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To Become So Very Welsh: Denis Williams' *The Third Temptation* and the Effacement of Afro-Caribbean Identity

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Abstract: This essay resituates Denis Williams' underexplored second novel, *The Third Temptation*, in terms of racial and colonial violence. Published in 1968, the largely forgotten novel, a highly experimental musing on identity that shares much in common with the Nouveau Roman movement, is seldom addressed in terms of postcolonial or Caribbean literature, in part because all the major characters are white Europeans and the novel is set in Wales. My essay suggests that the novel's absence of black identity functions as a critique of Welsh colonialism, evidenced in the text by both Williams' personal experiences in Wales and repeated, veiled images of Welsh missionary William Hughes, who worked exhaustively to convert African children into Welsh Christians. I suggest that the experimental collapse of subjectivity in the novel is designed to mirror the process by which Hughes attempted to efface African identity. Turning to a history of Hughes' *Congo Institute*—as well as Williams' own struggle to reconcile his role as a European artist with his Afro-Caribbean roots—I demonstrate how the novel's experimentation with perspective is enacted to examine Wales' often-overlooked involvement in colonial oppression.

Keywords: Denis Williams, Caribbean, Wales, colonialism, experimental literature

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 is especially true in regard to his two innovative novels, the semi-biographical *Other Leopards* (1963) and the overtly experimental *The Third Temptation* (1968). Like his fictions, the trajectory of Williams' 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" (Cambridge 115) and, in 1957, left Europe to reside in Africa, where he taught art courses in Sudan, Nigeria, and Uganda. 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' 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' fiction is explicitly experimental. This is evident in *The Third Temptation*, a dense, innovative examination of narrative perspective that, surprisingly, takes after Alain Robbe-Grillet and the French Nouveau Roman movement. The novel is rife with repetitions and extended, hyper-detailed descriptions of inanimate objects. It lacks a single narrator; the narrative's vantage point shifts, frequently and exhaustively, between minor and major characters: a constable, a pregnant woman, a dead man, and an accident victim, among others, all exchange narrative responsibility. The novel's 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. Joss 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 domestic trauma. Bid has left Joss because she is unable to cope with the death of her ex-husband—Joss' 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 nothing of its ingenuity, which lies in how the plot is told and retold from multiple angles and perspectives. Key scenes in 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.

Yet what is perhaps most striking about the novel is its whiteness. In the fictional version of the Welsh seaside town Llandudno, all the main characters are white Europeans. Furthermore, the Afro-Caribbean autobiographical elements common to Williams' work are seemingly absent, and the novel appears 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 discover his African heritage. Whereas *Other Leopards* was fairly well-received, *The Third Temptation* has garnered almost no critical attention, perhaps because of its difficult prose and Welsh setting. Even Williams' 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' reissue of the novel in 2010, it has remained a forgotten footnote in the corpus of Caribbean literature—and, as Victor J. Ramraj notes, some critics refuse to consider the text a Caribbean novel at all (17). In any case, Williams' novel, which seems at a cursory glance almost entirely void of race, politics, or the Caribbean, is one of the strangest and least discussed in Caribbean literature.

Yet as I argue in this essay, *The Third Temptation* is fascinating for 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 its connection to the French Nouveau Roman movement while ignoring larger questions of racial identity. Ramraj argues, for example, that the novel

> has 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]

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

Indeed, a close analysis of the novel reveals the Wales of the 1960s as a complicated, conflicted intersection of colonial resistance and imperialist tendencies. This analysis, however, requires re-situating the novel within its forgotten biographical and historical context. Taking Charlotte Williams' recent memoir *Sugar and Slate*—in which her father Denis Williams plays a central role—as a starting point, I demonstrate the extent to which Williams' 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' personal crises—in which he struggles to "shrug off the influences of the West" (C. Williams, *Sugar* 190)—emerge in the novel juxtaposed against a veiled yet resoundingly important historical investigation of Welsh colonialism: the novel confronts the imperialistic pursuit of the Welsh missionary William Hughes, whose Congo Institute in the early twentieth century aimed to transform Africans into Welsh Christians. 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 an identity that is unfixed and unstable. Characters are frequently swallowed up by one another and, indeed, the primary trauma of the text is the fear of erasure: the notion that European identity will overwrite 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.

I. Wales and the Aesthetics of Hostile Space

The Third Temptation is set in Wales, which may be surprising given Williams' devotion to African and Guyanese culture. The setting of the novel, however, is not arbitrary. Though Williams never resided there, Wales was essential to his artistic development: it was the site of a momentous aesthetic crisis in which he faced a seemingly irreconcilable conflict between embracing Western art and culture and embracing a new anti-colonial artistry. This aesthetic crisis began in London. In the late 1950s, while working on his first novel, Williams suddenly repudiated 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 (E. Williams 31), he left Europe in 1957 and settled in Khartoum, where he took on a lecturer position in the School of Fine Arts.[4] Yet Williams' familial obligations meant he was unable to leave his European life entirely behind. His wife, Katherine, was Welsh, and they had two young children. Although his family joined him in Africa for a short time, Katherine was unhappy and shortly thereafter left with the children to settle in Llandudno, which became the setting of *The Third Temptation* (fictionalized in the novel as the town of Caedmon). Williams' need to escape Europe to hone his artistic sensibilities was met with the realization that he could not divorce

himself from his familial obligations in Wales, and he began migrating back and forth between Khartoum and Llandudno.

Wales was thus the central site of personal and colonial trauma, in which Williams could neither escape his previous life nor fully embrace a new identity that rejects the oppressive ideology of the West. As Charlotte Williams argues, "everything [my father] did was a rejection of European domination" (*Sugar* 190). Williams' view of Wales was engendered not simply by familial resentment but by a growing realization that he was losing his heritage and becoming, essentially, a European artist. As such, frequent migrations between Wales and Africa exacerbated Williams' aesthetic crisis. Throughout the late 1950s and 60s, while working on *The Third Temptation*, he travelled 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" (*Sugar* 5), in which the family moved exhaustingly between Africa and Wales. Whereas Africa enabled Williams a newfound sense of power and artistic sensibility, Wales was a place of obligation and European influence. He wrote to his daughter Charlotte, "[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" (qtd. in C. Williams, *Sugar* 4). For Williams, the rapid movement between two places—one in which he felt aesthetically emancipated and one in which he felt aesthetically imprisoned—shape the central exploration of space in the novel.

Accordingly, *The Third Temptation* reveals from the outset Williams' conflicted emotions about Wales and their effect on his art: in the novel, 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, and images of dislocation emerge as a central theme in its very first scene. *The Third Temptation* begins with a suicide that disorients the geographical space of the novel. Lawrence Henry Owen, or "Lho," a commercial artist, hangs himself in the forest just outside the fictional Welsh town of Caedmon because he

is traumatized by his wife's infidelity and the realization that the child she is carrying is that of his employer, Joss Banks. The suicide, however, is not simply a death but an act of dislocation. As Lho swings from the tree dying, 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—circumambience that might possess being but no centre, a function of space and yet not space" (Williams, *Third* 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). The impossible space between here and there becomes a thematic principle of the novel and immediately following Lho's suicide, the first chapter depicts a constable who, like Lho, is trapped between two spaces. The constable 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 the novel's opening scenes immediately foregrounds. The fact that these scenes mirror Charlotte Williams' descriptions of her father's visits—in which she repeatedly describes him as being "somewhere and elsewhere"—firmly plants Williams' crisis of identity as a profound influence on the ideological and narrative strategies of the novel.

Themes of dislocation frequently center on the novel's Welsh setting. Images of Afro-Caribbean art and culture repeatedly puncture the white, European landscape of the novel. In an early scene, we see a spinning globe, which hints at life outside of Wales: "How masterful to rotate the earth with one's fingertips—50°…60° . . . Galapagos Islands 60°…the Amazon 40°…Equator… Torrid zone…Alto Trombetas…the virgin forests of Guyana" (Williams, *Third* 28; second ellipsis added). None of the characters in the text have any relationship to Guyana at all, yet Guyana appears again and again, anchoring the discord of the

novel. The novel's frequent snapshots of a Caribbean setting intimate the mark of something overwritten by the overbearing whiteness of the text. 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). He notes that 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 near invisibility of these images is telling: the novel alternately signals and suppresses Afro-Caribbean identity but is unable to erase its presence from the textual landscape entirely. Thus the Wales of the novel is a hostile space in which flickers of a subverted culture, place, and people repeatedly threaten to emerge but ultimately recede into the background.

Undeniably, in both Williams' life and in the novel, the 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 a corpse swing from the tree. The scene is immediately followed by an image of power and authority: the constable. Indeed, the sole authority figure in the text, the constable, is primarily referenced in terms of his "island"—the traffic police stand from which he observes the town. Yet it is worth noting here that the word "island" and many of the other subtle references to the Caribbean in the text—such as the woodlands surrounding Caedmon that resemble forests of Guyana—are almost always punctuated by images of domination, most notably in the form of the constable as well as Joss Banks, who appears in the text during Lho's death throes. And although the word "colonialism" is never uttered in the text, the novel repeatedly pairs images of colonial landscapes with explorations of violence, authority, and oppression. The in-between space and fluctuating ontological status Lho experiences during his death is, not surprisingly, described as a loss of power. The narrator remarks that "[h]e could not use his mind—he had lost that power" (Williams, *Third* 24). These themes of oppression, power, and displacement solidify the novel as

colonial in nature, and this colonialism is reinforced by the absence of black identity in the text. Resoundingly, all the characters that possess authority are European, and power in the text is an entirely white phenomenon.

The relationship between racial oppression and geographical disorientation is essential to understanding the novel. Williams' move from Africa, where he felt empowered and invigorated, to Wales, where he felt psychologically and racially isolated, guides the depiction of Welsh life in the novel. While Charlotte Williams acknowledges that, in part, her father "loved Wales although it had something of a fairytale quality to him" (*Sugar* 53), the prejudice he felt and the racial climate complicated his feelings toward Wales, as he frequently felt ostracized. As Charlotte Williams argues, "[h]e was the outsider, he needed us to mediate this alien environment. . . . [H]e never belonged. He never could" (53). His blackness, she reveals, 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' skin, considerably darker than that of his children, combined with his marriage to Katherine, marked him as an outsider in the predominantly white Welsh countryside.

Welsh life for Williams thus fluctuated between moments of inclusion and exclusion, and his life was a constant negotiation of racial tension. This sense of ever-present tension emerges most explicitly in Williams' reflections on Wales in 1958, one year after his relocation to Africa. 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: "'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'" (Williams qtd. in C. Williams, "Young Man" 95). Williams' sense of detachment as a Modernist Black Guyanese artist living in Africa but unable to sever his connections to Wales became a source of pronounced horror. As he gazed at the photo, he realized that he could not shed his associations with his European life and felt trapped in a warped "fairytale" from

which he could not escape.[5] For Williams, Wales threatened to efface 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 a person with a sense of overt panic and terror to the extent that he or she can no longer recognize him or herself—is essential to understanding the novel's experimentation with perspective. In the text, the notion of identity is exhaustively undermined. The narrative shifts from perspective to perspective and eschews a single dominant narrative point of view such that characters are unable to maintain their individualities. The novel blurs subjectivities, making it difficult for the reader 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 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 scrawled with a love letter detailing the end of Sean's relationship, as Joss, Sean, and the text on the postcard merge together uncomfortably. The collision of identities and shifts of perspective in this passage culminate in a literal wreck, as a car accident suddenly interrupts the scene. Mangled bodies and onlookers merge into one, as the narrator notes that "people have accumulated" into "blobs" and "masses" (Williams, *Third* 53–54) and are thus violently stripped of any discernible identity. Overwhelmed by the confusion, a narrator interrupts the action moments later to voice his frustration:

> 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. (56–57)

Speech and thoughts blend together, sometimes exhaustingly, throughout the novel. Identity, as such, is always under duress, as seemingly

every major character in the text is afflicted by Williams' own crisis of recognition, in that they too struggle to negotiate the trauma of multiple, conflicting, and unstable identities.

II. The Corruptive Force of the Martyr

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 of colonialism: a statue of a "Welsh Martyr" (28) who planted Christianity in "Darkest Africa" (54). Looming over the horizon, its bronze image gazes down upon citizens of Caedmon. Impossible to ignore, its presence infects the everyday speech of the town's inhabitants, who are inexplicably drawn to it. The statue celebrates the power of European civilization. Lho muses that it functions as a reminder of European superiority: "[For] 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" (78). The statue of the martyr that adorns the landscape thus serves as a visual reminder for characters that power is never equally distributed. In this way, the novelistic focus on effacement, conversion, and the fragility of identity is set against the spectre of colonial trauma. Simply put—and as Lho's quote implies—the statue of the Welsh Martyr is important both within the landscape of Caedmon and for rethinking *The Third Temptation* in terms of colonial violence.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the statue first appears at the start of the text and, indeed, its image brackets the novel. Its first appearance in the text is juxtaposed with the figure of the constable, 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" (27). Here the statue 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; neither the man nor his mission nor his history is evident. The statue marks a severed connection to Africa, now lost. Moreover, it 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 the statue firmly etches the image of Africa's supposed inferiority into Caedmon's consciousness.

Yet the statue's origins can be traced. Though Caedmon is a fictional version of Llandudno, the martyr—but not the statue—is entirely real. One of the ignored aspects of the text is its historical confrontation with Wales' troubling history of Christian missionary work in Africa throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Welsh Martyr, identifiable by his birth and death date (1856 and 1924) noted on the statue's third appearance in the novel 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' fictional town of Caedmon is built around Hughes' life and work, though he was a minor figure in Wales. 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' struggle with Afro-Caribbean identity during the writing of the novel, Hughes' project—to use Wales as a site to convert and remake African savages in Europe's image—no doubt mirrors Williams' own concerns over the danger of European influence and racial effacement. In his introduction to the novel, Ramraj 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, though he could not omit it altogether" (12). Hughes' statue, however, is more significant than Ramraj suggests, and its history and symbolism firmly establish 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' methodology is outlined in *Dark Africa and the Way Out*

or A Scheme for Civilizing and Evangelizing the Dark Continent, a book *The Third Temptation* frequently references. Hughes' goal was not simple missionary work. Rather, Hughes aimed to bring "uncivilized" African children to Wales to educate them using Western principles in the hope that, once converted, they would return to Africa to spread Christianity. Hughes' project was one of unapologetic conversion: he aimed, foremost, to strip his students of their identities and their African-ness. In *Dark Africa*, for example, Hughes contends that Africans must be "kept away from the surrounding superstitions and evil influences of their people" (2). He argues that "[i]t 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). Hughes, in no uncertain terms, marks the unconverted African as not simply savage but resoundingly evil, a malicious force that, in Hughes' words, tempts and ruins (20). 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' success depends on the speed and effectiveness with which he can convert the largest number of African students. Conversion, in Hughes' ideal world, happens quickly and repeatedly. In *Dark Africa and the Way Out*, he 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 (Hughes 113). Hughes' celebration of rapidly stripping identity is evident in *The Third Temptation* when a narrator is momentarily taken aback by the ease of this change:

> 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, alarm-

> ing even, when the mind thus perceives the visual constriction within which human personality manages to operate, and even to flourish. (Williams 92)

Hughes' ideology of rapid conversion thus becomes a textual norm. The quickness with which one's identity is blurred and subverted is startling, as every character in the text is subject to conversion; as I've mentioned above, 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 Williams' fictional Wales, its greatest achievement—in fact its only monument—is the carrying out of Hughes's project. The text, then, depicts the effacement of African identity as integral to Welsh national identity. Hughes saw his missionary work as a decidedly global project from which Wales was the starting point. In *Dark Africa and the Way Out*, he argues that Wales must be the center of a larger 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" (Hughes 105). Hughes viewed his project as inextricable from Welsh nationalism, which would initiate a process of global conversion affecting all nations and peoples. His Welsh missionary work would provide a model for the world. And, in this sense, the Congo Institute represented not only a symbol of national pride but the incipient emergence of a global coalition—an international network, led by Wales, whose mission was the eradication of African identity. The project of conversion was thus essential to Welsh national identity and the future of Wales' development as a nation—and this project lurks below the surface of the novel.

Yet while Hughes viewed his Congo Institute as the start of a larger global coalition of missionary work, he was explicit that such a coalition must not impinge upon Welsh linguistic and cultural identity. Indeed, in the passage above, Hughes makes a subtle distinction between English- and Welsh-speaking nations, which is unsurprising given Hughes' criticism of Britain's suppression of the Welsh language. In this

regard, Hughes' interpretation of nationalism is considerably more complicated and contradictory than it first appears. While Hughes' Institute aimed to sever Africa from the African, it was nevertheless an outspoken critic against legislation that devalued the Welsh language and sought to champion forgotten and disenfranchised Welsh art and culture. Ironically, 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[.] . . .[T]hey 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. It is an injustice that suitors and persons charged with offences cannot give evidence in their own language, unless they employ an interpreter. 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)[6]

Williams' allusion to Hughes' project opens a space to discuss 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 the formation of a global coalition can and should only be achieved provided Wales is able to maintain its linguistic and cultural autonomy.

Despite his devaluing of African cultures, Hughes frequently championed festivals of Welsh art and literature and advocated for a rediscovery and embrace of Welsh identity, even though during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Welsh was banned in schools and students speaking it were reprimanded and punished (C. Williams, *Sugar* 30). His institute thus both participates in and repudiates imperialism concurrently. Hughes, like other missionaries, insisted he operated on moralistic ground; he exculpated his work 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 nineteenth century, achieved a kind of heroism different than that of their English counterparts. As Aaron puts it, the missionary's reputation "arises from [his] 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). According to Aaron, while the Welsh missionary appropriates 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' writing and, at the same time, explains the historical precedent for Hughes' view that his missionary work is an anti-colonialist gesture. Given Hughes' prominent role 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' project is how much the effacement of African identity engenders a sense of nationalistic pride. Converting Africans to Welsh Christians both repudiates British dominance and strengthens nationality. In *Sugar and Slate*, Charlotte Williams argues that

> [Welsh Missionaries] had to tell about their work in a way that condemned exploitation and plunder and disassociated itself from the forces of colonialism. . . . They 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 colonization. . . . '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. (34)

Charlotte Williams outlines a contradiction that suggests the complexities of postcolonial Wales. Kirsti Bohata, for example, draws attention to Wales' double role as the oppressor and the oppressed. Arguing against writers like Ned Thomas who suggests imperialist Welsh behavior was enacted and inscribed into the fabric of Welsh society by the colonizer, Bohata insists 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 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).

While Williams was no doubt interested in Hughes' hypocrisy, there is no Welsh in *The Third Temptation.* In a key scene in the novel, Lho, tired, frustrated, and experiencing, like Williams, 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, trying on a new Welsh identity as a coping mechanism. Yet Lho's quest for identity and language results only in incomprehension: "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-brac, their language. . . . He became so very Welsh, incomprehensible consequently to his countrymen" (Williams, *Third* 65). Lho's ability to speak Welsh and his quest to become more Welsh is an "affront" that makes him unapproachable (66). In this regard, Lho's linguistic mastery leads 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 a comic gesture of futility. Lho cannot find solace in the language of the past, which suggests a critical view of the value of Welsh linguistic emancipation.

More importantly, while Cambridge suggests that the struggle for Welsh linguistic rights is implied in the text, the Hughes of the novel does not sustain Welsh art and culture, nor does he have any interest in linguistic rights: he is committed only to oppression.[7] It would, of course, be easy to assume that the novel's examination of violent temporal disorientation is set in Wales not solely because of personal trauma but because of Wales' unique double role as the colonizer and colonized. The notions of belonging and exclusion, victim and oppressor, and the space between "here and there" in some ways speak to the colonial history of Wales as well as Williams' own sense of being caught between European 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' 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 fear, hostility, and confusion.

The martyr of the novel is spoken about repeatedly only in reference to "Dark Africa." What overwrites the historical image of a Wales struggling for linguistic emancipation while committing its own imperialism is the undeniable nature of violence Hughes committed:

> 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. (131)

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. The supposed objectivity of the statue, overlooking the port—indeed, Hughes viewed Colwyn Bay's proximity to a port as integral to the success of the Institute—is in stark contrast to the characters' inability to

maintain their individual identities. In this passage, to submit to the statue is enviable; pleasure and comfort exist not in resistance but in surrender. No surprisingly, Williams articulates how much colonial power strips individuality from the subject, noting that, "[y]ou 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" (qtd. in C. Williams, *Sugar* 53). Denis Williams argues that resistance, 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 the characters cannot be fully resistant because their ideological positions are never stable and always exist under duress. The statue's attempt to mollify—to normalize ideological surrender and suppress the clamor of resistance—marks it as a threat. It does not represent linguistic or cultural empowerment. For Williams, Hughes and the statue represent only corruption, violence, and surrender.

III. Miscegenation and the Legacy of the Martyr

The institutionalized reverence toward the martyr and the unmistakable physical presence of his colonial ideals normalize and ingrain the inferiority of blackness—specifically black men—in Caedmon. Given the centrality of the martyr in Williams' novel, it is important to consider the most significant element of the text: the troubling representation of its black characters. The overbearing, undeniable image of the worshipped martyr in the text means that black identity is mostly invisible or, worse, exists only in terms of racial stereotypes. As such, blackness in *The Third Temptation* affirms the martyr's stereotypes of uncivilized, savage black men. Sensational fears that black men will corrupt white women pervade the narrative, and 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. Even before any black characters are introduced, blackness is paired with an explicit depiction of

sexuality and, what's more, infects the white European masses with its destructiveness. For example, early on in the text, a white, pregnant European woman wearing a pink and white smock suddenly transforms into a lurid, pornographic blonde, with legs spread "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 hair, her eyes, now bare legs, pelvis bare, augmented breasts" (Williams, *Third* 30–31). Yet this transformation occurs only as the woman stares at a phallic, burning image of kaleidoscopic "blackness" and, indeed, it is the exposure to blackness that transforms her from a chaste white woman waiting for her husband to an exposed, aroused seductress. In sum, blackness functions 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 again evokes Hughes by mirroring the martyr's insistence that blackness needs to be civilized if it is to function in Welsh society. It is significant that the blackness described in the above passage is not a human being, but a concept—an amorphous cloud of destruction lingering over the white populace, begging for someone to contain it. Such scenes seemingly provide a moral justification for Hughes' project to "civilize" African men by repeating the racist trope that black bodies need to be pacified before they are integrated. In the novel, however, these scenes do not endorse stereotypes of black sexuality, but critique Welsh society's views on race, as citizens of Caedmon cannot conceive of a black populace beyond sensational depictions of jungle savagery.

The novel introduces only two black characters—both men—who are embodiments of racial hysteria. The black characters exist only through their relationships to "the blonde"—Chloe, the Chronicle girl, a 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 and 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, including Chloe. During an awkward, failed sexual encounter with Joss Banks in a historic church, Chloe details a need to be violated as she

narrates an animalistic sexual encounter with the man with no nose, a hysterical depiction of a negro savage possessing "just two black holes in the middle of his face" (104). Yet the man with no nose represents the height of Chloe's sexual desire—so much so that she is unable to tell the story without growing aroused, stopping twice, shouting, "it was the best ever, ever, Oh God!" (104) and, "God, how he made love to me! It was like I'd never done it before the way he made love to me" (105). Indeed, Chloe frequently waits by the window hoping the man with no nose will return and ravish her. Just as the amorphous "blackness" morphs the pregnant woman in the pink smock into an object of sexual desire, Chloe is unable to resist the lure of the sexual violence of the black savage. This hyper-sexualization of race in the text depicts a Welsh landscape that is still, long after Hughes' martyrdom, a hostile space that is unable to free itself from its dehumanization of black men.

The Third Temptation's martyr likely functions as a means through which to examine Welsh and European perceptions of miscegenation, a topic that increasingly interested Williams.[8] Indeed, no doubt influenced by the work of Frantz Fanon, Williams argued, following his move to Africa, that miscegenation must be an aspect of all his future creative work (E. Williams 104).[9] Williams' interest in Fanon is not surprising, especially given his own exploration of ideologies of power and control (E. Williams 70). The racial depictions of black men and white women in the text were likely influenced by Fanon, as Fanon's analysis of violence and the power dynamics of gender in *Black Skin, White Masks* shares 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 is also associated with fantasy and pain—to white women. In an oft-quoted passage from *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon analyzes the dynamics of interracial desire:

> [W]e 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 that 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, lack of attention toward the sexuality of black women, and heteronormative assumptions regarding a woman's sexuality, Williams was undoubtedly interested in Fanon's examination of the objectification of black male bodies. Indeed, in an early interview, it is Fanon who Williams cites to express his frustration with being objectified as a negro artist.[10] 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.

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 monstrous black assailant is juxtaposed against her boyfriend, Gent. Although Chloe's sexual act with Gent depicts explicit racial violence, it produces no pleasure:

> [I]t 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. (Williams, *Third* 89)

Despite the inherent violence of the scene, the relationship is consensual and therefore boring—a stark contrast to the violent, spontaneous en-

counter with the savage noseless 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 enacts a feeling of both fear and sexual hysteria. Yet this myth—as Fanon describes in an encounter with a white prostitute who dejectedly remarked that "going to bed with [black men] was no more remarkable than going to bed with white men"—fails to engender sexual fulfillment, as the stereotype obviates sexual pleasure. The novel, then, both endorses and refutes the myth Fanon describes. Chloe takes pleasure from the noseless man precisely because he is a threat. Gent, however, evokes no such fear, as the violence of their relationship has become routine, formulaic, and largely performative. Just as the prostitute in Fanon's example yearns for a fabricated black body to stimulate and violate her, Chloe and Gent's relationship exists only as a series of impossible, racist stereotypes.

The Third Temptation's focus on the racist stereotypes that surround interracial relationships has a historical corollary, as it was ultimately a miscegenation scandal that shut down the Congo Institute. In December 1911, the "energetically xenophobic" (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, in keeping with the larger racist, colonialist message of the magazine, which regularly featured articles like "ENGLISH LADIES AND NEGROES" that described how "*black and white* may frequently be seen strolling together down the road behind the Institute" and how supporters of the Congo House were race traitors who ignored the plight of starving British children (Draper and Lawson-Reay 238; emphasis in original). To save his reputation, Hughes sued the publication's owner, Horatio Bottomley, for libel in June 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; ellipses in original). This statement by Bottomley, a member of British parliament (at least until he was expelled and imprisoned for fraud in 1918), once again brings to mind the colonial conflict between Britain, Wales, and Africa, as Hughes' 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.

That the collapse of Hughes' Congo Institute occurred not because of a repudiation of colonialist practices but because of widespread racial hysteria and a public smear campaign signals a larger critique of contemporary Welsh society. The dissolution of the Congo Institute, frequently intimated in the novel, thus reveals Williams' deep concerns over the history and future of interracial relationships 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 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. In the fictional landscape of *The Third Temptation*, Hughes is not a forgotten symbol of African corruption but a martyr who is venerated. Strikingly, nearly fifty years later, this landscape has an eerie contemporary resonance. In 2002, Christopher Draper and John Lawson-Reay published *A Scandal at the Congo House*, which provides the mostly forgotten history of the Congo Institute—a study sorely needed. Yet Draper and Lawson-Reay's study hardly views Hughes' work with impartiality, much less with critique. They argue that the Congo House represented "the noblest kind of imperialism" (276), and the end of their text resembles an apologist treatise. 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). They conclude that Hughes is a Welsh hero:

> William Hughes achieved a tremendous amount with limited resources, both financial and intellectual. He was brave, imagi-

> native 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. . . . 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 as a forgotten Welsh hero extends the tragedy of the novel, as Draper and Lawson-Reay venerate Hughes' legacy in almost the same way as many of the novel's characters do. 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. Williams' novel requires further investigation as a text not only for its radical experimentation but for its investigation of the role of racial oppression in contemporary Wales.

Notes

1 Ramraj echoes this sentiment in his introduction to *The Third Temptation*, arguing that the novel is marked by an "avoidance of explicit postcolonial issues" (13).

2 Robbe-Grillet's work attempts to replace individualism with objectivity: the novel's emphasis must no longer be on individuals—or characters—but rather on the world itself. As he writes in *For a New Novel*, his novels "renounce[e] the omnipotence of the person" (29). For Williams, the Nouveau Roman depicts a model of fiction in which there is no longer a narrative center of control; the center has been dispersed. Thus Williams' citation of the Nouveau Roman as a means to examine identity is not entirely surprising, given his fascination with rethinking modernist forms in terms of race and violence. As James writes in "'The Closeness of Profound Curiosity'": "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 suggests, both Williams and Harris employ and distort Western aesthetic forms. In this sense, Robbe-Grillet's experimenta-

tion with time and identity was no doubt appealing to Williams, who uses it as a springboard for larger musings on oppression and exploitation in *The Third Temptation*.

3 See the work of Williams' daughter, Charlotte Williams, whose 2002 *Sugar and Slate* examines the relationship between racial oppression and contemporary Wales. See also Aaron and Williams' 2005 collection *Postcolonial Wales* and Bohata's 2004 *Postcolonialism Revisited: Writing Wales in English*. These books consider the role of British oppression in the development of a Welsh identity.

4 Williams was 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 due 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)

5 In fact, the myth of the idyllic Welsh countryside became increasingly stained by his racial discomfort—and scenes like Williams' confrontation of the photograph become more and more common. Enveloped by whiteness and dislocated from the site of his newfound aesthetic power, Williams once caught an image of himself in the mirror and, exclaimed, "WHAT KIND OF GHOST IS THIS? WHAT IS A BLACK MAN DOING IN THIS MAUSOLEUM? I CAN'T LIVE WITH THIS FAIRYTALE!" (C. Williams, *Sugar* 55).

6 See Charlotte Williams' *Sugar and Slate*, which 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" (30). Charlotte Williams' text spends considerable time examining Hughes' hypocrisy of championing freedom for some but not others.

7 Cambridge argues that the setting and characters of the text display an anticolonialist 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 based 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-twentieth century, see Phillips.

8 Williams once discussed some of his first experiences in London in which a shopkeeper stopped him to remark, "[B]etcha women don't leave you alone. What is it you chaps got?" (Dance 25). For more on miscegenation in relation to Williams and the Windrush generation, see Dance.

9 Miscegenation, Williams argued, is "the first reality of Guyanese being" and must be confronted if the arts are to achieve "autonomy and authority" (qtd. in E. Williams 104).

10 The full quotation appears as such: "Paradoxically, however, as Fanon has so perceptively shown, given the circumstances of the day, Western acceptance was in fact the most unacceptable, indeed probably the most humiliating of choices open to the Colonial artist" (Locher 557).

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