**To Become so Very Welsh: Denis Williams’s *The Third Temptation* and the Effacement of Afro-Caribbean Identity**

Except for a few brief publications, there has been almost no critical attention directed at the work of Denis Williams—an underappreciated and largely forgotten Guyanese painter, archeologist, and writer. This point is especially true in regards to his two innovative novels, 1963’s semi-biographical *Other Leopards* and 1968’s overtly experimental *The Third Temptation*. Like his fictions, the trajectory of Williams’s career is multifaceted and disorienting, and resists easy classification. Born in Georgetown, Williams studied painting in London in the 1950s as a protégé of Wyndham Lewis—and achieved acclaim for his experimentation with Modernist forms and racial identity, most notably for his *Human World* series. Williams, however, resented being labeled and marketed as a “Negro Artist,” and, in 1957, left Europe in to reside in Africa, where he taught Art courses in Sudan, Nigeria, and Uganda (Cambridge 115). There, he developed an interest in archeology, to which he devoted his career; shortly thereafter, he returned to Georgetown. While Williams is most known and respected for his painting and archaeological work, his fictions have mostly faded into obscurity.

Williams’s interdisciplinary background and disparate interests led him to fuse, rethink, and sometimes appropriate cross-cultural literary forms in decidedly innovative ways. In this sense, like the fiction of his countryman Wilson Harris, Williams’s fiction is explicitly—and some might say aggressively—experimental. This point is evident in his second novel, *The Third Temptation*. Williams’s novel is a dense, innovative examination of narrative perspective that, surprisingly, takes its influence from Alain Robbe-Grillet and the French Nouveau Roman movement. The novel is rife with repetitions, hyper attentive descriptions, and it lacks a single, discernable narrator. Its plot, however, is relatively simple. Set in Wales and centered on an affair between a wealthy businessman and his employee’s wife, the novel’s central character is a middle-aged, white European named Joss Banks. Banks is an unapologetic misogynist struggling with the effects of aging on his virility and status: he has recently retired from his printing press and his wife, Bid, has just left him. The central motif of the novel is thus largely a question of domestic trauma. Bid has left Joss because she is unable to cope with the death of her ex-husband—Joss’s former employee—who took his life as a result of her affair with Joss. The suicide—depicted in the opening scene of the novel—festers like an open wound and, in fact, much of the action of the novel revolves around it: the plot of the novel, as such, focuses largely on Joss and his friend Sean’s conversations about their failing relationships and Bid’s ex-husband’s suicide. A plot summary of the novel, however, reveals almost nothing of its ingenuity, as this skeletal plot is told, and retold, from multiple angles and perspectives. Central aspects of the novel appear again and again, and constantly shifting narrative perspectives repeatedly undermine everything that is said, making the exact sequence of events—and even who is speaking—frequently impossible to discern. Hyper-attentive descriptions describe multiple vantage points and angles of Joss and Sean’s conversations, as narratorial interruptions sever linearity to muse on the efficacy and ethics of power and violence.

Yet what is perhaps most striking about the novel is its whiteness. Set in a fictional version of the Welsh seaside town Llandudno, all of the main characters are white Europeans and, at least on the surface, there exists none of the Afro-Caribbean autobiographical elements common to Williams’s work—and the novel seems unconcerned with race, politics, or colonialism altogether. As such, it is a radical departure from his first novel, *Other Leopards*, in which the Guyanese protagonist struggles to reconcile his African heritage. Whereas *Other Leopards* was fairly well received, *The Third Temptation*—perhaps due to its difficult prose and Welsh setting—has received almost no critical attention. Even Williams’s daughters, Charlotte and Evelyn Williams, who have published extensively on their father’s legacy and work, largely omit *The Third Temptation* from their monographs. And despite Peepal Tree Press’s reissue of the novel in 2010, it has still remained a forgotten footnote in the corpus of Caribbean literature—and some critics refuse to consider the text as Caribbean novel at all (Ramraj 16). In any case, Williams’s dense prose, combined with the fact that the novel seems, at a cursory glance, almost entirely void of race, politics, or the Caribbean, makes it, perhaps, one of the strangest—and least discussed— in all of Caribbean literature.

Yet as I will argue in this essay, what is fascinating about *The Third Temptation*’s abstract, dense prose is the subtle, surreptitious intimation of racial oppression and exploitation lurking below the surface of the largely white textual landscape. Thus far, the scant criticism on the novel has focused almost exclusively on the strange connection to the French Nouveau Roman movement, while ignoring the larger questions of racial identity that surround the novel. Victor J. Ramraj argues, for example, that the novel,

[H]as little or nothing to do with Africa or racial identity. Williams, in fact, is concerned less with themes than with formal and technical experimentation, based on the theories of the Nouveau Roman school, particularly as advocated by its chief exponent, Alain Robbe-Grillet…the novel is a difficult one, and it makes demands on the reader for which he may or may not feel amply compensated (488).[[1]](#endnote-1)

To be sure, questions of racial politics are not explicit in the text, and the Welsh landscape Williams portrays is one that is almost exclusively white, in which only two black characters emerge, briefly, as a sexual objects. It is misplaced, however, to suggest the novel does not confront larger questions of racial and colonial identity. As such, *The Third Temptation*’s experiments with perspective function not as a loving ode to the Nouveau Roman, but as a means to acknowledge a history of racial violence that is a deeply entrenched into Welsh society. [[2]](#endnote-2) As I will show, the novel is ripe for rediscovery, in part because Williams’s text, in many ways, precedes a current trend in thinking about Wales in a postcolonial context.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Indeed, this essay argues that close analysis of the novel reveals the Wales of the 1960s as a complicated, conflicted intersection of colonial resistance and imperialist tendencies. To do so, however, requires re-situating the novel within its forgotten biographical and historical context. Therefore, taking Charlotte Williams’s recent memoir *Sugar and Slate*—in which her father Denis Williams plays a central role—as a critical starting point, I demonstrate the extent to which Williams’s personal trauma provides key context for understanding the role of Wales as a site of racial and psychological tension in the novel, in which Afro-Caribbean identity and European art and culture clash uncomfortably. Williams’s personal crises—in which he struggles to “shrug off the influences of the West”—emerge in the novel juxtaposed against a veiled, yet resoundingly important historical investigation of Welsh colonialism, as the novel confronts the imperialistic pursuit of the Welsh missionary William Hughes, whose “Congo Institute” in the early 20th century aimed to convert Africans to Welsh Christians (*Sugar and Slate* 190).[[4]](#endnote-4) Accordingly, the novel’s depiction of Wales as a symbol of overbearing European influence and colonial domination manifests as an ontological crisis in the narrative in which identity exists only in flux and crisis. Every major character in the text possesses identities that are never fixed and never stable. Characters are frequently swallowed up by one another and, indeed, the primary trauma of the text is the fear of erasure: the very notion that European identity will overwrite and stifle black individuality. As such, I read the novel’s aesthetic ingenuities not as ahistorical or apolitical experiments, but as a means to express racial and colonial oppression, as Williams incorporates experimental narrative techniques that repeatedly undermine the stability and fixity of identity, thereby suggesting that the effacement of black identity is both inevitable and integral to the landscape of twentieth century Wales.

**Wales and the Aesthetics of Hostile Space**

The entirety of *The Third Temptation* is set in Wales—a point that may be surprising given Williams’s devotion to African and Guyanese culture. The setting of the novel, however, is not arbitrary. Though Williams never resides in Wales, it is Wales that is essential to his artistic development, as it is the site of a momentous aesthetic crisis, in which he faces a seemingly irreconcilable conflict between embracing a theory of Western art and culture and embracing a new anti-colonial artistry. This aesthetic crisis begins in London: in the late 1950s, while working on his first novel, William’s reaches a sudden breaking point in his life and work, in which he begins to repudiate the mark of European influence on his increasingly Afro-Caribbean aesthetic. Long frustrated with the exoticization of his art and “patronizing overtones” toward his work, he abruptly leaves Europe in 1957 and settles in Khartoum, where he takes on a lecturer position in the School of Fine Art (*The Art of Denis Williams* 31).[[5]](#endnote-5) Yet Williams’s familial obligations mean he is unable to leave his European life entirely behind. His wife, Katherine Alice, is Welsh, and they have two young children. Although they join Williams in Africa for a short time, Katherine Alice is unhappy, and shortly thereafter leaves with the children to settle in Llandudno—which becomes the setting of *The Third Temptation* (fictionalized in the novel as the town Caedmon). Williams’s need to escape Europe to hone his artistic sensibilities is met with the realization that he cannot divorce himself from his familial obligations in Wales—and he begins migrating back and forth between Khartoum and Llandudno. This sense of tension, of being caught between two places and two identities, becomes a focal point of his career.

Wales is thus the central site of personal and colonial trauma, in which he cannot escape his previous life but cannot fully embrace a new identity that rejects the oppressive ideology of the West. As Charlotte Williams argues, Williams “spent his life trying to shrug off the influences of the West; everything he did was a rejection of European domination” (*Sugar and Slate* 190). So, it is important to note that Williams’s view of Wales is not simply engendered by familial resentment, but a need to return—or more importantly, a need to escape a growing realization that he is losing his heritage and becoming, essentially, a European artist. As such, frequent migrations between Wales and Africa exacerbate Williams’s aesthetic crisis. Throughout the late 1950s and 60s—while working on *The Third Temptation*—he travels so frequently between Africa and Wales that Charlotte Williams refers to these years as the start of her family’s “to-ing” and fro-ing” or perpetual state of being “somewhere and elsewhere,” in which the family moves exhaustingly between Africa and Wales (*Sugar and Slate* 5).Whereas Africa exists as a space that enables a newfound sense of power and artistic sensibility, Wales exists as one of obligation and European influence. Writing to his daughter Charlotte, he writes, “[In Africa] I feel much more confident in my own power… I feel I’m worth much more to myself and to everyone as what I am—an artist, and must try to work up to the brim of my own possibilities” (*Sugar and Slate* 4). For Williams, the rapid movement between two spaces— one in which he feels aesthetically emancipated—and one in which he feels aesthetically imprisoned, shape the central exploration of space in the novel.

Accordingly, Williams’s conflicted emotions about Wales and its effect on his art reveal themselves in the novel at the outset as, in *The Third Temptation*, the trauma of physical displacement is an underlying horror that can never be fully articulated, but nevertheless permeates every facet of existence. While the action of the novel is set only in Wales, Williams repeatedly investigates larger questions of diaspora, as geographical disorientation emerges as a central theme in its very first scene. Indeed, the novel begins with an examination of physical and psychological space, as *The Third Temptation* begins with a suicide that disturbs and disorients geographical space. Lawrence Henry Owen, a commercial artist, hangs himself in the forests just outside the fictional Welsh town of Caedmon. Traumatized by his wife’s infidelity and the realization that the child she is carrying is not his—but his employer’s, Joss Banks—Lho, as he is called, takes his life. He hangs himself. The suicide, however, is not simply a death, but an act of dislocation. As Lho swings dying from the tree, he oscillates in and out of ontological spaces, as the temporal boundaries between here and there, then and now, and is and is not, collapse into a grotesque amalgamation of fear and sadness.

In Lho’s death throes, time and space collapse as he experiences “a darkness…a circumambience that might possess being but no centre, a function of space and yet not space” (23). At this moment, he is both living and dead, husband and ex-husband, Welsh and not Welsh. He is, the narrator tells us, there and not there: “Without effort he could distinguish this previous state from the suspended nothing which dwelled in him, there and not there…an unseen and terrible space whose quivering cavities relayed echoes to further terribly trembling spaces there and not there” (23). This notion—the impossible space between here and there—becomes a thematic principle of the novel and, in fact, the first chapter of the text, immediately following Lho’s suicide, begins with an image of constable who, like Lho, is trapped between two spaces. The constable, it seems is both “on his island jeweled in the morning sun” and “not on his island” at the same time (26). It is this push and pull—and the feeling of psychological and physical displacement that emerges with it—that is immediately foregrounded in the novel’s opening scenes. The fact that these scenes mirror Charlotte William’s descriptions of her father’s visits—in which she repeatedly describes him as being “somewhere and elsewhere”—firmly plant Williams’s crisis of identity as a profound influence on the ideological and narrative strategies of the novel.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Undeniably, in both Williams’s life and in the novel, the tenuous boundaries and demarcations between geographical space intimate racial trauma. And it is this push and pull—evident in Lho’s death—that bears the novel’s first mark of colonialism. Lho’s death, a hanging, is synonymous with colonial violence and evokes the image of a lynching, in which readers watch his corpse swing from the tree. The scene, further, is immediately followed by an image of power and authority: the constable. Indeed, the sole authority figure in the text—the constable—exists only in terms of the signifier “island”—and, though set in Wales, it is indeed significant that the Wales of the novel is one rife with images of islands and jungles. Caedmon is surrounded by forestry, as Lho, early in the text, retires to the jungle that surrounds the city to find a reprieve from the cosmopolitan seaside town in which he resides. These images, which evoke Africa and Caribbean, are almost always followed by images of textual power, most notably the constable—and Joss Banks, who’s image appears in the text as Lho is in the midst of his death throes. And although the word “colonialism” is never uttered in the text, it is significant that novel juxtaposes images of colonial landscapes and lynchings with images of oppression. Of course, textual explorations of power are hardly surprising given that the title of the novel, *The Third Temptation*, refers to Satan’s temptation of Christ with the promise of power. Accordingly, in-between space—and the fluctuating ontological status Lho experiences during his death—is described as a loss of power, as he remarks that, captured in this space, “He Could not use his mind—he had lost that power” (24). These themes—oppression, power, and displacement—firmly solidify the key themes of the novel as colonial in nature, a point enforced by the absence of black identity in the text. Resoundingly, all of the characters that possess authority in the text are European—and power, in *The Third Temptation*, is an entirely white phenomenon.

It is this relationship between racial oppression and geographical disorientation that is essential to understanding the novel. The move from Africa, where Williams felt empowered and invigorated, to Wales, a place in which he felt isolated psychologically and racially, guides the depiction of Welsh life in the novel. While Charlotte Williams in *Sugar and Slate* acknowledges that, in part, her father “loved Wales although it had something of a fairytale quality to him” (53), the prejudice he felt and the racial climate complicated Williams’s love of Wales, as he frequently felt ostracized. As Charlotte Williams argues, “He was the outsider, he needed us to mediate this alien environment…he never belonged. He never could” (53). It was, she reveals, that his blackness made him a spectacle: “We were a traveling show… a curiosity that people came out of their houses to see. Black people and countryside don’t go together in white people’s thinking” (53). Williams’s skin, considerably darker than that of his children, combined with his marriage to Katie Alice, marked him as a racial threat in the predominantly white, Welsh countryside.

Welsh life for Williams thus rapidly fluctuates rapidly between moments of inclusion and exclusion and, indeed, is a site of constant racial tension. This sense of ever-present tension emerges most explicitly in Williams’s reflections on Wales following his re-location to Africa. This crisis of identity can be seen to come sharply into focus in 1958, one year after he left Europe. His retrospective accounts in several interviews speak of a defining moment when he catches sight of a photo of himself in the window of the family home in Wales. This image of himself is so wholly alien that he begins screaming and tearing off his clothes. As he explains: ‘I was ranting, tearing […] something had gone wrong. That’s not me. What is this about? […] And I think from the moment I began to reverse from that image’” (Charlotte Williams, “A Young Man with Hope” 95).[[7]](#endnote-7) This sense of detachment from oneself—Williams, as a Modernist Black Guyanese artist living in Africa but unable to sever his connections to Wales—becomes a source of pronounced horror. As he gazes at the photo, he realizes he cannot shed his associations with his European life, and feels trapped in warped “a fairy tale” from which he cannot escape.[[8]](#endnote-8) For Williams, Wales threatens to efface and suppress his newfound African identity—to stamp it out entirely.

This trauma of recognition—or the fact that Wales exists as a site of perpetual estrangement that leaves one with a sense of overt panic and terror to the extent that he or she can no longer recognize himself—is essential to understanding the novel’s experimentation with perspective. In the text, the very notion of identity is exhaustively undermined, and no character possesses a fixed or stable identity. The narrative shifts from perspective to perspective and eschews a single dominant narrative point of view, in which characters are unable to maintain their individualities. Rapid blurring of subjectivities occur—and readers are frequently unable to determine who is talking, or to what or whom a character refers. For example, early on, Joss Banks and his friend Sean discuss Lho’s aforementioned death in graphic detail, but constant interruptions make it impossible to determine who is speaking. Images of advertisements, postcards and love letters briefly intrude on the narrative. In one case, we see a violent pornographic postcard sprawled with a love letter detailing the end of Sean’s relationship, as Joss, Sean, and the text on the postcard merge together uncomfortably. These exchanges occur throughout the passage, and it perhaps comes as little surprise that the collision of identities and narratorial responsibilities culminates in a literal wreck, as a car accident suddenly interrupts the scene, in which a blue ford slams into a mini-van. Mangled bodies and onlookers merge into one, as the narrator notes a crowd gathered around the scene in which, “people accumulate [into]… blobs and masses” (37) and are thus violently stripped of any discernable identity. Overwhelmed by the confusion, a narrator suddenly interrupts the narrative to voice his frustration, noting, “Even though monochromatic and attenuated the movement was a movement of men. There was at last a He, a They. They swam before him, uncertain vestments, grey intensities of unstable mass and contour hovering on the visual threshold so that it was impossible to establish for certain that these were not mere spots dancing and swimming there…[in] continual flux, endless interpretation” (41). Identity, as such, is always under duress, as seemingly, every character in the text is afflicted by an overt crisis of recognition. Agency is never assured, as speech and thoughts blend together, sometimes exhaustively, throughout the novel.

Behind textual acts of effacement, however, often lurks the intimation of subtle resistance. Despite the collapse of subjectivity in the text, overt images of Afro-Caribbean art and culture repeatedly puncture the textual veneer, as if to suggest erasure, while frequent, is not all consuming. As such, lurking behind the almost entirely white landscape of Wales is juxtaposed against fleeting, but repeated images of both Africa and the Caribbean. The word, “Guyana” is littered throughout the text, set against the town of Caedmon, as if reminding us that, in this story, the Caribbean is more real than the European landscape in which the novel is set. In an early scene, we see a spinning globe, one that repeatedly reminds readers of life outside of Wales:

How masterful to rotate the earth with one’s fingertips—50°…60°…longitude east… 80°… 90°… 100° to Gilbert Island 180°; then back to 170°… 160°…130° longitude west…120°…110°….100°, Galapagos Islands 60°… the Amazon 40°… the Equator… Torrid zone… Alto Trombetas… the virgin forests of Guyana (12).

This scene is particularly important, as none of the characters in the text have any relationship to Guyana at all; rather, Guyana functions as an anchor to the discord of the novel and hangs over the chaos and disorientation of the text. The novel’s frequent signposts toward Caribbean identity intimate the mark of something lost—or overwritten—by the overbearing whiteness of the text, as the presence of the Caribbean repeatedly punctures the textual veneer that would lead readers to believe the text is a European novel. As Vibert C. Cambridge suggests, the novel embeds “numerous clues” in its many “micro-stories” that signal “West Indian/Guyanese geography and cultural life” (120). As Cambridge notes, the novel includes references to Guyanese games such as “Duck and Drake” and “Riddle Me, Riddle Me,” which appear out of context and alien given the Welsh setting (Cambridge 120). The subtlety, and almost invisibility, of these images is telling, as the novel repeatedly signals, and then suppresses, Afro-Caribbean identity, but is unable to erase its presence from the textual landscape entirely. Thus the Wales of the novel, a hostile space that strips and suppresses the subject’s individuality, becomes all the more traumatic, as flickers of a subverted culture, place, and people repeatedly threaten to emerge, but always ultimately recede into the background.

**The Martyr as Corruptive Force**

While the presence of Afro-Caribbean identity emerges only fleetingly in the text, a tribute to power, oppression, and disenfranchisement appears as an unmistakable monument in the novel. Standing tall in the center of the city is a physical embodiment to colonialism: a statue of a “Welsh Martyr,” who left Wales to plant Christianity in “Darkest Africa” (28, 43). Looming over the horizon, its bronze image gazes down upon citizens of Caedmon. Impossible to ignore, its presence infects the every day speech of the town’s inhabitants, as they are inexplicably drawn to it. The statue, seemingly, celebrates the power of European civilization. As Lho muses, the statue functions as a reminder of European superiority, noting: “us Europeans…life’s never lost, sort of, we keep inheriting like, from the dead, inheriting it, so it goes on… indestructability of spirit you know, stuff this Welsh Martyr brought back from Africa” (62). The statue of the martyr that adorns the novelistic landscape thus serves as a visual reminder in the text that power is never equally distributed. And, in this way, the novelistic focus on effacement, conversion, and the fragility of identity is set against the spectre of colonial trauma, as embodied in the statue’s reminder of Europe’s power over Africa. Simply put—and as Lho’s quote implies—the statue of the Welsh martyr is enormously important within the landscape of Caedmon—and in rethinking *The Third Temptation* in terms of colonial violence.

It’s hardly surprising, then, that the statue’s first appearance appears at the very start of the text and, indeed, its image brackets the novel. It is the first and last image readers see in the novel. Its first appearance in the text is juxtaposed with the image of the constable, the novel’s lone authority figure who endlessly patrols the city, yet never comments or intervenes. The constable gazes into “the bronze eyes of the statue placed there by an African government, weathered, bleached on brows, cheeks, shoulders, its protuberances etched like highlights against the grey rockface, against the patina of the figure itself “ (11). The statue, here, is not a Welsh landmark per se, but a pact with Africa—a kind of vague, uniform representation of Africa that lacks all specificity. No one can tell, really, where and how the statue emerged into being. It simply exists, worn and partially indecipherable. As a relic, to gaze upon it is to see only obscurity; neither the man, his mission, or his history is evident. The statue marks only a severed connection to Africa, now lost. Its image, what’s more, is juxtaposed with a commodified vision of wild Africa: an image, or advertisement of a zebra, which is first visible in the window display of a butcher shop (10). These images pervade the text, and it is clear from the outset of the novel that though the characters in the text are almost exclusively white and European, the statue firmly etches the image of Africa’s supposed inferiority into Caedmon’s consciousness.

Yet the statue’s origins can, in fact, be traced. Though Caedmon is a fictional version of Llandudno, the martyr—but not the statue—is entirely real. And, in fact, one of the most widely ignored aspects of the text is the novel’s historical confrontation with Wales’s troubling history of Christian missionary work in Africa throughout the 19th and early 20th century .The Welsh Martyr, identifiable by the birth and death date (1856-1924) marked on its third appearance, as well as repeated textual references to “Dark Africa,” is none other than Rev. William Hughes—a figure who, today, seemingly holds little historical or cultural relevance in Wales. Williams’s fictional town of Caedmon is seemingly built around the presence of Hughes’s life and work, a minor figure in Wales in the late 19th and early 20th century. To be sure, there is no statue of Hughes in modern Llandudno: his missionary work has never been monumentalized, nor is it imbricated in the public consciousness, as it is in the text. Given Williams’s struggle with Afro Caribbean identity during the writing of the novel, Hughes’s project—which was quite simply to use Wales as a site to convert and remake African savages in Europe’s image—no doubt mirrors Williams’s own concerns over the danger of European influence and racial effacement. Victor Ramraj, in his introduction to the novel, remarks on the connection between Hughes and the novel and contends that the “presence of the statue hints at… imperial resonance”—but that Williams “considers it out of place in [the novel], but could not omit it altogether” (12). Hughes’s statue and the novel, however, are much more significant than Ramraj suggests and, in fact, its history and symbolism firmly establishes Wales as a site of colonial violence in the novel.

In 1892, Hughes opened his Congo Institute—sometimes referred to as the African Training Institute, or simply the Congo House—at Colwyn Bay. Hughes’s methodology is outlined in *Dark Africa and the Way Out or A Scheme for Civilizing and Evangelizing the Dark Continent*, the title of which is frequently referenced in *The Third Temptation*. Hughes’s text was originally published in 1892 by Sampson Low—and later reprinted in 1960 by Negro Universities Press. Hughes’s goal was not simple missionary work. Rather, Hughes aimed to bring “uncivilized” African children to Wales to educate them with Western principles in the hope that once converted, they could be returned to Africa to spread Christianity. To be sure, Hughes’s project was one of unapologetic conversion: he aimed, foremost, to strip his students of their identities. The African-ness of his students, he argued, must be subverted at all costs. In *Dark Africa*, for example, Hughes contends that Africans must be segregated from the negative influences of their own people. His African students must be “kept away from the surrounding superstitions and evil influences of their people” (2). Hughes’s project, then, attempts to erase and suppress cultural identity, which spreads like cancer. As he argues, “It avails little to scatter a dim light in the midst of dense darkness, or to train a few of the natives, as some missionaries do, and let them return too soon to their own people, whose bad customs destroy the good that has been done, the powers of evil being too great for the few young native converts to overcome” (6). Here, Hughes, in no uncertain terms, marks the African as not simply savage, but resoundingly evil—a malicious force that does not act out of ignorance, but rather spite and hate that tempts and ruins (20).[[9]](#endnote-9) The project of every good Christian Welshman is thus to aid in the effacement of African identity.

This in part explains the rapid collapse of individuality that pervades the novel. The martyr’s project is one of conversion and rapid change, as Hughes’s success depends on the quickness and effectiveness to which it can essentially convert the largest number of African students. Conversion, in Hughes’s ideal world, happens quickly and repeatedly. In *Dark Africa and the Way Out*, Hughes remarks on the rapidity with which he can train an African to read the New Testament, noting he taught the entire book of Revelation to a student in nine days: “Someone may say: ‘ Is this possible?’ It is possible, even to an African,” he writes (113). This very notion, in which Hughes celebrates the quickness through which one’s identify can stripped from them, is too evident in in *The Third Temptation* as, in one scene, a narrator is momentarily taken aback by the ease in which agency is stripped from the subject, noting,

It can be surprising too how rapidly a body surrenders its identity, merging into the general ambience—three or fourscore yards, no more, beyond which it becomes impossible to recognize even intimate relations, wives or lovers. Surprising, alarming even, when the mind thus perceives the visual constriction within which human personality manages to operate, and even to flourish (92).

Hughes’s ideology of rapid conversion thus becomes a textual norm. The quickness, here, to which one’s identity is blurred and subverted is startling, as every character in the text is subject to conversion; their identities always exist under duress, subject to rapid erasure and immediate replacement.

While none of the characters fully understand the significance of the statue, it is hard to overstate its significance in the text. For the Wales of the novel is one in which Wales’s greatest achievement—in fact its only monument—is the carrying out of Hughes’s project. The text, then, depicts a Welsh nationality in which the effacement of African identity is integral to its national identity. Further consideration of Hughes’s writing suggests that the relationship between his project and national identity is hardly surprising, as Hughes saw his missionary work in decidedly global terms, to which Wales was the starting point. In *Dark Africa and the Way Out or A Scheme for Civilizing and Evangelizing the Dark Continent* writes, he argues Wales must be the center of African repurposing project: “We appeal…to the whole English-speaking nations, which happily includes America…We regard this scheme as too great for little Wales to have the honour of carrying it to completion” (105). Hughes views his project as inextricable from Welsh nationalism which, here, initiates a process of global conversion that will affect all nations and peoples. As Hughes sees it, his Welsh missionary work provides a model for the world. And, in this sense, the Congo Institute represents not only a symbol of national pride, but will engender the emergence of a global coaliation—an international network, led by Wales, thats mission is the very eradication of African identity. The project of conversion is thus essential to Welsh national identity and the future of Wales’ development as a nation.

Yet while Hughes viewed his Congo institute as the start of a larger global coalition of missionary work, he was explicit that the establishment of any such coalition must not impinge upon Welsh linguistic and cultural identity. Indeed, in the quote above, Hughes is careful to distinguish between English and Welsh speaking nations—a point that is not particularly surprising, given Hughes was an outspoken critic of Britain’s suppression of the Welsh language. And, in this regard, Hughes’s interpretation of nationalism is considerably more complicated and contradictory than it seemingly appears. While Hughes’s institute aimed to sever Africa from the African, it was nevertheless an outspoken critic against legislation that devalued the Welsh language—and it also sought to champion forgotten and disenfranchised Welsh art and culture. In the passage below, Hughes critiques colonial practices that devalue a nation’s linguistic identity:

It is wrong and a blunder to appoint Englishmen as judges, preachers, and magistrates over the people of Wales…they are ignorant of the Welsh language, unacquainted with the affairs of the Welsh people, their poverty, history, wrongs; they cannot sympathize with the sentiments, hopes, and aspirations of a conquered people like their own flesh and blood…The English church has failed in Wales because it came here with an unnatural way, preaching in another tongue to people who spoke Welsh (50).[[10]](#endnote-10)

In this way, Hughes’s project opens the space to discuss perhaps the most overt connection that *The Third Temptation* shares with recent scholarship on colonialism and Wales: mainly, the fight for—and historic suppression of—Welsh linguistic rights. Simply put, a Welsh national identity, for Hughes, is one in which Wales speaks Welsh—and, as he suggests, the formation of a global coalition can and should only be acheived provided Wales is able to maintain its linguistic and cultural autonomy.

Predictably, though, Hughes critiques colonial practices that suppress Welsh art, language, and culture, but sees no contradiction in his own quest to stifle African art and culture which he views inferior. Yet despite his imperial blindness, he does bring attention to Welsh linguistic rights. During the late 19th and early 20th century, speaking Welsh was banned in schools—and students speaking it were reprimanded and punished (*Sugar and Slate* 30). Hughes frequently championed festivals of Welsh art and literature and advocated for a rediscovery and embrasure of Welsh identity. His institute thus both participates in and repudiates imperialism concurrently. While Hughes’s work, as that of other missionaries, insists it operates on moralistic ground, it exculpates itself from critique by foregrounding England’s injustices against Wales.

Wales, then, is a different kind of colonizer, one that Hughes argues attempts to set right the sins of Mother England. As Jane Aaron argues in, “Slaughter and Salvation: Welsh Missionary Activity and British Imperialism,” Welsh missionaries, especially in the 19th century, achieved a kind of glamour different than that of their English counterparts. As Aaron puts it, the missionaries’ reputation “arises from the missionary’s redemptive role as a savior not only of the natives but also Welsh pride in the face of the by now much-documented historical humiliations of the century” (58). The Welsh missionary represents a “better mode of relating to the world at large than that of the English imperial officer” (58). Thus, while the Welsh missionary appropriates, and indeed is only possible, through England’s colonial model, he nevertheless sees him or herself as resisting colonial power rather than embracing it (58). This contradictory logic emerges overtly in Hughes’s writing—and, at the same time, explains the historical precedent for Hughes’s view that his missionary work is an anti-colonialist gesture.It’s not surprising then, that for Hughes, the African conversion movement functions as a form of warped colonial resistance. Given the prominent role of Hughes in *The Third Temptation*, Williams was no doubt aware and fascinated that an advocate of the Welsh language movement foregrounded Welshness at the expense of African identity.

Indeed, what is interesting about Hughes is this contradictory, double bind of a hybrid Welsh-African identity as a marker of Welsh nationality. Converting Africans to Welsh Christians provides both a repudiation of a British dominance and also a means by which to strengthen nationality. In *Sugar and Slate*, Charlotte Williams extensively addresses Hughes’s nationalist project, arguing that:

[The Congo Institute] had to tell about their work in a way that condemned exploitation and plunder and disassociated itself from the forces of colonialism… [T]hey managed to be both saviours of the natives and at the same time bolster a sense of Welsh pride and self-identity that had been so cruelly robbed and pillaged by the same English colonisation… ‘Little Wales’ would have a finer, spiritual glory untainted by the savagery of and slaughter of the English at whose hands Wales itself had suffered centuries before. So the African and the Welshman were linked in a spiritual haven from the encroachments of the English (35).

The contradiction Williams outlines is essential in perceiving the complexities of postcolonial Wales. Kirsti Bohata, for example, draws attention to Wales’s double role as the oppressor and the oppressed. Arguing against writers like Ned Thomas who suggest imperialist Welsh behavior was enacted and essentially inscribed into the fabric of the Welsh society by the colonizer, Bohata suggests it is important not to “ignore Welsh involvement in imperial missionary work throughout the Empire… as well as Welsh colonization of Patagonia, not to mention North America, Australia, and so on. It is neither helpful nor acceptable to divide desirable and undesirable attitudes to imperialism into Welsh and British (read English) perspectives” (5). It is, Bohata contends, not correct or accurate to think of Wales and England in terms of colonizer or colonized (5), but instead preferable to “reveal the ways in which the Welsh have been subjected to a form of imperialism over a long period of time, while also acknowledging the way the Welsh have been complicit in their subjugation and in the colonization of others” (5).

Yet while Williams was no doubt interested in Hughes’s hypocrisy, it is worth pausing here to acknowledge that there is no Welsh in *The Third Temptation*—and it is not certain how well Williams himself could speak Welsh—or whether he was invested or interested in Welsh linguistic rights. Charlotte Williams notes that their family spoke a hybridized language that teetered between English and Welsh—a language that resembled both “Llandudno Welsh” and “Llandudno English” (52). And though Williams notes that Welsh vernacular influenced her father’s speech long after he left Wales, it is clear that his knowledge of Welsh was sparse at best.[[11]](#endnote-11) Indeed, Charlotte Williams recalls that the family would speak mostly English when Williams returned. In any case, it is unclear how supportive Williams was of Welsh linguistic rights, especially given the representation of the Welsh language—and Welshness as a whole—in the novel (53). See, for example, a key scene in which Lho, tired and frustrated—and who, like Williams, is too experiencing a moment of domestic trauma— seeks to ease his pain by “becoming Welsh:” he secludes himself in a “hut” in the Welsh countryside to reclaim a lost ancestry and language and, essentially, tries on a new Welsh identity as a coping mechanism. Yet Lho’s quest, and his new language, results only in failure and incomprehension, as the scene below describes:

How did he come by this hut in the woods? By walking a bit farther than usual one Sunday morning… Up at the farm to which it belonged he drank skim milk with a couple of the seventeenth century, felt very Welsh with them, their furniture, their bric-a-crac, their language… He became so very Welsh, incomprehensible consequently to his countrymen (49).

This is not the only time in the text that Welsh is associated with incomprehension, as later in the novel, Lho’s ability to speak Welsh—and his quest to become more Welsh—is described as an “affront” that makes him unapproachable (66). In this regard, it is interesting that Lho’s linguistic mastery does not result in a sense of satisfaction, but leads only to further resentment. Lho’s Welsh is never accepted (and significantly is never heard in the novel) and a return to a Welsh “way of life”—both linguistically and culturally—is seen as a comic gesture of futility. Lho cannot find solace in the language of the past and the novel, as a whole, seems critical of the value of Welsh linguistic emancipation.

More importantly, while Charlotte Williams and Vibert C. Cambridge have suggested that the struggle for Welsh linguistic rights is implied in the text, it’s worth noting that the martyr of the novel carries only the image of his missionary work.[[12]](#endnote-12) The Hughes of the novel does not sustain Welsh art and culture, nor does he have any interest in linguistic rights: he sustains only oppression. It would, of course, be easy to assume that *The Third Temptation’s* examination of violent temporal disorientation is set in Wales not solely because of personal trauma, but because of Wales’s unique double role as the colonizer and colonized: that is, the Welsh are at the same time victims of colonial oppression and perpetrators of it. This notion of belonging and exclusion, victim and oppressor, and the space between “here and there” in some ways speaks to the colonial history of Wales—and also Williams’s own sense of being caught between European and and Afro-Caribbean aesthetic and cultural values. Yet the landscape of the novel focuses only on Wales as a site of oppression and, while Williams’s biography reveals a conflicted sense of belonging to Welsh culture, the fictional world *The Third Temptation* depicts focuses almost exclusively on Wales as the oppressor. The Wales of the novel is not under duress, nor is it oppressed; it is instead a resoundingly dangerous place for black men and women—a place that signals only fear, hostility, and confusion.

To be sure, the martyr of the novel is referenced, repeatedly, only in reference to “Dark Africa.” Indeed what over-writes the historical image of a Wales struggling for linguistic emancipation, but also committing its own imperialism, is the undeniable nature of violence committed by Hughes. In this regard, as the text concludes, the statue begins to signal more and more overt images of violence:

Pivoting, the eyes of the constable light on the bronze figure of the Welsh Martyr rising you might say from an ocean of blood, its undiscriminating gaze fixed on the restless tides of Sweeley Street, a gaze whose objectivity the constable might well envy, persons and objects being so uniformly unemotive from this godlike view… beyond which a body surrenders its identity and merges into the general ambience (114).

The penultimate image of the martyr, then, is inextricable from violence. Here, the statue of Hughes possesses what neither the constable nor the narrators can: a limitless gaze that, from its vantage point, sees and affects all. It possesses a gaze that cannot be restrained or suppressed. The supposed objectivity of the statue, overlooking the port—indeed, Hughes, not surprisingly, viewed Colwyn Bay’s proximity to a port as an integral to the success of his institute—is in stark contrast to the characters’ inability to maintain both subjective and objective positions. Here, to submit to the statue results in envy or surrender, a willing submission into comfort and ambience, a point directly opposed to resistance. Resistance, the novel suggests, is indicated by discord, not ambience. According to Charlotte Williams, her father argued “You can’t be a man if your head has been cut off by colonialism. How can you speak, act, create anything if your every thought has been shaped for you by Europeans? If you can’t think of a thought that hasn’t already been cast with meaning by the coloniser” (*Sugar and Slate* 53). Here, Williams argues that resistance itself, under the guises of colonial power, collapses: colonization always limits the subject’s ability to express individual thought. This articulation of colonial suppression bears much in common with the novel, in which no character is able to fully resist because their ideological positions are never stable and always exist under duress. It is the statue’s attempt to mollify—to normalize ideological surrender and to suppress the clamor of resistance, which marks it as a threat. There is, then, no empowerment in submitting to the statue in the text, just as there are no textual references to Hughes’s attempt to create a new Welsh national identity. For Williams, the statue represents only corruption, violence, and surrender.

**Miscegenation and the Legacy of the Martyr**

The institutionalized reverence toward the martyr—and the unmistakable physical presence of his colonial ideals—normalizes and ingrains the inferiority of black men and women in Caedmon. Given the importance of the martyr in Williams’s novel, then, it is important to consider perhaps the most significant element of the text: the troubling representation of black characters in the landscape of the novel. Simply put, the overbearing, undeniable image of the martyr in the text—one that is worshipped and venerated—means that black identity in the text is mostly invisible—or worse, exists only in terms of racial stereotypes. As such, the only blackness in *The Third Temptation* is blackness which affirms the martyr’s stereotypes of uncivilized, savage black men. Sensational fears that black men will corrupt white women pervade the narrative and, in this regard, the novel is rife with intimations of miscegenation and violence.

Repeatedly, blackness functions as a corruptive force in the text and as an ever-present threat to white women. And, before we see any black characters in the text, blackness appears as a destructive concept that infects the white European masses. Frequent violent, misogynist advertisements of women pervade the narrative and, early on, a woman emerges out of “blackness,” spread eagle “over her head, in dozens of postures, a blond figure appears, now in mink, now in mist, now in a foamy bath, now reflected in a million mirrors, now nude among floating bubbles, now her here, her eyes, now bare legs, pelvis bare, augmented breasts” (16). Blackness functions here as signifier for sexual deviance that will swallow and consume the virtue of white women: it engenders heightened sexual arousal and unnatural poses, gestures, and behaviors. The scene, what’s more, once again evokes the image of William Hughes, in that it mirrors the martyr’s insistence that blackness *needs* to be civilized if it is to function in Welsh society. And, to that end, it is significant that the blackness described here is not a human being, but a concept—an amorphous blob of destruction lingering over the white populace, begging for someone to contain it. Such scenes provide a seeming moral justification for Hughes’s project to “civilize” African men, in that they repeat the racist trope that black bodies need to be pacified before they are integrated. Furthermore, these scenes function as a larger critique of Welsh society’s views on race, as it becomes explicitly clear that citizens of Caedmon cannot conceive of a black populace beyond sensational depictions of jungle savagery.

Not surprisingly, then, there are only two black characters in the text, and they both seem to be embodiments of racial hysteria and, in *The Third Temptation*, black bodies appear only as sexualized objects. Both black characters exist only through their relationships to “the blonde”: Chloe, the Chronicle girl, the beautiful white woman who is a constant source of desire in the text. They are both her lovers: her ex-boyfriend, Gent, a rail worker—who is most likely a Caribbean immigrant—and the man without a nose, a savage caricature of sexual violence and desire who preys on unsuspecting white women to rape them. In the midst of an awkward, failed sexual encounter with Joss Banks in a historic church, Chloe details a need to be savaged and raped, as she narrates an animalistic rape by the man with no nose, who represents a hysterical depiction of a negro savage who possesses, “just two black holes in the middle of his face” (88). The man with no nose is described as the height of sexual satisfaction, and he crawls into her window and forces himself on Chloe (88). Indeed, Chloe frequently waits by the window hoping the man with no nose will return and ravage her. Like the amorphous, conceptual black body discussed above, the corporal black body too exists only to copulate with white women. This hyper-sexualization of race in the text depicts a Welsh landscape that is still, long after Hughes’s martyrdom, a hostile space that is unable to free itself from its dehumanization of black men.

While Williams spoke little of the racial dynamics of his marriage, it is likely that the martyr functions as a means through which to examine Welsh and European perceptions of miscegenation, a topic that Williams was growing increasingly interested in.[[13]](#endnote-13) Indeed, no doubt influenced by work of Frantz Fanon, whose work he was deeply invested in, Williams argued, following his move to Africa, that miscegenation must be an aspect of all his future creative work (*The Art of Denis Williams* 104).[[14]](#endnote-14) Williams’s interest in Fanon is not entirely surprising, especially given his own exploration of ideologies of power and control in his works (*The Art of Denis Williams* 70). It is likely, then, that the racial depictions of black men and white women in the text were significantly influenced by Fanon, as Fanon’s analysis of violence and the power dynamics of gender in *Black Skin, White Masks* share much in common with the racialized, sensational images of black men in the text. For Fanon, the negro always functions as a sexual threat—but also fantasy and pain—to white women. In an oft-quoted passage from *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon analyzes the dynamics of interracial desire:

we discover that when a woman lives the fantasy of rape by a Negro, it is in some way the fulfillment of a private dream, of an inner wish. Accomplishing the phenomenon of turning against self, it is the woman who rapes herself. We can find clear proof of this in the fact that it is commonplace for women, during the sexual act, to cry to their partners: “Hurt me!” They are merely expressing this idea: Hurt me as I would hurt me if I were in your place. The fantasy of rape by a Negro is a variation of this emotion: “I wish the Negro would rip me open as I would have ripped a woman open” (138).

In Fanon’s view, the white woman thus imagines the black man as a manifestation of pain which she enacts on herself. In this case, blackness becomes an object of the women’s “sadomasochistic desire” (Chow 68). While many critics, such as Rey Chow and Amber Jamilla Musser, have rightly attacked Fanon’s discussion of rape, his lack of attention toward the sexuality of black women, and the heteronormative assumptions here regarding a woman’s sexuality—there’s little doubt that Williams was interested in Fanon’s examination of the objectification of black male bodies.[[15]](#endnote-15) Indeed, in an early interview, it is Fanon who Williams cites to express his frustration with being objectified as a “negro artist.”[[16]](#endnote-16) Accordingly, in the novel—as in Fanon—black bodies function as commodities for white women, as neither of the two black characters in the text—Gent or the man without a nose— have value beyond their sexual potency; they exist solely as sexual objects.

As such, the *Third Temptation* mirrors Fanon’s depiction of interracial relationships by focusing on the black male body as an object through which the white women negotiates her sexual trauma. Accordingly, Chloe’s aforementioned monstrous black assailant is juxtaposed against her boyfriend, Gent, who Chloe argues is racial, but not savage. Gent is not dangerous or violent enough. Rather, with Gent, the sexual act becomes a grotesque performance. With Gent, she says,

it wasn’t ever really nice with him—too racial—neither of us was getting the most out of it like: he could only get going by calling me a white swine and trash and that, so I’d say to him Come on me black baboon you wonderful beast give it to me like you know how, like you give your own women and that would make him so he couldn’t help walloping me afterwards (89).

Despite the inherent violence of the scene, the relationship is consensual and therefore boring—a stark contrast to the animalistic rape by the more savage nose-less man. As Fanon argues, miscegenation is guided by a narrative of self-hatred in which the black body must function as the manifestation of an unbearable threat and danger. The imagined interracial act thus enacts a feeling of both fear and sexual hysteria. Yet this myth—as Fanon describes in an encounter with a white prostitute who dejectedly remarks, “going to bed with [a black man] was no more remarkable than going to bed with white men”—fails to engender sexual fulfillment, as the stereotype always obviates sexual pleasure.[[17]](#endnote-17) In the novel, Chloe imagines Gent as the man with the holes in his face—the savage, the brute—the stereotype of the savage. Yet Gent is not the savage—and in fact their relationship is so contaminated by interplay of racial expectations that their lovemaking exists only as a forced imitation of interracial hatred. Chloe and Gent thus perform—and indeed know no other form of interaction—expectations of racial violence on another, interminably, and futility. But, like the prostitute in Fanon’s example who yearns for a racist fabrication of a black body to stimulate and violate her, Chloe and Gent’s relationship exists only as a series of impossible, racist expectations.

Yet it is worth pausing here to acknowledge that what is significant about Chloe and Gent’s relationship is the very fact that racial hatred is, for the first and only time in *The Third Temptation*, unmistakably visible. It is outspoken and evident rather than surreptitious and, in so doing, the scene seemingly violates the textual norms that veil explicit discussions of race. Yet Chloe’s insights on race—and her realization that racial stereotypes sabotaged her relationship with Gent—prove to be short lived. The scene, as it continues, predictably collapses into an absurd display of racial fears and hysteria that mirrors the racist fear that white women, once exposed to black men, will be overcome by sexual longing. Indeed, by the end of the scene, what Chloe most values about Gent is the unspoken sexual, racist need to produce a black child: “That’s why I run away—we was driving each other up the wall and there wasn’t no fun in it really except we keep insulting each other. Even though I wanted his children, I really did, I always will I think, I never wanted anybody’s children after that, only abortions” (89). Williams’s juxtaposition of overt racial violence is thus juxtaposed by an almost absurd, performative degree of racist imagination.

Not surprisingly, however, *The Third Temptation’s* focus on interracial relationships has a real life corollary, as Chloe’s statement directly evokes miscegenation scandal that shut down the Congo Institute. In December of 1911, the “energetically xenophobic” (Declercq and Walker 219) British publication *John Bull* published an article about the Congo Institute with the scandalous headline “BLACK BAPTIST’S BROWN BABY” (Draper and Lawson-Reay 237). The article was less an attack on Welsh society than a racist diatribe, and it was in keeping with the larger racist, colonist message of magazine, which regularly featured headlines like “ ENGLISH LADIES AND NEGROES… black and white may frequently be seen strolling together… How these black boys must laugh!” (Draper and Lawson-Reay 238). To save his reputation, Hughes sued the publication’s owner, Horatio Bottomley, for libel in June of 1912, but lost the case and was considerably humiliated during the proceedings (Draper and Lawson-Reay 239). Following the loss, Bottomley, an unapologetic racist, gloated overtly that “Colwyn Bay is delighted to be rid of the pest Hughes and his niggers… a sensuous, barbarous and cunning lot of niggers, some of them of the lowest order of intelligence and morals… an ever present menace to the safety of white women” (Draper and Lawson-Reay 270). This statement by Bottomley, who it is worth noting was a member of British parliament (at least until he was expelled and imprisoned for fraud in 1918), once again brings to mind the ideological colonial conflict between Britain, Wales, and Africa, as Hughes’s supposed moralistic racism was dethroned by an even more intolerant, overt form of racism that argued black bodies were, and could only ever be, entirely savage.

Thatthe collapse of Hughes’s Congo Institute occurred not because of a repudiation of colonist practices, but due to widespread racial hysteria and a public smear campaign, no doubt signals a larger critique of contemporary Welsh society and, indeed, Chloe’s need to produce a black child strongly echoes the *John Bull* scandal that erupted around Hughes’s institute, in which black men corrupt white woman to produce “BROWN BABIES.” The dissolution of the Congo Institute, frequently intimated in the novel, thus reveals Williams’s deep concerns over the history—and future of—interracial relationship in Wales. In citing and re-situating the miscegenation scandal in the contemporary landscape of 1960s Wales, Williams implies that the racist ideologies surrounding the collapse of the Congo Institute remain, sadly, ever-present.

In sum, the novel’s exploration of historical and biographical trauma is guided by an underlying racial violence that, Williams argues, is an integral aspect of Welsh life. The fictional landscape of *The Third Temptation* is one where Hughes is not a forgotten symbol of African corruption, but a martyr who is venerated, to whom the entire town is built around as a locus, and to whom all the whites in the novel owe thanks. Strikingly, nearly fifty years later, this landscape has an eerie contemporary resonance. In 2002, Hughes Draper & Lawson-Reay published *A Scandal at the Congo House*, which provides the oft forgotten history of the Hughes institute—a study sorely needed. Yet Draper and Lawson-Reay’s study is hardly objective, and views Hughes’s work not with objectivity or even critique, but from the perspective of decided veneration. They argue the Congo House represented “the noblest kind of imperialism,” and the end of their text resembles an apologist treatise (276). Hughes, they write, “didn’t believe Africans were less intelligent or occupied a lower evolutionary plane but he did believe in the ultimate superiority of European civilisation” (276) and they conclude that Hughes is a Welsh hero:

William Hughes achieved a tremendous amount with limited resources, both financial and intellectual. He was brave, imaginative and enlightened but he just wasn’t up to the enormous task he set for himself. He allied himself to men far less altruistic and radical than himself….Crushed by a combination of ineptitude and bigotry he remains an inspiration. Hughes’ long and close association with Mojola Agbebi and the independent Black African churches is testimony to his integrity, and the enduring influence of his students his abiding legacy… In a final letter addressed from ‘The African Institute, Colwyn Bay,’ just before he was shuffled off into penury and obscurity, William Hughes begged of old friends and supporters, and perhaps of us today: ‘Please do not forget to remember me’ (278).

The rediscovery of Hughes, not in terms of colonial horror, but rather as a forgotten Welsh hero, paradoxically fulfills the tragedy of the novel. The legacy depicted here is, then, almost the very same as in the novel. Viewed in this way, the novel is not an apolitical, European tribute to experimental fiction, but rather an examination of psychological principles and positions that repeatedly threaten to efface black identity. In this sense, Williams’s novel requires further investigation as a text not only for its radical experimentation, but for its investigation of the role of racial oppression in 20th century Wales.

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**Notes**

1. Ramraj echoes a similar sentiment in his introduction to *The Third Temptation*, arguing that the novel is marked by an “avoidance of explicit postcolonial issues” (13). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Much of the criticism on the novel focuses on its similarities to the work of Robbe-Grillet, and I do not wish to recycle those discussions here. Nevertheless, given Williams’s struggle with self-identification, it is easy to see why he took interest in the Nouveau Roman. Robbe-Grillet’s work, of course, attempts to replace individualism with objectivity; the main idea of which is that the novel’s emphasis must no longer be on the individual—or characters—but rather on the world itself. His novels, he writes in “For a New Novel, “renounce[e] the omnipotence of the person” (29). For Williams, the Nouveau Roman no doubt depicts a model of fiction in which there is no longer a narrative center of control; the center has been disintegrated and dispersed. Accordingly, in both writers’ works, readers are met with repeated exchange of narratorial power and control. Stories and anecdotes are told and retold and narrative authority is exchanged in a deliberately unclear, disorienting fashion—and readers observe characters who have been stripped of their identities.

   Thus Williams’s citation of the Nouveau Roman as means to examine identity is not entirely surprising, given Williams’s fascination with rethinking Modernist forms in terms of race and violence. As Louis James writes in “‘The Closeness of Profound Curiosity’– the Parallel Visions of Wilson Harris and Denis Williams”:

   Both Denis Williams and Wilson Harris were exploring ways by which to dismantle the colonial structures implicit in the Western concept of ‘realism,’ a form seen as one based on a materialist concept of reality and a rigid, clock bound sense of historical time. Liberation from a colonial or postcolonial mentality involved rejection of such Western aesthetic structures (79).

   As James writes, both Williams and Harris effectively employ and distort Western aesthetic forms. In this sense, Robbe-Grillet’s experimentation with time and identity was no doubt appealing to Williams, which he uses as a springboard for larger musings on oppression and exploitation in *The Third Temptation*. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. In this regard, see the work Williams’s daughter, Charlotte Williams, whose 2002 *Sugar and Slate*, examines the relationship between racial oppression and contemporary Wales. See also Jane Aaron and Chris Williams’s 2005 collection, *Postcolonial Wales* and Kirsti Bohata’s 2004 *Postcolonialism Revisited: Writing Wales in English*. These works are useful in considering the role of British oppression in the development of a Welsh identity and are particularly instructive in analyzing attempts by the British to stifle and suppress the Welsh language and identity. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For the sake of clarity, Charlotte Williams will be cited as *Sugar and Slate* and Evelyn Williams will be cited as *The Art of Denis Williams*. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Williams was repeatedly frustrated with the reception of his work. As Evelyn Williams notes in *The Art of Denis Williams*, “part of the critical acclaim of Williams’ work was no doubt do to the novelty of his colonial status. Critical reaction to his ‘alien,’ ‘exotic’ or ‘foreign’ presence in the art scene was ambiguous and sometimes inept. In a *Time* magazine article, Williams was further characterized using the following words in a sequence: ‘Negro,’ ‘threatening,’ ‘jungle, ‘loin-cloth,’ primitive,’ and ‘savagery.’ Even for its era the article had patronizing overtones” (31) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Charlotte Williams herself, however, misses this connection, as *The Third Temptation* factors little into *Sugar and Slate*. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. It is unclear what interview or interviews Charlotte Williams is referring to here. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. In fact, upon repeated visits, the myth of the idyllic Welsh countryside became increasingly stained by his racial discomfort—and scenes like William’s confrontation of the photograph become more and more common. Enveloped by whiteness and dislocated from the site of his newfound aesthetic power, Williams once catches an image of himself in the mirror and, exclaims, “WHAT KIND OF GHOST IS THIS? WHAT IS A BLACK MAN DOING IN THIS MAUSOLEUM? I CAN’T LIVE WITH THIS FAIRYTALE!” (*Sugar and Slate* 55). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Hughes’s attempt to associate religion with power is not only confronted by the presence of the statue, but also by the very title of the text itself. The “third temptation,” concerning the question of religious power and temptation is no doubt a citation of Hughes’s quest for racial purification. The biblical temptation, in which Satan offers Christ dominion over the Earth, is explored by Lho’s death, as moments after his death, he ponders the third temptation of Christ and wonders,

   But the third: Power? Whence it offered or conferred, who the agent? –a concept different entirely from the other two: a true temptation, profoundly horrifying, a proposition without the conditional. So he clobbered to the inescapable conclusion that power and evil are one—and divine (46).

   The implication here is that Lho’s death is in part a religious death, though he has expressed no sentiments of religion in the text. Given the statue of Hughes, it is almost impossible to dissociate power from religion in the text. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See also Charlotte Williams’s *Sugar and Slate*, who narrates a visit from African nationalist Mojolo Agbebi:

    The reverend himself preferred to pray in Welsh and the Africans in Wales gave a spur to the congregations’ efforts to sing and pray in their own language and to protect their culture in local chapels. Speaking Welsh was banned in schools in Wales and children caught speaking it were punished, but these Africans attested to the fact that English was not the only valid language (Charlotte Williams 30).

    Charlotte Williams’s text spends considerable time examining Hughes’s hypocrisy of championing freedom for some, but not others. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Paraphrasing his speech, Charlotte Williams recalls her father’s Welsh-isms, such as, “What dat damn *rig-a-rig* foin’ on down dere? Yuh banging round like a damn *felyfecli*” (53). Reflecting on their speech, she notes that the family spoke,“the creolized, syncretic language registers that relate to station stops across Wales. We spoke Llandudno Welsh or was it Llandudno English?” (53). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Vibert C. Cambridge argues in “Denis Williams and the New Novel,” that the setting and characters of the text displays an anti colonist sentiment—and suggests that the novel functions, in part, as a critique of British suppression of the Welsh language. While much of Cambridge’s argument is solely on the connection between Williams and Robbe-Grillet, he does suggest that the novel “can be seen as a novel of affinity and solidarity with the subalternized people of Wales and other internal colonies of Europe” (121). Cambridge, however, does not explore this connection in any further depth.

    For more on Welsh linguistic suppression in the mid 20th century, see Dylan Phillips’s, “A New Beginning or the Beginning of the End? The Welsh Language in Postcolonial Wales.” *Postcolonial Wales.* Eds. Jane Aaron and Chris Williams. Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 2005. 100-113. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. In terms of Caribbean literature, Williams, along with George Lamming, Sam Selvon, and other Caribbean writers living in Europe, have frequently commented on European fears of miscegenation.Williams himself once discussed some of his first experiences in London in which a shopkeeper stopped him to remark, “betcha women don't leave you alone. What is it you chaps got?” (Dance 25). For more on miscegenation in relations to Williams and the Windrush generation, see Daryl Cumber in "Matriarchs, Doves, and Nymphos: Prevalent Images of Black, Indian, and White Women in Caribbean Literature” in Studies in Imagination 26.2 (1993): 21-31. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Miscegenation, he continues, is “the first reality of Guyanese being” and must be confronted if the arts are to achieve “autonomy and authority” (*The Art of Denis Williams* 104). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. See Rey Chow,’s “The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency. Miscegenation, and the Foundation of Community in Frantz Fanon." *The Rey Chow Reader*. Ed. Paul Bowman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. 56-75 and Amber Jamilla’s Musser’s *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*. New York: New York University Press, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The full quote appears as such, “Paradoxically, however, as Fanon has so perceptively shown, given the circumstances of the day, acceptance on this level was in fact the most unacceptable, indeed probably the most humiliating of choices open to the Colonial artist” (Locher 557). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Fanon describes the passage in question below:

    There is something in the mere idea, one young woman confided to me, that makes the heart skip a beat. A prostitute told me that in her early days the mere thought of going to bed with a Negro brought on an orgasm. She went in search of Negroes and never asked them for money. But, she added, “going to bed with them was no more remarkable than going to bed with white men. It was before I did it that I had the orgasm. I used to think about (imagine) all the things they might do to me: and that was what was so terrific” (122).

    Here, it is the racial fantasy of the act, and not the act itself, which derives sexual pleasure. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)