', but has been corrected in the unmistakably shaky handwriting of Rhys's old age as having been 'adapted from a story by E. de Nève'.⁷ Such appropriation is reflected in the strong similarities between Rhys's early story 'The Sidi', which appeared in *The Left Bank*, and de Nève's semi-autobiographical novel *Sous les verrous*.⁸ Rhys herself translated *Sous les verrous* as *Barred*, but her considerable labour on that text is left unattributed: there is no mention on the cover or title pages of any translator, other than a dedication by de Nève to Rhys as the book's 'godmother'.⁹ Such persistent ambiguities of authorship are further confounded by a

⁵ Jean Rhys, 'The Chevalier of the Place Blanche', Annotated typescript of short story translated from Édouard de Nève (undated). University of Tulsa, McFarlin Library, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Jean Rhys archive, Coll. No. 1976.011.1.3.18. The archival notes indicate that Rhys named 'Chevalier' as a translation that she tried to sell a few years before writing *The Left Bank*, so date it to shortly after WW1. However, as Angier points out, there are apparent parallels in 'Chevalier' with de Nève's own fraudulent activities (for which he was arrested in December 1924). Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (London: André Deutsch, 1990), p. 138. As these parallels are already apparent in the Tulsa draft, it is probable that this particular version dates from at least the mid 1920s.

⁶ Jean Rhys, 'The Chevalier of the Place Blanche', Annotated typescript, Jean Rhys archive 1976.011.1.3.18.

⁷ Jean Rhys, 'Vengeance', Annotated typescript of short story adapted from Édouard de Nève c1927-8, Jean Rhys archive, 1976.011.1.5.10.

⁸ See Taylor-Batty, pp. 95–99.

⁹ For a full analysis of the considerable changes that Rhys made to de Nève's text, see Martien Kappers-den Hollander, 'A Gloomy Child and Its Devoted Godmother: Jean Rhys, *Barred*, *Sous Les Verrous*, and *In de Strik*', in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1990), pp. 43–53.) It is worth noting that Rhys was also not named as translator on her other published translation, of Francis Carco's novel *Perversité* (*Perversity*, 1928), which was enthusiastically (and on the part of the publisher probably quite

peculiar question that Rhys asks Francis Wyndham in 1970, of whether *Barred* had ever been translated *into French*.¹⁰ On some level, then, Rhys seems to have retained a sense of ‘authorship’ of *Barred* – a text on which she is not even named as translator.

Other archival sources indicate an anxiety of originality in relation to her own work. One box contains a sheaf of unidentified fragments of notes from the 1960s or 70s. These notes are often barely legible, and form an increasingly scrawling palimpsest of writing upon writing. Within them is one page entitled ‘Quotations’ that relates to a text entitled ‘From a Diary: at the Ropemakers’ Arms’ that Rhys first wrote in 1947, and that was later included in her posthumously published *Smile, Please: an unfinished autobiography*.¹¹ The page includes very few typed words: ‘Quotations’ is the title, followed by an unfinished line: ‘Oh conquistadores, conquerors of the Americas’ (which Rhys, in *Smile, Please*, attributes to the sixteenth-century mystic St. Teresa of Avila).¹² Over the rest of the page, and its reverse, are a handwritten collection of half-remembered and mutated quotations from a range of sources including a ballad by Jean Richepin, more from St Teresa, *Finnegans Wake*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Scrawled across the top of the page: ‘Everything’s been done before’. This fragment is surprisingly evocative: an anxiety of originality is combined with the juxtaposition of diverse fragments, all mutated or changed somehow. But on closer inspection, it becomes clear that this page also subverts the very concept of ‘originality’ that it invokes. ‘Everything’s been done before’ is itself a quotation, the title of a song from the Jean Harlow film *Reckless* (1935).¹³ Rhys refers to it in a letter to Francis Wyndham of 1964 when she talks of her realisation that she has inadvertently copied elements from *Madame Bovary* in a draft of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.¹⁴ The song expresses the inevitable unoriginality of a love which nonetheless feels ‘new’; Rhys tells Wyndham: ‘I like it very much and sing it a lot

deliberately) attributed to Ford Madox Ford. Francis Carco, *Perversity*, trans. by Jean Rhys (Chicago: Pascal Covici, 1928). See also Angier, p. 164. For my analysis of Rhys’s translation of *Perversity*, and of the implications of de N claiming *Barred* as his ‘own’, see Taylor-Batty, pp. 82–83, 89–94.

¹⁰ Rhys writes to Francis Wyndham that ‘I don’t think that *Barred* was ever translated into French though it may have been without my knowledge.’ Correspondence from Jean Rhys to Francis Wyndham, 7 April 1970, Jean Rhys archive, 1976.011.2.14.6.

¹¹ Jean Rhys, Collection of miscellaneous unidentified fragments (undated), Jean Rhys archive 1976.011.1.6.11. Rhys, *Smile Please*, pp. 159–73.

¹² Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 160.

¹³ Victor Fleming, *Reckless* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1935).

¹⁴ Jean Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-1966*, ed. by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 276.

– to my words – as the only other line of the original that’s stuck is “But it’s new to me – it’s new to me”.¹⁵ Ironies abound: the only ‘original’ part of the song that Rhys remembers and repeats is that which affirms the lover’s sense of ‘newness’; the rest is not a copy, but a reinvention of the song in Rhys’s ‘own words’, and thus, in the context of the letter, an implicit defence of her own appropriative practice in the novel.

In the ‘Everything’ fragment itself, even where Rhys is presumably recording examples of what has been ‘done before’, those examples are often *already*-translated, adapted or appropriated. The words ‘Only this I know full well / I cannot tell I cannot tell’, which appear at the bottom of the second page, seem to be a quotation but in fact merge Siegfried Sassoon’s poem ‘What you are I cannot say’ with the nursery rhyme that Sassoon has drawn upon, ‘I do not like thee Doctor Fell’.¹⁶ The St Teresa quotation, whose position on the page suggests a deliberate association by Rhys of ‘quotations’ and ‘conquest’, appears to have come, not from any text by St Teresa, but from a travel narrative by Elsa Maillard, *The Cruel Way: Switzerland to Afghanistan in a Ford, 1939*, published in 1947, the same year that the quotation first appears within Rhys’s ‘Ropemaker’s Arms’ notebook.¹⁷ Indeed, the passage is followed both in the notebook and later in *Smile Please*, with a reference to Paul Morand’s comment ‘that English novelists always start with a quotation’.¹⁸ St. Teresa’s affirmation of spiritual conquest, appropriated into Maillard’s travel narrative, is in turn appropriated by Rhys into a commentary on intertextuality. The title ‘Everything’s been done before’, then, seems to indicate not any single ‘original’ text, but a chain of appropriation and a subversion of textual ‘origins’.

¹⁵ Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters*, p. 276.

¹⁶ The traditional nursery rhyme reads as follows: ‘I do not like thee Doctor Fell, / The reason why – I cannot tell; / But this I know, and know full well, / I do not like thee, Doctor Fell.’ The relevant part of Sassoon’s poem is as follows: ‘What you are I cannot say; / Only this I know full well – / When I touched your face today / Drifts of blossom flushed and fell.’

¹⁷ Ella K. Maillard, *The Cruel Way* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1947). Although I have so far been unable to trace the quotation to any St. Teresa text, the epigraph as quoted in Maillard corresponds very closely to Rhys’s version in the original ‘Ropemaker’s Arms’ notebook: ‘You are seeking a “New World”. I know one that is always new because it is eternal. O adventurers, conquerors of Americas, mine is an adventure more difficult and more heroic than all yours. At the cost of a thousand sufferings worse than yours, at the cost of a long death before the fact, I shall conquer this world that is ever young. Dare to follow me and *you will see!*’ The quotation also recurs, in slightly altered form, in a letter to Selma Vaz Dias in 1957, but Rhys at no point attributes it to Maillard. Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters*, p. 144.

¹⁸ Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 161.

Emily Apter, in *Against World Literature*, writes that ‘Literary communities are gated: according to Western law and international statute, authors *have* texts, publishers *have* a universal right to translate (as long as they pay), and nations *own* literary patrimony as cultural inheritance.’¹⁹ Romantic conceptions of nationality and national ‘culture’ are central to such principles of ‘cultural inheritance’, to the notion of authorial ‘ownership’, and to the very possibility of ‘originality’. Textual ‘belonging’ is closely allied to conceptions of linguistic ‘belonging’: the Romantic conception of ‘originality’ is founded in the notion of the national ‘genius’ ‘rooted’ in the ‘soil’ not only of the nation, but also, crucially, of the national language. When Edward Young, in his seminal essay *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), lionises ‘Originality’, its counterpart – ‘Imitation’ – is presented through metaphors of ‘transplantation’ that resemble the etymological meaning of translation as ‘carrying across’:

The pen of an *Original* writer, like *Armida’s* wand, out of a barren waste calls a blooming spring: Out of that blooming spring an *Imitator* is a transplanter of laurels, which sometimes die on removal, always languish in a foreign soil.²⁰

Following Young’s argument, translation – as an explicitly ‘derivative’ mode – would epitomise not merely a lack of originality, but a movement away from the creative nourishment of the ‘soil’ of the nation’s language and culture. Such a judgement is emblematic of what Yasemin Yildiz has called the ‘monolingual paradigm’, according to which ‘individuals and social formations are imagined to possess one “true” language only, their “mother tongue,” and through this possession to be organically linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture and nation.’²¹ As Yildiz writes, ‘[t]he uniqueness and organic nature of language imagined as “mother tongue” lends its authority to an aesthetics of originality and authenticity. In this view, a writer can become the origin of creative works only with an origin in a mother tongue, itself imagined to originate in a mother.’²²

¹⁹ Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 15.

²⁰ Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, ed. by Edith Morley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1918), p. 7.

²¹ Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 2.

²² Yildiz, p. 9.

In the context of modernism's resolute transnationalism, such assumptions become particularly problematic. 'Make it New', wrote Ezra Pound, in a statement that is retrospectively and obsessively repeated by critics as one of the emblematic clarion calls of modernist literature. Pound scholars have known for a while now that the phrase 'Make it New' is hardly 'new' at all in the conventional sense of the word: as Pound's deliberately distorting retranslation of a French translation of an ancient Chinese text, it suggests, rather, an aesthetic of translational appropriation and rewriting.²³ This matches Pound's own literary work, of course, within which, as Steven G. Yao has demonstrated, 'translating constituted not just a sustained, but more important, a generative writing practice.'²⁴ Following Lawrence Venuti and Yao's work on modernist translation, we know that in the period it transcends its traditionally 'derivative' role, forming 'an integral part of the Modernist program of cultural renewal' and 'a specific compositional practice'.²⁵ Thus, I would argue, the modernist idea of the 'new' can be reconceptualised as something that is inherently related not to 'originality', with its reliance on the concept of *origins* (whether national or authorial), but as an aesthetic product that is inherently bound up with a condition of translation, uprooting, and transplantation.

Modernism, of course, challenges conceptions of 'originality' in other ways too, not least in the predominance of intertextual appropriation, citation and allusion in so many modernist texts. T.S. Eliot famously proclaimed that 'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal',²⁶ a

²³ This was first revealed in Kurt Heinzelman, "'Make It New" The Rise of an Idea', in *Make It New: The Rise of Modernism*, ed. by Kurt Heinzelman (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2003). For an insightful further exploration of Pound in relation to the concept of newness, see also Michael North, *Novelty: A History of the New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 144–71.

²⁴ Steven G Yao, *Translation and the Languages of Modernism: Gender, Politics, Language* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 4.

²⁵ Yao, pp. 6–7; Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 164–236. Another important recent work has illustrated the impact of translation on the work of Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield: Claire Davison, *Translation as Collaboration: Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and S.S. Koteliansky* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). For an excellent overview of the significance of translation within modernism, see Rebecca Beasley, 'Modernism's Translations', in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Matt Eatough and Mark Wollaeger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 551–70.

²⁶ T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber Ltd, 2014), 2: THE PERFECT CRITIC, 1919–1926, p. 245 <<https://muse.jhu.edu/>> [accessed 1 August 2016].

statement which is reflected in the ‘verbal kleptomania’ of his own poetry.²⁷ This is not to say that there is uniformity in modernist appropriative practices, however, and I would argue that Rhys’s peculiar, uncertain and anxious forms of appropriation present a challenge to some of the dominant appropriative modes of high modernism. Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, for example, reveals profound assumptions about cultural inheritance, whereby the writer is compelled to write with ‘the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country’ in ‘his bones’.²⁸ It is particularly significant that Eliot elsewhere describes ‘influence’ as ‘a feeling of profound kinship’ with another author.²⁹ One of the etymological meanings of ‘plagiarism’ is the kidnapping of someone else’s child. As Marilyn Randall explains, to invoke the ‘stealing-of-the-child meaning’ of the word ‘plagiarism’ is to suggest ‘the perversion of the proper transmission of the “true” literary heritage that in the Western literary imagination traditionally follows a patriarchal lineage’.³⁰ To assert ‘kinship’ with earlier authors, then, is to rhetorically affirm a ‘legitimate’ patriarchal heritage that is not plagiarism. That is: the writer’s literary ‘heritage’ and ‘tradition’ already belong to him.

Colonial and postcolonial formulations of textual and cultural appropriation are utterly different. Compare Eliot’s model of filiation, for example, to the Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade’s ‘Manifesto Antropófago’ (‘Cannibalist Manifesto’) (1928), which highlights the violence of cultural appropriation:

Tupy or not tupy, that is the question.

[...]

Só me interessa o que não é meu. Lei do homem. Lei do antropófago.³¹

²⁷ This is Maud Ellmann’s evocative phrase for Eliot’s allusive practice. Maud Ellmann, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987).

²⁸ T. S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber Ltd), 2: THE PERFECT CRITIC, 1919–1926, p. 106 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1567048>> [accessed 1 August 2016].

²⁹ T. S. Eliot, ‘Reflections on Contemporary Poetry IV’, in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber Ltd, 2014), 2: THE PERFECT CRITIC, 1919–1926, 66–71 (p. 66) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/>> [accessed 1 August 2016].

³⁰ Marilyn Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit, and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 64.

³¹ Oswald de Andrade, ‘Manifesto Antropófago’, *Revista de Antropofagia*, 1.1 (1928), 3–4. Note Oswald’s use of English for his cannibalist appropriation of Shakespeare in ‘Tupy or not tupy’.

[‘I am only concerned with what is not mine. Law of Man. Law of the cannibal.’³²]

Oswald draws on the Brazilian indigenous Tupy rite of killing and consuming enemies captured in combat as a means of absorbing their strength. Eliot as a North American does not make explicit any anxiety in relation to European culture in his conceptualisation of tradition. Oswald’s theory, on the other hand, engages directly with Brazil’s colonial history, and a relationship with European culture that cannot go unquestioned. The notion of cultural anthropophagy is a vivid defence of the consumption and use of European culture, not in a way that is ‘derivative’ or ‘secondary’, but in the construction of new cultural forms. It is an emblem of victory over the defeated enemy, after all – of conquest – but also a mark of respect: the consumption of the man/text to absorb his/its best qualities, its strength. Crucially, what is ‘consumed’ is *not* the cannibal/artist’s own, whence its power: ‘I am *only* concerned with what is not mine’. This is a theory of influence that does not assume cultural ownership or unquestioned access to a ‘tradition’ and which reveals the assumptions that underlie Eliot’s theory: for anthropophagists, Europeans were the first ‘devourers’ anyway (and indeed Haroldo de Campos, who famously builds on Oswald in his theory of translation as *transcreation*, specifically describes Eliot as a ‘devourer’ of Laforgue.³³)

‘Again the Antilles’

Rhys might not have formulated any such theoretical standpoint, but her writing, and especially *Wide Sargasso Sea*, makes apparent her awareness of the political dimensions of intertextual appropriation. Her early story, ‘Again the Antilles’, reveals the racial and colonial politics at the heart of ideas of national culture, cultural ‘inheritance’, questions of authorship, and of ‘belonging’ within a ‘mother tongue’. The story follows a dispute within the pages of the *Dominica Herald and Leeward Islands Gazette* between Papa Dom, the mixed-race editor of the *Gazette*, and Mr Musgrave, an old colonial ‘Englishman of the

³² Oswald de Andrade, ‘Cannibalist Manifesto’, trans. by Leslie Bary, *Latin American Literary Review*, 19.38 (1991), 38–47.

³³ Haroldo de Campos, ‘The Rule of Anthropophagy: Europe under the Sign of Devoration’, trans. by María Tai Wolff, *Latin American Literary Review*, 14.27 (1986), 42–60.

governing class'.³⁴ The argument, whose original cause we never learn, centres on the two men's use of canonical English literature as a rhetorical strategy. It is, Judith Raiskin explains, 'a struggle over the racial right to English culture and, by extension, the right to political power.'³⁵ Papa Dom, writing under a pseudonym, accuses Mr Musgrave of behaviour that demonstrates 'degeneracy of a stock', contrasts him with 'the ideals of true gentility', and calls upon:

the beautiful description of a contemporary, possibly, though not certainly, the Marquis of Montrose, left us by Shakespeare, the divine poet and genius.
'He was a very gentle, perfect knight....' (T 179)

As Mr Musgrave is quick to point out, however:

The lines quoted were written, not by Shakespeare but by Chaucer, though you cannot of course be expected to know that, and run

*He never yet no vilonye had sayde
In al his lyf, unto no manner of wight –
He was a verray parfit, gentil knyght.*

'It is indeed a saddening and a dismal thing that the names of great Englishmen should be thus taken in vain by the ignorant of another race and colour.' (T 179)

Musgrave is outraged at the mixed race colonial man's misattribution and misquotation of English canonical texts. He asserts 'ownership' here of an 'original' and 'genuine' English cultural heritage through correct attribution and by quoting the original source text rather than a translation. Musgrave's supposed 'rootedness' in English culture is reflected in his assertion of textual and linguistic 'origins' and in his understanding of historical forms of the English language. The joke, as Sue Thomas points out, is that *Musgrave* is also misquoting Chaucer, inadvertently partially translating the text into modern English.³⁶

³⁴ Jean Rhys, *Tigers Are Better Looking, with a Selection from The Left Bank* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1968), p. 178. Subsequent references will appear in parentheses with the abbreviation T.

³⁵ Judith L. Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 116.

³⁶ Sue Thomas comments that many critics have also missed this element of the joke, assuming that Musgrave has quoted Chaucer correctly. This element of the story is problematic: as Thomas writes, 'the textual strategy of calling on the knowingness of an audience to pick the errors in the allusions of two characters [...] activates "a corporate subjectivity," those with the highbrow cultural competence in an English tradition to be "in the

Musgrave uses his assumed cultural ownership of authorial origins and translational originals to mark his own racial 'purity' and 'authenticity' in the face of Papa Dom's accusation of racial degeneracy. Papa Dom, on the other hand, questions the possibility of authenticating authorship, and challenges the very nature of canonical 'genius':

I accept your correction though I understand that in the mind of the best authorities there are grave doubts, very grave doubts indeed, as to the authorship of the lines, and indeed the other works of the immortal Swan of Avon. (T 179-80)

The riposte runs deep: to question the authorship, and thus also the 'genius', of two of the most important figures in the English literary canon is to question post-Romantic notions of originality, literary value, and the tenets of a 'national' literature. Edward Young, in *Conjectures*, calls on Shakespeare as a true original, a writer whose purported lack of erudition makes him able to 'copy' directly from 'nature', as it were.³⁷ The Romantic fiction of Shakespeare's 'originality' and 'genius' ignores, of course, his extensive use of sources, his aesthetic of imitation and transformation. Chaucer, likewise, belongs to a venerable tradition of literary appropriation and rewriting. From within that tradition, Papa Dom's appropriation of Chaucer would be far less of a transgression; to someone like Mr Musgrave, who has embraced the cultural validation for the 'Englishman' of post-Romantic conceptions of national culture, however, the challenge to authorship is deeply offensive.

Such notions of 'originality' also conceal the colonial appropriative practices of Western art, an irony that is not lost on Rhys. As Mary Lou Emery writes, in Rhys's novel *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, the protagonist Julia Martin's response to a Modigliani painting, 'exposes the representational effect of European primitivist painting as both icon for and suppression of the subjectivity of a migrant woman of uncertain cultural background.'³⁸ Sasha Jensen in

know," or with reasonably ready access to a Middle English text of Chaucer's poem.' Sue Thomas, *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 57.

³⁷ Young writes that '*Shakespeare* mingled no water with his wine, lower'd his genius by no vapid imitation', and asks: 'Who knows whether *Shakespeare* might not have thought less, if he had read more?' (35). Instead, Shakespeare 'was master of two books [...] the book of nature, and that of man. [...] These are the fountain-head, whence the *Castalian* streams of *original* composition flow'. Young, pp. 34, 35, 36.

³⁸ Mary Lou Emery, *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 210.

Good Morning, Midnight encounters 'African' masks fabricated by the modernist artist Serge Rubin.³⁹ A draft of the original ending of *Voyage in the Dark* at the University of Tulsa contains a deleted passage that critiques still more explicitly the practice of white cultural appropriation of black art. Anna Morgan, feverish and hallucinating during an abortion that will prove fatal, recalls playing the song 'Ma belle ka di maman li'. Crossed out in the typescript is the following passage describing her father's reaction to it:

The tune's all right Father said there's a fortune waiting for the man who'll
come round and ~~pick up~~ get hold of some of the nigger tunes in these islands'
And then say they're his of course
Yes why not⁴⁰

Rhys has been critiqued for elements of 'racial masquerade' in *Voyage in the Dark*, particularly in her character Anna's identification with black culture as a source of rebellion.⁴¹ This deleted passage, however, distinguishes between different forms of appropriation: on the one hand, Anna's performance of 'Ma belle ka di maman li', and on the other, the suggestion that the song should be aggressively appropriated for financial gain. Anna's sympathy with black culture and implicit resistance to her father's words are reflected in the passage which follows, where she translates the song for her stepmother Hester:

But that one's very melancholy Hester said and the words don't seem to me
to make any sense.

I said it means My beautiful girl is singing to her mother The little ones
grow old The little ones [grow] old⁴²

³⁹ Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), pp. 76–77. As Rosenberg highlights, this scene 'reflects two alienating elements of European modernist aesthetics': the homogenization of Africa (Serge agrees that the masks are 'West African', but then talks of them coming 'straight from the Congo'), and 'the constructed nature of the primitive in modern art' (Serge, a Russian Jew, has made the masks himself). L. Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 202.

⁴⁰ Jean Rhys, Annotated typescript of *Voyage in the Dark*, Jean Rhys archive, 1976.011.1.5.13.

⁴¹ See Peter J. Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters: British Literary Culture and the Emergence of Postcolonial Aesthetics*, *Modernist Literature & Culture*, 20 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 229–33.

⁴² Jean Rhys, Annotated typescript of *Voyage in the Dark*, Jean Rhys archive, 1976.011.1.5.13.

Her role as translator here reflects what Snaith has described as Anna's 'constantly shifting' identification with black Dominican culture in the novel as 'moving between desire, empathy and ventriloquized identity'. In the ending of *Voyage*, a delirious Anna remembers Dominican carnival parades where black revellers adopt white masks. Her identification becomes a 'form of anti-imperialism' by imagining a space where power hierarchies are reversed.⁴³ In this deleted passage, I would argue, that imagined rebellion takes the form of a resistance to appropriative colonial forms of 'authorship'.

'Let Them Call It Jazz'

Though this idea was deleted even from the early draft of *Voyage in the Dark*, a very similar theme is picked up again in Rhys's later story 'Let Them Call it Jazz', which highlights the inequities inherent in the financial and legal 'authorship' of texts. 'Jazz' transposes Rhys's own experiences of cultural alienation, transgression and imprisonment into the voice and patois language of Selina, a mixed race Caribbean woman in London.⁴⁴ Selina dulls her experience of poverty, cultural alienation and racism by drinking and singing songs, troubling her 'respectable' London neighbours. This culminates in a dispute that leads to her incarceration in Holloway prison. There, she hears singing emanating from one of the cells above her, which another inmate identifies as 'the Holloway song'. For Selina, this provides a moment of aesthetic defiance, affirmation, and escape: the song 'don't fall down and die in the courtyard; seems to me it could jump the gates of the jail easy and travel far, and nobody could stop it.' (T 64) It is also, significantly, one of collective ownership and matrilineal heritage, which is echoed in the feminine solidarity that the Holloway Song seems to embody.⁴⁵ Its effect on Selina is powerful:

⁴³ Snaith, *Modernist Voyages*, p. 149.

⁴⁴ In the story, Rhys draws on her own unhappy experiences of living in Beckenham, South London, including running disputes with neighbours that lead to a conviction of assault (against which Rhys maintained her innocence) and a brief spell in Holloway Prison. See Angier, pp. 441–48.

⁴⁵ Snaith links this 'sound without origin' to the Martiniquan folk songs, passed down from her grandmother, that Selina sings earlier in the story. 'Jean Rhys and the Politics of Sound' (presented at the Modernism Now! British Association for Modernism Studies International Conference, Institute of English Studies, Senate House, London, 2014). I would like to thank Anna Snaith for having shared this article with me prior to publication.

When I'm back in my cell I can't just wait for bed. I walk up and down and I think.
'One day I hear that song on trumpets and these walls will fall and rest.' I want to get
out so bad I could hammer on the door, for I know now that anything can happen
[...] (T 64)

The 'Holloway song' resists the social structures that assign power and ownership to notions of 'origins' and 'originality'. Selina can thus appropriate it as a form of cultural resistance and empowerment. In the story, she sings all the time, yet her own compositions are always instantly forgotten. The 'Holloway song', on the other hand, transcends and subverts ideas of aesthetic property, allowing her to participate in a process of collective 'ownership' and symbolic solidarity:

[...] after all, that song was all I had. I don't belong nowhere really, and I haven't
money to buy my way to belonging. I don't want to either.

But when that girl sing, she sing to me and sing for me. I was there because I
was *meant* to be there. It was *meant* I should hear it – this I *know*. (T 67)

This positive cultural appropriation by the narrator is undermined, however, when a man at a party – who is probably white – hears Selina whistling the song to herself, takes up the tune and plays it on the piano, 'jazzing it up' (T 67).⁴⁶ He subsequently assumes financial and legal ownership by selling 'his' composition of the song. Selina, for her part, receiving five pounds from him as thanks for her 'help' in his composition, laments that, having 'let them play it wrong', the song 'will go from me like all the other songs – like everything. Nothing left for me at all.' (T 67).⁴⁷ Ironically, the process of recording means that she will forget it,

⁴⁶ Although the story does not specify, my assumption is that the man is white. As Kristin Czarnecki comments, the cover of the 1996 Penguin edition of *Let Them Call It Jazz and Other Stories*, an image of a mixed-race pianist, is puzzling. Kristin Czarnecki, 'Jean Rhys's Postmodern Narrative Authority: Selina's Patois in "Let Them Call It Jazz"', *College Literature*, 35.2 (2008), 20–37 (p. 31).

⁴⁷ There is an irony here in the re-appropriation of the song: jazz, arising out of African American Culture (and hence an inherently mixed racial and cultural heritage), is a popular art-form based on improvisation which itself resists the closure of a written and authorized musical text. As a genre, jazz is also, however, inherently based on processes of derivation and adaptation. For analysis of the complexities of jazz in relation to copyright law in the mid-twentieth century and in relation to literary modernism, see Mark Osteen, 'Rhythm Changes: Contrafacts, Copyright, and Jazz Modernism', in *Modernism and Copyright*, ed. by Paul K. Saint-Amour (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 89–113.

because the song has been appropriated into an economic and legal system of financial and artistic 'authorship' from which she is excluded. 'Let Them Call It Jazz' thus highlights the power-dynamics inherent in cultural appropriation.

Selina not only lacks a stable 'origin' or 'home' but resists the principle of such discourses of 'rootedness': she doesn't 'belong', but she also doesn't *want* to.⁴⁸ The Holloway Song is 'all she has', but not as property or as something she has 'authored': it is sung 'for her' and she continues to perform it. Rhys's choice of a mixed-race Creole-speaking narrator is significant: Selina's very language, through its rhizomatic development, subverts notions of cultural or linguistic 'roots' and 'origins'.⁴⁹ Although 'Jazz' illustrates the problems of appropriating collective folk art, and has, like *Voyage*, itself been critiqued as 'racial masquerade',⁵⁰ the story does present a moment of possibility: the song suggests a poetics of imitation and appropriation which *can* be a productive and subversive cultural expression.

'The Joey Bagstock Smile'

Critical assessments of 'Jazz' can reveal an unease with art-forms that challenge and undermine our conceptions of authorial origins. Thomas Staley's early and inaccurate summary of 'Jazz' as 'a woeful portrait of a West Indian woman immigrant whose only real possession is a melody she has composed in her head' is telling: he mistakenly re-inscribes Selina as 'composer' of the story in a slip that reveals a resistance to the Holloway Song as a

⁴⁸ Towards the end of the story, Selina states that 'I don't belong nowhere really, and I haven't money to buy my way to belonging. I don't want to either.' (T 67)

⁴⁹ This is relevant to the Martiniquan theorist Édouard Glissant's conception of Caribbean language and culture as essentially rhizomatic. See Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

⁵⁰ See Elaine Savory for a critique of Rhys's 'white female appropriation of black identity' in 'Jazz' and *Voyage*. Elaine Savory, *Jean Rhys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 30–31. Czarnecki asks: 'What rights can [Selina] claim to the Holloway song? Similarly, what rights can Jean Rhys claim to a black idiom?', and explores the extent to which Rhys could be participating in racial masquerade. Czarnecki, p. 31. Her conclusion is that Rhys's stylised patois is not a problematic appropriation of black idiom. Kalliney also examines the story in this light, concluding that, although Rhys's use of Creole language in 'Jazz' might be read as 'pointed use of minstrelsy', the story 'reveals a volatile combination of jealousy, celebration, emulation, and straightforward identification in its treatment of West Indian artists' and can be defined as 'nascent version of postcolonialism'. Peter J. Kalliney, pp. 239–41.

subversively un-authored art-form.⁵¹ The critical and editorial fixation with origins, sources, texts and authorship is a notable feature of what academics *do*. Rhys's work, however, tends to frustrate and undermine our searches and our attempts to 'fix' origins.⁵² This tendency is particularly apparent in another document in the Tulsa archive: the corrected proofs of Rhys's late, very short and hitherto neglected story 'The Joey Bagstock Smile', which appeared in *The New Statesman* in 1977. The editorial annotations on this document attempt to resist Rhys's unsettling mode of intertextual appropriation. In the story, the narrator, attempting to describe the cruelty of her dead husband's smile, resorts to uncertain intertextual references and misquotations, particularly to Joey Bagstock, a minor character in Dickens's *Dombey and Son*. She misquotes from Dickens twice, with slight variation.⁵³ The editor's comments on the corrected proof are telling. They attempt to 'correct' citations and to locate 'original' sources: 'Is this quotation meant to be wrong? In *Dombey & Son*, it's: "He's tough, ma'am, tough, is J.B. Tough and de-vilish sly!"', and then at the end of the story, again: 'See query above about this quotation. Shouldn't it be exactly the same here as in first paragraph?'⁵⁴ Editorial anxiety reaches a peak however, at a suspected unmarked quotation. Against Rhys's passage – 'But one thing is certain and the rest is lies, the flower that once has bloomed forever dies.' – we find an attempt to correct 'rest is' to 'rest are', and the following annotation:

Is this a quotation from something? (The "lies" – "dies" rhyme makes one think so.)
If it's a quote, we'd like to know the source.

⁵¹ Thomas F Staley, *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 126. Albeit to a lesser extent, this is also apparent in more recent criticism. Kalliney, for example, reveals an assumption that Selina is a form of 'author' of the song when he describes her as 'developing the melody into a full-blown song' and as 'an artist whose work is expropriated by the metropolitan culture industry'. Peter J. Kalliney, pp. 239, 240.

⁵² For example, my desire to locate de Nève's source text of 'Chevalier' and the original source of Rhys's quotation from St. Teresa of Avila have so far been unsuccessful.

⁵³ The first paragraph ends with 'Joey Bagstock, he's tough old Joey, tough and devilish sly.' The story finishes with the slightly different 'He's tough old Joey, he's tough and devilish sly.' The typescript of the story that is held in Tulsa presents the final quotation unmarked by inverted commas, suggesting a final assimilation of the citation into the narrator's voice. Jean Rhys, 'The Joey Bagstock Smile', Annotated proofs, Jean Rhys archive, 1976.011.1.2.20. Jean Rhys, 'The Joey Bagstock Smile', *The New Statesman*, 23 December 1977, p. 890.

⁵⁴ Jean Rhys, 'The Joey Bagstock Smile', Annotated proofs, Jean Rhys archive, 1976.011.1.2.20. Rhys's use of misquotation as a stylistic device is confirmed by her refusal to respond to the editor's corrections, as is evidenced in the final published version of the story.

This is indeed a quotation, from Edward FitzGerald's notoriously appropriative translation *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, which Rhys admired despite accusations of its 'inaccuracy'.⁵⁵ Rhys makes minor changes to the *Rubaiyat* quotation, which is seamlessly integrated into the story without any attribution. This process itself reflects the considerable liberties that FitzGerald took with *his* professed 'transmogrification' of his source text. For Padma Rangarajan, the *Rubaiyat's* questionable status as 'translation' moves it more towards a form of imitative composition, even 'original creation', to such an extent that she situates the poem within the tradition of orientalisng pseudo-translations.⁵⁶ In 'Joey Bagstock', an already-translational and appropriative text is adapted and appropriated, within the context of a narrative voice that needs to resort to misquotation rather than her 'own' words. Ultimately, the 'source' that the editor wants to locate is itself no 'original'.

Rhys's use of FitzGerald is also significant because she herself made use of translation as a mode of composition.⁵⁷ For Apter, it is translation that becomes crucial as a subversive form of 'authorized plagiarism' in its status as 'a form of creative property that belongs fully to no one'.⁵⁸ As we will see in the final section of this article, Rhys's fiction itself presents another possibility: appropriative translation as a subversive and paradoxically productive aesthetic which can produce 'new' stylistic forms, but which also undermines the distinctions between 'original' and 'derivative' work.

'The Chevalier of the Place Blanche'

⁵⁵ FitzGerald's text reads: 'One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies; The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.' Omar Khayyam and Edward FitzGerald, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 29. In *Smile, Please*, Rhys writes of her fondness for Omar Khayyam despite her Aunt Jeanette's statements that it is 'just a bad translation', and that 'people who ought to know tell me that FitzGerald's translation is a very inaccurate one indeed.' Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 70. The Tulsa archive also contains a typed note where Rhys comments on being 'haunted' by lines from the Khayyam translation. Jean Rhys archive, 1976.011.1.6.10.

⁵⁶ Padma Rangarajan, *Imperial Babel: Translation, Exoticism, and the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 121. FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat* is so bound up with imperial ideologies that, as Rangarajan puts it, it is 'difficult not to read it as a story of pure imperial acquisition.' Rhys's mentions of the poem do not critique such colonial appropriation, although it is worth noting that Joey Bagstock's cruelty in Dickens is colonial and racial: in *Dombey and Son*, Bagstock is known specifically for his brutal mockery of his Indian servant 'The Native', a voiceless and powerless subaltern figure.

⁵⁷ See Taylor-Batty, pp. 80–112.

⁵⁸ Apter, p. 15.

Peter Kalliney has recently argued for the impact of modern copyright laws on interwar modernist writers' stylistic development: 'the penchant for formal experimentation', combined with a 'reputation for eccentricity', 'can also be read as a sign of their awareness of their work as property, both commercial and cultural'. Rhys's 'distinct, hard-boiled style', he argues, 'was particularly well suited' to 'the protection offered by copyright law'.⁵⁹ But what about where such stylistic 'uniqueness' is itself the product of a 'derivative' writing process? What about where translation becomes integral to modes of composition? The stylistic distinctiveness of much modernist writing is the product of modernist writers' fascination with – and engagement with the process of – translation, which in copyright law is a 'derivative' form of writing.⁶⁰ Perhaps because of its declared 'derivative' nature, 'Chevalier' has received very limited critical attention. Elaine Savory groups it with Rhys's other unpublished translations from de Nève as having a very distinct 'texture' from all Rhys's other works.⁶¹ I want to argue instead for its significance within Rhys's body of work. The story shows us how translation can function as a mode of composition for Rhys that is not one of conquest or assimilation, but of partial transplantation and mutation. As such, 'Chevalier' could be seen to put into practice the idealised mode of 'shared' or 'collaborative' expression that is the Holloway Song in 'Let them Call it Jazz'. Rather than adhering to the modernist 'authorial signature', Rhys in this story challenges and questions it.

Ania Spyra has written persuasively about how Rhys critiques the use of notions of linguistic 'belonging' as a mode of exclusion.⁶² Spyra focuses on multilingualism and Rhys's use of 'untranslatables' in *Voyage in the Dark*, but such questions pervade all Rhys's fiction. 'Chevalier' presents a particularly interesting case study in that it is textually 'derivative', translational, and multilingual. Its status as 'adapted translation', as I hope to show, calls

⁵⁹ Peter Kalliney, 'Jean Rhys: Left Bank Modernist as Postcolonial Intellectual', in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Matt Eatough and Mark Wollaeger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 413–32 (p. 420).

⁶⁰ For detailed analysis of the function of translation as a 'generative' mode of writing, see Yao. Indeed, even Ezra Pound's famous invocation to 'Make it new' is itself the product of mistranslation: it is derived from the retranslation of a French translation of an ancient Chinese text. See North, p. 164.

⁶¹ Savory, p. 263.

⁶² Ania Spyra, 'Language and Belonging in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*', in *Rhys Matters*, ed. by Mary Wilson and Kerry L. Johnson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 67–83.

into question notions of textual 'origins' and authorial 'originality', but it also represents and calls into question linguistic 'belonging'. It is not only that the transnational characters of the story are linguistically unsettled; Rhys's stylistic use of bilingual and translational effects also highlights the permeability of linguistic 'boundaries', and calls into question the 'belonging' of individual words within 'national' languages. (This, as we will see, brings out an editorial anxiety in later editions of the story that recalls the 'Joey Bagstock' editor's desire to fix 'sources' and 'origins'). 'Chevalier' is an 'imitation' that literalises Young's metaphor in its 'transplantation' of a story by de Nève into English. The final text, however, far from 'languishing' in its 'foreign soil', transcends any notion of 'imitation' because it challenges the very notion of cultural or linguistic 'belonging'. Indeed, 'Chevalier' is both constructed on the basis of, and is *about*, interlingual tension. That tension arises not so much from its 'roots' in any 'source' text, but out of the process of translation. The story's own mode of translational composition becomes central to the representation of intercultural and interlingual contact, translation, and untranslatability. Ultimately, I will argue, 'Chevalier' is no 'inferior' imitation; instead it thrives stylistically from the problematic process of transfer between languages.

'Chevalier' is about a Parisian man, a fraudster and self-styled 'conqueror of women' (SL 121), who picks up an Englishwoman, Margaret, in a bar hoping to charm her into giving him money. She, it turns out, is a painter who resists his seduction and tries to persuade him to travel with her as a muse for *her* art. Each exoticises the other, perceives them as inherently different: she romanticises him as an 'Apache' or gangster; he, meanwhile, is obsessed with her Englishness, especially the perceived 'austerity' of her clothes and her lack of conformity to French notions of style and feminine beauty. Though both are bilingually competent, they fail to communicate. That failure of communication is reflected in the story's own bilingualism, whereby English is constantly supplemented by French words and phrases that often serve to highlight untranslatability. For example, in the story's opening, which presents the Chevalier waiting in a bar, the narrative reverts to French to signal the inadequacy of English:

'Sacré Floriane', muttered the Chevalier. He looked at a Swedish couple at the next table, at the bald American by the door, and at the hairy Anglo-Saxon novelist in the

corner, and thought that they were a strange-looking lot, and exceedingly depressing. (Quelles gueules qu'ils ont, was how he put it.) (SL 113)

This French phrase 'Quelles gueules qu'ils ont' is indeed difficult to translate. Its literal meaning – 'what gobs they've got' – is more idiomatically rendered by Rhys as 'they were a strange-looking lot, and exceedingly depressing'. The very presence of the 'original' French in the text suggests the inadequacy of the English (which does indeed fail to capture the rudeness of the expression). Rhys, by including the French, is, however, implicitly quoting not only from the character's thoughts, but from her source *text*, de Nève's story – which presumably is where those thoughts were first articulated. In effect, Rhys's translation here declares its inability to replace its source text, working instead as a supplement to it.

This implicit signalling of a source text and source language does not mean that textual or linguistic 'origins' are signalled in any clear or stable sense. For a start, Rhys is translating from a text that was never published. In that sense, 'Chevalier' is a translation that can *gesture* to an 'original' but whose source or 'origin' can never be confirmed. (As far as I am aware, no draft of de Nève's story survives). In describing the story as a 'much-adapted' translation, Rhys already calls into question its 'fidelity' as a translation; the ambiguities of attribution that we find on the cover of the early Tulsa draft make it even harder to determine the extent of Rhys's own creative input. English is supplemented with French throughout the story, and this serves to unsettle rather than to fix origins, whether those 'origins' be authorial, textual or linguistic. The characters' bilingualism, as I will demonstrate, is unsettling and oddly accented; the 'original' language that is being represented (the language that they are meant to be speaking) is not always clear either. Moreover, the story as a whole manifests a preoccupation with loan-words and untranslatables that move backwards and forwards between languages, often changing meaning and connotations in the process.

The story's bilingualism is thematic as well as stylistic: both characters use English and French to communicate, and both try to avoid communicating in their own language:

The girl spoke to the waiter. Her accent, though slight, was unmistakable – English or American. English, he decided, after carefully observing her hat. At this point an old man, carrying a concertina [...] began a waltz which the Chevalier vaguely remembered having heard when a small boy. He remarked aloud: ‘Tiens!’ That makes me feel young again.’

‘It gives me the cafard,’ said the girl, answering him in French.

‘Madame,’ said the Chevalier seriously, ‘one must kill a cafard at once, cruelly and without scruple.’ The girl laughed, but her eyes were so unhappy that he looked away from her, fearing that she was about to cry.

He said: ‘After all, it is always possible to kill a cafard. For that champagne is best. [...] ‘Do you know Montmartre well?’

‘No,’ she said. ‘Hardly at all.’

‘A pity. I live there. Shall I tell you about it?’ He spoke in English.

She said hastily, ‘No, I understand you perfectly. Where did you learn your English? It doesn’t matter, don’t tell me. When you speak to me, will you speak French? I like your voice in French so much.

‘Is that so?’ he asked politely. ‘As you wish.’ (SL 114)

The Anglophone Margaret speaks a French which is slightly odd and unplaceable: although the Chevalier finds her accent ‘unmistakeable’, he cannot tell if it is ‘English or American’. The Francophone Chevalier speaks an accented English and is clearly disappointed by Margaret’s insistence that they speak French. The early version of the story that is held in Tulsa contains a wonderful reference to his ‘extraordinary accent half nasal, half cockney’, of which he is extremely proud and describes as his ‘speciality’⁶³ – and which, we might add, with its ‘cockney’ inflections also undermines the way that an accent is often assumed to ‘place’ the non-native speaker’s ‘original’ language and cultural identity.⁶⁴ Moreover, it is not always clear what language they are meant to be speaking. In the above passage, for example, we do not know at what point the Chevalier starts speaking in English, and as a

⁶³ Rhys, ‘The Chevalier of the Place Blanche’, Annotated typescript, Jean Rhys archive, 1976.011.1.3.18.

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the function of accent in Rhys see Liedeke Plate, ‘Sounds of Belonging: Accented Writing in Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*’, in *Thresholds of Listening: Sound, Technics, Space*, ed. by Sander van Maas (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 175–91.

result to what extent French words indicate his code-switching or function as a translational convention to indicate speech that is meant to have occurred in French. That lack of clarity is significant and unsettling: we do not know the language of the 'original' conversation.

Untranslatability is a key feature of this passage, particularly in Rhys's refusal to translate the word 'cafard'. Rhys's anxiety as a translator is especially clear in the earlier Tulsa draft of the story. This is one of the most heavily annotated parts of the typescript: the typed word 'cafard' is crossed out and replaced by 'the blues', amidst further crossed out revisions that oscillate between the English and French words. The apparent final amendment in the draft, only partly legible, reads as follows: 'Then she looked at the Chevalier and translated her [?] into French: "ça me donne le cafard".' In the published version, Margaret's dialogue in French is rendered bilingually; in the early draft, it is *Margaret* who struggles with the act of translating: she speaks in English first, and then translates into French for the Chevalier. In a sense, Rhys's own act of translating is reflected in Margaret's own role as a translator, negotiating and moving in between languages.

Rhys eventually decides to retain the word 'cafard' in French without a translation, and this reflects how she stylises bilingual effects throughout the story. The word 'cafard' is drawn into metalinguistic focus and its punning potential is highlighted: it comes to mean 'cockroach' as well as 'depression', in what becomes something of a catchphrase for the Chevalier and Margaret: 'to kill the cafard'. This is particularly explicit in a passage of the draft that Rhys subsequently cut. In response to the Chevalier's proclamation that 'I am never unhappy',

The lady asked, with some scepticism, if that was because singing killed his cafard. She knew all about that insect and one didn't stop it trotting (metaphorically) about one's brain as easily as all that.⁶⁵

It is not hard to see why Rhys cut this rather laboured explanation of the pun. Instead, we find the alliterative phrase 'kill the cafard', which only really *works* bilingually (the French

⁶⁵ Jean Rhys, 'The Chevalier of the Place Blanche', Annotated typescript, Jean Rhys archive 1976.011.1.3.18.

‘tuer le cafard’ lacks the alliterative patterning that makes ‘kill the cafard’ so effective). This, I would suggest, is an excellent example of the metalinguistic and interlingual punning and stylistic effects that arise from the story’s translational mode of composition. ‘Cafard’ signals a ‘source’ language and text, while also becoming integral to a stylistic effect that occurs through the process of appropriation and assimilation.

The gradual assimilation of the loan word ‘cafard’ reflects a general preoccupation with loan-words as untranslatables within the story. The Tulsa draft of ‘Chevalier’ describes Margaret’s hair as ‘that red gold colour which is called blond anglais in France, heaven knows why’: the French meaning of ‘English blond’ has no relation to the meaning of ‘blond’ in the English language.⁶⁶ The published version contains a still more subtle play on loan-words in the following passage, where the Chevalier is setting the scene for his seduction:

He knew the importance of a *mise-en-scène* on these occasions and he bought crimson roses to place in a yellow vase, white roses for a black one. [...] Finally, he arrayed himself in the garment or garments which he called his ‘smoking’ and sat down to wait.

She arrived rather late wearing a dress which, though she had bought it in a French shop, yet gave the impression of being completely English. She admired the roses and the view but did not appear to notice the smoking. (T 119)

First of all, we have ‘*mise-en-scène*’, a French loan-word that is already assimilated to English. More complex is the reference to ‘the garment or garments which he called his “smoking”’. The presentation of the word ‘smoking’ in quotation marks serves to highlight the fact that this is not the English meaning of the word, but the loan-word in *French* for tuxedo. The ‘quotation’ from the Chevalier’s discourse, and implicitly from the de Nève source text, is thus not ‘originally’ French: it has already travelled from English to French and gained a different meaning, before being transplanted back into English, via translation. ‘Smoking’ here is both English and not-English – its meaning has been transformed in the process of assimilation into French to such an extent that it needs explaining back to the

⁶⁶ Jean Rhys, ‘The Chevalier of the Place Blanche’, Annotated typescript, Jean Rhys archive 1976.011.1.3.18.

Anglophone reader. This back-and-forth between languages and cultures is reflected in other modes of dress too: Margaret's outfit appears to have been successfully assimilated to her Englishness, and hence estranged from its French 'origins'. The English word (and item of clothing, 'smoking jacket') become French, the French word and French dress become English. But in this process of translational mutation and defamiliarisation, the signifying potential of the 'smoking' is lost: the Englishwoman fails to respond to its symbolic significance in the French cultural context. When she later calls the Chevalier an 'Apache', he thinks: 'And my smoking, then [...], hasn't the woman noticed my smoking?' (T 120-21).⁶⁷ By removing the quotation marks from the word 'smoking', Rhys brings in a subtle ambiguity as to whether we are to read 'smoking' in the English or French senses, and to which language that word 'belongs'.

Typographical convention in English usually serves to highlight – and implicitly, to 'place' – 'foreign' words by italicising them. To remove italics from loan words in printed copy is usually to accept them as English. The Tulsa draft is strangely inconsistent here: although some words (as in the above example) are clearly underlined and marked as French, this occurs rarely. Within a heavily Gallicised text, only four French words or phrases are underlined.⁶⁸ And as, in the later published version of 'Chevalier', the ambiguous status of the word 'smoking' is unsettled by a shift away from marking the word in quotation marks, the first published edition of the story in *Sleep it Off, Lady*, removes almost all italicisation of French words altogether.⁶⁹ As a result, French words are not clearly demarcated as 'foreign' or not, and appear to shift even more indeterminately between languages. The editorial anxiety to mark sources and 'origins' that we saw in the annotated proofs of 'Joey Bagstock' recurs in later editions, however, where typographical convention is reintroduced. The Norton edition of *Jean Rhys: The Collected Short Stories* (1987) consistently italicises non-

⁶⁷ A further irony here is that 'Apache' is also a loan-word, the name for a Native American tribe which has been appropriated to indicate unruly lawlessness and gangster-like behaviour in a way that romanticises that behaviour.

⁶⁸ Jean Rhys, 'The Chevalier of the Place Blanche', Annotated typescript, Jean Rhys archive 1976.011.1.3.18.

⁶⁹ The only phrases in the first edition that are italicised are '*femme du monde*' (SL 114) and '*Auf Bruderschaft*' (SL 116).

English words in 'Chevalier', marking those words clearly *as* 'foreign', and reducing the unsettling nature of Rhys's play on loan-words.⁷⁰

Rhys once countered a description of herself as an 'expatriate' with the riposte 'Expatriate from where?'.⁷¹ It is well known that her characters unsettle ideas of national 'belonging'. Her works provide an even more profound challenge to notions of textual and linguistic ownership and belonging. The textual history and complex attributions of 'Chevalier' undermine any notion of a textual or authorial 'origin' to such an extent that it is impossible to gain any clear sense of 'authorship' in the conventional sense. 'Chevalier' might be explicitly described as a 'translation', but when we closely examine the story's thematic preoccupations and linguistic characteristics, we find strong indications that the story has its 'origins' not so much in any French story by de Nève as from the *process* of translation and transfer. In this respect, it is tempting to ally Rhys with other modernist writers such as Pound and Eliot whose translational and appropriative work produces a form of modernist 'newness' that is distinct from conceptions of 'originality'. Unlike Eliot, however, Rhys does not develop an assertive poetics of appropriation; unlike Pound, she does not explicitly integrate translation into her oeuvre as a mode of composition. Indeed, as I have argued, stories like 'Again the Antilles' and 'Let Them Call It Jazz' directly critique the politics of cultural appropriation, and help us to see the problematic assumptions that underlie Eliot's own conception of 'Tradition'. But we cannot ally Rhys with the defiant anti-colonial appropriation of Andrade's theory either. Rhys does not say that she appropriates; neither does she assert that what she is writing is 'original'. She prevaricates and deliberates on how to attribute 'Chevalier' and the other de Nève translations. She is beset by anxieties of authorship. She is uncertain. That uncertainty reflects Rhys's complex liminal status as a white colonial writer, but it is also peculiarly unsettling, even radical. Undermining the 'monolingual paradigm' involves more than displaced and nomadic characters, or even linguistically-displaced multilingual texts. Rhys's writing, I argue, goes further: 'Chevalier', viewed in the context of archival materials, questions and undermines translational source

⁷⁰ Jean Rhys, *The Collected Short Stories* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987). This editorial decision has been repeated in the recent Penguin Modern Classics re-issue. Jean Rhys, *The Collected Short Stories* (London: Penguin Classics, 2017).

⁷¹ Cited in Mary Lou Emery, *Jean Rhys at 'World's End': Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 13.

texts, national languages, lexical 'origins', and, ultimately, post-Romantic notions of authorial 'originality'. 'Let Them Call It Jazz' presents the potential power of a nomadic, anonymous art that resists and destabilises the system of cultural capital and authorial 'ownership' within which it is finally subsumed. A story like 'Chevalier', I would argue, begins to gesture towards such an art.

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