

# Language under the Microscope: Science and Philology in English Fiction 1850-1914

Submitted by William Harrison Abberley to the University of Exeter  
as a thesis for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English  
In September 2012

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## Abstract

This study explores how Anglophone fiction from the mid-Victorian period to the outbreak of the First World War acted as an imaginative testing-ground for theories of the evolution of language. Debates about the past development and the future of language ranged beyond the scope of empirical data and into speculative narrative. Fiction offered to realize such narratives in detail, building imaginative worlds out of different theories of language evolution. In the process, it also often tested these theories, exposing their contradictions. The lack of clear boundaries between nature and culture in language studies of the period enabled fictions of language evolution to explore questions to which contemporary researchers have returned. To what extent is communication instinctive or conventional? How do social and biological factors interact in the production of meaning?

The study traces two opposing tendencies of thought on language evolution, naming them language ‘progressivism’ and ‘vitalism’. Progressivism imagined speakers evolving away from involuntary, instinctive vocalizations to exert rational control over their discourse with mechanical precision. By contrast, language vitalism posited a mysterious, natural power in words which had weakened and fragmented with the rise of writing and industrial society. Certain genres of fiction lent themselves to exploration of these ideas, with utopian tales seeking to envision the end-goals of progressive theory. Representations of primitive language in imperial and prehistoric romances also promoted progressivism by depicting the instinctive, irrational speech from which ‘civilization’ was imagined as advancing away. Conversely, much historical and invasion fiction idealized a linguistic past when speech had expressed natural truth, and the authentic folk origins of its speakers.

Both progressivism and vitalism were undermined through the late nineteenth century by developments in biology, which challenged claims of underlying stability in nature or purpose in change. Simultaneously, philologists increasingly argued that meaning was conventional, attacking models of semantic progress and degradation. In this context, a number of authors reconceptualized language in their fiction as a mixture of instinct and convention. These imaginative explorations of the borderlands between the social and biological in communication prefigured many of the concerns of twenty-first-century biosemiotics.

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## Acknowledgements

First of all, I should thank Matthew Beaumont, who taught me Victorian and Modern literature during my undergraduate years at Oxford, and later advised me when I sought to return to academia. He put me in contact with Angelique Richardson, who would become my supervisor at Exeter. She helped me to turn my vague thoughts about the evolution of language in the Victorian imagination into a credible proposal. She has since been a constant support to this project, with thoughtful and sympathetic comments at every turn. I am also grateful to my second supervisor, Regenia Gagnier, who challenged and made me defend and refine my opinions on this topic.

Exeter is a hotbed of Victorianists, and I am thankful to all of the staff in the university's Centre for Victorian Studies for creating an atmosphere of enthusiastic enquiry with regular events and guest speakers. I am grateful to Philipp Erchinger for many interesting conversations that have pushed this study in new directions. Serving as Postgraduate Representative for the Centre's committee, I was funded to attend the Dickens Project at The University of Santa Cruz, California. I must thank the Centre collectively for putting their trust in me to represent the university at this intellectually stimulating event. I have also benefitted greatly from my membership of the British Association for Victorian Studies, as a conference participant and committee member. In addition, I am indebted to Richard Nemesvari of St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia, who helped to secure funding for me to attend the Hardy at Yale conference, 2011. Another person deserving of thanks is Sharon Ruston of the University of Salford, whose excellent series of AHRC-funded workshops 'Theories and Methods: Literature, Science and Medicine' inspired new avenues of thought during my research.

I am very grateful to Peter Faulkner for his untiring help with my research into William Morris and his ideas about language. I have lost count of the number of stimulating chats we have had over tea, and of the books he has lent me. I thank Isobel Armstrong and James Moore for giving me their time and advice. I am also thankful to Ruth Livesey and her colleagues at the *Journal of Victorian Culture* for rigorous constructive criticism of my work on Morris. I must thank my brother Joe and his partner Karah for putting me up in London during numerous visits to the British Library. I am eternally grateful to my mother, Tessa Abberley, who has always nurtured my interest in literature and helped me to believe in myself. I wish the same to my father, John Abberley, sadly no longer with us, whom I will always remember traipsing through the Staffordshire Moorlands loudly quoting Tennyson and Omar Khayyám to bemused ramblers. My final thanks go to Deni, for supporting me throughout this project, and teaching me to laugh and love in a foreign language.

## Chapter One. Introduction: Dismantling the Microscope

‘Under the microscope of the etymologist every word almost discloses traces of its first metaphorical conception’

- Friedrich Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language* (II 354).<sup>1</sup>

‘Astonished at the performances of the English plough, the Hindoos paint it, set it up, and worship it; thus turning a tool into an idol: linguists do the same with language’

- Herbert Spencer, *The Philosophy of Style* (83).

‘I knew a woman who read French, and she ran away from her husband, and died of consumption. For it’s in the language. My husband says it’s rotten and corrupt, and he ought to know, being a chemist by examination’

- John Davidson, *A Full and True Account of the Wonderful Mission of Earl Lavender, which Lasted One Night and One Day* (73).

This study explores how English fiction of the mid-Victorian to Edwardian periods acted as a testing-ground for theories of the evolution of language. Imaginative fictional narrative, particularly, offered an ideal vehicle for exploring questions about the nature and history of language that ranged beyond empirical proof or testability. Gradual shifts towards modern, structural linguistics and anthropology from the late nineteenth century onwards would frame culture and nature as conceptual opposites. These changes rendered orthodox the assumption that the ‘nature’ of language (if it even had one) was fixed and unchanging. Its possible evolution from prehuman communication, and the continuing role of instinct in semantics, became regarded as imponderables good for only idle speculation.<sup>2</sup> This thesis argues, conversely, that the speculative two-way traffic between fiction and language studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enabled both to engage with issues to which mainstream science and linguistics have returned only relatively recently. The questions raised remain relevant today. Are words wholly arbitrary? Is there an

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<sup>1</sup> Multiple texts by single authors are differentiated here by the publication year of their specific editions, if not their titles.

<sup>2</sup> In 1945 the American linguist George S. Lane hailed ‘mechanistic’ linguistics for removing ‘the heritage of speculation’ that had ‘burdened’ earlier investigations (476). On the hardening of nature/culture binaries, see Stocking 1982, 196-233; Williams 1985, 89-91; Radick 2007, 189-96.

instinctive component in the production and reception of signs? Is language fundamentally different from animal communication or an anthropocentric construct? Similarly as language studies in the period often blurred with the physical sciences, theories of language blurred with narratives about it. Scholars and commentators searched for the nature of language through competing stories of its development. As this thesis will demonstrate, imaginative fiction did not merely passively reflect ideas in language studies about the origins and evolution of language but helped to create them. Through this argument, the study offers new readings of seminal and less well-known Victorian and Edwardian texts.

The eighteenth-century philologist John Horne Tooke had described etymology as ‘like a microscope ... useful to discover the minuter parts of language which would otherwise escape our sight’ (531-32). However, when the Victorian language scholar Max Müller used the same image in his 1860s lecture it carried radically different connotations. By this time, microscopes no longer only amplified molecular space, but also traversed deep time. While rock fragments revealed their structural evolution, fossils showed the extinction of ancient species. At the same time, microscopes revealed the evolution of organisms, growing from simple embryos instead of fully-formed homunculi (Gooday 420-32). Such transformative ontogeny offered a model for understanding society and language as evolving organisms. Whereas Horne Tooke had viewed words as artificial tools reflecting the thoughts of individuals, Müller imagined them as forces of nature, unfolding diachronically over millennia. The discovery of ancestral links between Latin, Greek and Sanskrit in the late eighteenth century had encouraged Continental scholars such as Franz Bopp and Jacob Grimm to trace the diversification of speech varieties through history. As in geology and embryology, they formulated natural ‘laws’ and stages of development, as though speech were a form of organic life (Aarsleff 1983, 3). Müller’s microscope promised to discover through these changes the atoms of the human mind, embedded in the metaphorical ‘roots’ of words. At the same time, material investigations of the speech organs and brain were placing the production of language under a microscope as never before (Rylance 80-97). By analysing the physical mechanisms and acquirement of speech, investigators of various disciplines sought the origins and development of human consciousness. In 1893 the American phoneticist E. P. Evans compared the role of the phonograph in philology to that of the microscope in bacteriology (438; see Radick 2005, 462-63). Like the word-histories of earlier philology, the instinctive, infinitesimal parts of

vocalization seemed to carry traces of the past, requiring only microscopic analysis to reveal their secrets.

Victorian philology constituted an uncertain, amorphous form of knowledge, hovering between physical and historical science (what we now call the humanities). Müller acknowledged that ‘physical science deals with the works of God, historical science with the works of man’. Yet Müller and his fellow researchers studied languages not ‘as a key to an understanding of the literary monuments’ of the past, but as ‘a vehicle or an organ of thought; we want to know its origin, its nature, its laws’ (1866, I 23, 25). The wide acceptance of philology as a natural science was demonstrated in 1859 when Charles Darwin compared the common descent of species to that of languages, drawing on the supposed credibility of the latter (Alter 1999, 14-21). Philology overlapped with physiology and psychology, anthropology and sociology, concerning the physical production of speech and the somatic processes behind it, both for individuals and communities. Early philologists considered their discipline not only material science but, potentially, the ‘science of sciences’, concerning the medium through which all science was communicated (Harpham 72). Enlightenment philosophers had used words to classify and explore nature, assuming that these were simply the tools (however imperfect) of sovereign minds. Philology collapsed the boundary between the material universe and the abstract instrument used to classify it, folding both into a wider monistic nature. As Müller observed: ‘Man had studied every part of nature ... every nerve and fibre of his own body. ... [H]e had meditated on the nature of his soul, on the laws of his mind ... and yet language, without the aid of which not even the first step in this glorious career could have been made, remained unnoticed. Like a veil that hung too close over the eye of the human mind, it was hardly perceived’ (1866, I 27). Philology’s bold promises of becoming a ‘philosophy of universal history’ compensated for the epistemological crises it threatened to create (Bunsen iii). Logic might be imagined as no longer universal but only the perspective of a particular stage of language growth (Burrow 1967, 187; Dowling 1986, xi-xii; Stitt 19). These developments in the study of language raised new questions. Could language talk about itself objectively, acting simultaneously as both the microscope and the object under its lens? Was scientific language possible, or even desirable? How might writers come to terms with their compromised position as products and functions of language as well as users of it?

Linda Dowling and Christine Ferguson have both explored language studies as sources of anxiety in Victorian culture. For Dowling, philology eroded old certainties about the naturalness of words and human control over them; for Ferguson, evolutionary theories raised the mortifying possibility of speech originating in animal vocalizations. This thesis builds on these works, exploring how nineteenth-century linguistics opened up new imaginative frontiers. Philology produced models of human origins, development and destiny, through which different political and ideological agendas could be projected. As science offered new views of the relationship between body and consciousness, philology did likewise to ideas of nature and culture, heritage and nation. Dowling argued that towards the end of the nineteenth century the linguistic sign increasingly came to be seen as arbitrary and indifferent to civilization (1986, 80). However, such proto-linguistic relativism was counterbalanced by the incursions of biology into the realm of signs. A word's sound may be arbitrary, but the urges and emotions that structured it derived from millennia of accumulated instincts. Twentieth-century refusals to speculate on the origins or evolution of language in structural linguistics had their roots in late-nineteenth-century philology with its emphasis on empirical facts (Stam 255-62). Yet, the more recent revivals of these questions in psychology and animal communication studies lead back to threads of speculation from the same period (Radick 2007, 320-64). The variability of Victorian and Edwardian language studies in their methods and scope of exploration gave them the imaginative freedom to pursue questions that continue to excite controversy in the twenty-first century.

Theories about the origins and evolution of language developed in tandem with genres of fiction, which tested these ideas through imaginary narratives. In 1901 the American philologist Hanns Oertel lamented that, 'unlike the physicist or chemist', the social scientist 'is not able to vary at will the conditions under which phenomena or objects present themselves. Nature performs on a very large scale a certain number of experiments before his eyes, but he can be a spectator only and never participate in them' (51). This dilemma did not, however, prevent experiments in speculation, imagining prehistoric and future languages from theoretical models. In 1868 August Schleicher published the first attempted reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European language. *Avis Akvāsas Ka* ('The Sheep and the Horses') was a short fable in hypothetical forms produced through philological comparisons (Beekes & de Vaan 287). Similarly, much literature of the period experimented with linguistic possibilities made imaginable by philology. The exotic,

unfamiliar settings of imperial, extraterrestrial, utopian, dystopian, historic and prehistoric romances, from Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) to H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), opened spaces for authors to imagine alternative forms of language. These involved reviving and fabricating archaic forms, depicting the evolutionary past of language beyond philological records, and predicting future development. By problematizing language, philology also problematized the attempts of realist fiction to objectively represent the world. In response, novelists such as Thomas Hardy and H. G. Wells destabilized the conventions of realist reported speech, depicting layers of instinctive communication in parallel to words. Yet, these authors continued to narrate their tales in Standard English, often third-person, narrations, even while their ideas about language undermined the notion of an objective, scientific idiom. This contradiction reflected a tension between the urge to embrace the natural chaos of language and the wish to document it scientifically, between the generic tendencies, as Andrew Lang wrote, of 'Realism and Romance' (1887, 683). Ann Ardis and Angelique Richardson have argued that fin-de-siècle 'New Woman' fiction challenged and destabilized realist conventions in ways previously credited to the later authors more generally considered the first modernists (Ardis 6-8; Richardson 2010, 144). George Egerton's 'A Cross-Line' (1893), for example, is narrated impressionistically through characters' mental associations, forging a path of verbal experimentation from which the male authors discussed here ultimately shied away. Their attachment to Standard English and realist conventions might be understood within wider gendered discourses of science, which typically opposed masculine intellectual abstraction to embodied female instinct. Yet, this idea was countered by alternative models of verbal masculinity as strongly embodied and instinctive, against imitative, conventional femininity. Such ambivalence engaged with long-running debates about the nature of the linguistic past and whether this past was something to reconnect with or escape from.

The epigraph quotations from the philosopher Spencer and philologist Müller represent opposing tendencies of this question, which I will call language progressivism and language vitalism. Both tendencies continued eighteenth-century arguments and were discussed and nuanced by many other writers throughout the Victorian period. However, I will focus particularly on Spencer and Müller because they were highly influential voices who consistently promoted the respective sides through parallel careers. Language vitalism conceived meaning as an organic essence derived from a primordial epoch of creation. Müller claimed to trace this mystical power through primordial 'roots' of speech, elusive

unions of sound and sense that supposedly echoed through the history of language. Progressivism, conversely, saw meaning as an artificial production, forged through humans gaining control over the chaotic forces of nature. Language progressivism and vitalism both valued the linguistic past but for different reasons: for vitalism it was a point of return; for progressivism one of orientation as language advanced in the opposite direction. Both tendencies problematized the relationship of present language to truth, and human agency over it. Progressives viewed modern speech as riddled with primitive ‘survivals’, sustaining subjective, superstitious ideas. Conversely, language vitalism regarded Standard English as alienated from its history, with users parroting each other according to mechanistic convention. Both postulated a perfect correspondence with ‘truth’ in their idealized languages of the past and future, but struggled to explain how either could be realized outside of cultural perspectives. In either case, the vision of uniting humanity under a *lingua franca* clashed with the aim to particularize speech, reflecting more fully the soul of a given people, community or individual. Yet, their urge to direct contemporary language towards their respective ideals was derailed by the autonomous processes of change revealed by philology. Whether one located meaning in preindustrial, pseudo-Edenic nature or the evolution of social structures, both views undermined individual control over speech and thought. Equally, both models often treated language as a passive reflection of thought rather than an active agent which also shaped thought. Towards the turn of the century, new ideas of language and thought as unstable catalysts of each other undermined both progressive and vitalist narratives.

These two tendencies were amorphous and overlapping, with philological and imaginative writers often combining elements from both to suit different ideological agendas. Patriots such as R. C. Trench and Charles Kingsley tried to present modern Standard English as the fulfilment of an organic destiny traceable through history. Likewise, Spencer and several utopians portrayed the mechanical progress of language as part of a monistic evolution that collapsed oppositions between nature and society. Further, Victorian progress could be imagined as a spiral as well as a straight line, involving the recovery of past strands of development (Bowler 10-11). This muddling of apparently contradictory models of language only increased in the latter decades of the century as the mid-Victorian mirage of a totalizing ‘science of sciences’ dispersed. ‘Up to about 1850’, William James wrote in 1904, ‘almost everyone believed that sciences expressed truths that were exact copies of a definite code of non-human realities’. Now: ‘There are so many

geometries, so many logics, so many physical and chemical hypotheses, so many classifications, each one of them good for so much and not good for everything' (459). As the physical world fragmented into a plurality of explanations, language followed suit with the emergence of specialist technical vocabularies and no obvious *lingua franca* to unite them. At the same time, language scholars increasingly treated meaning as contextual rather than an historic inheritance or development (Nerlich 209). Instead of searching for one, totalizing explanation of language, some writers began to imagine it as a plurality of systems working in concert. Language would never be perfect or complete because it was not singular but a negotiation of different functions understood through different bodies of knowledge. In this way, the fictions of Samuel Butler, Hardy and Wells explore language as a site of dialogue between natural instincts and social convention rather than purely one or the other. This pluralism opened a space for the authors to critique moral and social dogmas, such as the supposed naturalness of marriage and the family. Such concepts appeared no longer eternal but as unstable adaptations of social tradition and biological inheritance. The once apparently united science of language was dissolving into many objects under many different lenses.

Ideas about the evolution of language pervaded Victorian and Edwardian literary culture, and this study is necessarily partial in its selection of material. While its arguments might be extended through the work of many poets, such as William Barnes and Gerard Manley Hopkins, I have limited my discussion to fiction.<sup>3</sup> This focus helps to clarify the project's emphasis on narrative, tracing competing stories of linguistic change. Continuous prose enabled writers to flesh out these narratives in living detail. Kingsley, Grant Allen, Hardy, Butler, Wells and Jack London command particular attention due to their parallel interests in philology and biology, and reflect the overlap between these fields in their fiction. Equally, Kingsley, Hardy, William Morris, R. M. Ballantyne, J. F. Hodgetts and Paul du Chaillu warrant discussion for their persistent interest in an imagined organic linguistic past before industrial modernity. Certain fiction genres also stand out as literary parallels to the language theory, not only reflecting the latter but also helping to shape it. While language progressivism often appears symbiotic with utopia, language vitalism developed in tandem with historical romance and its later offshoots, such as invasion and fantasy fiction. Similarly, anthropological notions of 'primitive' language paralleled

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<sup>3</sup> For previous scholarship on Victorian poetry and philology see Cary Plotkin on Hopkins, Dennis Taylor on Hardy and Dowling (1986) on Browning, Swinburne and Yeats.

imperial, prehistoric and apocalyptic romance, which described ‘primitive’ speech from a supposedly higher mental altitude. This study is also concerned with realism, as far as it can be defined as a genre, since Victorian efforts to represent reality in fiction often depended on language acting as a neutral tool, reflecting extralinguistic facts (Levine 1981, 6). The failure of language to fulfil this ideal might be explored through many novelists from Charles Dickens to W. M. Thackeray (see Brantlinger 1998, 5). Nonetheless, Hardy, Butler and Wells’s evolutionary visions of language as a random extension of animal instincts had the potential to destabilize the epistemological foundations of the genre more radically than before. Similarly as such visions undermined the objectivity of the scientific observer, so they also threatened the objectivity of the realist narrator.

### The Future of Language

Chapter Two considers how comparative philology shaped imaginative visions of future language progress. Comparative philologists often traced grammatical development through epochs, imagined as paralleling the evolution of knowledge and society. Wilhelm von Humboldt and Schleicher ranked grammatical evolution into the fixed stages of ‘monosyllabic’, ‘agglutinative’ and ‘inflective’. Humboldt wrote in 1836 that language structure reflected ‘the growth of man’s mental powers into ever new and often more elevated forms’ (21). Most Anglophone readers first encountered the new philology through anthropologists and early sociologists importing its data into wider discussions of social progress (Burrow 1967, 188). The teleology inherent in such discourse encouraged speculation on future development. Indeed, the act of predicting the future would demonstrate present advancement, as people became aware of the processes at work upon them. John Stuart Mill wrote that by Auguste Comte’s model of development ‘we may hereafter succeed not only in looking far forward into the future history of the human race, but in determining what artificial means may be used . . . to accelerate the natural progress’ (1882, 643). What, then, was the end-point for language progress and how might it be realized?

Language progressivism grew in tandem with mid-century ideals of scientific objectivity and social altruism. These ideals combined with models of philological development to produce three goals of language progress: mechanization of meaning, detachment from the sensory body and the merging of speakers into a united ‘mind’.

Lorraine Daston notes that many scientists in the latter nineteenth century sought to render language objective by fixing international technical nomenclatures (2000, 262).

Progressives such as Henry Buckle and Spencer presented standardization as the ascent of human control over the forces of nature. Philology had revealed a history of language change independent of human intentions, but the march of literature and science promised to fix meaning. Progressives depicted language as advancing from involuntary instinct to consciously crafted tool. Conceiving meaning through the prism of industrial output, they projected a dual process of increasing efficiency and precision. Language appeared to convey denser meanings in ever less space. ‘The dying out of forms and sounds is looked upon by the etymologists with painful feelings’, wrote the philologist J. F. Kräuter; ‘but no unprejudiced judge will be able to see in it anything but a progressive victory over lifeless material’ (qtd. Jespersen 1894, 15). At the same time, words seemed to become increasingly rigid in their definitions and uses. ‘Each tongue acquires further accuracy through processes which fix the meaning of each word’, Spencer wrote in 1862: ‘By and by dictionaries give definitions, and eventually among the most cultivated indefiniteness is not tolerated’ (386). These ideals rested upon contradictory models of semantics, however, torn between the accumulation of meanings over time and their destruction in line with new knowledge. Prophetic romances such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Coming Race* (1871) and John Macnie’s *The Diothas* (1883) illustrate this conflict in their visions of future language progress.

The idea of progressive language mechanization strove to keep at bay the relativist implications of comparative philology, which undermined faith in language as a route to truth. By tracing phonetic change irrespective of word-meanings, the new comparative philology implied that meaning was determined by context rather than a transcendent order (Bossche 7). Language mechanization resurrected this order in the future unity that scientific language was imagined to be, which would name forever the fundamental elements of the universe. This process of mechanization enabled Victorians to imagine that the sciences were moving towards a unified explanatory system, in spite of their different conceptual foundations. The polymath William Whewell, who coined the term ‘scientist’, wrote in 1840: ‘Final causes, if they appear driven further from us by such an extension of our views, embrace us only with a vaster and more majestic circuit: instead of a few threads connecting some detached objects, they become a stupendous net-work, which is wound round and round the universal frame of things’ (I 635). Nature might seem disordered, but

this image of disorder came only from current ignorance of her laws or, in Whewell's words, her 'language'. Since the 1830s, British scientists had debated adopting a uniform chemical notation, with Whewell arguing for a rigid algebraic system. Timothy Alborn notes that such thinking rejected *ad hoc* notations suited to specific problems, assuming a 'higher form of mathematical certainty' beneath the disparate sciences (457). The more precise and detailed technical terms became, Whewell suggested, the more they could escape the socio-historical perspectives of language, framing symbols that mapped onto an objective, extra-linguistic world. He wrote:

To trace order and law in that which has been observed, may be considered as interpreting what nature has written down for us, and will commonly prove that we understand her alphabet. But to predict what has not been observed, is to attempt ourselves to use the legislative phrases of nature; and when she responds plainly and precisely to that which we thus utter, we cannot but suppose that we have in a great measure made ourselves masters of the meaning and structure of her language. (II 64-65)

The notion that language was becoming increasingly precise and controlled raised the question of who would control it. Utopians of language mechanization often predicted the centralization of control over language in tandem with the centralization of power in an authoritarian technocracy. Such visions show how the goal of language mechanization engaged with wider debates about political authority, fearing the chaos of democracy. Yet, these utopias also often linked language mechanization with individualism, seeking to render meaning private rather than public property. The liberal ideal of autonomous *homo economicus* contradicted that of a unified, collective mind, which would demand the sacrifice of individual self-sovereignty.

The drive for mechanical objectivity led many commentators to locate progress in the abstraction of language from the body. 'The psychological life', Spencer wrote in 1855, became increasingly 'distinguished from the physical life', as organisms grew in complexity (503). Hence, orthography developed from hieroglyphs and picture-writing the same as words and thoughts developed from chaotic sensation-noises. This dynamic imported into an evolutionary framework the Lockean assumption that language had an

external and internal life, divided between the material ‘body’ of speech and ‘spirit’ of ideas (Crowley 47). Such a spirit of pure mind might be re-imagined as a gradual emergence rather than eternal condition. Progress consisted of the mind rising above bodily subjectivity, discovering objective truths about the universe and reshaping language to convey them. Progressives also conceived the elevation of language above personal and parochial perspectives as a form of moral evolution. A rational society would be a sympathetic, cooperative one in which members restrained their selfish urges. It was no coincidence that the most strident proponent of language progressivism, Spencer, was also heavily engaged with debates about altruism (Dixon 2008, 4). Spencer claimed that communicative evolution was two-pronged, involving both a ‘language of ideas’ and ‘language of emotions’. While the former united intellects, the latter engendered sympathy through ever-finer shades of tone, rhythm and pitch, ‘ultimately enabl[ing] men vividly and completely to impress on each other all the emotions which they experience from moment to moment’ (1891, II 426). Spencer’s model of progress thus fluctuated between refining the body and abstracting from it. Such inconsistency stemmed from efforts to avoid the epistemological relativism implied by materialist psychology. If all conceptions derived from sensory experience then how could thought and speech escape bodily subjectivity? Sensations and ideas were defined by their relations with each other in an enclosed system (Herbert 2001, 44). Meaning was thus uncertain, a shifting mass of associations that varied depending on group and individual perspectives. Instead of translating nature or the human soul, language might, rather, invent them. In envisioning progressive theory, utopias frequently resorted to spiritualism and telepathy to escape its contradictions. Such dreams of direct thought transference enabled the authors to hold in abeyance the conflicting goals of individual autonomy and collective unity, of human domination over and harmony with the wider universe.

Prophetic fiction could challenge ideas of progressive language mechanization and disembodiment as well as promote them. Several early scientific romances of H. G. Wells explore the incompatibility of strictly regulated language with an individual autonomy that was both mental and linguistic. Tales such as ‘A Story of the Days to Come’ (1897) and *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) associate the fixing of language by a central authority with mass manipulation, reducing individuals to nodes in the system. This challenge to Spencerian language progress cohered with Wells’s wider political and intellectual radicalism. Wells’s interest in socialism made him suspicious of the centralization of

power. Further, his training in post-Darwinian science influenced him to question the assumption of a translatable, unitary language of nature as dogmatic. The random mutation and environmental pressures of natural selection offered him a model for understanding language as unstable and relative. Symbolic meaning might be imagined, like organic adaptation, as a matter of context, undirected by any higher teleology. Wells explored the implications of this semantic relativism most fully in his fictions of extraterrestrial intelligence *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). Both tales question the notion of perfect communication, depicting beings whose close communion with each other renders them incapable of understanding or sympathizing with outsiders. They suggest that a fixed, depersonalized language might imprison and limit consciousness as much as liberate it.

While the young Wells challenged the discourse of language progress, however, he also illustrated its adaptability and pervasiveness. In his Edwardian years, as his interest grew in the creation of a world state, Wells succumbed to many of the contradictory ideas that he had earlier attacked. With world war looming, he pinned his hopes for a rational future on the creation of a global *lingua franca*. His efforts to imagine this dream clashed with the contextuality of meaning which his previous writing had exposed. Faced with the diversity of speech communities and the different worldviews they encoded, his utopian visions of a global tongue flirted with authoritarianism. His struggles reflected wider conflicts in schemes and prophecies of a global language. How could a common language and set of meanings be found without imposing one group's perspective over others? If different languages were maintained, then how could a common, mediating cipher bridge their different socio-historical perspectives? Like the theorists he had once critiqued, Wells could only avoid these conundrums by withdrawing his focus from particulars to the macro-level of social planning – in effect, by withdrawing from fiction.

### Primitive Language

Chapter Three explores how progressive discourse defined primitive language, setting it in binary opposition to ideals of scientific, civilized language. Progressivism depended on this binary to support its teleology, indicating where language was going by where it had come from. Representations of future language rendered instability of meaning a temporary condition to be overcome. Representations of primitive language implied, by contrast, the

objectivity and self-control of the language classifying them. This binary mirrored race, class and gender inequalities, with primitive non-Western, working-class and female speech constructed as foils to Western, middle-class male discourse. However, the progressive dynamic on which this binary was based also threatened to collapse it, blurring the boundaries between primitive and civilized along an unbroken continuum. Towards the end of the century, developments in anthropology and sociology undermined totalizing oppositions between primitive and civilized culture. The decoupling of culture from biology by figures such as Tylor destabilized the edifice of civilized language, revealing primordial instincts and tendencies beneath the thin surface of social tradition. As with future language, concepts of primitive language unravelled the more that fiction tried to realize them.

Progressive ideals of language becoming increasingly controlled, conventional and disembodied characterized primitive expression as contrastingly limited to the instinctive, imitative body.<sup>4</sup> ‘All language consists, at the beginning’, Spencer wrote in 1854, ‘of symbols which are as like to the things symbolized as it is practicable to make them’. Primitive communicators gesticulated, ‘mimicking the actions or peculiarities of the things referred to’ with vocalizations ‘imitating the sounds the objects make’. ‘Savages’, he claimed, used such manual signs to supplement their meagre vocabularies, ‘dramatizing ... a likeness’ of the things described (1891, II 31-32). Their consciousness thus lacked the Westerner’s differentiation of psychical action from physical action; the bushman narrating the story of his hunt had to become or embody the things he wished to describe, either in gestures or onomatopoeia. Later, in *First Principles* (1862) Spencer wrote: ‘The lowest form of language is the exclamation, by which an entire idea is vaguely conveyed through a single sound; as among the lower animals’ (347). Spencer’s two comments highlight the contradictory concepts of primitive language as both homogenous mass and scattered fragments. Savage speech was either too precise, referring to specific material objects, and thus incapable of abstractions, or too vague, and thus incapable of drawing distinctions. Similarly as representations of language progress varied between change and stability, primitive language could be both static and intensely changeable. The Oxford philologist A. H. Sayce wrote in 1874: ‘The savage has the delight of a child in uttering new sounds, and exhibiting his power and inventiveness in this manner, with none of the restraints by which

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<sup>4</sup> See Ferguson 2006, 34-39. I use the terms ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’ in the sense that they were understood historically and without suggesting any legitimacy for them.

civilization confines the invention of slang to the schoolboy and the mob' (83). Conversely, others stressed the homogeneity of primitive language, rooted in the unchanging physical body and environment. Writers from Galton to Darwin claimed that primitive speakers were unable to count beyond the number of their fingers (Ferguson 2006, 34). Tylor, L. H. Morgan and Romanes further argued that the manual gestures of the deaf were everywhere the same, recapitulating primordial, instinctive signs (Tylor 1871, II 185; Morgan 36-37; Romanes 116-119). The primitive speaker appeared a creature of ahistorical, bodily urges and imitative echoes, voiced without reflection or agency.

This image was contradicted, however, by definitions of primitiveness as rigid adherence to tradition and convention. Christopher Herbert argues that late-Victorian anthropologists transformed 'savage' society 'from a void of institutional control where desire is rampant to a spectacle of controls exerted systematically upon the smallest details of daily life' (1991, 65-66). Contrary to his earlier writings, the older Spencer characterized 'savage' society in 1876 by 'ceremonial regulation', and 'a complicated and often most inconvenient set of customs' (II 4, 322; qtd. Herbert 67). Savage speech was always redrawing the world in response to subjective sensations, yet, at the same time, it was an unchanging fossil, stubbornly repeating ancestral forms and ideas. This tension between change and continuity derived from the same conflict between semantic models observed in the previous chapter. The concept of diachronic accumulation located primitiveness in changeability, erasing historical meanings. Alternatively, synchronic precision located it in the preservation of old terms, obstructing the progress of knowledge. Such inconsistency was necessary in representations of primitive language to avoid the cultural-linguistic relativism of meaning depending on context. These tensions are discernible in the fictions of the primitive linguistic past of Henry Rider Haggard. Tales such as *King Solomon's Mines* and *Allan Quatermain* (1887) represent the colonial subject as mentally imprisoned in the body, unable to think outside of its urges and subjective sensations. This model is at odds, though, with the complex network of superstitions in which primitive speakers appear embedded. The conflicting models of primitive language cause Haggard's tales to locate verbal savagery sometimes in the individual body and at other times in the collective social body. Primitive speech in his fiction explodes anarchically from the individual sensorium and, yet, slavishly echoes the voice of the tribe. Both forms of verbal primitiveness are further strained when 'savages' conspire with Haggard's Europeans, muddling the primitive/civilized boundary.

Anthropologists and philologists often characterized language as primitive through the ability of Europeans to translate and decode its meanings from a higher perspective. The translatability of such language would justify its subordinate position, conveying no meanings or concepts not contained in the history of European language. The colonial administrator T. B. Macaulay had declared, with regard to language policy in the colonies, ‘that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia’ (2003, I 230). The irony of this comment was that Macaulay knew neither language, having only read some texts in translation. His attitude was not far from that of many philologists, however, who often studied language with no concern for how they were used in context. Even Müller, who later castigated anthropologists for their lack of proficiency in native languages, saw no problem in searching for his ‘roots’ in the lexicons of tongues he could not speak. In 1891 he complained of colonized speakers being ‘totally misrepresented by men ignorant of their language’ (1902, I 247; see Ferguson 2006, 34-35). Yet, in his earlier, popular lectures he drew on data from many non-European tongues in which he was not fluent, declaring: ‘we do not expect the botanist to be an experienced gardener, or the geologist a miner’ (1866, I 26). Anglophone scholars routinely treated Western designations as the yardstick for all meaning, assuming that all was translatable into European terms. This discourse of primitive translatability can be traced in Grant Allen’s ethnographic romances, such as ‘The Reverend John Creedy’ (1883) and *The Great Taboo* (1890). However, primitive speech too easily understood also threatened to erase the distinction between civilized and primitive. Allen’s tales thus equivocate on the capacity of European speakers to comprehend primitive speech, seeking to distance them from it. Equally problematic was the fact of colonized natives learning European languages, transgressing the boundaries between primitive and civilized. This issue reflected a wider contradiction within colonialism, which justified itself through the innate inferiority of its subjects, yet also claimed to civilize them (Brantlinger 2011, 2). Macaulay had called for the grafting of civilized English onto native tongues, to ‘refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich [them] with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population’ (2003, 237). Yet if the superiority of the colonizers lay partly in their language then this superiority was threatened by multilingual natives. Allen’s tales both engage with such transgressions and illustrate how anthropologists sought to neutralize them, presenting language learning as primitive imitation.

One way of maintaining the image of primitive speech as instinctive and ahistorical was to construct hypothetical primordial speakers from before any traditions had formed. In the latter decades of the century prehistoric fiction emerged in dialogue with palaeontology. Evolutionary paradigms of development emboldened authors to imagine the linguistic past before records had begun. The same as utopians sought to demonstrate the advancement of current language by predicting future progress, prehistoric fiction did the same by excavating the ancient past. Philologists such as Hensleigh Wedgwood and William Farrar had speculated that language began in onomatopoeia and emotional exclamations before acquiring conventional meanings. Allen argued that, on this basis, primordial speech could be imagined through onomatopoeia and instinctive vocalizations still used, since ‘it is the old geological and biological doctrine of “causes now in action” applied to philology’ (1894, 65). Tales such as Wells’s ‘A Story of the Stone Age’ (1897) and Stanley Waterloo’s *The Story of Ab* (1897) depict the linguistic past as a series of stepping-stones from instinctive and imitative sounds to consciously-manipulated symbols. Such tales struggle to pin down primitive language as a definite stage in a linear process, however, since every period in ancestral history is preceded by earlier communicative activity. Darwin’s model of continuous, uniformitarian change from animal communication to human speech obliterated any sense of an origin for language. It merged into a spectrum of communication systems throughout organic life, undermining the privileged status of humanity. Further, the more detail in which these authors imagined the linguistic past the less it fed neatly into the present. Instead, their fictions sometimes suggested alternative lines of development and context-bound meanings with no equivalent in modern, ‘civilized’ language. Darwin’s account of language evolution challenged the idea of purposive change, depicting human speech as a collection of random adaptations. Similarly, fin-de-siècle narratives of human prehistory are conflicted between charting a teleological path to present humans and their society, and reflecting the open-endedness of natural selection.

The separation of language and ‘culture’ from heredity by anthropologists such as Tylor rendered civilization and science a thin crust that barely covered humanity’s primitive instincts. Tylor acknowledged this point, tracing ‘survivals’ of myth and superstition through Western language and customs. The conventionality of polite, middle-class etiquette rendered it open to comparison with taboos and fetishes, as Allen suggested in his novel *The Great Taboo* (1891). Simultaneously, the mechanisms of natural selection gave no guarantee of inevitable progress. E. R. Lankester famously observed that changing

environmental conditions could produce what conventional standards would judge degeneration. Mobile crustaceans had become stationary limpets while multiple digits shrivelled into the single horse's hoof (37, 74). This point fuelled speculation on the possible degenerative effects of modern, artificial environments on the bodies, brains and, consequently, language of humans. Not only did vestiges of the primitive endure in current speech, but they might also be revived by the very conditions of civilization. Wells's early scientific romances *The Time Machine* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) discovered pockets of primitiveness in middle-class, supposedly civilized speech, linking humans with their animal cousins. If civilized speech was a mere matter of learning signs and their conventional associations, Wells suggested, then there was little to separate it from the primitive or even animal. Perhaps all humans were imitative savages, merely echoing each other in accordance with habitual associations. Beneath these associations lay primordial urges, which custom was able to divert and repress but not eradicate. As Wells's utopian visions often tended towards linguistic authoritarianism, with a scientific elite fixing word meanings, so his visions of degeneration involved the loss of institutional control over language, setting loose the primitive within. This idea existed in tension, though, with a more ambivalent attitude towards instinct. Darwin and George Romanes had argued that instinctive vocalization and gesture were not simply signs of chaotic, individual associations but constituted systems of fixed, inherited meanings. Wells's tales of degeneration sometimes suggest that such instinctive sign-systems encode useful knowledge, such as emotional literacy. Suppressing such instinctive signs could also suppress sympathy, problematizing the binary between primitive and civilized.

The same uncertainty dogs London's representations of language degeneration in his apocalyptic fictions *The Iron Heel* (1908) and *The Scarlet Plague* (1912). These novels warn of the breakdown of prescriptive authorities over language plunging humanity back into primitive instincts and social savagery. Yet, London's utopian-socialist inclinations towards centralized control clashed with Nietzschean interest in the creative dynamism of instinct. Friedrich Nietzsche had hailed the potential of verbal instinct to break with dead, ossified dogmas, driving people to speak in 'forbidden metaphors and unheard-of combinations of concepts ... demolishing and deriding the old conceptual barriers' (98). As Maria João Mayer Branco writes, summarizing Nietzsche's claim, 'At their origin, metaphors ... are movement, transference, transport of nervous stimulations into images and sounds, – and therefore, they open up new possibilities of understanding, multiple

interpretations. They have within them the power to “liberate” the intellect from its servitude to the rigid limits, the “boundary stones”, of conceptual abstractions’ (43-44). London similarly conceived language as a form of energy transference. Primitive, bodily instinct might not be opposed but integral to linguistic creativity. Language was perhaps not wholly a progression out of instinct but a negotiation and dialogue with it.

### Language Nostalgia and the Organic Voice

Chapter Four explores reverence for the linguistic past, particularly of non-literate communities, as a vital heritage to be recovered. Language vitalism grew out of theological and romantic narratives of degeneration from an original, perfect state of nature. It rested on the assumption that language signified through a living inner essence that remained constant through history and directed its growth. In the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacque Rousseau and Johann Gottfried Herder had venerated ancient oral speech as the source of truth and power in language, now weakened by artificial writing. Comparative philology sought to access this organic orality through the history of nations (Eco 31-44). ‘Nations and languages against dynasties and treaties’, Müller declared, would ‘remodel ... the map of Europe’ in the coming age (1866, I 13). In contrast to the modern fragmentation of classes and voices, Müller imagined a past when speakers were united both with each other and their natural environment. He argued that words were not arbitrary but derived their meaning from primordial ‘roots’ forged by a now-extinct creative instinct. Such thinking influenced the genre of historical romance, which looked to the authentic, oral folk-speech of England’s past as a source of identity and direction. Progressivism presented scientific, intellectual male discourse in opposition to emotional, instinctive femininity. Language vitalism, by contrast, often regarded modern, abstracted writing as feminized, impure and mechanical in comparison with the natural, masculine vigour and truthfulness of ancient speech. Anglo-Saxon, Müller claimed, was a warrior language, its consonants maintained with ‘a manly, sharp and definite articulation’, before the laziness of ‘effeminate, vague and indistinct utterance’ caused ‘phonetic decay’ (1866, II 176). How, though, could the power of such organic orality be accessed in an age (and medium) of industrial print? How could the multiplicity of Indo-European dialects revealed by philology be manipulated to present the modern nation state as natural and predestined?

These questions permeated Charles Kingsley and R. M. Ballantyne's fictions of the past, such as *Westward Ho!* (1855) and *Norsemen in the West* (1872). The authors frequently presented their tales as transcriptions of speech, opposing organic inspiration and truth to the calculation and artifice of modern literary culture. In this way, they contrived auratic storyteller personas to compensate for the impersonality of print; a manoeuvre pioneered by Thomas Carlyle. Antagonistic truth-values collided in these narratives, however, as they vacillated between scholarly historical evidence and spontaneous organic inspiration. Simultaneously, their desire for authentic oral communities conflicted with their efforts to trace a coherent, united national heritage that was only possible in writing. As philology had revealed, literature imposed linguistic unity across states, while oral communities rapidly diverged from one another. Stitt notes the popular Victorian 'image of history as an inner force – pushing words from acorn to oak' (12). For Kingsley and Ballantyne such nationalist teleology meant revering past language and, yet, imposing upon it the values of nineteenth-century Standard English. Ironically, nostalgia for a mythical oral past could act to suppress and delegitimize current dialectal variation, which undermined the narrative of a single, united descent.

Another obstacle to retrieving the oral past was that its only records were written ones, mere fossilized impressions of living speech. Many authors and commentators sought to bridge this gap by racializing linguistic heritage (Hannaford 16). Ancient speech might no longer live on the tongue, but Victorian readers could imagine the blood of their Teutonic ancestors bequeathing organic memories, carrying common ideas and impulses. Such ideas drew on Lamarckian models of ancestral memories transmitted in the blood (Otis 1994, 15-25). Etymology seemed to offer a means of reconnecting with racial heritage, excavating ancient words which one's instinctive impulses would fill with meaning. As philology traced the Germanic precursors of English, scholars increasingly sought England's racial heritage in Old Norse literature. New translations of these texts provided source material for the emerging genre of Viking fiction. Examples of this genre by Paul du Chaillu and James Frederick Hodgetts sought to revive or discover traces of ancient Norse vocabulary in modern English. The desire for a true ancestral language to match imagined racial descent tangled such authors in a search for impossible purity. The hybrid vocabulary of English which progressives celebrated, language vitalists lamented as dilution and contamination of the living national essence. In 1851 Arthur Schopenhauer had described modern English as a degraded 'jargon, that cloak of ideas which is patched and

compiled from scraps of different materials' (II 565). The Viking fiction of du Chaillu and Hodgetts thus mirrored the efforts of purists such as Edward Freeman and William Barnes to purify English to its imagined authentic racial origins. However, the search for purity clashed with British imperialism, which the authors also imagined as a racial destiny. Even as it seemed to fulfil this destiny, empire threatened to uproot English from its mythical native soil and speakers.

The idea of purity and contamination produced fears of future invasion by foreign languages, repeating the imagined desecration of the Norman Conquest. From the 1870s onwards, fictions of military invasion repeatedly stressed the linguistic effects of foreign occupation. Anxieties about linguistic impositions upon England permeate George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) as well as many other tales of the genre. Saki's *When William Came* (1913) is particularly interesting in this regard, imagining the English national spirit weakening in parallel with the language. The novel externalizes in a foreign invader anxieties about internal pressures in England that seemed to be destroying its organic speech heritage. P. G. Wodehouse would parody these ideas, along with the conventions of invasion fiction in *The Swoop! or How Clarence Saved England* (1909). Besides the fear of invaders destroying English was the opposing concern that foreigners might imitate its standardized form so well as to impersonate natives. Spy fiction of the era produced the stock figure of the foreign agent disguised by his mastery of the de-regionalized, middle-class language. The communication technologies that had enabled the English-speaking nation to stretch far and wide also made it vulnerable to infiltration. Hence, a number of invasion fictions depict invaders seizing control of the national telegraph network and printing presses, ventriloquizing the national voice. Against this threat, Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) promotes specialized technical dialects as a means of excluding foreign spies from discourse. Such measures conflict, however, with the notion of a united, organic national voice to be defended, reducing meaning to context. The more that tales of invasion and espionage depict characters modifying speech to outwit foreign enemies the more they undermine the myth of natural folk-speech.

However, nostalgia for organic orality was not inherently conservative and nationalistic. The fiction of William Morris revered ancient oral communities but also reflected his principles of socialist internationalism. Writing in an increasingly archaized English, Morris reinterpreted the artifice and decay of modern, literary language which the

vitalists were describing as the effects of industrial capitalism. He suggested that the organic past could be revived along with its communal values and, unlike other language vitalists who conflated etymology with racial exclusivity, Morris focused on the ultimate unity of tongues described by Müller. His late romances, particularly, attempt to revive organic ‘roots’ of speech, imagined as natural blends of sound and sense. Morris’s search for folk-speech rooted in ancestral experience and local landscapes collided, though, with his visions of global unity and cooperation. For all of Müller’s efforts to stress universal mental concepts, comparative philology had revealed the importance of context in producing meaning. Different languages encoded different worldviews through their specific histories and folk-experiences. Morris’s efforts to revive and purify these local folk-roots of language existed in tension with his socialist wish for a single language enshrining universal values.

Could, then, nostalgia for an idealized, pure, oral past ever tolerate the plurality of speech variants and identities which philology had revealed? The fiction of Thomas Hardy mourned the destruction of ancient dialect, yet also recognized its diversity and social contexts, which were neither eternal nor pure. While being influenced by Müller and Barnes, Hardy also absorbed newer theories of language as social convention. Instead of carrying a mystical living power, regional dialect in novels such as *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) mirrors the communal experiences and concerns of its speakers. Standard English frequently appears in these visions as a destroyer of communal identity, absorbing speakers into a more remote national one. The language nostalgia of Hardy’s fiction is for the diversity of speech, which the modern nation state suppresses. Outsiders in his tales such as the protagonist of ‘The Distracted Preacher’ (1879) must learn the codes and categories of the local community to understand its values. The dogma of a single, correct version of English emerges in tandem, Hardy observes, with a more general intolerance towards plural identities and different social perspectives.

### Instinctive Signs: Nature and Culture in Dialogue

Chapter Five considers language as a site of interchange between biological instinct and social custom in the late-Victorian and Edwardian imagination. Darwin argued that speech had developed from animal vocalizations and expressions, which humanity’s ancestors produced and understood instinctively. The language of social convention codified in

dictionaries and grammars thus represented only the visible, upper crust of communication. Beneath it, in the physical voice and body, lay primordial emotional triggers, operating separately from conscious will. Speech could be imagined as a plurality of sign systems, some conventional, some instinctive, which might cooperate or conflict with each other. The chapter argues that Samuel Butler, Hardy and Wells embraced instinctive signs as a vehicle for dramatic tension. All three authors challenged traditional Christian belief and morality in their writing, and sometimes their personal lives. Conceiving language as a dynamic interchange between social convention and inherited instinct helped them question the naturalness of these traditions. Language vitalism and progressivism had both idealized states of linguistic stasis (either as a lost origin or future goal) in which meanings were fixed by an external authority (divine, natural or scientific truth). Imagining language as a dialogue between instinct and convention challenged such absolutism, rendering meaning relative, contextual and plural. How, then, did conventional signs and ideas combine with primordial instinctive signs? What were the implications of this exchange for realist traditions of fiction, described by a detached, supposedly objective narrator? George Levine defined Victorian realism as ‘an attempt to use language to get beyond language, to discover some nonverbal truth out there’ (1981, 6). Yet, as Nietzsche observed, language only led back to bodily sensations and instincts and forward to their distortion through metaphors: words could never convey objective truth or a God’s eye view. Further, given the strong identification of scientific language with masculinity at the time, what were the implications of instinctive signification for gender politics?

Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) uses the conflict between nature and nurture in language to explore how children are controlled by, and might escape, their parents (biological and intellectual). The novel conceives heredity and social custom as parallel phonographs, recording and repeating mental-verbal habits through successive generations. This evolutionary model dissolves individual identity into a monistic process of growth. Succeeding generations of Butler’s Pontifex family repeat the gestures, ideas and even words of their predecessors, seemingly unable to escape the ‘grooves’ carved for them by custom and heredity. However, this process is neither fixed nor unitary. New individual experience reacts upon past ones in Lamarckian fashion, rendering a future of unforeseen transformations. The coexistence of society and heredity as two *langues* makes for a dynamic interchange between them in speech, in which meanings are never stable. Social tradition and biology are not single, straight trajectories but entangled thickets of many

potentialities, some latent, others expressed, depending on the environmental influences that stimulate or suppress them. The rebellion of Ernest Pontifex against his father's voice in *The Way of All Flesh* is as much a revival of older ancestral voices as the fashioning of a new, individual one. Butler recognized the semantic plasticity of symbols, by which the literal words of one generation could become ironic or metaphorical in another. This changeability of meaning opened a space of agency for himself as a writer, and his character Ernest, when their words and ideas seemed all inherited or second-hand. Biological and social inheritances emerge in language and thought not as singular recordings to be passively repeated but dialogues between a myriad of possible selves.

While Butler used the concept of instinctive signs to critique Victorian parent-child relations, much of Hardy's fiction did the same for marriage. Darwin had argued that speech was an adaptation of mating songs, rendering the voice a site of instinctive urges which might conflict with the conventional meanings of words. Spencer, also, in spite of his rhetoric of progressive disembodiment, posited a 'language of emotions' in tone, rhythm and pitch existing in parallel to the 'language of ideas'. Hardy was interested in the idea of an instinctive language of emotions, frequently exploring it through fictional dialogues between lovers and would-be lovers. This language existed in tension with the conventional one with its monogamous morality and rigid marriage laws. In tales such as *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) Hardy also associated the suppression of this instinctive sign system with the loss of sympathy between people: rigid convention thins speech to a game of artificial appearances. Altruism and language standardization did not necessarily advance in parallel and might even be mutually antagonistic. However, the repressive order that Hardy criticized ultimately lay neither wholly in nature nor society but a combination of the two. Hardy's criticism of social convention suppressing natural signs and feelings conflicted with the idea that such dissonance and suppression were inevitable. In his fiction, human communication appears plural and multilayered, with different sign systems pulling speakers in different directions. Perhaps, Hardy's fiction sometimes suggests, there is no true self to express but, rather, an entangled mass of conflicting urges and ideas to which speech gives the illusion of unity. Symbols and communication blur the boundaries in Hardy's vision between organisms and their behaviour. Hardy's fiction transcends naïve binaries between natural, truthful dialect and artificial Standard English, reconceiving language as an endless dialogue with heritage, both cultural and biological. Like their users,

signs and their meanings are not anchored by ultimate origins or essences but exist in a state of ongoing negotiation and becoming.

Wells developed a similar idea of language as a mass of conventional associations and instinctive adaptations, often impossible to disentangle from each other. While, as a utopian social-planner, he tended towards linguistic authoritarianism, as a novelist he recognized the threat posed by rigid verbal convention to individual agency. Modern obsessions with social correctness and exact knowledge threatened to turn language convention into a kind of secondary instinct, automatizing thought. Wells's idea of verbal automatism can be traced in the 'echoing' between characters in his social satires. In *Tono-Bungay* (1909), *Kipps* (1905) and *The Food of the Gods* (1904) people parrot the 'catch-words' of the mass-media and advertizing, or the accents of the upper-classes in the race for social advancement. Treating language as a static, polished structure, separate from our dynamic instincts, Wells implies, will enforce mental rigidity. Wells thus sometimes sought to recapture the primordial instability of language, the babble of noises and ideas that created the first metaphors. Might instinct serve as a tool of social progress, rupturing the ossified categories of convention with seemingly irrational urges and associations? Might rediscovering instinct, beneath apparently stable language, help to oppose religious dogma and repressive sexual morality? The closest Wells's fiction came to embodying this idea was in *The History of Mr. Polly* (1909), the hero of which defies both social and linguistic convention. Polly's non-conformity stems from his refusal to passively echo the speech of others, constantly coining and mangling words. Wells's ambivalent view of language as an experiment without fixed rules prefigured Modernists' testing of the limits of meaning in later decades. However, Wells ultimately withdrew from the implications of his own theories about language, confining most of his verbal play to letters and other personal writings. Instinct had to yield to social convention in his utopian visions of a world state, excluding anarchic games with language as Plato's *Republic* had excluded poetry.

The mingling of natural and social sciences in the mid- to late-nineteenth century enabled authors to engage with questions about language which continue to puzzle investigators in the twenty-first century. Are communicative signs wholly arbitrary and culturally relative, or are they combined with instinctive signalling-systems? The field of non-verbal communication studies explores the interplay between instinct and conventionality in gesture (Segerstråle & Molnár 2). Similarly, phonosemantics questions Ferdinand de Saussure's dogma that phonemes are only meaningful in systematic

combinations, exploring dimensions of emotional expression in vocalization (Medvedev 7). Recent research into animal communication systems has further blurred the categories of conscious expression and instinctive behaviour. The fiction explored in this thesis illustrates the long history of such 'biosemiotics', emerging prior to the institutional and semantic separation of nature from culture (S. Winter 128). Further, it demonstrates the extent to which literature both expressed and shaped ideas of language evolution and concepts of communication.

## Chapter Two. The Future of Language in Prophetic Fiction

‘The reader will doubtless take up this little work with an incredulous smile, supposing that he is about to peruse the impracticable schemes of some good citizen of Utopia’

- L. L. Zamenhof, ‘The Making of an International Language’ (7).

This comment by the Polish linguist and creator of Esperanto Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof in 1887 highlights the reciprocity between fiction and linguistics in visions of the future of language at the time. The immense historical changes charted by philology fuelled speculation about future metamorphoses, and practical efforts to realize them, such as Zamenhof’s Esperanto (Yaguello 45). Ideas of teleological progress inspired many commentators to predict linguistic development in tandem with social evolution. Models of language progress were contradictory, torn between semantic diachrony and synchrony, the autonomy of individual speakers and authority of systematic rules. They imagined language evolving from a force of nature into a technology, consciously shaped by human will. Such verbal mechanization revolved around the ideals of semantic precision and efficiency. However, these goals relied on conflicting philosophies, requiring both the storage of past meanings and their destruction. Progressives imagined speakers gaining control over themselves and their world and, yet, in so doing, merging with a wider monistic process, becoming more individuated and, yet, dissolving into a collective. As well as producing harmony of thought and feeling within nations, future language was often also conceived as a *lingua franca*. How, though, as they coalesced under common categories of reason, could populations avoid privileging one language and, thus, one social perspective? Controlling meaning became blurred with controlling speakers.

Language progressivism inherited its tension between the individual and collective from John Locke’s argument that words signified ideas in the individual mind and, yet, were also products of social convention. John Durham Peters observes that Locke’s semantic model dovetailed with his economic one, rendering meaning private property. ‘The sovereignty of the individual over his or her consciousness’ thus conflicted with ‘the dream of communication as replication of ideas’ (85). Similarly, language progressivism must be considered in the context of debates about autonomy and authority in the economic and political system. Some proponents, such as Spencer, hailed capitalism as an enabler of

individual autonomy while fearing the uncontrolled chaos of democracy. Others, such as Wells, called for centralized control of society and, yet, also individual influence upon this control. These conflicting aims were mirrored in their visions of language progressing to both liberate individual speakers and regiment them under prescriptive authorities. In 1894, the philologist Otto Jespersen looked forward to an 'ideal language' of the future from which 'irregularity and ambiguity would be banished; sound and sense would be in perfect harmony; any number of delicate shades of meaning could be expressed ... [and] the human spirit would have found a garment combining freedom and gracefulness, fitting it closely and yet allowing full play to any movement' (365). Linguistic utopias often resorted to such metaphysical rhetoric of 'spirits' and 'minds' to rescue the autonomous ego, undermined by materialist psychology (Rylance 80). The idea of a 'mind' controlling meaning hovered uncertainly, though, between the individual speaker and the speech community in which he or she was a mere node. Towards the end of the century, a new generation of scholars and scientists increasingly challenged the foundational assumptions of language progress. Its reassuring visions of language growing to unite people around objective truth faltered under new ideas that prefigured the linguistic revolutions of the twentieth century.

These conflicts can be traced through prophetic fiction, which attempted to imaginatively realize what others had discussed in theory. Industrialization and urbanization in Britain and the USA in the late nineteenth century saw an upsurge in prophetic writing, reflecting what Matthew Beaumont calls 'a culture of expectancy'. Amidst rapid socio-economic transformation, the fictional imaginary future offered a means 'to understand the transitional epoch in which it is produced' (15). The Hegelian model of history depicted humans progressing towards comprehension of their destiny, so that predicting progress could be the first step to fulfilling it. How, though, might future language be represented by the contrastingly crude tools of current English? Fredric Jameson noted that the 'deepest vocation' of utopia 'is to bring home in local and determinate ways and with a fullness of concrete detail, our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself' (289). In attempting to imagine the unimaginable, could such fiction expose the contradictions of language progress?

## Mechanizing Language

Progressives imagined the future rationalization of language as part of the exertion of human control over nature. The historian Henry Buckle had presented civilization as a transition from ‘nature modifying man’ to ‘man modifying nature’ (I 20). In 1872 another historian and philosopher, William Winwood Reade, described such modification as potentially endless: ‘When we have ascertained, by means of Science, the method of nature’s operations, we shall be able to take her place and to perform them for ourselves ... [and] we shall be able to predict the future as we are already able to predict comets and eclipses and the planetary movements’ (512). The gradual diversification of languages from common sources disturbed Locke’s claim that language was a tool, revealing constant change seemingly independent of human intention. Progressives thus conceived language as developing into a tool rather than being eternally so; a process apparently demonstrated by the rise of print and language standardization. Georg Hegel had claimed that self-consciousness emerged through labour: the worker developed it as he acted upon external objects, differentiating them from himself (117-18; see Shiach 2004, 24-25). Similarly, by objectifying language, humans could abstract themselves from the socio-historical subjectivities revealed by philology. Rather than being bound by context, meaning might be imagined as mental substance, its conveyance a matter of precision and efficiency. At the same time, language could be presented as connecting humans with the wider universe, revealing the cosmic elements through the fixing of definitions. However, mechanization, aiming at the goals of efficiency and precision, relied on incompatible theories of semantics, one diachronic, the other synchronic. Visions of verbal mechanization vacillated between the accumulation of meanings through time and their destruction in line with new knowledge. This contradiction, which theorists often finessed through abstract discussion, emerged more starkly in fictive imaginings of future language mechanization.

The contradictory ideals of language mechanization were built upon different responses to the spread of writing. Through the nineteenth century, Britain and the United States became increasingly ‘awash with documents’ (Bailey 1996, 68). The penny post, telegrams, memoranda and an explosion of news print brought the written word to new levels of society. Public examinations, generally oral at the start of the century, were mostly written by the end (Horner 340). Commentators interpreted this change as progress towards greater efficiency. Writing abstracted language from its immediate context, storing long

chains of past thought and discussion. In 1851, R. C. Trench declared that ‘every word is a concentrated poem’ and ‘language is the amber in which a thousand precious and subtle thoughts have been safely embedded and preserved’ (5). The growth of dictionaries and encyclopaedias through the century enhanced the sense of enormous historical weight behind words. The *Oxford English Dictionary* project, particularly, promised to connect readers with a vast collection of word-meanings accumulated through history. In 1889 Henry Reeve observed, *a propos* of the *OED*: ‘there is [now] an amount of industry and scholarship employed in storing and reproducing the knowledge of the world which has never been surpassed’ (330). By recording and organizing the past, writing increased the semantic density of future discourse.

Progressives combined this notion with Horne Tooke’s earlier claims that language developed through abbreviation, condensing words into aggregates to convey complex ideas (Stam 29). Charles Babbage’s calculating engines had appeared to show this dynamic in action, reducing the mental processes of arithmetic to algebraic notation. As Babbage wrote with John Herschel, mechanistic symbols promised ‘to condense pages into lines and volumes into pages’ (i-ii). Speech and thought could be imagined as forms of industrial production, growing ever more efficient (Ashworth 631). Single words, Whewell wrote, now signified ‘the results of deep and laborious trains of research ... without being in any way impeded or perplexed by the length and weight of the chain of past connexions which we drag along with us’ (I 52). The idea of progressive semantic density gained in popularity later in the century, with Oxford’s philology professor A. H. Sayce writing in 1879: ‘The significant word [...] is really a crystallized sentence, a kind of shorthand note in which a proposition has been summed up. ... and the more complex the idea or the fact, the more numerous will be the reasonings, the sentences or judgments, which underlie it’ (1900, I 115). This intellectual compression coincided with the shrinkage of the material of speech. In line with the conservation of energy, sounds and letters disappeared as ‘thought’ became ‘of more consequence than the vocal symbols in which it is expressed’ (I 218). The idea of verbal efficiency relied on a strict division of the ‘material’ of discourse from its abstract meaning. Spencer argued that shorter words were superior because they enabled ideas to ‘be apprehended with the least possible mental effort ... whatever force is absorbed by the machine is deducted from the result’ (1884, 11). This industrial rationalization of language seemed to be evidenced in Victorian culture. As letters and memoranda circulated in greater volume, ‘commercial English’ emerged as a writing style, reflecting the popular

assumption ‘that English in its full form was wasteful and that businesslike abbreviations were efficient’ (Bailey 1996, 59). Isaac Pitman’s phonographic shorthand, first presented in 1837, reduced writing to minimal loops and curves, inviting predictions that it would replace the current orthography (Gitelman 24-30). Telegraphic Morse code also produced many abbreviations. Spencer argued that the process of verbal compression could be observed in terms such as ‘good bye’, which concentrated the old phrase ‘God be with you’ (1870a, 321). Sales of telegraphic code-books from the mid-century onwards seemed to continue this trend, compressing sentences into one-word acronyms for quick, cheap transmission. The abbreviations of the present looked set to become the ordinary words of the future.

Parallel to efficiency was the notion that language advanced through increasing precision. The anthropologist James Cowles Prichard had written in his *Physical History of Man* (1813): ‘The permanency of languages is ... more constant in proportion to the advancement of society. Among civilized nations who have arrived at the knowledge of letters ... writers regulate their style, and the idiom becomes fixed’ (245). Standard English seemed to show humans gaining control over the natural forces of change, imposing uniformity across regions. Lynda Mugglestone notes the growing trade in grammatical guides and pronouncing dictionaries through the century, reflecting ‘the myth of a perfectible, invariant standard of spoken English, one prescribed for all speakers without exception’ (21). Uniform language became associated with scientific objectivity, abstracting symbols from personal or parochial perspectives. Burgeoning print culture and the founding of newswire services such as Reuters in the 1850s developed concepts of objective ‘knowledge’ or ‘information’. This could be abstracted from specific contexts, organized, classified and stored through print (Rauch 1-3; Weller 45). From the mid-century, journalistic reportage and scientific writing adopted increasingly impersonal, passive styles, removing the human observer to present phenomena as objective facts (Bailey 1996, 238; Gross *et al* 122-23). Daston nuances this point, arguing that in the technical registers of late-nineteenth-century science ‘the scientific self was not so much effaced as illuminated from within. Scientific subjects were not eliminated but imagined as fully transparent to themselves, every idea and argument bathed in the noontday glare of consciousness’ (2000, 264). Pitman presented his shorthand as an example of such objective self-transparency; ‘founded upon a minute and careful examination of the organs of speech’, it uncovered the ‘natural alphabet’ of the larynx (9). In the 1870s the

phonograph promised to similarly fix and illuminate speech by analyzing it into reproducible sound waves. Sayce hailed this as the final ascent from constantly changing 'linguistic anarchy' to a system for which 'means will be found for making the symbols [both spoken and written] uniform and constant' (1900, I 218). Not only could writing visualize the sounds of speech, it might also one day reproduce them, forming an enclosed system of unchanging phonemes and graphemes. Verbal precision would not necessarily equal stasis, however. As human thought developed, the more it dismantled old words, definitions and grammar, discarding the antiquated logic on which they were structured. Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote: 'The more mature the mind feels itself to be, the more boldly it works in combinations of its own, and the more confidently it casts away the bridges that language constructs for the understanding' (206). Spencer agreed that language gained 'precision' by 'multiplication of words', which enabled it to 'express directly and perfectly' what would otherwise require misleading, indirect metaphors (1870a, 374). Scientific precision demanded the creation of an ever-larger vocabulary to name the microscopic shades of difference between things.

Although often described as two sides of the same development, precision and efficiency represented antagonistic philosophies of semantics. Efficiency relied on Locke's assumption that every word had an original, sensory meaning that remained constant. Language progressed by compounding these stable units of meaning into aggregates. However, if users were constantly redefining words in response to new knowledge then progress consisted as much of forgetting old meanings as accumulating them. As Spencer wrote, 'with the advance of language, words which were originally alike in their meanings acquire unlike meanings' because 'there necessarily arises a habit of associating one rather than the other with particular acts, or objects' (1870a, 421). Further, as knowledge advanced towards abstract relations and laws many words contained no reference to sensory objects. Numbers, colours or shapes had no material referents, deriving from metaphorical applications of concrete terms. If classifications grew, as Spencer suggested, through habitual associations then what truth-value could they claim other than convention? Words signified not individual sensible objects but a grid of shifting, arbitrary divisions across phenomenal reality. Herbert notes that Spencer's psychological associationism questioned the existence of objects in isolation, recognizing only networks of relations (2001, 44). Spencer wrote, 'every thought involves a whole system of thoughts and ceases to exist if severed from its various correlatives' (1870a, 135; qtd. Herbert 53). Without a

natural set of boundaries between sensible objects, words had no basis outside of these seemingly enclosed systems of relations. As Herbert comments, associationism provided the model of synchronic relativity which Saussure would import into the study of semantics. The more precise and, therefore, conventional progressives imagined language becoming, the more they undermined semantic accumulation, which demanded natural, extralinguistic conceptions. David Amigoni notes Spencer's recognition in *First Principles* 'that within every religious and scientific concept was an element of fiction-making, and a space of representation not fully controllable by its writer' (2007a, 131). The spherical Earth, for example, was not a fact verifiable by the senses but a 'symbolic conception', imagined through reference to sensible, round objects. While Whewell presented nature as a 'language' that scientists were striving to translate, Spencer suggested instead that they invented it: 'we are led to suppose we have truly conceived a great variety of things which we have conceived only in this fictitious way; and further to confound with these certain things which cannot be conceived in any way' (1870a, 28). Spencer avoided the vortex of relativism, however, through faith in a 'non-relative', objective reality beyond present knowledge (1870, I 209; see Herbert 2001, 55-56). The belief that conventional language would progress teleologically towards such transcendental truth enabled progressives to ignore its semantic relativity.

An attempt to imagine future language on the progressive model can be seen in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's subterrestrial romance *The Coming Race* (1871). A conservative peer in the House of Lords, Bulwer-Lytton combined his interests in mesmerism and evolution in the novel with Swiftian satire on Western democracy. The tale depicts an American discovering an underground super-race named the Vril-ya destined to replace humans. The narrator describes their society as 'an aristocratic republic' united around scientific and literary authorities, unlike the divided classes of the upper world. Vrililians remember the democracy of their ancestors as 'one of the crude and ignorant experiments' of barbarism (185, 57). Bulwer-Lytton presents future progress as the consolidation of elite authority, demonstrated in Vrililian language which is tightly controlled by scientists, 'scholars and grammarians' (86). This vision opposes the democratization of language norms through mass print and popular politics. Mill had complained that modern language-users 'find their resources continually narrowed by illiterate writers, who seize and twist from its purpose some form of speech which once served to convey briefly and compactly an unambiguous meaning' (1882, 433). By contrast, Vrililian words are united in their

meanings, while also preserving their historical significance. In this way, Vrillian language exhibits the contradiction between diachronic accumulation and synchronic precision. The narrator suggests that the two have been achieved harmoniously: while ‘preserving so many of the roots in the aboriginal form’ Vrillian language has yet ‘attained to such a union of simplicity and compass ... the gradual work of countless ages and many varieties of mind’. He continues: ‘Though now very compressed in sound, it gains in clearness by that compression. By a single letter, according to its position, they contrive to express all that with civilised nations in our upper world it takes the waste, sometimes of syllables, sometimes of sentences, to express’ (84-86). How, though, can Vril-ya speech both store all of the concrete conceptions of the past and be shaped by scientific convention to convey the abstract qualities of vril?

Bulwer-Lytton solves this problem by switching from language progressivism to vitalism. The Vril-ya’s unified scientific knowledge does not simply fix conventional meanings for their words, but returns them to their primordial origins. Bulwer-Lytton dedicated his tale to Max Müller and the description of Vril-ya language is underpinned by the philologist’s concept of original, mental-verbal ‘roots’. ‘It is surprising’, the narrator comments, as the language became inflected,

to see how much more boldly the original roots of the language project from the surface that conceals them. In the old fragments and proverbs of the preceding stage the monosyllables which compose those roots vanish amidst words of enormous length. ... But when the inflectional form of language became so far advanced as to have its scholars and grammarians, they seem to have united in extirpating all such polysynthetical or polysyllabic monsters, as devouring invaders of the aboriginal forms. Words beyond three syllables became proscribed as barbarous, and in proportion as the language grew thus simplified it increased in strength, in dignity, and in sweetness. (85-86)

The compounded elements of Vril-ya words are not concrete but abstract: the ‘root’ sounds which Müller claimed signified eternal, abstract ideas. Hence, ‘An (which I will translate man), Ana (men); the letter *s* is with them a letter implying multitude, ... Sana means mankind; Ansa, a multitude of men. ... Gl... at the commencement of a word infers an

assemblage or union of things ... as Oon, a house; Gloon, a town (i.e., an assemblage of houses)' (86-87). The Vril-ya have analyzed and named the atomic parts and mechanisms of the universe only to rediscover things previously felt by intuition. Hence, the phoneme *zoo* prefixes

words that signify something that attracts, pleases, touches the heart – as Zummer, lover; Zutze, love; Zuzulia, delight. This indrawn sound of *Z* seems indeed naturally appropriate to fondness. Thus, even in our language, mothers say to their babies, in defiance of grammar, 'Zoo darling'; and I have heard a learned professor at Boston call his wife (he had been only married a month) 'Zoo little pet'. (93)

Chapter Four explores the role of Müller's language vitalism in reverence for the past, when authors imagined speakers had been closer to the organic 'roots' of language. However, vitalism was not necessarily incompatible with progressive ideas such as efficiency, as Müller wrote in 1870: 'A struggle for life is constantly going on amongst the words and grammatical forms in each language. The better, the shorter, the easier forms are constantly gaining the upper hand, and they owe their success to their own inherent virtue' (257). Müller thus refigures abbreviation as the refinement of natural sound-symbols. Although Vril-ya words are 'compressed' into single letters, these letters are not arbitrary notations but rediscoveries of natural sound-symbols. Such word-roots guide science to reveal objective truths which humans had always dimly conceived. Hence, Bulwer-Lytton suggests that Victorian ideas of 'mesmeric clairvoyance' prefigure the universal energetic agencies that Vril-ya science proves empirically (48). Yet, the narrator can only master 'the rudiments of their language' because his own lacks equivalent words for Vrillian knowledge (49). When they define 'vril', the 'unity of energetic agencies' through which they control nature, he confesses: 'I understood very little, for there is no word in any language I know which is an exact synonym for vril. I should call it electricity, except that it comprehends in its manifold branches other forces of nature, to which, in our scientific nomenclature, differing names are assigned, such as magnetism, galvanism, &c' (47). These difficulties contradict the notion that future science is adumbrated in the linguistic past. Bulwer-Lytton's equivocation between semantic models highlights a paradox in language progress. It sought to escape the past yet also needed to connect with it to present

meaning as purposive evolution rather than synchronic convention, unguided by any transcendental authority.

Language progressives often imagined such transcendental authority as a fundamental force behind all physical phenomena. Victorians from Michael Faraday to John Tyndall viewed the conservation of energy as potentially the key to this agency, while Spencer presented ‘persistence of force’ as the power behind evolution (Gold 71-73; Spencer 1870a, 188). Bulwer-Lytton suggests the mysterious power of ‘vril’ by quoting Faraday’s claim ‘that the various forms under which the forces of matter are made manifest, have one common origin; or, in other words, are so directly related and mutually dependent that they are convertible, as it were into one another’ (47). Language and thought could be imagined as forms of such convertible energy, weaving into the fabric of the universe. One Vrillian tells the narrator:

no form of matter is motionless and inert: every particle is constantly in motion and constantly acted upon by agencies, ... the current launched by my hand and guided by my will does but render quicker and more potent the action which is eternally at work upon every particle of matter, however inert and stubborn it may seem. If a heap of metal be not capable of originating a thought of its own, yet, through its internal susceptibility to movement, it obtains the power to receive the thought of the intellectual agent at work on it. (132)

Like Spencer’s ‘non-relative’ existence beyond present knowledge, the idea of a universal energetic agency enabled the possibility of symbols not only mapping but also affecting reality. The goals of controlling the external world and verbal significance might converge, with language shaping as well as interpreting reality. When science finishes decoding the universe, its symbols will cease to be arbitrary, their meanings or ‘thoughts’ acting directly upon matter.

John Macnie’s utopia *The Diothas* (1883) similarly predicts future science closing the gap between being and representation. As in *The Coming Race*, it reveals the anti-democratic impulse behind the search for semantic authority through science. Macnie was a Scottish linguist and mathematician who obtained a master’s degree from Yale in 1874 before becoming Professor of Modern Languages at North Dakota. His time at Yale

coincided with the rise to prominence of its most famous philologist, William Dwight Whitney, who argued that all language was conventional. Meanings changed, he claimed, through shifts in majority habit, functioning like a democracy (1875, 149). Macnie's utopia rejects such synchronic semantics, however, along with the democratic ideology it implied. As Spencer had argued, dictionaries should fix the meanings of words across the language community, not simply record their diversity (1870a, 376). Arthur Lipow notes that American Positivism had emerged in opposition to mass democracy, requiring an elite to direct the rational organization of society (13-14). *The Diothas* reflects this tradition, depicting a future in which a strict technocracy replaces the old 'extremes of democracy and lawlessness' ruled by populist 'charlatans' (110). Equally, it avoids the semantic relativity theorized by Whitney through uniform language set by scientific authority.

Macnie published other books on geometry and algebra, and his utopia reflects his belief in the hidden mathematical unity of nature, which future language would name. Journeying centuries hence through hypnosis, the narrator finds a people who have deciphered nature's signs. His guide explains: 'Chemistry long ago ceased to be an experimental art. It is now a strictly deductive science, in which, by the proper manipulation of symbols and formulas, interesting or important discoveries may be made without the necessity of handling a re-agent or an instrument' (85). As humans evolve towards Lamarckian harmony with their environment, so language evolves to absorb its referents. In this way, Macnie's chemists are able to grow beef-steaks from maize crops by altering their algebraic formulations. The guide continues, 'our experts are able, not only to imitate any definite compound known to exist in nature, but even to invent others'. Control over nature is reduced to framing consistent symbols and definitions. This development also extends inward to human nature, with the narrator characterizing his descendants by 'self-control. In proportion as man had become master of nature, it had become needful to become master of himself' (45). Personal and class perspectives vanish as science abstracts language from bodily subjectivity: 'Most questions have been so thoroughly discussed, if not settled ... that oratory, as implying an appeal to the emotions, is practically a thing of the past'. Discussions now concern 'establishing a theorem in exact science' (103-4). Speech has reached the exactitude previously only found in geometry and algebra, with the guide declaring, 'all sciences worthy of the name are now but branches of mixed mathematics'. This echoed a wider belief among mathematicians that algebra might unite humans, overcoming the subjectivity of language (Cohen 148). George Boole had

described mathematics as ‘universal reasoning expressed in symbolic forms’ (195). The transcendental authority for symbolic meaning that Bulwer-Lytton found in the conservation of energy, Macnie imagined in algebraic equations.

Again, the idea of symbols gaining control over nature vacillates between diachronic and synchronic models of semantics. Macnie’s future speech is both an accumulation of meanings through time and a notation for the latest knowledge. The narrator’s guide explains: ‘The present universal language is based upon the Anglian of your day much as that was based upon Saxon’, with an ‘enormous increase of the vocabulary by the adoption of a great variety of synonyms from many languages’. The ‘dozen different words signifying a dwelling’ have expanded to ‘more than a hundred; each, when appropriately employed, conveying a different shade of meaning’ (118). Macnie suggests that linguistic precision depends on convention: synonyms from other languages must lose their etymological meanings to mark new distinctions. Efforts to separate symbols from bodily urges produce codes of conventional etiquette. A man proposes to a woman by ‘offer[ing] her a seat in his curricle. If the fair one consents, even by a nod, she is supposed to admit him as a suitor on probation’ (92). Such conventionality is undercut, though, by the trope of efficiency. Writing is now so compressed that ‘a complete file of the *London Times* for a year’ can be ‘concentrated into the space of a sheet of foolscap’ (61). Ubiquitous phonographs have precipitated ‘an enormous curtailment in the length of speeches’, rendering them a dense code of cross-references. Every utterance signposts a huge mass of past discourse so that, ‘though a trope is not an argument, it may be efficiently employed to illustrate an argument, or even be used as an elegant substitute for one’ (102-3). Equally, in speech ‘the words of most frequent use in the language had been reduced to monosyllables ... no words of more than three syllables were tolerated’ (187). The nineteenth-century place-names recalled by the narrator have been superseded by shorter contractions, such as ‘Uespa’ for ‘West Point’, causing one woman to tease him: ‘How lavish of breath you must have been in those old times!’ (303). Phonetic decay becomes subsumed into the progressive refinement of ideas. Signs cannot be wholly conventional because this would relativize their meanings and render arbitrary their connection with the external world. In order for language to become a transparent window upon nature, it must also form part of nature, exhibiting the same purposive growth. Instead of being simply erroneous, past signs and their meanings are the seeds which will grow to form the future ideal. By this logic, Macnie’s future speakers cannot suppress all bodily,

emotional expression with social conventions. They refine Spencer's 'language of emotions' (see Chapter One) to a minimal notation so that, when an estranged couple reunite, the narrator 'read in their eyes what was to me a revelation of how much of a long repressed feeling can be expressed in one look, – trust, joy, love, beyond the power of words' (48). Married couples routinely spend their first year apart, communicating via telephone 'the delicate shading of thought possible to the living voice alone, and the mental stimulus arising from the present collision of thought with thought ... the reciprocal interaction of two minds' (158). The rarefied abstractions of mathematics thus blur in Macnie's ideal communication with the emotional, sensory body, albeit spiritualized by technology. To progress towards correspondence with nature language must both forget and reconnect with its past, both abstract from the body and re-enter it from the immaterial position of 'mind'.

### Meetings of Minds

The contradictions in progressivism often led to speculation on the transcendence of language through telepathic or spirit communication. As meaning appeared increasingly unstable, ideas of progress shifted to removing the intermediary between minds. This involved a monistic view of mind as a higher manifestation of the material universe. Notions of communication becoming progressively disembodied cohered with the aims of scientific objectivity. Victorian scientific truth, George Levine comments, became characterized by 'the radical distrust of the corporeal, the contingent, the personal. Salvation – religious, aesthetic, or epistemological – depends on the capacity of the self to get outside of itself' (2002, 68). Freed from the subjective, bodily frame of reference, telepathy and spiritualism promised unlimited access to the noumenal universe. Such communicative progress was torn between privileging the individual and dissolving it in a wider whole. The single mind gained total control over its expression; yet, to enter direct communion with other minds, it had to relinquish this autonomy for a common mental currency (Peters 89). Equally, disembodied individuals controlled the universe, bending its symbols to their intentions; yet, they also lost agency, becoming utterances of a higher, cosmic power. Late nineteenth-century utopias of telepathic or spirit communication exemplified this tension. They imagined individual minds attaining sovereignty over discourse only to lose it, merging in communal consciousness or the infinite mind of God.

Models of language progressing from local subjectivity and ambiguity to universal objectivity and precision persistently involved disembodiment. Evolutionary theory enabled commentators to imagine mental-symbolic abstraction as an emergent rather than fixed capacity. Spencer had claimed that ‘psychical life’ developed through increasing separation from ‘physical life’ (see Chapter One). Anthropologists from Tylor and L. H. Morgan to Romanes argued that language evolved from gesture to speech with the abstraction of ideas (Baynton 37-46). This process had reached its furthest extent, they claimed, in philosophy that had no referents in material sensation. ‘Gestures, in being more or less always ideographic, are much more closely chained to sensuous perceptions’, Romanes wrote; ‘No sign talker, with any amount of time at his disposal, could translate into the language of gesture a page of Kant’ (147). Tylor agreed: ‘By eliminating from speech all effects of gesture, of expression of face we go far towards reducing it towards the system of conventional, articulate sounds which the grammarian and comparative philologist habitually consider as language’ (1871, I 167). Yet, even in writing, language remained moored to the subjective experiences of the body, framing abstractions from ‘material metaphor’. In matters of language, Tylor complained, ‘we have gone too little beyond the savage, but are as it were still hacking with the stone celts and twirling laborious friction-fire’ (II 446). Christine Ferguson notes that Tylor’s view paralleled spiritualism in the period, with both seeking the abstraction of language and consciousness from material bases (2006, 39). Yet, the materialization of mind in psychology would seem to remove any transcendental authority from human ideas, rendering them mere aggregate sensations. How, then, could ideas be meaningful without reference to bodily sensations?

The answer depended upon how one defined sensation. Roger Luckhurst observes: ‘The method and mode of communication in the nervous system was unknown at the time ... In the higher reaches of the central nervous system the nerves disappeared off the scale of the Victorian microscope, becoming vanishing points’ (82). Like electricity, sensory signals seemed to jump between gaps in the physical nerves, suggesting that the stuff of human consciousness might extend beyond the body. Scientists such as Herman Helmholtz had studied the nervous system in parallel to electric circuits, often describing them through analogies with each other. If the wired social body mirrored nervous communication with the individual body then perhaps some continuity existed between the two (Otis 2001, 26). Charles Bray wrote in 1866, ‘We have no difficulty in conceiving of electricity as existing freely throughout space; but thought or mind, and electricity, are the same force in different

forms ... Mind is in connection with all other mind' (80; qtd. Luckhurst 86). Older ideas of animal magnetism thus gave way to notions of 'thought-atmosphere', 'psychic force' or ether. In 1882 the Society for Psychical Research coined the word *telepathy*, denoting the transmission of mental impressions without the aid of known sense organs (Luckhurst 24, 61). Henry Drummond later described this as 'theoretically the next stage in the Evolution of Language'. He built his conclusion upon the model of progressive mental-symbolic disembodiment, stating: 'When a speaker soars into a very lofty region, or allows his mind to grapple intensely and absorbingly with an exalted theme, he becomes more and more motionless, and only resumes the gesture-language when he descends to commoner levels'. Telepathy, he claimed, was foreshadowed by the telegraph and telephone. As they advanced communication 'from the icy physical barriers of space, to a nearness closer than breathing; from the torturing slowness of time to time's obliteration' humans must evolve further 'in the direction of what one can only call spirituality. ... If Evolution reveals anything ... it is that Man is a spiritual being and that the direction of his long career is towards an ever larger, richer, and more exalted life' (185). Drummond's prediction, delivered in 1894, drew on a body of thought which prophetic fiction had long been exploring. Evolution towards direct thought transference seemed to offer a means of uniting speakers with both each other and the wider cosmos.

One of the first tales to place telepathy at the centre of its utopian vision was Edward Bellamy's 'To Whom this May Come', published a year after his famous *Looking Backward* (1888). *The Coming Race* had suggested that by 'animal magnetism' 'the thoughts of one brain [might] be transmitted to another, and knowledge be thus rapidly interchanged' (22). However, Bellamy's tale presents such communication as a biological rather than technological evolution. It depicts a race of mind-readers, whose hereditary ability produces a united, harmonious society. Bellamy was the son of a Baptist minister, who absorbed Comte's concept of a 'religion of humanity' as a replacement for his wavering faith in God (Schiffman 723). The transcendentalism of R. W. Emerson enabled him to relocate divinity in human beings. As a young man in 1874 he had written of the 'tendency of the human soul to a more perfect realization of its solidarity with the universe' (12). Paradoxically, his interests in transcendentalism and positivism translated this self-consciousness into a progressive dissolution of self into wider circles of being. He commented, 'the cardinal motive of human life ... is a tendency and a striving to absorb or be absorbed in or united with other lives and all life ... As individuals we are indeed

limited to a narrow spot in today, but as universalists we inherit all time and space' (1984, 18; qtd. Schiffman 722). Joseph Schiffman notes that Bellamy's philosophy 'denied the possibility of individual redemption', relocating the immortal human spirit in the social organism (722). Similarly, Bellamy's story struggles to balance his ideal of absolute sympathy with individuality. It also struggles to reconcile the privileged status of humans with their merging into the wider universe.

Bellamy's tale describes telepathy as an apotheosis of the spiritual self. Unlike 'the laborious impotence of language', it enables people to bridge the 'gulf fixed between soul and soul' (401-2). Mind-readers cannot lie, mislead or misconstrue one another because 'it is always one another's real and inmost thought that they read' (398). They exchange their mental states directly instead of through material analogies: 'It is by the mind, not the eye, that these people know one another. ... The absolute openness of their minds and hearts to one another makes their happiness far more dependent on the moral and mental qualities of their companions than upon their physical' (406). Such perfect communication relies on Locke's view of thoughts as the possessions of a sovereign, inner self. Looking forward to modernism, language for Bellamy is unreliable not because it cannot express thoughts, but because it does so linearly rather than, as they are held in the mind, simultaneously. Among the mind-readers, the narrator explains, 'pictures of the total mental state were communicated, instead of the imperfect descriptions of single thoughts which words at best could give' (401). Again, semantic progress is imagined as accumulation and efficiency, searching for a comprehensive symbol that will condense many simultaneous thoughts into one. Yet, materialist psychology challenged the assumption of a stable mind that preceded sensory and symbolic experience (Bordogna 507). As T. H. Huxley wrote in 1874, Descartes's claim that animals were machines could be equally applied to humans, whose bodies constantly acted prior to conscious reflection (1894, 221). Words did not simply name phenomena but helped to create them. Spencer had argued in 1855 that perceptions which 'appear as one' were really successions of mental states compounded 'by constant association' (10). Hence, the apprehension of an object, which seemed unitary through habit, actually involved the rapid, successive apprehension of distance, form, colour and movement. The apparently sovereign mind combining ideas simultaneously was an illusion produced by infinitesimal, successive mental states. Language thus named groups of thoughts rather than individual ones, compounded arbitrarily and differing with the

associations of individuals. Denser symbolic compounds would not offer a closer reflection of mind but only a more elaborate fiction of it.

Bellamy's tale attempts to rescue Locke's autonomous mind by presenting it as emerging in tandem with telepathy. Similarly as Spencer claimed that egoism and altruism developed symbiotically, Bellamy treats mental individuation and integration as mutual catalysts (Spencer 1879, 219). The more the mind-readers comprehend each other the more they comprehend themselves. However, this reproduces the Cartesian division between mechanical body and sovereign mind since there must be a deeper, 'inner' mind to transmit thoughts and 'read' those of others:

Of all they see in the minds of others, that which concerns them most is the reflection of themselves, the photographs of their own characters. ... [Man] is compelled to distinguish between this mental and moral self which has been made objective to him, and can be contemplated by him as impartially as if it were another's, from the inner ego which still remains subjective, unseen, and indefinable. In this inner ego the mind-readers recognize the essential identity and being, the noumenal self, the core of the soul, and the true hiding of its eternal life, to which the mind as well as the body is but the garment of a day. (410-11)

Bellamy glosses over the disintegration of an autonomous self with what psychologists call 'the homunculus fallacy', explaining cognition by positing a self-conscious agent behind it (Hirstein 12). His telepathy penetrates the psyche only to bury it in a deeper 'inner ego'. The thoughts of the mind-reader become the external signs of this inner ego, which transmits and apprehends them as 'mental pictures'. Minds abstract from bodies only to replicate the old duality, with a kind of mental body protecting their individuality: 'like the touch of shoulder to shoulder, like the clasping of hands, is the contact of their minds and their sensation of sympathy' (402). Bellamy's mind-readers suggest both that the atoms of consciousness are knowable and nameable, and that these atoms will reveal a stable, united identity. As one mind-reader comments to the narrator: 'It is you they understood, not your words' (393). By focusing on the gaps between minds, the tale downplays the conceptual disintegration of the individual mind.

On a wider scale, telepathy and spiritualism promised both objective knowledge of the natural universe and mystical union with it. Similarly as such ideas protected individual selves by merging them in a collective, so they guarded the privileged position of humans by merging them with the cosmos. This paradox is revealed in Byron A. Brooks's utopia *Earth Revisited* (1893), in which the contemporary narrator dies and reincarnates a century later. The New York author was a committed spiritualist and inventor of typewriters, printers and telegraph devices. Brooks's novel combined this knowledge of communication technology with his faith, imagining 'souls' transmitting messages beyond body and grave. By treating consciousness as convertible energy, telepathy offered to connect humans directly with the 'language' of nature. Charles Babbage had imagined the conservation of energy immortalizing human speech, writing in 1837: 'Every atom, impressed with good and ill, retains at once the motions which philosophers and sages have imparted to it ... The air itself is one vast library, on whose pages are forever written all that man has ever said or woman whispered' (37). Absorbing speech into the material universe might seem to threaten its privileged status, reducing it to mere molecular vibrations without transcendent meaning. Spiritualists would avoid this, though, by presenting human consciousness as the predestined culmination of cosmic processes. In *The Religion of the Future* (1893) the American Samuel Weil claimed: 'There is a spiritual, as well as a physical evolution. ... The whole universe, though apparently unmoral, has a sublime moral purpose and destiny. Nature is a tremendous workshop for the ultimate perfection of man' (11). Instead of thoughts being mere temporary energy-forms, the physical universe becomes an archive and inventory of human consciousness (Connor 362-63).

*Earth Revisited* imagines this anthropocentric *telos* through the invention of 'harmonic telegraphs'. These machines convert thoughts into music, transmittable across the globe as electric pulses. The narrator's guide Dr. Merivale explains, 'you know that sound and speech, light, heat and electricity are all other forms of force known to us, are but pulsations of the all-pervading ether that fills the universe' (199-200). Thoughts and feelings are 'things' floating between bodies, as the narrator muses: 'Light, heat, sound, life and love itself, were but the pulses of the all-pervading spirit of the universe'. Brooks conflates the imagined endurance of speech through the cosmos with the survival of thoughts and feelings beyond the body. The narrator pines for the long-dead sweetheart of his former life, and receives 'thought-messages' from her. These are manifested as both physical letters which seem to appear out of nowhere and, at another time, 'a small square

of light' projecting 'in glowing letters, "Teresa lives. You shall see her"' (169, 203). Psychological life, while separable from the body, retains a presence in the monistic universe. Although elusive to nineteenth-century knowledge, it has entity and agency which future generations will be able to harness directly. As the narrator reflects, 'Matter cannot cease to be. Much less can the soul. The immortality of the atom is the guarantee of the immortality of the soul' (315). The deceased Dr Merivale is quoted speaking to his daughter from beyond the grave, claiming to 'have demonstrated that the mind, the pure thought of man, can extend itself through the invisible ether which is the substance of the universe and impinge itself upon other minds' (276). Mind is imagined escaping the body and its temporal logic, enabling communication across past and present. As in Bellamy's tale, Brooks relies on traditional spiritual vocabulary to smooth over the tension between synchronic and diachronic semantics. In his vision, words are not arbitrary clusters of associations but vessels of eternal spirit. Material space and time must bend to the eternal, infinite human psyche, which remains necessarily mysterious, as Merivale comments: 'Nothing can be more mysterious than that I can talk to you; that the vibrations of the viewless air made by my lips can convey my thought to your mind, and that thus two souls can converse together in magnetic sympathy' (201). The mystery derives from the assumption that coherent, autonomous 'minds' or 'souls' precede speech rather than being invented by it.

Brooks's privileging of the human psyche enables him to present Western science as progressing towards universal, extralinguistic truth. His utopia illustrates this assumed universality through its future society communicating with extraterrestrials and animals. The possibility of signalling to other planets became a popular talking-point in the 1880s and 1890s with various theories advanced for finding a common language (Crowe 395-97). In 1892 Francis Galton debated with a Mr. Haweis on a possible system for communicating with Mars, via reflected solar rays or electric lights. Both assumed that intrinsically intelligible signals could denote universal concepts, beginning, Galton suggested 'from the mathematical side'.<sup>5</sup> *Earth Revisited* imagines such signaling in practice, with Martians reciprocating. 'Truth is the same in all worlds', Merivale explains, so that the 'immense equilateral triangle' built on America's western plains was answered on Mars by the same figure, 'and, enclosing it, an immense circle of light – the symbol of all truth and

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Galton, 'Sun Signals to Mars', *The Times* (6 August 1892), 7; Mr. R. Haweis, 'How to Speak with Mars', *Pall Mall Gazette* (18 August 1892), 2.

perfection. ... We are preparing to flood the desert of Sahara, leaving an immense circular island' (95-6). The assumption that sign-making develops in tandem with Western values is also demonstrated in the utopia's speaking animals. The narrator meets a dog who understands English and replies in Morse code-like barks. Ferguson emphasizes late-Victorian anxieties about the barriers disintegrating between animal and human communication (2006, 21-25). Brooks avoids relativizing human speech, though, through anthropocentric, Westerncentric teleology. While Darwin had described language as random mutations and adaptations, Brooks regards it, and its categories, as predestined. The dog has developed Western values of politeness and sympathy in tandem with his speech capacity. His human interpreter tells the narrator: 'He says you don't seem to recognize him. But he is delighted to see you again, apparently in health' (79). The dog's owner hails the prospect of humans discovering 'the hidden thoughts and experiences and reasoning of the brutes, which have hitherto been as unknown to us as the depths of ocean or the composition of the stars' (81). Yet, the discovery only reveals the same values and concepts of humans, or rather Westerners, assumed to be the destiny of all evolution.

The anthropocentric (and typically Westerncentric and androcentric) teleology on which language progressivism relied emerges most starkly in John Jacob Astor's scientific romance *A Journey in Other Worlds* (1894). A member of the rich New York Astor family, the author patented inventions including a pneumatic road-improver and a 'vibratory disintegrator', which produced gas from peat moss (Madsen 281). Astor was friends with the newspaper editor and spiritualism enthusiast W. T. Stead, who may have informed Astor's thinking, and perished alongside him on the Titanic in 1912. Astor's interest in spiritualism emerges in his tale of explorers who travel to Jupiter and Saturn, only to meet the spirits of dead humans. In Astor's vision, disembodied spirits represent a higher stage of life, which advances through increasing control over nature. The novel depicts human cultivation of nature, like Astor's own inventions, as evolutionary destiny. The narrator states that, 'Mile after mile Africa has been won for the uses of civilization, till great stretches that were considered impassible are as productive as gardens', its native populations swept away by enterprising white settlers (22). Arriving upon Jupiter, Astor's voyagers plan to continue this work by introducing species from earth. As one remarks, 'It would be an awful shame if we allowed it to lie unimproved'. Human life and, by extension, Western civilization, are presented as inevitable stages in the universal progress; one explorer gauges Jupiter's arrested development on the basis that 'we certainly have

seen no men, or anything like them, not even so much as a monkey' (126, qtd. Herrick 203). Later, on Saturn, the travellers meet the spirit of a deceased man, who explains that they form part of a wider, endless progression, which 'depends largely on your command of the forces of nature' (155-56). He predicts that humans will one day induce earthquakes and raise new continents to improve the Earth, since 'God made man in his own image; does it not stand to reason that he will allow him to continue to become more and more like himself?' Astor's super-evolved spirits present (white, male) human consciousness as an emerging power, rather than product, of the universe.

This autonomy is contradictory, however, since it only emerges through the preset plan of a creator. Human discourse becomes immortal by embodying the expression of a higher being. The explorers are able to summon the spirits by prayer, their speech and thoughts penetrating the subtler levels of existence on which the spirits dwell. They then converse in English with a spirit, who apprehends their thought and speech as different manifestations of the same convertible energy: 'I see the vibrations of the grey matter of your brain as plainly as the movements of your lips; in fact, I see the thoughts in the embryonic state taking shape' (159). The physical universe becomes a medium of 'souls', manifesting signals as the movements of a telegraph receiver register electro-magnetic pulses. Astor's confident vision of total human mastery over nature, including death, again exposes the tension between individual and collective in models of language progress. The spirit's ability to foresee the speech and embryonic thoughts of the explorers undermines their self-mastery. Their progress towards disembodied, higher life is driven not by personal agency but by what Spencer called the 'Unknown Cause', a mysterious force that catalyzed evolution in all organisms (1870a, 123). As before, Astor preserves individual agency within this model through the incompatible logic of an immortal, Augustinian soul. Disembodied souls, the spirit claims, 'circulate' infinitely through the universe after being 'moulded' and 'stamp[ed]' on the 'mint' of Earth. Unlike other organisms, humans acquire an unchanging essence, manifested in their consciousness. Yet, contradictorily, this essence is not fixed, as the spirit explains that disembodied souls continue to evolve on a higher plane and are only beginning to learn how to contact the embodied. Astor's coupling of perfect, telepathic communication with immortality is undermined by the evolutionary dynamic through which they emerge. His future humans are both produced by the universe's processes and, yet, independent of them; both constantly changing and

coalescing, yet, eternal, individual souls. The deeper that predictive fictions probed the logic of language progress, the more they exposed its contradictions.

### Questioning Progress

One author who explored rather than avoided these contradictions was the young H. G. Wells. Influenced by Darwin, the former science teacher challenged ideas of teleological progress through his early scientific romances. Developments in psychology and sociology influenced him to see language as separate from both nature and individual agency. He came to view words as neither organic growths nor the tools of sovereign minds, but an unstable network of associations. Instead of individuals advancing towards ever-greater control over meaning, they seemed rather drones to mass suggestion. This view was as much political as scientific. The socialist-sympathizing Wells rejected Spencer's coupling of free-market economics with the growth of individuality. As his tale *The First Men in the Moon* implied, individual autonomy and collective unity in relation to language were not complementary, but opposing tendencies. Further, with scientific nomenclature fragmenting into specialist vocabularies, Wells questioned the ideal of a united, comprehensive language, associating the search for it with dogmatism. However, Wells the utopian social-planner retained belief in some kind of language progress, regarding a global, scientific language as requisite for a peaceful world state. Increasingly, in his Edwardian writings, Wells would repress his radical ideas about language, aligning more with the authoritarian, technocratic visions of earlier utopian authors.

Wells's close reading of Darwin made him sceptical of teleological progress, and open-minded to new arguments that located meaning in context instead of etymology. Darwin's view of nature as a self-regulating system paralleled the growing tendency among philologists to regard language as self-regulating. Whitney claimed that individual speakers made changes to language, which spread or disappeared with majority usage, rather than being directed by an external authority. Similarly, Darwin argued that species evolved from individual mutations, which spread when favoured by environmental pressures, without any overriding plan. Wells's tutor and later friend Edwin R. Lankester observed that previously essential organs shriveled as they ceased to advantage the species. He extended this point to language change, noting that standards altered in line with the 'decay or diversion of literary taste' (75). Darwin concurred with this view in *The Descent of Man*, suggesting that

language change was often as random as biological mutation. Many words appeared or changed meaning, he wrote, through 'mere novelty and fashion ... for there is in the mind of man a love for slight changes in all things' (I 60). Both words and species could only be understood, then, through their position in wider contexts. Hence, Darwin compared vestigial organs to written silent letters; ancestral traces become 'useless' in the current natural or spoken environment (1859, 455). This sense that words and species were defined by their contexts prefigured Saussure's later description of language as a synchronic system of relations.

Essential to the contextualization of meaning was the separation of language from cognition. Locke and Horne Tooke had assumed a soul-body symbiosis between thoughts and words. In the last decades of the century scholars increasingly challenged this assumption; as Whitney argued, with Darwin's agreement, language was an 'auxiliary' of thought, not thought itself (1873, 297; see Alter 2008, 46). This rendered meaning a matter of individual mental associations rather than a general *Sprachgeist* (Nerlich 213-14; Sampson 1980, 26). Whitney described language as constantly fragmenting into specialized dialects, reflecting the activities of different groups. The vocabulary of physicists departed from mainstream speech the same as sailors' slang, expressing the peculiar associations of their speakers (1875, 112). Darwin used Whitney's argument in *Descent* to separate the development of language as a capacity from its contextual usage (Radick 2007, 43-47; Alter 2005, 185-95). Unlike Spencer's smooth, tandem evolution of speech and thought, Darwin argued that the two had catalyzed each other. The first, basic signs had acted as tools for speakers to elaborate ideas, which, in turn, caused them to elaborate their symbols (I 57; see R. J. Richards 2002, 41-48). Language and thought were thus rough adaptations rather than routes to universal truth. While language had, perhaps, progressed as a capacity, meaning was conventional and had no life outside of its contextual uses. The philosopher George Frederick Stout wrote in 1891 that 'the signification of words varies according to the context in which they appear', rendering the idea of a 'usual meaning' for a term a 'fiction' (194). The article was published in *Mind*, a journal which Wells read frequently and would later write for himself. Wells would also learn the radical implications of mental associationism through the psychologist William James, with whom he became close friends (S. Hardy 26). James came to view the naming of things 'less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and particularly as an indication of the ways in which the existing realities may be changed' (1907, 53). In this intellectual atmosphere, Wells

considered scientific language as pragmatic, establishing systems of representation for specific uses and contexts. His view undermined ideas of progressive verbal efficiency, unity and correspondence to an extralinguistic reality, and this scepticism inflected his early fictions.

Wells's earliest expression of ambivalence about language progress was his 1891 article 'The Rediscovery of the Unique'. He indicates here that primitive humans might be better qualified linguistically for scientific investigation than modern Westerners because they were not bound by the dogma of classification. Rather than grouping phenomena under artificial common nouns, their speech of concrete substantives recognized that 'all being is unique' (106). The traditional Western assumption of a stable universe, reducible to one theoretical scheme, was fading with the specialization of science into disciplines with incompatible logics (see Chapter One). Wells concluded: 'Science is a match that man has just got alight. He thought he was in a room ... and thought his light would be reflected from and display walls inscribed with wonderful secrets and pillars carved with philosophical systems wrought into harmony'. Yet, now that the match was alight, he 'see[s] his hands lit and just a glimpse of himself and the patch he stands on visible, and around him, in place of all that human comfort and beauty he anticipated – darkness still' (111). Sylvia Hardy notes that Wells developed a form of nominalism, figuring the universe as arbitrary groupings of disordered atoms (23). Language obstructed induction with assumptions of underlying order, as Karl Pearson similarly wrote: 'men of science are coming to recognise that mechanism is not at the bottom of phenomena, but is only the conceptual shorthand by aid of which they can briefly describe and resume phenomena. That all science is description and not explanation' (vii). Such scepticism of language as a conveyor of ultimate truth bred suspicion of the goals of linguistic precision and unity, associating them with dogma. Pearson worried about the necessary 'obscurity' of language in physics, which often caused physicists to become 'entangled in the meshes of such pseudo-sciences as natural theology and spiritualism' (x-xi). The young Wells similarly criticized psychical researchers such as Oliver Lodge for their 'over-hasty' belief, mistaking words such as spirit for transcendent realities (1895, 274). His concern about words shaping facts rather than vice-versa also emerged in his early journalism on science teaching. In an 1894 article he criticized the past 'elaborate system of lecturing, note dictating, "model answer" grinding ... and a mechanical copying out from the text-book'. Courses should instead 'develop a clear and interrogative habit of mind' through practical

experiment rather than memorizing theory as scripture (1894a, 525-26). Intellectual freedom consisted of disturbing settled linguistic systems, not conforming to them.

The idea that language mechanization encroached upon individual mental autonomy haunted several of Wells's early prophetic fictions. Marx, whom Wells had read, argued that ideas arose from material conditions: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness (1878, 5). The sociologist Benjamin Kidd argued in 1894 that modern society demanded a diminution of mental autonomy as classes fulfilled fixed roles. 'Simpleminded and single-minded devotion' to one's duties, he claimed, were replacing intellectual inquiry (275). Wells was a former draper who escaped his humble origins, and divorced his cousin-wife to live with his middle-class former pupil. His tale 'A Story of the Days to Come' depicts a similar rebellion against circumstances by the lovers from different classes, Elizabeth and Denton. However, such non-conformity is more difficult to imagine in Wells's future, with mass crèches and hypnotism indoctrinating people as to their place in society. Ubiquitous phonographs regulate speech and behaviour through constant suggestion. Their influence has all but removed disruptive violence (at least among the higher classes) as citizens mechanically quote mantras, such as 'violence is no remedy', from the 'Modern Man's Book of Moral Maxims' (196). Psychologists such as Edmund Gurney had suggested that language might circumvent thought by suggestion, procuring effects beneath conscious volition. Gurney described hypnosis as '*conscious reflex action*', by which hypnotists established nervous associations, stimulating subjects to automatic 'words or movements' on cue and without thought (481). In this way, Elizabeth's father pays a hypnotist to wipe his daughter's memory of her relationship with Denton. When Denton accosts her in the street, she speaks 'almost as one who repeats a lesson. "No, I do not know him. I know – I do not know him"' (191). Such verbal suggestion also occurs through advertizements bombarding pedestrians with associations that barely register as conscious thoughts. Rather than compressing a greater density of ideas, shortened words merely serve to catch the narrowed attention of passersby. On the street, projected text advertizing a hat shop declares: "'ets r chip t'de", or simply 'ets'. And in spite of all these efforts ... so trained became one's eyes and ears to ignore all sorts of advertisement, that many a citizen had passed that place thousands of times and was still unaware of the existence of the Suzannah Hat Syndicate' (242). Homogenous consumerism erases individual expression and imagination. Dreams have become standardized

commodities which people ‘order’ from hypnotists, while Elizabeth’s father frowns on Denton’s archaic tendency to write poems. The couple’s rebellion involves their invention of ‘a little language of broken English that was, they fancied, their private possession’ (183). This extends to their child, whom they nickname ‘Dings’ while attempting to raise her themselves, before poverty forces them to leave her in the state crèche.<sup>6</sup> The erosion of mental-linguistic autonomy is illustrated most pathetically by Elizabeth’s other suitor, Bindon. Facing death, he resolves to record his voice for posterity, only to realize that he has nothing to say. The narration verbalizes his thoughts: ‘Might one not try a sonnet? A penetrating voice to echo down the ages, sensuous, sinister, and sad. ... In the course of half an hour he spoilt three phonographic coils, got a headache’, and abandoned the plan (318). Contrary to the progressive narrative, Wells’s mechanization of language renders people products rather than producers of discourse.

Wells’s political concerns emerge more starkly in *When the Sleeper Wakes*, in which the future mechanization of language brings ‘aristocratic tyranny’ (234). The Victorian protagonist Graham is transported two centuries hence to a world where revolution has just overthrown the old order. Yet, the rebel leader Ostrog has no interest in empowering the masses, regarding them as mere tools of suggestion. He explains: ‘The day of democracy is past. ... The common man now is a helpless unit. In these days we have this great machine of the city, and an organisation complex beyond his understanding. ... The Crowd is a huge foolish beast. ... It can still be tamed and driven’ (235). Wells is ambivalent, however, about how such mass regulation might be achieved. Verbal mechanization seems sometimes to divide people into class dialects, and, at other times, to homogenize them into mass conformity. This tension in Wells’s dystopia mirrors the utopian language progressivism that it critiques. The opposing goals of specialization and universality (conflated by utopians) are thus both explored as threats to individual agency. The future education system has extended the rote-learning of Wells’s own time so that people are drilled through intensive hypnosis:

Instead of years of study candidates had substituted a few weeks of trances, and during the trances expert coaches had simply to repeat all the points necessary for adequate answering ... all operations

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Five for discussion of Wells’s interest in the private languages of lovers and families.

conducted under finite rules, of a quasi-mechanical sort that is, were now systematically relieved from the wanderings of imagination and emotion, and brought to an unexampled pitch of accuracy. Little children of the labouring classes, so soon as they were of sufficient age to be hypnotised, were thus converted into beautifully punctual and trustworthy machine minders, and released forthwith from the long, long thoughts of youth. (215)

With most children raised by machines, people become correspondingly mechanical, their actions and thoughts circumscribed by fixed verbal mechanisms. Needing only to perform simple, repetitive tasks, the underclass speaks in ‘scraps like Pigeon English, like “nigger” dialect, blurred and mangled distortions ... with the drifting corpses of English words therein’ (133). Rigid class boundaries render people incapable of imagining or verbalizing anything outside of their social perspective. The same process has occurred in ‘A Story of the Days to Come’, in which the underground machine-workers fight and snarl at each other in barely intelligible ‘dialect’. An equivalent ‘dialect, a code of thought’ narrows the sympathies and ideas of the upper world, preventing them from challenging the status quo: ‘a language of “culture”, which aimed by a sedulous search after fresh distinction to widen perpetually the space between itself and “vulgarity”’ (265-66). Wells’s societies of the future divide and rule through verbal parochialism, narrowing social interests and sympathies.

This mental-linguistic fragmentation is at odds, however, with Wells’s contrasting nightmare of homogenization through tightly controlled mass media. The separateness of language from thought complicates the elite’s control, since the meanings of words are not fixed but vary with individual associations. Ostrog’s elite therefore influence the masses by instilling habitual, barely conscious verbal associations. Phonographic speakers or ‘babble machines’ in every street and home dispense non-stop propaganda slogans which the population echoes. When rebels refuse to disarm after the revolution, Ostrog tells Graham: ‘We are setting the Babble Machines to work with counter suggestions in the cause of law and order’ (234). Ostrog seems to reference Gustave Le Bon’s influential work *The Crowd: a Study of the Popular Mind* (1896), mocking Graham’s democratic ideals: ‘The Crowd as Ruler! Even in your days that creed had been tried and condemned’ (235). Wells would cite Le Bon in his later non-fiction, and his tale coheres with the sociologist’s arguments about

mass media manipulating populations.<sup>7</sup> Le Bon claimed that language addressed to the masses used words associatively, evoking vague mental ‘images’ and emotions: ‘the word is merely as it were the button of an electric bell that calls them up’ (117). The masses of Wells’s tale seem subject to such verbal automatism. As a troop of African police put down a rebellion in Paris, ‘all the mechanisms were discoursing upon that topic, and the repetition of the people made the huge hive buzz with such phrases as “Lynched policemen”, “Women burnt alive”, “Fuzzy Wuzzy”’ (253). Again, the shortening of utterances renders meanings less precise, as sound-bites evoke vague associations (such as racist stereotypes) rather than conveying compacted information. Broadcasting Graham’s voice and image to the world, Ostrog instructs him to ‘say something’: ‘Not what you used to call a Speech, but what our people call a Word – just one sentence, six or seven words ... If I might suggest – “I have awakened and my heart is with you”’ (149). Abstracted from particular contexts, words lose their semantic precision, devolving into emotional triggers. Wells’s tale critiques language progressivism by presenting the consequence of its aims as the loss of mental-linguistic autonomy. Yet, it also questions the possibility of total, centralized control over language and thought, since meaning is contextual. This renders Ostrog’s power less secure than he imagines. He mocks Graham’s democratic ideals, observing that the babble-machines ‘taught’ the people their revolutionary song during a palace coup. However, Graham wonders, ‘can you teach them to forget it?’ (283). The workers demand further political reform, and continue to sing the song even as the machines instruct them not to. Meaning slips from Ostrog’s control as the rebels appropriate his song and invest it with new significations. They similarly listen to the babble machines for information on the coming strike against them, ignoring the calls to stop rebelling. The semantic instability of language which enables elites to manipulate the population might also be the basis of resistance to such authorities. The narrative leaves this question open, ending at Graham’s death in aerial combat, the fate of the revolution uncertain.

Wells’s scepticism towards language progress found its most radical expression in his fictions of extraterrestrial telepathy. Such fantasies enabled him to critique the anthropocentrism and teleology of the discourse. His tales expose the goals of universal truth and perfect communication between minds as dogmatic and destructive of individuality. In addition, Wells suggests that such mental oneness would prevent the

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<sup>7</sup> Wells cites Le Bon in *Mankind in the Making* (266-67). See Mclean on Wells and Le Bon (2009, 86).

collective from comprehending or sympathizing with beings outside of the network. In 1896, when Galton expanded his ideas about communicating with extraterrestrials into an article in the *Fortnightly Review*, Wells published a different opinion on the subject: ‘No phase of anthropomorphism is more naïve than the supposition of men on Mars. The place of such a conception in the world of thought is with the anthropomorphic cosmogonies and religions invented by the childish conceit of primitive man’ (1975, 178). Wells would illustrate this point two years later in *The War of the Worlds* in which Martians resembling octopi seek to exterminate humanity. Although the invaders are mentally united by telepathy, they have no sympathy for or desire to communicate with humans. The novel refers to a ‘great light’ observed on Mars in 1894, but the narrator speculates that rather than a signal to Earth, it was, ‘the casting of the huge gun, in the vast pit sunk into their planet, from which their shots were fired at us’ (6). When authorities attempt to signal the landed visitors with flags ‘the Martians took as much notice of such advances as we should of the lowing of a cow’ (60). Collective consciousness folds their sympathy into an exclusive, closed system, rendering them less communicative with outsiders than the apparently primitive humans. The narrator remarks of the beings, whose brains have expanded while their bodies shrivelled: ‘Without the body the brain would, of course, become a mere selfish intelligence, without any of the emotional substratum of the human being’ (211). The Martian collective recapitulates the egotism of supposedly ‘lower’ life, becoming one body with no remorse for life outside of it. Darwin had presented sympathy as an instinctive inheritance rather than a product of civilization, suggesting common emotional expressions between humans and animals. Wells similarly locates sympathy and mental adaptability in the instinctive body. Mind is built upon physical sensation and instinct so that, disembodied, it loses the ability to engage with other life-forms and the wider environment. Ferguson links the Martians’ ‘purity’ of communication and identity with their ultimate defeat by bacteria. Their closed system of signs and concepts ‘prevents the invader from comprehending and thus conquering the seething, sullied space of nation’ (2006, 134). Equally, human language is incapable of comprehending the Martians when fixed by rigid dogma. This problem is demonstrated through a curate who shelters with the narrator from the invaders and struggles to reconcile them with his scriptural perspective: “‘What does it mean?’ he said. ‘What do these things mean? ... Why are these things permitted? What sins have we done? ... What are these Martians?’”. The narrator’s responding question (‘What are we?’) highlights the arrogance of humanity in positioning

itself and its categories at the centre of the universe (112). The curate assumes that all things must have a human significance, the whole cosmos being utterances of God. Such anthropocentricity renders him unable to comprehend the instability and randomness of nature, which develops without transcendental plan. The more fixed and internally consistent a communication system becomes, the less able it is to engage with chaotic reality, or the perspectives of outsiders.

Wells extended his critique of utopian language progress in *The First Men in the Moon*, in which two lunar explorers encounter an underground civilization of ant-like creatures. Captured by these 'Selenites', as the explorers call them, the eccentric Dr. Cavor reasons: 'The problem is communication. ... Of course they are minds and we are minds; there must be something in common. Who knows how far we may not get to an understanding?' (145-46). Wells's narrative subsequently challenges Cavor's assumption that thought and truth are universal rather than relative to human biology and culture. As with the Martians, the Selenites seem to have perfected their communication, conversing together without ambiguity. Yet, again, this fixed system of signs and meanings renders them incapable of sympathizing with or imagining the perspectives of outsiders. The Selenites expose the contradiction of progressive individual autonomy within a wider integration. Cavor's first attempts to communicate with Selenites fail because he accosts individuals, assuming that they are 'minds' rather than one, interconnected mind. Different classes in the colony perform different mental operations, communicating together in mechanized codes. The calfherds whom the explorers meet on the moon's surface speak and think in a 'dialect' of 'accomplished mooncalf technique', while the mathematician's 'voice becomes a mere stridulation for the stating of formula; he seems deaf to all but properly enunciated problems' (305). Some Selenites are all muscle with scarcely any mental activity, relaying sensations and following nervous commands from the 'Grand Lunar' at the centre of the network. Even this, however, is only a 'gigantic ganglion' with no individual psyche; other Selenites must discharge the various operations of cognition, 'wabbling jellies of knowledge' 'carried from place to place in a sort of sedan tub' (306-7). Whereas anthropocentric utopias imagined telepathy developing with the greater individuation of human souls, Wells's Selenites suggest the opposite. Their collective mind relies on the obliteration of individual thought, agency and expression. Cavor remarks: 'every citizen knows his place. He is born to that place, and the elaborate discipline of training and education and surgery he undergoes fits him at last so completely to it that he

has neither ideas nor organs for any purpose beyond it' (304). The Selenites' disregard for individual life is evidenced by their lack of desire for vengeance after Cavor and his companion initially kill some of them. They only cut off Cavor's communication with Earth, and possibly kill him, after learning the unthinkable – that human nations wage war on each other, and thus threaten the Selenite collective. The future of communication represented by the Selenites does not enhance individual identity but destroys it, along with the Western values it reflects.

Wells's tale satirizes the teleology of language progressing towards universal truth through the parallel development of humans and Selenites. Rather than converging, their worldviews are mutually incomprehensible, and Wells equivocates over their relative superiority. The Selenites regard humans as living in 'social savagery', storing their knowledge in books rather than the distended heads of a class born to memorize. Cavor comments of the moon-dwellers, 'in intelligence, morality, and social wisdom are they colossally greater than men' (291). This superiority seems to be demonstrated by the Selenites gradually learning broken English and Western numerals, while Cavor is incapable of mastering their symbols. However, the humans innovate technology to travel to the moon while the Selenites remain static. Wells seems to have partly built his Selenites upon Galton's speculations about communicating with extraterrestrials. The Selenites somewhat resemble the race of 'highly developed ants' whom Galton imagined signaling the principles of arithmetic and geometry to the Earth. Galton's ants signal numerals up to eight rather than using a decimal system, reflecting the senders' '6 limbs and 2 antennae' (1896, 661). Yet, Galton assumes that the universal truth of mathematics will bridge such vast bio-cultural differences. Cavor mentions the 'paper by the late Professor Galton' on signals that could convey 'those broad truths that must underlie all conceivable mental existences' (146). Although, initially, the Selenites ignore Cavor's attempts to trace equilateral triangles with his finger, they later learn a kind of broken English. One specializes in enunciating words while his large-headed colleague remembers them, and others draw diagrams and frame analogies. The further that communication advances, however, the more incompatible human and Selenite perspectives appear. The moon-dwellers learn concrete nouns and verbs easily enough, Cavor states, but 'when it came to abstract nouns, to prepositions, and the sort of hackneyed figures of speech, by means of which so much is expressed on earth, it was like diving in cork-jackets' (300). Selenite understanding depends on analogies with their own ant-hill-like society, rendering Cavor's

descriptions of human life on Earth opaque. Cavor reports of his conversations with the Grand Lunar:

For a long time I had great difficulty in making him understand the nature of a house. To him and his attendant Selenites it seemed, no doubt, the most whimsical thing in the world that men should build houses when they might descend into excavations, and an additional complication was introduced by the attempt I made to explain that men had originally begun their homes in caves, and that they were now taking their railways and many establishments beneath the surface. ... There was also a considerable tangle due to an equally unwise attempt on my part to explain about mines.... I told him of lions and tigers, and here it seemed as though we had come to a deadlock. For, save in their waters, there are no creatures in the moon not absolutely domestic and subject to his will and the idea of anything strong and large existing 'outside' in the night is very difficult for them. (329-32)

The idea that meaning is context-bound would later lead linguists such as Edward Sapir to argue for linguistic relativity. 'No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality', Sapir wrote in 1929: 'The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached' (209). Wells's alien communications prefigure this conclusion to an extent, suggesting that language develops towards the expression of not universal truths but only particular social perspectives. However, as will be shown below, Wells ultimately balked at these implications because they threatened to derail his visions of progress towards a world state. Having released the genie of linguistic relativism in his early fiction, the Edwardian Wells would struggle to bottle it up again.

### World Peace and a Global Lingua Franca

If meaning depended on context then language might still be imagined progressing towards unity and objectivity through the widening of context. Since languages encoded different worldviews, many progressives concluded that humanity would unite under universal

scientific truth with the emergence of a world speech. Sayce looked ‘forward to the day when there shall be not only one hope and one faith, but also one language in which they shall find utterance’ (1880, I 219). Daston argues that many scientists in the latter nineteenth century strove to establish international nomenclature in their disciplines, associating this with ‘communitarian objectivity’ (262). Botanists such as Alphonse de Candolle strove to decompound and name their objects of study along universally-agreed lines, like a ‘global map pieced together by a community of far-flung observers’ (262-63). These efforts coincided with an upsurge in interest in the possibility of constructing an artificial lingua franca that would be both logical and de-nationalized (Forster 50). In 1879 Johann Schleyer combined vocabulary and grammar from many languages to invent Volapük, followed a decade later by Zamenhof’s Esperanto. Idiom Neutral and Ido in the 1900s sought to improve these systems (Yaguello 31). The Austrian physicist and artificial language proponent Richard Lorenz wrote that scientific investigators had set the template for such work. Developing uniform specialist vocabularies between their countries, they had become ‘accustomed to think in this language apart from their nationality’ (57). The ideal of future linguistic unity glossed over the division of science into specialist technical dialects, preserving faith in monolithic truth. While Wells was suspicious of efforts to fix language he also rejected parochialism, seeking truth in the synthesis of diverse perspectives. His hopes for a rational, scientific future were thus bound up with the need for a common medium of intercourse. A committed internationalist, Wells regarded national borders and governments as dogmas to be outgrown and replaced by a global state. This commitment led much of his Edwardian writing to succumb to the teleology of language progress that he had previously rejected. Wells’s inconsistency illustrates the moral stakes tied up in language progress, which sought a more peaceful world through the ascent of science. With militarization increasing across Europe through these years, Wells imagined linguistic unification as the prerequisite to a rational, peaceful future. As his writings show, however, this aim involved the same contradictions that he had earlier exposed. While dreaming of linguistic unity on the macro level, Wells struggled to reconcile this with his other priority of individual verbal-mental autonomy. Wells’s desire for both fixity and flexibility in language encapsulated the inherent tension in language progressivism between faith in ultimate stability and recognition of constant change.

Visions and schemes for linguistic unity sought to both mediate between languages via a simple cipher and replace them with a gargantuan hybrid. An 1885 *Saturday Review*

article described Volapük ‘as a system of counters, convertible at sight into any spoken tongue that possesses the key to it’ (‘Volapük’ 15). Esperanto similarly reduced communication to less than a thousand root words combined with a minimal, consistent grammar. Yet, it aimed to augment vocabularies rather than reduce them, enabling the rapid transfer of knowledge across the globe. Zamenhof commented that, with knowledge currently divided across many languages, ‘we are often obliged, even in speaking our own language, to borrow words and expressions from foreigners, or to express our thoughts inexactly’. With a single language ‘the prime motor of civilisation ... would grow richer, and reach a higher degree of perfection than is found in any of those now existing’ (8). Such richness would necessarily mean more words since, as Lorenz later observed, translations of technical language into Esperanto rapidly became idiomatic. Its limited roots combined to transform, ‘A rotary transformer might be called a motor-generator’, into: ‘A self-turning otherwise-making instrument can be called a motor-producer’ (59). The need for many words to mediate the increasing scope and complexity of knowledge led many commentators to propose English as the future world-language. Jakob Grimm had earlier praised the absorbent quality of English, its mixed heritage and simple grammar enabling it to easily import foreign words (50). In 1892 C. R. Haines similarly claimed that English was destined to be the world language because ‘there is scarcely an important language, classical or modern, which has not furnished its quota to the structure’ (375). Some language-inventors sought to enhance this process of synthesis, combining English with modern French and German in ‘Teutonish’ and ‘Anglo-Franca’ (Goodman & Graddol 189). However, commentators also predicted the global spread of English as a pidgin, mediating between speech communities that remained distinct. Hence, Haines wrote, ‘there will be several separate dialects of English, which in time will become unintelligible to other portions of the English race’. Conversely, Zamenhof dreamed of mental and emotional synthesis, predicting that, ‘Books being the same for everyone, education, ideals, convictions, aims, would be the same too’ (7). How though, could such homogeneity be achieved without the forceful imposition of one language upon other speech communities? Even if speakers retained their native tongues, translating their expressions into the international tongue, this required common, *a priori* concepts outside of social contexts. Again, meaning had to be conceptualized as stable, decomposable elements rather than contextual relations. As Wells gradually convinced himself, the future world language

would need to be controlled by a central authority to prevent it dividing again into isolated variants, reflecting local perspectives.

Wells's interest in a world language coincided with his growing belief through the Edwardian period in a future world state. Mixing with socialist reformers such as Beatrice and Sidney Webb and G. B. Shaw, he came to imagine the future as a process of rationalization, overcoming dogmas such as nationalism. His book *Anticipations* (1901) predicted the future union of states under a single government, mediated by a single language. He echoed Zamenhof's rhetoric of universal access to the world's knowledge, writing that, as scientists increasingly cooperated in a global community, people 'will escape from the wreckage of their too small and swamped and foundering social systems, only up the ladders of what one may call the aggregating tongues' (250). In every region where multiple languages are spoken, 'Almost inevitably with travel, with transport communications, with every condition of human convenience insisting upon it, formally or informally a bi-lingual compromise will come into operation' (262). Wells's friend the Serb-American Nikola Tesla, who is cited in *The First Men in the Moon*, argued in 1905 that such bridge-building between speech communities was essential to peace. 'Fights between individuals, as well as governments and nations', he wrote, 'invariably result from misunderstandings ... [which] are always caused by the inability of appreciating one another's point of view' (22). In the same year, Wells echoed the idea of a common language as a network of convergences and compromises between national perspectives in *A Modern Utopia*. Wells distinguished his vision from previous 'static' utopias which had claimed to depict the end of development. Unlike the mentally rigid and politically repressive futures that had formed his earlier dystopias, Wells's ideal society would be 'kinetic', continuing to involve 'friction, conflicts and waste, but the waste will be enormously less than in our world' (262; see Partington 49). A global speech would not be brought about by one tongue defeating others but the 'wedding and survival of several in a common offspring'. Different ways of segmenting reality across tongues would be 'superposed and then welded together through bilingual and trilingual compromises' (22). Wells's imagery allows for *parole* to react upon the universal *langue*, with individuals and groups all adding and adjusting bricks in the overall edifice. Wells realized that to frame eternal linguistic rules and categories was to assume that 'the whole intellectual basis of mankind is established, that the rules of logic, the systems of counting and measurement, the general categories and schemes of resemblance and difference, are established for the

human mind for ever' (20). The finality promised by such artificial systems goes against the constant restructuring of existence which constitutes knowledge and thought, since 'there is no being, but a universal becoming of individualities. ... What folly, then, to dream of mapping out our minds in however general terms, of providing for the endless mysteries of the future a terminology and an idiom!' (21). World language will be mediated through globalized social relations, yet it will have no single designer or group of designers, and will never be finalized. 'All mankind will' possess 'a common resonance of thought, but the language they will speak will still be a living tongue, an animated system of imperfections, which every individual man will infinitesimally modify' (21-22). People will unite as language-makers rather than be united under a language pre-designed by elites. This model of development evokes Spencer's double process of simultaneous integration and individuation, effecting an ever finer compromise between self and community. Wells's vision of verbal autonomy within unity remains, like that of Spencer, at a high altitude, saving him the trouble of explaining how all individuals can equally influence the language and society of a scientific technocracy. How could speakers compete with wider forces, such as urbanization and the class system, which privileged some speech communities over others? How, also, could speakers contribute equally to a united tongue if they were not innately equal, as Wells implied through his support of eugenics?<sup>8</sup>

Wells was still avoiding these questions in his 1913 novel *The World Set Free*, which imagines leaders forming a world state following the destruction of atomic warfare. Although figuring English as the base of the future lingua franca, Wells is careful to denationalize it, rendering Modern English like Anglo-Saxon before its mixture with Norman French:

The language was shorn of a number of grammatical peculiarities, the distinctive forms for the subjunctive mood for example and most of its irregular plurals were abolished; its spelling was systematised and adapted to the vowel sounds in use upon the continent of Europe, and a process of incorporating foreign nouns and verbs commenced that speedily reached enormous proportions. Within ten years from the

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<sup>8</sup> His *Modern Utopia* includes 'the actual population of the world with only such moral and mental and physical improvements as lie within their inherent possibilities ... the breed of failure must not increase, lest they suffer and perish, and the race with them' (136-37).

establishment of the World Republic the New English Dictionary had swelled to include a vocabulary of 250,000 words, and a man of 1900 would have found considerable difficulty in reading an ordinary newspaper. (217-8)

Wells plays down his positioning of native English speakers at the centre of his global society, suggesting that they must adapt in equal measure to other nations. English does not absorb other tongues into a fixed system but is restructured by them. Wells strays here into the logic of verbal efficiency, suggesting that no past meanings will be lost in the great aggregation. While Edwardian speakers would struggle to read future English, ‘on the other hand, the men of the new time could still appreciate the Older English literature’. This claim seems bizarre, given the great lexical and grammatical changes envisaged. Wells imagines the ‘scientific’ restructuring of society producing in language an objective view-from-nowhere in which meanings are no longer bound by context. Or, rather, all possible contexts are paradoxically stored and compressed into a composite language. The familiar model of diachronic semantic accumulation implies the correlative of tightening prescriptive authority, with language doubling as a vast archive of the past. Against the rhetoric of democratic autonomy, Wells ends *A Modern Utopia* with the narrator hoping to dissolve into ‘a synthetic wider being, the great State, mankind, in which we all move and go, like blood corpuscles, like nerve cells, it may be at times like brain cells, in the body of a man’ (372). Similarly, *The World Set Free* avoids problems of semantic relativism by treating speech and thought as the behaviour of vast Spencerian aggregates rather than individuals. As one of the organizers of the world government King Egbert declares, ‘Science ... is the mind of the race’ (162), imposing an imaginary unity upon diverse theories and methods. The narrator explains the prior carnage of world war through the discrepancy that ‘the political structure of the world at that time was everywhere extraordinarily behind the collective intelligence’ (76-77). As in the utopias discussed above, Wells buries problems of semantic instability by turning language into communication between nerves and brain cells instead of separate consciousnesses.

In spite, then, of Wells’s rhetoric of ‘kinetic’ democracy, the language of his future world state is necessarily authoritarian. In *The World Set Free* A vaguely described ‘World Council’ sets the rules of global speech, which spreads in tandem with standardized education and urbanization, wiping out rural speech communities. The narrator states: ‘That

shy, unstimulated life of the lonely hovel ... that hoarding, half-inanimate existence away from books, thought or social participation and in constant contact with cattle, pigs, poultry and their excrement is passing away out of human experience' (216-7). Wells had prefigured this view in *Anticipations*, writing that, as the newest science and learning circulated in English, French or German, the speaker of a minor language 'must either become a mental subject of one of the greater languages or sink to the intellectual status of a peasant' (249). Rather than a compromise, Wells describes the emergence of a *lingua franca* as a Darwinian struggle. Speakers of minority languages are not able to synthesize their words and grammar with a larger one but must join it on the periphery to avoid exclusion from the future world order. Wells's plan for the world language as a decentred, collective property is irreconcilable with his desire for a technocracy led by scientific authorities. Not only, then, does Wells champion standardized writing as the destroyer of dialectal speech; he also prescribes texts by privileged scientific authorities. He warns of English potentially losing the struggle for global status through the populist tendencies of its publishers, who translate little of the latest scientific work. 'One has only to see a Parisian bookshop, and to recall an English one', he writes, 'to realize the as yet unattainable standing of French. The serried ranks of lemon-coloured volumes in the former have the whole range of human thought and interest' (258). Wells's tendency towards linguistic prescriptivism comes into sharpest focus in *Mankind in the Making* (1903) in which he offers instructions on the verbal stimulation of infants. Children should not be confused by different tongues, he proclaims, or mothers succumbing to their instinctive 'feelings' and babbling 'baby talk'.<sup>9</sup> Rather, the child 'requires to be surrounded by people speaking one language, and speaking it with a uniform accent' (123).

While the advancement of science procures 'a perpetual necessity for new words, words to express new ideas and new relationships', these should only be framed by experts in their fields. 'The neologisms of the street and the saloon' are detrimental to such progress, perpetuating obsolete concepts and muddling word definitions (129). Whitney had observed that language changed through majority usage rather than intrinsic standards of improvement, a reality which Wells sought to counter with 'an English Language Society'. Words and their uses, he states, would be governed by a 'non-hereditary aristocracy' imposing 'a common scientific and, in its higher stages at least, a common

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<sup>9</sup> As Chapter Five discusses, Wells was much interested in, and conflicted about, the instinctive, emotional elements of speech, and their relation to childhood, gender and sexuality.

educational organization' (391). Wells's authoritarian impulse would ultimately lead him to the vision in *The Shape of Things to Come* (1932) of a global 'Language Bureau' fixing the uses of words (I 418; see S. Hardy 57). Wells also campaigned in the 1930s for the creation of a 'World Brain' or global encyclopaedia 'to hold men's minds together in something like a common interpretation of reality' (1938, 34-35). Global cooperation seemed only achievable through a homogenization of speech and thought around a central authority.

Wells's belief in the necessity of a single, centrally-controlled language for world peace is illustrated by his novel of impending global conflict *The War in the Air* (1908). Unable to sympathize with each others' perspectives, the military powers all seek to impose their own upon the world. France and Britain continue their empire-building, while 'the German alliance still struggled to achieve its dream of imperial expansion, and its imposition of the German language on a forcibly united Europe' (75). Instead of combining their languages in parallel with scientific combinations of knowledge, nations dissemble, misinterpret and fail to understand each other, causing needless violence. This is played out in miniature when the cockney anti-hero Bert Smallways is marooned with two German soldiers and their inability to communicate precipitates a 'war' between them. Having reluctantly killed one, Bert wishes to befriend the other who has fled, but is prevented by the language barrier: 'If I knew some German, I'd 'oller. It's jest not knowing German does it. You can't explain' (187). Mere mechanical language-learning, however, is still insufficient to overcome narrow-minded nationalism. This point is demonstrated in the novel by the Anglicized German (or Germanized Englishman) Lieutenant Kurt. Half-English and schooled in England, he speaks with the colloquialisms of its privileged class, exclaiming 'ra-ther!' and promising to give America 'what for' (85-86). Upon hearing of the sinking of Germany's prize warship he vacillates between linguistic identities: "Barbarossa disabled and sinking!" he cried. "Gott im himmel! Der alte Barbarossa! Aber welch ein braver Krieger!" ... For a time he was wholly German. Then he became English again. "Think of it, Smallways!" (111). While intellectually capable of switching between tongues, Kurt's emotions cling to an essential nationhood, asserting that he is 'German nonetheless' without explaining how. Esperanto makes a brief appearance on bilingual advertisements when Bert crash-lands in an American town. His problems communicating even in American English, though, suggest that no two nations can share a 'common' language while remaining grounded in nationalist perspectives. This is highlighted by his attempt to buy food in a local 'shop' for English shillings: "He calls A store A shop", said

the proprietor, “and he wants A meal for A shilling. May I ask you, sir, what part of America you hail from?” (235). The scene evokes Henry Sweet’s 1877 prediction that American and British English would become mutually unintelligible in the future (196). The autonomy of nation states causes languages to diverge, encoding different practices and worldviews. The only solution discernible in Wells’s Edwardian fiction is a scientific elite directing speech and thought into a single channel. While the World Council takes control of language in *The World Set Free*, psychologists prepare to regiment the population’s cognition. As the leader Karenin states: ‘Psychologists are learning how to mould minds, to reduce and remove bad complexes of thought and motive, to relieve pressures and broaden ideas’ (279). The hypnotism and mass suggestion that Wells’s earlier fiction feared as threats to individual sovereignty become triumphs of social integration. Unlike his dystopias, which imagined the effects of such techniques upon individuals, Wells’s state-building visions remain at a high altitude, avoiding the contradictions in language progress that his earlier fiction had exposed.

Wells’s fiction illustrates the amorphousness of language progressivism as a discourse, able to be fitted equally to socialist and capitalist, imperialist and internationalist agendas. It also illustrates the yearning which language progressivism expressed for a transcendental authority that would reveal universal truth outside of socio-historical perspectives. Huxley had argued in 1893 that the ‘ethical process’ driving the progress of civilization emerged in opposition to the ‘cosmic process’ of random, chaotic change (34). If order did not exist in observable nature, then perhaps humans could create it, thus fulfilling a higher purpose currently beyond their ken. In contrast to Wells’s earlier mockery of spiritualist anthropocentrism, *The World Set Free* ends with the aging Karenin facing death without fear of oblivion. ‘For indeed is it Karenin who has been sitting here talking’, he asks a friend; ‘is it not rather a common mind, Fowler, that has played about between us?’ (283). The following war years would see Wells attempting to resurrect monotheism in *God the Invisible King* (1917). His temporary conversion to the idea of ‘a personal and intimate God’ put a religious name to the ultimate truth which he had previously imagined as the end of progress (ix). Wells’s dream of a united, scientific language assumed that such truth could one day be represented. This faith in science as the ultimate aggregator of human thought contradicted prevailing trends. As Chapter One outlined, investigators increasingly used pragmatic technical vocabularies for specific problems with no fixed semantic centre. Wells had bemoaned this tendency in 1894,

warning that practitioners were becoming isolated from each other and the wider public as they wrote ‘in the dialect of their science’ (300). Such anxiety about linguistic disunity stemmed from the fear that no coherent, external authority existed to render language objective. The notion that language evolved independently of the intentions of individual speakers contained the seed of semantic relativism, confining meaning to context. However, the utopian desire for a transcendent purpose amidst the rapid changes of modernity caused writers from Bellamy to Wells to ignore such implications. As war loomed between the European powers, Wells clung to the hope that science and civilization were more than arbitrary signs for unstable associations. Language progressivism kept semantic and epistemological relativity at bay by interpreting their symptoms, such as ambiguity, as transitions in a wider teleology. The teleology that Darwin had undermined in nature might be resurrected in human society, striving to discover transcendental meaning beyond the apparent cosmic disorder. As the next chapter explores, this future goal depended on contrasting classifications of primitive language to demonstrate the operations of progress. The future could only be predictable through opposing images of the past.

## Chapter Three. Primitive Language in Imperial, Prehistoric and Scientific Romances

In 1864 the British explorer William Winwood Reade wrote of the difficulties of converting Africans to Christianity, due to their language:

The African dialects are minute, but always physical. They have few words to express the commonest qualities or emotions. . . . Mere reason is cold and unintelligible to the savage. He must be terrified and awed before his languid nature can be excited to enthusiasm. The fire and the sword are tangible weapons of faith; words appear to him mere shadows. (443)

Reade's comments demonstrate Peter Melville Logan's observation that, 'While Victorians were unable to explain precisely what culture was, they had far more success in identifying what it was not. Abstract claims about culture derive from contrasts with something that is not culture' (2). Definitions of civilization as abstract and intellectual depended on the binary opposite of sensual, instinctive savagery. The same might be said of language progress. Ideas of language evolving towards self-control and objectivity relied on oppositional concepts of primitive speech as involuntary and subjective (Errington 2001, 32-33). As with language progress, though, these characteristics contradicted each other, relying on antagonistic models of semantics. Edward Said famously described the colonized Orient in the nineteenth-century Western imagination as a projection of suppressed Western desires and anxieties (1979, 207). This chapter argues, similarly, that the concept of primitive speech transferred onto disempowered speakers problems of semantic instability and perspectivism in language. Representations of non-Western, female and working-class speech as shaped by involuntary urges, personal and social perspectives implied that white, male, middle-class discourse had escaped, or was escaping, such problems. The opposition crumbled towards the end of the century, however, as anthropologists such as Tylor discovered pockets of primitiveness within supposedly civilized language. The fragility of the binary is discernible in popular fiction of the period which attempted to demonstrate imaginatively theories of primitive language. As authors such as Wells and London delved deeper into the logic of primitive language the wider its

circle expanded. Nevertheless, many such authors and anthropologists preferred to find primitiveness in their own language rather than to abandon the concept, since this would also mean abandoning progress. The spectre of linguistic relativism was, perhaps, ultimately more frightening than the idea that one's own language remained partly bestial noise. Further, figures such as Darwin complicated the model of progress, implying that primitive, instinctive communication was not always opposed to civilized life but sometimes upheld it. The past of language proved as difficult to define as its future.

### Body Language

The concept of progressive disembodiment figured primitive language as contrastingly inseparable from the body, enslaved to its urges and sensations. This view of embodied language led anthropologists to characterize primitive speech as vague and, yet, overly particular, limited to both concrete minutia and indistinct generalities. Philosophers had long debated whether language began with general or concrete terms, and Victorian anthropologists vacillated between the two positions.<sup>10</sup> This concept of primitiveness as inadequate classification functioned to contain anxieties about the arbitrariness of all classification. Near the beginning of the century, Dugald Stewart had argued, although with little influence, that abstract terms had no natural basis but were contingent upon habitual associations. Names for individual objects or sensations, he claimed, came to signify genera and species through analogy. Hence, words which appeared to convey universal abstract truths merely reflected 'our habits of speaking and thinking' (197; see Eddy 2006, 381-86). By characterizing sensory and contextual association as primitive, later commentators positioned Western classifications as contrastingly objective. Nineteenth-century missionaries typically compiled native dictionaries by searching for equivalents to European terms rather than considering meaning in context (Henson 11-12; Errington 2008, 3-5). Different designations could not render different realities but only a less accurate or integrated version of Western reality. At the same time as being confined to sensory phenomena, however, primitive language was also imagined as removed from it. Primitive speech obstructed empirical induction, with dogmatic superstition and taboos overriding

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<sup>10</sup> John Locke and Adam Smith argued that the first words were names for specific objects; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Johann Gottfried Herder argued that they were generalities used indiscriminately. See Stam, 32-45, 81-99; Eddy 2011, 9-14.

evidence of the senses. In this way, it transposed onto the raced or gendered other anxieties about the influence of society upon individual thought and expression, undermining speaker autonomy. Mill had warned in *On Liberty* (1859) of ‘mechanical adhesion’ to ‘custom’ reducing speech, thought and behaviour to ‘ape-like ... imitation’ (65). Thus while one tendency located primitive speech in the individual, subjective body, another defined it as the suppression of individual perspectives by a rigid social body (see Herbert 1991, 63-65). The imperial romances of H. R. Haggard and Grant Allen illustrate this conflict between concepts of primitive language as egoist subjectivity or collective custom.

Numerous Victorians defined primitive speech as limited to the body, framing civilized language as contrastingly metaphysical. In 1853 the Swedish-American philologist Maximilian Schele de Vere had claimed that words ‘advance from materialism to formalism, from natural to metaphorical expressions, from the physical to the intellectual, from the concrete to the abstract. ... [T]he immortal soul longs to break through its earthly prison, the mind strives to rise unfettered to on high’ (239). Even large vocabularies could be primitive if their distinctions were merely sensory without generalization (Pennycook 150-51). John Lubbock described ‘savage’ vocabulary as ‘rich ... for everything, in fact, which they can see and handle. Yet they are entirely deficient in words for abstract ideas; they have no expressions for colour, tone, sex, genus, spirit ... man, body, place, time ... nor such a verb as “to be”’ (1890, 572). Sayce similarly claimed that Cherokee language had many verbs for washing different objects but none for washing in general (1874, 78-79). By ignoring the different contextual associations of native words, philologists and anthropologists were able to present them as merely failures to grasp the higher truths of Western abstraction. If primitive speech was not wanting in generalizations then it lacked distinctions. Darwin’s cousin Hensleigh Wedgwood argued that words had begun as onomatopoeia and emotional cries, so that, ‘in the course of time, as the objects for which designations were required became more and more numerous, the necessity of a nicer distinction’ split these cries into discrete parts (19). The first terms, Sayce similarly claimed, had been ‘sentence-words’ which were yet to distinguish things from their properties. Hence, ‘the Tasmanians, when they wanted to denote what we mean by “tall” ... had to say “long legs”’ (1880, I 101). This imagined lack of differentiation extended to words blurring with gestures. As Chapter Two showed, many anthropologists depicted language progress as the separation of words from bodily movements. Romanes remarked: ‘the advent of self-consciousness enables a mind, not only to *know*, but to *know that it*

*knows*; not only to *receive* knowledge, but also to *conceive* it' (192). Linguistic advancement enabled 'the human mind ... to stand outside of itself, and thus to constitute its own ideas the subject-matter of its own thought' (175). In primitive speech, by contrast, representation remained undifferentiated from being: it used signs without comprehending the nature of signification.<sup>11</sup> Unlike self-scrutinizing science, primitive language was unconscious of itself, discharging its metaphors and designations like reflexes. Speakers remained buried in their bodies, understanding signs only through subjective sensations or associations. The primitive speaker appears an isolated, unconscious echo-chamber, voicing subjective aural associations in response to physical stimuli.

This image of primitive speech was contradicted by other commentators who located primitiveness in the social, rather than individual, body. While the former tendency presented primitive speech as all *parole* with no *langue* structuring it, the latter imagined a rigid *langue* of superstitions and taboos preventing verbal-mental autonomy. The idea of progress as speakers gaining sovereignty over language figured primitive speakers as conversely produced by their language. In this vein, Walter Bagehot claimed that 'savages ... do not improve' their social state because of a cemented 'cake of custom' which rigid conformity to tradition prevented them from breaking (53). Tylor agreed, writing: 'The savage is firmly, obstinately conservative. No man appeals with more unhesitating confidence to the great precedent-makers of the past; the wisdom of his ancestors can control against the most obvious evidence of his own opinions and actions' (1871, I 142). Linguistic primitiveness, for Tylor, resided not in the isolation of the individual speaker but his embedding in an inflexible structure of conventions and traditions. Individuals, and even whole communities, were not 'originators' of their customs, he wrote, 'but the transmitters and modifiers of the results of long past ages' (16). The 'early tyranny of speech over the human mind' prevents his savage from apprehending the relations of things clearly (276). While objective, Western science recognized metaphors as adaptable fictions, the socio-linguistic dogmatism of primitive society prevented it from scrutinizing words apart from things. Tylor claimed: 'Analogies which are but fancy to us were to men of past ages reality. They could see the flame licking its yet undevoured prey with tongues of fire ... what we call poetry was to them real life' (269). Spencer similarly described the

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<sup>11</sup> Logan notes that Comte similarly characterized 'fetishism' as pre-symbolic thought in which 'object and god, signifier and signified, are one and the same. ... [R]ather than a representation of meaning, the fetish is meaning itself' (10).

primitive mind as enslaved to verbal convention while the civilized consciously reshaped it. Primitive words, he wrote, 'grow up unawares ... by metaphor which some observable likeness suggests. Among civilised people, however, who have learnt that words are symbolic, new words are frequently chosen to symbolise new ideas' (1895, II 15). Hence, tribal chiefs forbade the utterance of their names, 'conceiving that a man's name is part of his individuality, and that possession of his name gives power over him' (150). Primitive speech fluctuated incompatibly between the individual, sensory body and the dogmatic conventions of society.

Haggard's African romances embody this tension. His savage speakers are isolated bodies, enslaved to their sensations and urges, yet, they are repositories of convention, unable to break from the customs passed down to them. The 'ethnographic' romance genre emerged in the 1870s and 1880s in response to colonialism and evolutionary and racial theories that justified it.<sup>12</sup> Deane describes the 'lost world' narrative, which Haggard helped to pioneer, as 'the perverse offspring of the imperial romance and the utopian novel, energizing the political fantasies of the present not with a dream of what might be, but of what has been' (206). Haggard's tales drew on his experiences in Africa as a colonial administrator and, while romanticizing the heroism of Zulu warriors, they also sought to legitimize colonial rule by depicting such warriors as frozen in the childhood of human thought (Katz 145-47). They often associate the speech of the Zulu Umslopogaas with unconscious bodily urges. In *Allan Quatermain* when the eponymous English hero is reunited with his Zulu comrade, Quatermain's quiet 'how do you do' contrasts with his friend's loud, uncontrolled exclamations: 'Koos! Baba! (father) ... clever one! watchful one! brave one! quick one! ... Koos! Baba!'. The short, repetitious bursts follow each other without order, like expulsions of pent-up energy rather than conscious constructions. Quatermain emphasizes this point by interrupting Umslopogaas's torrent of speech with the comment: 'Has all thy noisy talk been stopped up since last I saw thee that it breaks out thus, and sweeps us away?' (22). Unlike his Europeans, Haggard's Africans are susceptible to the hypnotizing sensations of speech, its tones rousing their emotions instinctively. Quatermain states: 'I had let him run on thus because I saw that his enthusiasm was producing a marked effect upon the minds' of the other Africans, whom Quatermain wishes to recruit for his adventure. Umslopogaas is affected by the physical stimuli of his own

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<sup>12</sup> Street, 4-5; Ferguson 83-87. On Victorian colonialism and racial theory, see Stepan; Stocking 1982 & 1987; Hannaford; Brantlinger 2003 & 2011.

voice, working himself into a violent rage, which causes Quatermain to interrupt again: “‘Be silent”, I said, for I saw that he was getting the blood fever on him’ (24). Unable to fully separate being from representation, the primitive speaker embodies his tales and even acts them out. As Umslopogaas admits elsewhere: ‘I am rough, I know it, and when my blood is warm I know not what to do’ (191). Haggard further depicts the savage storyteller embodying his tale in the novel of tribal warfare *Nada the Lily* (1892). While the tale is mostly narrated by an old African witchdoctor, it is enclosed by a white narrator who meets him and, thus, transcribes it. The explorer states of the old man: ‘he acted rather than told his story. Was the death of a warrior in question, he stabbed with his stick, showing how the blow fell and where; did the story grow sorrowful, he groaned, or even wept ... This man, ancient and withered, seemed to live again in the far past’ (3). To use Saussure’s terminology, primitive signification cannot occur through speech’s more arbitrary symbols but must be ‘motivated’ by icons of gestural resemblance (39-40). Haggard frames detached narration as an attainment of Western civilization. Whereas Westerners can detach utterances from bodies, reporting others’ words from a distance, primitive stories are inextricable from the bodies that lived them.

*Allan Quatermain* further opposes embodied African speech to European abstraction through the naming practices of Umslopogaas. In contrast to Quatermain’s technical nomenclature, he names weapons according to their effects on his sensorium: ‘a double four-bore belonging to Sir Henry – was the Thunderer; another, my 500 Express, which had a peculiarly sharp report, was “the little one who spoke like a whip”; the Winchester repeaters were “the women, who talked so fast that you could not tell one word from another”’ (43). While Quatermain’s language is weighted with knowledge of the guns’ mechanics, grouping them according to their components, Umslopogaas distinguishes only the sounds which strike his senses. His acts of naming recall Wedgwood’s claim that speech began in imitation, and Tylor’s comment that primitive metaphor did not know itself as metaphor. Umslopogaas not only names his axe, but also ‘seemed to look upon [it] as an intimate friend, and to which he would at times talk by the hour, going over all his old adventures with it ... he would consult “Inkosi-kaas” if in any dilemma’ (43-44). Unlike Europeans, who gender objects by mere convention (or rarely at all in the case of English) Haggard’s Zulu imagines his axe as a ‘woman’, explaining that it ‘was very evidently feminine, because of her womanly habit of prying very deep into things’. Rather than being the tools of his autonomous mind, metaphors shape the primitive

speaker's ideas and perceptions. He seems, rather, the tool of his metaphors, unable to think outside of them. In an underground cavern, Umslopogaas personifies echoes of the explorers' voices as invisible observers: 'They can copy what one says, but they don't seem to be able to talk on their own account, and they dare not show their faces'. When Quatermain explains that Umslopogaas hears merely an echo, the Zulu replies: 'I know an echo when I hear one. There was one lived opposite my kraal in Zululand, and the Intombis [maidens] used to talk with it. But if what we hear is a full-grown echo, mine at home can only have been a baby' (108). Primitive speech reduces all phenomena to anthropomorphic agents; rooted in the sensory body, it cannot help but self-project.

The image of the savage body naming the world according to its solipsistic sensations clashes in Haggard's tales with that of rigid conformity to tribal tradition and convention. Haggard's friend and collaborator Andrew Lang wrote in 1882, chastising philologists who claimed to describe 'primitive' language: 'the most backward races of which history and experience tell us anything have already complicated rules, stereotyped customs, developed language. ... Thus they are far from being "primitive"' (374). Savages represented not so much the primordial individual human as an early stage of society, frozen in time. Sayce, whom Haggard mentions in his autobiography, wrote in this vein: 'The words in which one period of society struggles to express its knowledge and meaning may become the misunderstood shams of a later generation, and the explanation of them which is demanded by the mind serves only to perpetuate the delusion and stereotype an imaginary world' (See Haggard 1926, 199; Sayce 1874, 301). The 'lost race' narrative, which Haggard helped to pioneer, presented the colonial other as an unchanging fossil of ancient society. Haggard's breakthrough novel *King Solomon's Mines* sees Quatermain and his companions discovering the antique Kukuana people, which centuries of despotic rule seem to have frozen in the past. They speak 'an old-fashioned form of the Zulu tongue, bearing about the same relationship to it that the English of Chaucer does to the English of the nineteenth century' (101). This linguistic stasis mirrors their societal stasis, having been ruled for many centuries by the seemingly immortal witch-woman Gagool. One tribe member tells the explorers how she replaced the former king with one loyal to her by interpreting a famine and birthmark upon the latter man as supernatural signs. Under this manipulation, 'the people being mad with hunger, and altogether bereft of reason and knowledge of the truth, cried out, "The king! The king!"'. Instead of voicing their individual, subjective sensations and associations, the Kukuanas are an undifferentiated

mass with one voice. They cry in unison as the new king seizes the throne: ‘*Twala is king!* Now we know that Twala is king!’ (111). This lack of personal individuation is even more pronounced when the explorers meet Twala in person before crowds of his people. ‘Eight thousand voices rang out the royal salute’, repeating the words of Gagool: “‘*It is the king*”, boomed out eight thousand throats, in answer. “‘*Be humble, O people, it is the king*”” (127). The king is as much embedded in the complex system of superstitious restraints as his subjects, explaining that a woman must be sacrificed to bring prosperity: “‘It is our custom, and the figures who sit in stone yonder’ (and he pointed towards the three distant peaks) “‘must have their due’”. He quotes by heart the nation’s dogma, illustrating their bondage to verbal convention: ‘Thus runs the prophecy of my people: “‘If the king offer not a sacrifice of a fair girl, on the day of the dance of maidens, to the Old Ones who sit and watch on the mountains, then shall he fall, and his house’”’ (161). Savage customs are perpetuated by deference to maxims handed down by tradition. Amidst this culture of mental-verbal conformity, the explorers can only recruit the help of Kukuana chiefs by exploiting their superstition, claiming to put out the sun during an eclipse. Isolated from other peoples, languages and customs, and ruled by a highly dogmatic regime, Haggard’s primitive lost race are slaves to verbal tradition. This enslavement is highlighted by the ability of Ignosi to see through such superstition, despite being Kukuana himself, the son of the old deposed king. His exile from Kukuanaland and exposure to other societies enables him to think outside of its dogmas. As he tells the explorers, ‘I am of the Zulu people, yet not of them’ (47). He thus helps the explorers to perform their supposed magic before the Kukuana, presenting a rifle as a ‘magic tube’ that kills ‘with a noise’ (104-5). Before the explorers install him as the new king at the end of the tale, he promises to abolish the witch-hunts. Primitiveness might arise less from subjective, bodily perceptions than the rigid interpretive conventions that regulate them.

In contrast to the progressive ideal of tongues and perspectives integrating, primitive speech could be imagined as purist, confined by narrow tradition.<sup>13</sup> An anonymous *Cornhill* article on ‘Primitive Language’ in 1863 claimed that ‘what creates and enriches language is intercourse with others – commercial intercourse more than any other’, rendering isolated tribes relics of tradition (198). Haggard uses such social isolation in *King*

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<sup>13</sup> Ferguson notes that Haggard’s *She* (1887) pits multilingual Europeans against ‘purity of speech’ in the ancient Arabic of the supernatural Ayesha (2006, 133). Errington claims that colonial linguistics revolved around ideas of ‘primevalness and purity’ (2001, 27).

*Solomon's Mines* to avoid positioning Ignosi on an equal level with his white comrades. Becoming king of Kukuanaaland, he vows to fight outsiders who come seeking its jewels. This rejection of commercial exchange coincides with his resurgent superstition, naming the area's mountains after his companions, which 'shall be "*hlonipa*" even as the names of dead kings, and he who speaks them shall die' (269). Returned to his native society, Ignosi seems to lose the perspective that he previously held over it, believing in the dogmas that he once exploited. Haggard's Zulus are usually monolingual, unlike his Europeans who move freely between languages. Umslopogaas in *Allan Quatermain* functions as a repository of his people's ancient, unchanging customs and worldview, ossified in Zulu language. When the adventurers discover a lost race of white Africans, the Zu-Vendi, all but Umslopogaas quickly master their speech. The narrator states, 'he did not wish to learn that "woman's talk"', and brandished his axe when approached by prospective teachers (159). When flying with enemies before battle, he exhaustively lists his ancestors, highlighting his conformity to tradition: 'I, Umslopogaas, of the tribe of the Maquilisini, of the people of Amazulu, a captain of the regiment of the Nkomabakosi: I, Umslopogaas, the son of Indabazimbi, the son of Arpi the son of Mosilikaatze, I of the royal blood of T'Chaka, I of the King's House, I the Ringed Man, I the Induna' (230). The past Zulu social structure in which these names and titles were meaningful has been swept away by white rule. Haggard wrote in his preface to *Nada the Lily* that, while earlier in the century 'the Zulus were still a nation; now that nation has been destroyed, and the chief aim of its white rulers is to root out the warlike spirit for which it was remarkable, and to replace it by a spirit of peaceful progress' (xi). As the last survivor of his warrior race, Umslopogaas exemplifies the 'discourse of extinction' that Brantlinger has traced through Victorian representations of natives who refused to adapt to Western rule. Brantlinger argues that Victorians often represented indigenous peoples as doomed to extinction by their own primitive customs, thus normalizing colonial violence and oppression (2003, 4). Umslopogaas's death in battle seems inevitable, since, in an era of capitalism, he is unable to deviate from warrior tradition, declaring: 'Man is born to kill. He who kills not when his blood is hot is a woman, and no man. The people who kill not are slaves'; 'Better is it to slay a man in fair fight that to suck out his heart's blood in buying and selling and usury after your white fashion' (1887, 47). Haggard's archaic English emphasizes the Zulu's mental fossilization, unable or unwilling to change. Associating Zulu honour with Elizabethan speech chimes with the nostalgic tendency of many writers in the period for

past speech, imagined as truer and more natural than present language (see Chapter Four). However, Haggard's romantic Zulus are unable to move between stages of social and mental development like whites. While the latter descend in battle to 'the savage portions of our nature', as Allan writes, the pure savage cannot think or act beyond this (13). This idea of savagery as mere, unchanging 'nature' conflicts, however, with the importance of custom and tradition suggested elsewhere by Haggard. Like Tylor, he seeks to avoid relativizing culture into plural traditions by treating it as a single line of development. Primitive speech thus emerges, contradictorily, as both natural and social, emanating from the individual body and repressing it.

### Unspeakable Savagery

Translating supposedly primitive speech was problematic, since it both subordinated native to Western language and suggested an equivalence between them. Colonial discourse operated on the assumption that all native customs and thought was understandable from the higher mental altitude of the colonizer. In 1908 the anthropologist J. G. Frazer declared: 'The savage is a human document, a record of man's efforts to raise himself above the level of the beast' (18). The customs and culture of primitive peoples could be used as a sort of Rosetta stone to chart a path of development from early society to Western civilization. There could be nothing mysterious about primitive language: it merely resembled European tongues at an earlier stage. Hence, anthropologists assumed that Western orthography could represent all non-Western speech, since primitive speech must differentiate fewer sounds.<sup>14</sup> Yet, colonialism also required an insurmountable gulf between primitive and civilized. 'Hard as it is for a Papuan to compass a modern abstraction,' wrote the philologist R. G. Latham in 1862, 'it is nearly as hard for a German or an Englishman to understand these rudimentary abstracts of our nonage' used by primitive speakers. 'The simple fact of his being able to write at all', Latham continued, 'removes him from that state of mind in which alone they approach distinctness' (738). Grasping the meaning of primitive signs was like attempting to recall the wild imaginings of one's infant years. Tylor claimed that

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<sup>14</sup> Isaac Pitman claimed that a modified version of his shorthand could serve as a universal alphabet, since 'the number of sounds that enter into the English language is so great, that the introduction of only a few additional phonographic signs will enable us to represent the true pronunciation of any language whatever' (67). Philologists including Bunsen and Müller held a conference in 1854 to discuss the creation of a universal alphabet for the same purpose (see Hunt 1869, 293-4).

Westerners could only access the ‘mythic idealism’ in which savage signs signified through the hallucinations of narcotics, fasting and dream-states (1971, I 277). Many writers also associated civilization with the moral repression of bodily urges, rendering such primitive feelings untranslatable. Joss Marsh describes the Victorian period as ‘a golden age of euphemism’ marked by a belief in the progressive expunging of vulgarity from print (215-18). It was the era of Bowledrized Shakespeare, when trousers became ‘indescribables’, whores ‘fallen women’ and madhouses ‘asylums’ (207). As Brantlinger notes, ‘one form of exaggeration that occurs in many missionary texts involves the trope of unspeakability’ (2011, 35). Such rhetoric presented Western moral superiority through its lack of equivalent terms for primitive practices, such as cannibalism or sexual promiscuity. Yet, refusing to acknowledge such things could easily be compared with the superstitious taboos of primitive language. Representations of primitive language, then, wavered between the describable and indescribable, between objective description and moral censorship.

These tensions erupt in Grant Allen’s 1890 novel of an English couple shipwrecked among Polynesian cannibals *The Great Taboo*. Allen was a prolific science writer and ardent follower of Darwin, Spencer and Frazer. This background, together with years spent as a teacher in Jamaica, fed his interests in race, mental and linguistic evolution (Ferguson 2006, 70-79). In an article ‘The Beginnings of Speech’ (1894) he echoed figures such as Sayce and Romanes, describing ‘primitive speech’ as grammatically and intellectually simple. He cites ‘negro English’ in which ‘tenses and persons are frequently lost. “Him gwine town” ... “Him eat”’ (62). Allen’s novel reflects this imagined mental-verbal inequality, as the English castaways Felix and Muriel struggle to translate savage language without collapsing the boundary between primitive and civilized. The plot revolves around them unraveling the islanders’ superstitions, which they are then able to manipulate. Discovering the logic of their ‘Great Taboo’ enables Felix to kill the chief Tu-Kila-Kila and usurp his status as a god. The Bouparis’ socio-linguistic stasis is demonstrated by the fact that a seventeenth-century English sailor previously decoded their customs and became chief. Reciting his tale to a parrot famed for its longevity, he bequeaths the tribe’s secrets to the Victorian castaways. An accomplished linguist, Felix is able to speak the islanders’ dialect, recognizing it as an offshoot of Fijian. This categorization of their verbal morphology precedes categorization of their internal ideas. The Bouparis are incapable of apprehending themselves from such an abstract perspective. When Felix asks one to define the word ‘Korong’, designating some superstition, the Boupari can only reply: ‘Why,

Korong is Korong ... You are “Korong” yourself”. The narrator comments that the islander was ‘so rigidly bound by his own narrow and insular set of ideas, that he couldn’t understand the difficulty Felix felt in throwing himself into them’ (57). Felix’s communication problems suggest that meaning is dependent upon social perspectives, rupturing the primitive/civilized binary. Perhaps Boupari meanings can only be understood in context. Allen the journalist wrote that ‘Savages always depend greatly on context and the pointing finger to bring out their words’, requiring civilized understanding to be conversely above contexts and perspectives (1894, 63; qtd. Ferguson 2006, 78). Allen maintains this distinction through Felix guessing the nature of ‘Korong’ by comparing Boupari customs with classical myths. After water is mysteriously poured over his and Muriel’s heads, he recalls reading that ‘it was a custom connected with Greek sacrifices. ... If the victim shook its head and knocked off the drops, that was a sign that it was fit for the sacrifice, and that the god accepted it’ (64-65). All the significations of Boupari customs are contained within European history and need only be matched to the corresponding words for translation. The narrator, similarly, treats the native mind as an open book to Western intelligence, describing the thought processes of Tu-Kila-Kila. The chief interprets a ship on the horizon as fire which he has sent: ‘Profoundly convinced of his own godhead, and abjectly superstitious as any of his own votaries, he absolutely accepted as a fact his own suggestion, that the light he saw was the reflection of that his men had kindled’ (22). The Bouparis’ ritual of sacrificing strangers to renew their crops is, as Allen admits in his preface, adapted from Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890), ‘whose main contention I have endeavoured incidentally to popularize in my present story’ (v). Allen’s Bouparis function as fictional demonstrations of Western anthropological theory; their language and customs are puzzles for the white castaways to solve rather than independent sign-systems to be understood on their own terms.

Allen’s representation of Boupari language as decipherable to Westerners is undercut by his efforts to differentiate savagery from civilization. Maintaining a distance between savage and civilized mind necessitated some loss of meaning in translation. Hence, when Tu-Kila-Kila is bitten by the island’s tabooed parrot, the narrator warns: ‘one must be a savage one’s self, and superstitions at that, fully to understand the awful significance of this deadly occurrence’. This caveat does not prevent the following explanation, however: ‘To draw blood from a god and, above all, to let that blood fall upon the dust of the ground, is the very worst luck – too awful for the human mind to contemplate’ (167). The rhetoric

of unspeakable savagery recurs regularly through the narrative. In the beginning Felix speculates to Muriel on their ship that ‘some unspeakable and unthinkable heathen orgy’ is occurring on the nearby island (6). A subsequent scene of human sacrifice confirms this, only for the narrator to cut it short: ‘the rest, a European hand shrinks from revealing. The orgy was too horrible even for description’ (24). Later, in a rage at one of his wives, Tu-Kila-Kila ‘flung her away from him to the other side of the hut with a fierce and untranslatable native imprecation’ (177). Allen’s narrator balances the two priorities of readability and difference: while civilized language can classify Boupari ideas and practices, it does so at a distance through general, abstract categories. Although some specific Boupari words are untranslatable, their functions can still be grouped under ‘superstitions’ or ‘imprecations’. When one Boupari observes that Felix (the supposed god of water) fell from the sky yesterday, ‘Felix wrung his hands in positive despair. It was clear indeed that to the minds of the natives there was no distinguishing personally between himself and Muriel and the rain or the cyclone’ (112). Westerners can classify primitive thought-processes but not empathize with them.

Tylorian classification could destabilize the primitive/civilized binary, however, revealing superstitious survivals in Western language. Tylor’s theory of survivals allowed for pockets of primitiveness to endure within wider structures of advancement. ‘Even the modern civilized world has but half learnt this lesson’, he wrote, ‘and an unprejudiced survey may lead us to judge how many of our ideas and customs exist rather by being old than by being good’ (1871, I 142). Allen similarly suggested that primitive, instinctive vocalizations continued to underlie civilized speech, such as when a diner exclaims, ‘Wah, wah, wah, wah!’ to prevent sugar being put in his tea. The continuing use of such instinctive noise and onomatopoeia, he wrote, showed that ‘there never is a moment when human speech does not refresh and renew itself from these primitive sources’ (1894, 65). In *The British Barbarians* (1896) Allen would satirize Victorian conventions of respectability through a timetraveller from the future examining such ‘taboos’. Similar barbs at religion, monarchy and sexual repression appear in *The Great Taboo*. The anthropological narrator states that Tu-Kila-Kila ‘accepted his own superiority as implicitly as our European nobles and rulers accept theirs’ (23). The Bouparis’ ritual signs mirror those of European Christianity since both reflect the same stage of superstitious symbolism. During ceremonies, the Bouparis make ‘a rapid movement on their breasts with their fingers which reminded Muriel at once of the sign of the cross in Catholic countries’ (46). Allen also

satirizes English prudery, with Muriel's aunt expressing consternation, after the couple's return, that they lived together for so long without being married. The narrator remarks: 'Taboos, after all, are much the same in England as in Boupari' (280). Such point-scoring maintains the idea of civilization as a progressive clearing away of old superstitions by self-aware, scientific reason. Yet, language is not always a reliable test of this progress, as Allen suggests through the Frenchman Peyron also stranded upon the island. Like the Bouparis, he is monolingual, and naively divides the world 'into Paris and the Provinces' (181). His delight at being able to converse in French with Felix and Muriel suggests that civilized language can be fetishized, worshipping sound regardless of sense. He effuses: 'figure to yourself the joy and surprise with which ... I hear again the sound, the beautiful sound of that charming French language. My emotion, believe me, was too profound for words' (181). Conversely, he interprets the English sailor's record, repeated by the parrot, as an extinct primitive language: 'It is a much more guttural and unpleasant tongue than any of the soft dialects now spoken in Polynesia. It belonged, I am convinced, to that yet earlier and more savage race which the Polynesians must have displaced' (185). The later discovery that this primeval babble is English highlights the danger of treating speech as intrinsically civilized or primitive.

The primitive/civilized binary was further threatened by so-called savages learning European speech. Did language reflect the fixed nature of its speakers or merely the structure of their society? Buckle and Tylor implied the latter, so that a primitive speaker transplanted into civilization would absorb its language and ideas, and vice-versa.<sup>15</sup> Allen's narrative broaches this issue through the young Boupari girl Mali learning English as a servant in Queensland, before returning to the tribe. While Muriel is unable to speak Boupari, Mali converses with her in English, potentially upsetting the balance of inherent Western superiority. Allen probed this problem more directly in his earlier tale 'The Reverend John Creedy' (1883), depicting an Oxford-educated African who becomes a missionary. Allen's time teaching in Jamaica heightened his awareness of the unreliability of language as a test of race. In one essay, he recalled instructing a class that through learning a man's name, such as John Smith, they might gauge his Anglo-Saxon heritage, only for one student so-named to laugh, 'for *this* John Smith was a pure-blooded negro'

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<sup>15</sup> 'The child born in a civilised land', Buckle wrote, 'is not likely, as such, to be superior to one born among barbarians' (I 178). Tylor agreed that humans could be treated as 'homogenous in nature', their differences arising from 'knowledge, religion, art, custom' (1871, I 5-6).

(1897, 461). Allen's tale extends this disjunction between language and race, depicting an African whose 'voice was of the ordinary Oxford type, open, pleasant, and refined, with a certain easy-going air of natural gentility, hardly marred by just the faintest tinge of the thick negro blur in the broad vowels' (1899, 13). Creedy also proves himself an able orator, speaking to his English audience 'fervently, eloquently, and with much power of manner about the necessity for a Gold Coast Mission ... John Creedy had been noted as one of the readiest and most fluent talkers at the Oxford Union debates' (15). Could the gulf between primitive and civilized language consist only in the loose network of social influences brought to bear upon individual speakers?

Some commentators avoided this implication through the Lockean division of language into external sounds and internal sense. The anthropologist James Hunt claimed that the language-learning of Africans merely testified to their memory, 'one of the lowest mental powers' (1864, 18). Spencer similarly denigrated language-learning as an inferior knowledge to science. While scientific knowledge encouraged the mind to challenge fixed views of reality, language-learning caused pupils 'to accept without inquiry whatever is established' (1911, 40). An unaccomplished monoglot, he even tried to present his failure in languages as a sign of intellectual strength. His *Autobiography* claimed that, rejecting 'everything purely dogmatic', he naturally resisted the 'rote-learning' of grammars (I 108-9). Ferguson notes that this dismissal of language-learning as mere imitation, 'put non-whites in an archetypal damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't position', so that both speaking and not speaking Western language were signs of primitiveness (2006, 82). However, the idea of primitive imitation, in which words only signified through contextual association, raised the troubling possibility that all meaning functioned in this way. Progressives guarded against such possibilities by racializing meaning, suggesting that speakers were physically predisposed towards certain ideas. In 1874 Pitt-Rivers claimed that 'the propagation of new ideas may be said to correspond to the propagation of species'. Ideas arose from 'the correlation of previously existing ideas' as new individuals did from the breeding of previously existing individuals. As animals diverged into separate species, so traditions of thought grew apart, until 'two nations in very different stages of civilisation may be brought side by side, as in the case of many of our colonies, but there can be no amalgamation between them' (18). Non-Westerners might imitate the sounds of civilized speech, but the thoughts attached to these sounds lack the generations of use and refinement inscribed upon Western bodies. Sayce similarly wrote: 'As words are carried down the

stream of time they change in both outward form and inward meaning, and this change is in harmony with the physiological and psychological peculiarities of the particular people that use them' (1880, I 347). Primitive and civilized conceptions could be imagined as somehow embedded in the hereditary brain.

*The Great Taboo* uses this strategy to separate native from acquired European speech. The Bouparis imitate European language as sound without meaning. Felix's guard repeats verbatim the French song of Peyron, only to then describe it as mere 'chatter, chatter, chatter, like the parrots in a tree; tirra, tirra, tirra; tarra, tarra, tarra; la, la, la; lo, lo, lo'. The guard's speech 'with a very good Parisian accent' is sound without sense, produced by 'that wonderful power of accurate mimicry which is so strong in all natural human beings' (92). Mali's broken English is not mere sound imitation, but it fails to bridge the mental gulf between savagery and civilization. Her inability to correctly conjugate verbs and modify nouns in the language mirrors her inability to grasp its mental hinterland, which contradicts Boupari superstition. Returned to Boupari from Queensland, she has reverted to the old superstitions, telling Muriel: 'no god in Queensland. ... Methodist god in sky, him only god that live in Queensland. But no use worship Methodist god over here in Boupari. ... All god here make out of man. Live in man. Korong! What for you say a man can't be a god! You god yourself!' (62). Learning the language of civilization has failed to give Mali any higher perspective over her native one. Her English words signify only through the conventional associations of her former life as a servant. The narrator comments, 'it never for a moment occurred to her simple mind to doubt the omnipotence of Tu-Kila-Kila in his island realm any more than she had doubted the omnipotence of the white man and his local religion in their proper place (as she thought it) in Queensland' (153). Although using the English term *god*, the mental conception she attaches to it is rooted in Boupari superstition, positioning Tu-Kila-Kila in the sky instead of a human body. While primitive speakers can learn the habitual uses of English, their minds are unprepared to grasp its metaphysical abstractions.

'The Reverend John Creedy' is more conflicted on the matter of primitive imitation and hereditary semantics. Upon returning as a missionary to his African homeland, Creedy reverts to its savage practices. Allen indicates the hereditary component in such primitiveness through Creedy's seemingly half-organic memory of Fantee language. Creedy 'noticed rather uneasily that every phrase and word, down to the very heathen charms and prayers of his infancy, came back to him now with startling vividness and

without an effort' (20-1). He later tears up his vestments to join a native dance as a 'reeling, shrieking black savage', showing that 'instinct had gained the day over civilisation' (24). These events seem to confirm the racial determinism bluntly expressed by the uncle of Creedy's fiancé Ethel: 'a nigger's a nigger anywhere, but he's a sight less of a nigger in England than out yonder in Africa. Take him to England, and you make a gentleman of him: send him home again, and the nigger comes out at once in spite of you' (11-12). However, Creedy's language destabilizes this simple division between true racial essence and acquired social manners. English speech and the civilized ideas it encodes compete in Creedy with his hereditary primitiveness, collapsing the boundaries between natural inner and acquired outer self. Horrified at the sight of him dancing semi-naked, Ethel collapses and sickens. Yet, Creedy is able to fool his dying wife with soothing English words into thinking that his reversion was a mere dream: 'For civilization with John Creedy was really at bottom far more than a mere veneer; though the savage instinct might break out with him now and again, such outbursts no more affected his adult and acquired nature than a single bump supper or wine party at college affects the nature of many a gentle-minded English lad' (27-8). His vow at the end of the tale never to speak English again is thus as much an act of suppression as resignation to his 'true' nature. The narrator comments, 'The truest John Creedy of all was the gentle, tender, English clergyman' (29). This blurring of boundaries between native and acquired tongue is reinforced when the disgraced Creedy deceives missionaries into thinking him an ordinary native, but then accidentally speaks to them in English. The narrator's explanation that 'he forgot himself for a moment' suggests that Creedy's Englishness, for all his reversion, has taken root in his unconscious psyche (26-27). It is not his performance of civilized whiteness which falters but that of his 'natural' Fantee identity. Creedy's decision to 'go to my own people' at the end is followed by the claim that travellers may now see him 'among a crowd of dilapidated negroes who lie basking in the soft dust' (30). The vagueness of Allen's final image, losing Creedy in a crowd, betrays the impossibility of presenting him as simply another heathen savage. Creedy may not be able to fully sustain his civilized self in heathen Africa but, like Clem returning to Wessex in Hardy's *Return of the Native* (1878), he can no longer be fully at home there either. In both his language-switching and self-imposed silence, 'acquired nature' undermines the idea of a primitive essence fixed in biology.

Allen wrote a preface to the tale, claiming that it illustrated 'the intensely impressionable African mind', capable of 'fall[ing] from the pinnacle of civilization to the

nethermost abysses of savagery' (1884, iv). However, his African parson also serves as a surrogate to the anxiety that the language and values of civilization might be equally fragile among Westerners, mere grafts upon primitive instinct. Archaeological finds from the mid-century onwards had vastly expanded human history, rendering the Indo-European language family a very brief, recent epoch (Burrow 1867, 190). Such civilized language might, then, have little more of a foothold in European blood than it did African. The narrator comments of Creedy's first sermon in England: 'Perhaps there was really nothing very original or striking in what he said, but his way of saying it was impressive and vigorous. The negro, like many other lower races, has the faculty of speech largely developed' (15). Darwin had argued that powers of oratory descended from the instinctive tones and rhythms of mating-songs, writing: 'the impassioned orator, bard, or musician, when with his varied tones and cadences he excites the strongest emotions in his hearers, little suspects that he uses the same means by which his half-human ancestors long ago aroused each other's ardent passions, during their courtship and rivalry' (1871, II 337). Chapter Five explores ideas of speech as a dialogue between instinct and convention in fiction of the period. Conversely, Allen presents instinctive signification as a variable tendency that increasingly dominates among primitive speakers. The sympathy felt by Creedy's future wife Ethel and her aunt to his sermon is equally double-edged, evoking Allen's belief that female readers valued bodily sensation over intellect. In 1892 Allen stated in an interview that authors such as himself did not even try to 'instruct', 'improve' or 'elevate' in their fiction, since 'the readers of fiction are mostly women'. Such readers seek not 'ideas', he claimed, but 'a good, rousing, rattling, sensational story' (G. Richards 267; qtd. Ferguson 2006, 72). Similarly, Creedy's sermon rouses Ethel and her aunt emotionally rather than intellectually: 'Aunt Emily and Ethel forgot his black hands, stretched out open-palmed towards the people, and felt only their hearts stirred within them by the eloquence and enthusiasm of that appealing gesture' (15). Yet, bringing them together as a primitive group threatens Allen's racial boundaries, which depend on his perception of miscegenation as unnatural. Ethel recoils instinctively when Creedy proposes to her: 'John Creedy saw the shadow on her face, the unintentional dilatation of her delicate nostrils, the faint puckering at the corner of her lips, and knew with a negro's quick instinct of face-reading what it all meant' (16). This revulsion contradicts her earlier attraction to him, though, which was also instinctive, sparked by his rousing oratory. Allen now suggests that Ethel's attraction is mediated by intellect, stating that her vicar and his wife

‘had argued themselves out of those wholesome race instincts ... and they were eager to argue Ethel out of them too’. The tale contradicts itself in opposing primitive instinct to civilized culture, suggesting that white civilization relies as much upon instinct as intellect. Ethel’s uncle, who opposes miscegenation, appeals to Ethel’s instinctive revulsion, stating: ‘our instincts wasn’t put in our hearts for nothing. They’re meant to be a guide and a light to us in these dark questions’ (17). Allen’s concept of linear development from primitive instinct to scientific rationality breaks down, with instinct underlying civilization no less than savagery. In its contradictions, Allen’s tale highlights the fear that instinctive signs are all too speakable for Europeans.

### Lost Origin or Missing Link?

One means of protecting civilized speech from equivalence with the primitive was to hypothesize forms of primordial speech before traditions or conventions had emerged. Investigators such as Darwin, Romanes and R. L. Garner inferred the nature of early speech through observation of infants, animals and the deaf. Avoiding the problem of preceding sociolinguistic tradition, imaginary proto-speech could be located mainly or wholly in bodily instincts. In tandem with these theoretical speculations, the new genre of prehistoric fiction sought to give a voice to the archaeological records. As Darwin had imagined hypothetical species to fill the gaps in the fossil record, such fiction imagined hypothetical speech to trace a linear progression from animal noises to civilized language. Depicting primitive speech as on the border between bodily automatism and conscious symbolism framed modern language as contrastingly controlled and self-aware. By locating instinctive signs in the primordial past, writers could downplay their influence in the present. Introducing one of the first examples of this genre *The Pre-Historic World* (1876), Élie Berthet wrote: ‘We have striven to reconstruct, to revive, this unknown world ... we shall be glad to have been the literary pioneer who first penetrated regions so long unknown’ (4). Yet, the further back in time that writers traced the history of speech and thought, the more their origins evaporated, undermining the sense of progressive purpose. Radick notes that Victorian debates about language origins mirrored earlier geological ones, divided between catastrophism and uniformitarianism (2007, 18-19). The claim that linguistic capacity had emerged suddenly and fully-formed clashed with the concept of gradual evolution from

animal communication. Tracing an instinctive heritage in speech threatened to expose unstable, primitive foundations, undermining the objectivity of modern discourse.

Reconstructions of verbal prehistory rested on a Lamarckian teleology in which the development of the individual speaker recapitulated that of the language faculty. Schleicher described primitive words as ‘the cells of speech, not yet containing any particular organs for the functions of nouns, verbs etc, and in which these functions of grammatical relations are no more separated yet than respiration or digestion are in the one-celled organisms, or in the ovary of the higher living beings’ (1983, 53-54). Sayce similarly wrote that words traced back to their oldest states presented ‘so generalized a type as to include, each within itself, all the functions that afterwards severally devolve upon different parts of speech. Like those animalcules which are at the same time but single cells and entire organisms, these are at the same time single words and independent sentences’ (1880, I 313-4). Sally Shuttleworth notes that late-Victorian psychologists habitually approached the mind of the child as a survival of the evolutionary past (246). In this way, an 1878 article by Darwin tracked the verbal development of his young son, beginning in purely instinctive cries of emotion. Yet, Darwin noted, ‘After a time the sound differs according to the cause, such as hunger or pain’. ‘Instinctive cries’ became ‘modified in part unconsciously, and in part, as I believe, voluntarily as a means of communication, by the unconscious expression of the features, – by gestures and in a marked manner by different intonations’. He spontaneously invented ‘words of a general nature’, such as ‘*Mm*’, meaning food, ‘in a demonstrative manner or as a verb, implying “Give me food”’ (293). In the same year, Hippolyte Taine argued that the infant’s verbal instinct was so inventive ‘several vocabularies may succeed one another in its mind. ... Many meanings may be given in succession to the same word’ (258). Such examples appeared to substantiate progressive theory, revealing primordial, instinctive voices, untamed by social tradition. The American writer and polymath Francis Lieber similarly claimed that echoes of primitive speech could be heard in the vocal sounds of Laura Bridgman, the first blind-deaf child in the Anglophone world to gain an education. While learning to communicate through tactile signs, Laura would often ‘indulge herself in a surfeit of sounds’, which Lieber named ‘symphenomena’, sympathetic bodily reflexes of emotion. Such symphenomena represented a universal proto-language, he claimed, of ‘grief, pain, affection, disgust, contempt, despair, pity, fear’ (460-61). By positioning instinctive signs in a prehistoric epoch, these commentators protected their modern language as the tool of self-conscious minds abstracted from biological automatism.

Such a teleological tendency is discernible in Wells's tale 'A Story of the Stone Age' (1897). Wells believed that humans were no different biologically from their cave-dwelling ancestors. Their subsequent evolution, he claimed, had been 'artificial', through the accumulation of customs and traditions, enabling new mental and behavioural possibilities (see Chapter Two). In an article of the same year 'Morals and Civilisation' Wells argued that the transition from individual to social organism involved the emergence of 'habit, the trick of imitation' (1975, 223). C. L. Morgan, cited in Wells's article, had written that speech was the main mechanism of such habit, arising from 'tradition' and 'social environment' (182-83). Wells's tale imagines the beginning of this development, with habitual, group associations replacing individual, instinctive vocalizations. The children of 50,000 years ago are introduced frolicking in the water: "“Boloo!” they cried. “Baayah. Boloo!” ... Stark-naked vivid little gipsies active as monkeys and as full of chatter, though a little wanting in words' (63). Yet, through group interaction, these sounds assume a regularity if not articulacy, mediating communal experience. This is illustrated in a moment of affection between the man Ugh-lomi and his lover Eudena after he defends them from a bear-attack:

He looked at her steadfastly for a moment, and then suddenly he laughed.

‘Waugh!’ he said exultantly.

‘Waugh!’ said she – a simple but expressive conversation. (99-100)

The transition from instinct to convention is further indicated by an old woman who unites the tribe under her hypnotic orations; although she 'had more words than any in the tribe ... Sometimes she screamed and moaned incoherently, and sometimes the shape of her guttural cries was the mere phantom of thoughts' (134). Translating her utterances, the narrator comments: 'Her cries were strange sounds, flitting to and fro on the borderland of speech, but this was the sense they carried' (131). Wells's friend Edward Clodd had written two years earlier that primitive man's conceptions had been 'a tangle of confusion, contradiction, and bewilderment . . . he dimly noted the differences, which, in the long run, lead the mind to comparisons, and thereby lay the foundation of knowledge – of the relation between things which we will call cause and effect' (66; qtd. R. Pearson 63). These relations remain untangled among Wells's primitive speakers, who designate both fire and sunlight as 'Brother Fire', and cannot differentiate things from their names. As the embers

of their fire fade, Ugh-lomi and Eudena call desperately for 'Brother Fire' as though the word will re-ignite them (96). The narrator's reported or, rather, approximated speech lends clarity to the speakers' intentions which the original utterances lack. When Eudena wishes to warn Ugh-lomi of their approaching enemies, the habitual associations of their speech lack the intricacy to convey this abstraction. She can only express the idea by performing it in her own immediately present body:

She cried: 'Ugh-lomi, the tribe comes!'

Ugh-lomi sat staring in stupid astonishment at her ... She sought among her feeble store of words to explain. ... She ... caught up the new club with the lion's teeth, and put it into Ugh-lomi's hand, and ran three yards and picked up the first axe.

'Ah!' said Ugh-lomi, waving the new club, and suddenly he perceived the occasion. (155-6)

Wells's translation of this primordial speech both distances it from and positions it in a teleological path towards modern English. The incoherent noises and mental associations of his cave people are destined to stabilize and accumulate to replace superstition with nineteenth-century Western knowledge and designations.

Wells's teleology is complicated, however, by Darwin's model of evolution, which, as the last chapter outlined, pluralized and even relativized development, questioning notions of progress. Organisms adapted to environmental niches with no overriding plan or definite, individual origins. Communication need not develop in one direction, as Wells suggested in his fictions of telepathic, insect-like extraterrestrials (see Chapter Two). Where, then, was 'the borderland of speech' in which his tale imagined the genesis of humanity? Patrick Parrinder argues that 'A Story of the Stone Age' reflects uncertainties in the 1890s about the heritage of humans and their Neanderthal cousins, using the terms 'Stone Age' and 'Paleolithic' interchangeably (86). Doing so avoided relativizing modern humans as one subspecies among many, suggesting instead a linear evolution, ending in modern civilization. Two decades later in his article 'The Grisly Folk' (1921), Wells would concede that many of the bones and tools found by anthropologists were probably made by 'not our ancestors, but a strange and vanished animal, like us, akin to us, but different from us'. The older Wells still privileged modern humans as the sole users of language, however,

stating inaccurately of the Neanderthal: 'Probably he did not talk at all' (1948, 679; see De Paolo 418). Wells's hero Huxley had hailed speech as the great division between humans and other animals, a faculty which seemed to have sprung into being fully formed (1863, 122). However, Darwin challenged such catastrophism, arguing that vocal signals and thought had catalyzed each other into increasingly elaborate forms. 'As monkeys certainly understand much that is said to them by man', wrote Darwin, 'and as in a state of nature they utter signal-cries of danger to their fellows, it does not appear altogether incredible, that some unusually wise ape-like animal should have thought of imitating the growl of a beast of prey, so as to indicate to his fellow monkeys the nature of the expected danger'. As increased use strengthened the vocal organs, they 'would have reacted on the mind by enabling and encouraging it to carry on long trains of thought' (1871, I 57). In Darwin's view, there had never been a cultural point of origin when thought and symbolism suddenly appeared and biological evolution abruptly ceased. Animals were not simply instinctive, he claimed, but capable of some reasoning. Lubbock extended this point, arguing that animals learned conventional signs besides their instinctive ones, through contextual association. He described teaching a dog to fetch different paper cards to express its wants, such as "bone", "water", "out", "pet me", thus demonstrating its capacity to associate ideas (1884, 547). Conversely, in human communication, Romanes stated, instinct and convention shaded into each other 'by gradations', becoming indistinguishable (102). These arguments threatened the narrative of linear, mental-verbal progress, obliterating a definite starting-point and compromising modern, civilized communication with enduring instincts.

Wells's tale engages with these problems obliquely through the incongruous presence of speaking animals. Departing from the realistic reconstruction of Stone Age society through anthropological sources, Wells's beasts converse with each other like characters in a fairy-tale. As Wells translates the semi-articulate speech of the humans, he translates the impulses and conceptions behind animal noises. When a grizzly bear chases the humans, 'he made a continuous growling grumble. "Men in my very lair! Fighting and blood. At the very mouth of my lair. Men, men, men. Fighting and blood"' (69). Later, after a scuffle with Ugh-lomi, the bear struggles to comprehend the man's axe, musing: 'He has a sort of claw – a long claw that he seemed to have first on one paw and then on the other. Just one claw' (104). He also attempts to classify humans as a cross between 'monkey and young pig', although their fire, 'the red thing that jumps' remains beyond him (90). In verbalizing these mental processes, Wells collapses the categorical division between mute,

instinctive beasts and thinking, symbolizing humans. His talking bear illustrates Darwin's claim that 'animals may constantly be seen to pause, deliberate, and resolve' (1871, I 46). Their ideas are shaped to an extent by habit and tradition like those of humans. Even C. L. Morgan, who was doubtful of much supposed animal cognition, admitted that instinct and habit were often difficult to distinguish. For example, did birds feign wounds out of sheer organic impulse or imitation of the flock? (325-26). Wells suggests the influence of incipient habit and tradition upon the bear through his interactions with a younger mate. He is, the narrator states, 'a bear of experience' who builds classifications upon the phenomena encountered during his long life (104). He passes on some of this experience to his mate, telling her of the simian-swines he encountered. In this way, the bears seem to ventriloquize the intermediate verbal-mental forms between apes and humans that Wells left out of his tale. The male tells the female of a 'bright thing' among the humans 'like that glare that comes in the sky in daytime – only it jumps about' (105). While the humans' term for heat and light, 'brother fire' lacks the abstraction and differentiation of modern English, the bear's conceptions are even vaguer. The search for original, primitive speech becomes lost in a continuum between human and animal communication. Wells's ideas on this matter share common ground with the American naturalist Richard Garner, who claimed to have isolated a vocabulary of simian proto-words by observing monkeys.<sup>16</sup> He recorded and replayed their vocalizations on a phonograph, concluding that the sounds had distinct meanings, such as warning of threats. In translating nature, Wells's omniscient narrator, like Garner, suggests that all life might be understood as layers upon layers of sign systems. In his *Text-Book of Biology* (1893), written as a young teacher, Wells mused that 'Zoology is, indeed, a philosophy and a literature to those who can read its symbols' (I 131). Similarly, in his tale instinct becomes another discourse, which the narrator translates. When Ugh-lomi mounts a wild horse, "'Hold tight"', said Mother Instinct, and he did' (117). Instead of revealing an origin of language, evolution dissolves it into infinite systems of nature.

The American journalist Stanley Waterloo similarly vacillated between linguistic catastrophism and uniformitarianism in *The Story of Ab: A Tale of the Time of the Caveman* (1897). Unlike Wells's primitive cave people, Waterloo presented them as an intermediate species between modern humans and their ape ancestors, with their speech developing in

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<sup>16</sup> Mclean suggests that Wells may have read Garner's articles in *The New Review*, which later published *The Time Machine* (2008, 26). For an overview of Garner's work, see Radick 2007, 84-158.

tandem with their bodies. His introduction to the tale posits that ‘the mysterious gap’ of ‘Paleolithic from Neolithic man never really existed. No convulsion of nature, no new race of human beings is needed to explain ... the relatively swift changes from one form of primitive life to another more advanced’. The development of tools and social organization merely reflected ongoing ‘growth, experiment, adaptation, discovery’ (ix-x). The mother of the hero Ab exemplifies this intermediacy, with strips of hair covering her shoulders and back, while ‘her thumb was nearly as long as her fingers’ (13). Waterloo’s depiction of the language of these proto-people wavers, though, between singular, human origins and missing links with animal communication. One of the first utterances in the narrative evokes Darwin’s claims of speech emerging from song as Ab’s mother emits ‘a strange call, a quavering minor wail, but something to be heard at a great distance. ... The call was answered instantly and the answering cry was repeated as she called again, the sound of the reply approaching near and nearer all the time’. As Ab’s father comes, the exchange becomes ‘a conversation, an odd, clucking, penetrating speech in the shortest of sentences’ (17). Yet, even as speech descends into instinctive noise, the modern, anthropologist-narrator seeks definite, describable origins for words. Hence, ‘The name of Ab’s father was One-Ear, the sequence of an incident occurring when he was very young, an accidental and too intimate acquaintance with a species of wildcat. ... The name of Ab’s mother was Red-Spot, and she had been so called because of a not unsightly but conspicuous birthmark’ (29). Waterloo suggests that some primitive words emerged through conventional associations gradually ascribed to instinctive sounds and imitations. While the speakers of the time did not consciously create such words, then, modern civilization could deduce their origins. For example, Ab’s name

was merely a convenient adaptation by his parents of a childish expression of his own, a labial attempt to say something. His mother had mimicked his babyish prattlings, the father had laughed over the mimicry, and, almost unconsciously, they referred to their baby afterward as ‘Ab’ until it grew into a name which should be his for life. There was no formal early naming of a child in those days; the name eventually made itself, and that was all there was to it. (30)

The narrator suggests that some such primitive associations might even survive in modern speech. Ab's friend Oak receives his name from the tree on which his parents hang his cradle, prompting the narrator to comment: "Rock-a-by-baby upon the tree-top" was often a reality in the time of the cave men' (31). Seeking to rationalize the origins of words, Waterloo resists the looming sense of subjective meaning in language, built upon immediate sensations. As in Wells, the omniscient narrator embodies a fantasy of objective, scientific language above perspectives. Yet, tracing word-origins on this small scale only distracts from the wider lack of origins for language as a capacity. The narrator-anthropologist is unable to completely historicize and, thus, control his language as it merges into an infinity of precursors.

Jack London's novella *Before Adam* (1906-7) seeks the origins of speech still further back in time and finds them correspondingly more elusive. London was an avid reader of Darwin and Spencer, and his fiction often struggled to accommodate their different views (Berkove 245-47). As Chapter Two showed, Spencer believed that all evolution tended towards univocal perfection, while Darwin was more circumspect, stressing the randomness of mutation and contingency of adaptation. London's tale sometimes suggests a Spencerian view of verbal evolution, opposing primitive noise and confusion to civilized discrimination and abstraction. The narrator locates his tale in 'the Mid-Pleistocene' when 'man, as we to-day know him, did not exist. It was in the period of his becoming' (21). Events in the narrative problematize this teleology, however, revealing multiple strands of human ancestry in which the languages of ideas and sympathy do not always advance in tandem. Unlike Spencer, Darwin had argued that the moral senses were animal instincts rather than products of conscious, civilized abstraction. Gestures, expressions and vocal sounds were the medium of this instinct, as Darwin wrote in *Descent*: 'Our cries of pain, fear, surprise, anger, together with their appropriate actions, and the murmur of a mother to her beloved child are more expressive than any words' (I 54). Such an argument undermined the binary between primitive and civilized speech, linking ethical advancement back to primordial instinct. Although London's tale does not abandon the idea of language progressing technically, it challenges simplistic primitive/civilized binaries. London suggests that some instinctive signs might even form part of the glue on which civilization was built.

London's narrator is a modern American who, through a freak of heredity, re-lives the life of his pre-human ancestor 'Big-Tooth' during his dreams. This plot device forms

the lynchpin of London's treatment of the opposition between primitive and civilized language, as the modern speaker builds a coherent narrative from the confused conceptions of his ancestor. Big-Tooth and his fellows are incapable of such narration, as the narrator comments, positioning Big-Tooth as his 'other self': 'if my mother knew my father's end, she never told me. For that matter I doubt if she had a vocabulary adequate to convey such information' (37). While the modern speaker is 'both actor and spectator', thinking that he thinks and knowing that he knows, as Romanes put it, the primitive is embodied action without reflection. The narrator remarks: 'It is I, the modern, who look back across the centuries and weigh and analyze the emotions and motives of Big-Tooth, my other self. He did not bother to weigh and analyze. He was simplicity itself. He just lived events' (129-30). This lack of self-knowledge is highlighted by the absence of personal names among Big-Tooth's kind: 'we bore no names in those days; were not known by any name. For the sake of convenience I have myself given names to the various Folk I was more closely in contact with' (41). Such interventions by the narrator frame modern Western language as a teleological development from his ancestor's grunts. London probably knew of Garner, since the latter's theory of simian speech was widely popularized in American print, and both authors had published pieces months apart in the *Windsor Magazine* in 1904.<sup>17</sup> Garner claimed to have distinguished eight or nine distinct 'monophones' used by monkeys to express vague conceptions, further differentiated by vocal tones (1996, 325-26). London's protohominids communicate at a stage or so beyond this, with 'a vocabulary of thirty or forty sounds', also modified by tones. Of Big-Tooth's utterances, the narrator comments: 'I call them SOUNDS, rather than WORDS, because sounds they were primarily. They had no fixed values, to be altered by adjectives and adverbs. These latter were tools of speech not yet invented. ... We had no conjugation. One judged the tense by the context' (38). London stresses the teleology of speech development by depicting communication among Big-Tooth and his companions as repeated false-starts, failing to reach the abstraction of his descendants. They cannot pass on knowledge or vicarious experiences to each other by speech alone, relying on gestural 'pantomime'. Hence, when Big-Tooth leaves the trees to join a horde of cave-dwellers, one 'gave me to understand that in that direction was some horrible danger, but just what the horrible danger was his paucity of language would not permit him to say' (74). Big-Tooth must himself encounter the aggressive 'Fire People'

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<sup>17</sup> See London's 'The Leopard Man's Story' and Garner's 'Monkey Prosperity' (both 1904).

dwelling in this area before he can understand. When a violent 'atavism' among their band, Red-Eye, kills one of them and steals his mate, the socialist-sympathizing London suggests that their collective outrage prefigures later human cooperation. Yet, they fail to unite against Red-Eye 'because we lacked a vocabulary. We were vaguely thinking thoughts for which there were no thought-symbols. These thought-symbols were yet to be slowly and painfully invented. We tried to freight sound with the vague thoughts that flitted like shadows through our consciousness' (169-70). As in Waterloo's tale, London frames such vocalizations as both the seeds of later, civilized, speech and fundamentally remote from it. He links primitive and civilized speech along a continuum but also maintains a hiatus between them to protect the privileged position of the latter.

Such teleology is complicated, however, by the presence of multiple protohominid races, of which Big-Tooth's are not the most technically advanced. The aforementioned Fire People appear closer to modern humans, walking completely upright and clothing themselves in animal skins, while Big-Tooth's 'Folk' are naked and bent forward. The Fire People have developed archery and catamarans, and are able to plan military campaigns through their more copious and abstracted speech. The narrator states that they 'had speech that enabled them more effectively to reason, and in addition they understood cooperation' (185). The Fire People demonstrate these abilities when they attack the Folk's caves with fire and arrows, a 'wizened old hunter directing it all. They obeyed him, and went here and there at his commands. Some of them went into the forest and returned with loads of dry wood, leaves, and grass'. Schleicher had speculated 'that not all organisms that found themselves on the way to becoming human have attained to the evolution of language ... [b]ut succumbed to retrogression and ... gradual extinction' (1983, 82). London's Folk seem to demonstrate this, exterminated along with their nascent speech. Yet, London's narrative challenges such simple, linear progression, locating many germinal values of human civilization among the simpler, gentler Folk. With all their intelligence and verbal abstraction, the Fire People are not morally superior, as the narrator comments, they were 'carnivorous, with claws and fangs a hundred feet long, the most terrible of all the hunting animals that ranged the primeval world' (185). The narrator admits that his ancestor's band lacked the Fire People's practical 'steadfastness of purpose', yet 'in the realm of the emotions, we were capable of long-cherished purpose' (89). This purpose is evidenced by the emergence of monogamous couples in their society and acts of companionship and self-sacrifice. When the Fire People hunt Big-Tooth and his friend Lop-Ear, the latter stays with

his traumatized companion, despite wishing to flee. The narrator interprets this act 'as a foreshadowing of the altruism and comradeship that have helped make man the mightiest of the animals ... I see visions of Damon and Pythias, of life-saving crews and Red Cross nurses, of martyrs and leaders of forlorn hopes, of Father Damien, and of the Christ himself ... whose strength may trace back to the elemental loins of Lop-Ear and Big-Tooth'. The Folk's 'sociable and gregarious' impulses prefigure the national governments of modern humans, while their collective, rhythmic chattering represents 'art nascent'(85-87). London further questions univocal, Spencerian progress by qualifying his description of the violent Red-Eye as 'an atavism', for 'the males of the lower animals do not maltreat and murder their mates ... Red-Eye, in spite of his tremendous atavistic tendencies, foreshadowed the coming of man, for it is the males of the human species only that murder their mates' (167). The narrator suggests that Big-Tooth bequeathed his 'racial memories' by mating with a lone female, possibly descended from the Fire People, although the full vicissitudes of heredity remain unknown. Instead of all pre-humans progressing teleologically towards modern humans, London implies that *Homo sapiens* might be hybrids of diverse evolutionary tangents. This possibility undermines the primitive/civilized binary, revealing the roles of supposedly primitive instincts in modern civilization. As London indicates by locating the narrative in a modern speaker's heredity, primitive language might be inescapable, its primordial significations transmitted in the blood.

### The Primitive Within

The more that fiction in the period tried to define primitive speech, the more it threatened to contaminate civilized language. If the latter was a hereditary characteristic, as Spencer and Sayce implied, then civilized speakers were as much products of nature as primitive speakers. Alternatively, if civilized language was produced by social convention and tradition, as Tylor argued, then beneath this thin veneer of acquired habit remained primordial instincts and their unconscious bodily signs. Wells and London were both intensely interested in the endurance of such primitive instinctive communication, but also worried about its potential to undermine civilization. Against the primitive, instinctive sympathy suggested in *Before Adam* was the fear of degenerate violence and anarchy. Ideas of societal and biological progress produced inverse concepts of degeneration when the imagined demands of progress were not met (Pick 11-15; Nye 49-50; Greenslade 16).

Utopian ideals of rational state-building and scientific authority existed in opposition to fears of fragmentation and disorder without central, controlling authorities. In this sense, Huxley claimed that humankind's 'ethical' evolution had emerged not in harmony with but in opposition to the 'cosmic' forces of nature (1893, 31-36). Without the strict maintenance of artificial conventions and traditions, humans would regress to their primitive instincts. Yet, equally, by protecting humans from the struggle for survival, such artificial life could also degrade the bodies and minds on which civilization was built (Pick 12). These ideas inflected theories of linguistic and aesthetic degeneration, in which 'Decadent' experiment became identified with regression to primitive instincts. Wells and London were both strongly influenced by theories of atavism and reversion. These models shaped representations of language degeneration in several of their fictions of the 1890s and 1900s. Degeneration appears in these examples as the breakdown of central authority over language, fragmenting speech into private idiolects of instinctive noise. Yet, both authors also viewed individual, instinctive speech-acts as means of resistance to mindless social convention. Their dark visions of primitive instincts overwhelming civilized speech clashed with more ambivalent attitudes to instinctive communication as potentially valuable to society.

Similarly as late-Victorian utopias often idealized centralized authority over language (see Chapter Two), many commentators identified verbal degeneration with the loosening of such authority. The criminologist Cesare Lombroso defined degenerative language in 1889 as 'a tendency to puns and plays upon words ... a tendency to speak for one's self, and substitute epigram for logic, an extreme predilection for the rhythm and assonances of verse in prose writing, even an exaggerated degree of originality' (359-60; qtd. Pick 117). Daston argues that discourses of objectivity from the mid-nineteenth century onwards divided the languages of science and art into 'incommensurable ways of knowing'. Scientists such as Helmholtz and creative writers such as Charles Baudelaire opposed the conscious, scientific manipulation of symbols to the instinctive 'tact' of the poet (2000, 264-76). Lombroso exemplified this opposition, diagnosing poetic language as a symptom of hereditary insanity while himself writing in an idiom that 'sought to purge itself of extravagant metaphor, to produce a pure medium of description ... freed from the subjectivity and atavism of its own past' (Pick 116-17). Symbolist poets such as Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé had experimented with the evocative potential of words apart from their conventional meanings. They sought to trigger indirect associations, as

Mallarmé famously quipped: ‘We do not write poems with ideas, but with words’ (qtd. Kronegger 77). The reactionary critic Max Nordau identified such unravelling of lexical categories with degeneration, writing that the symbolist utterance ‘sinks into a meaningless vocal sound, intended only to awaken diverse agreeable emotions through association of ideas’ (90). Regenia Gagnier argues for a widespread perception during the period of literary ‘degeneration’ as ‘the sacrifice of whole to the development of the part’ (2-3). In this vein, Havelock Ellis wrote in 1889, quoting Paul Bourget: ‘A style of decadence is one in which the unity of the book is decomposed to give place to the independence of the page, in which the page is decomposed to give place to the independence of the phrase, and the phrase to give place to the independence of the word’ (52; see Gagnier 2). Without conforming to a larger structure of relations, the rogue word or epigram threatened to lose its semantic clarity, floating vaguely through indefinite associations. At the same time, the popularization of print culture triggered fears of the unregulated speech of the masses eroding the fine distinctions of literary English. Mill had complained that ‘So many persons without anything deserving the name of education have become writers by profession, that written language may almost be said to be principally wielded by persons ignorant of the proper use of the instrument’ (1882, 432-33). The journalist Charles Mackay warned in 1888 of “‘slang” that was formerly confined to tramps, beggars, gipsies, and thieves’ which had now ‘invaded the educated and semi-educated classes’ through popular print (692). Wells and London are interesting authors to consider in this regard, since both came from humble origins and wrote for popular audiences. Their fiction often sided with the elitists and reactionaries, however, fearing the degenerative anarchy of unregulated speech.

Wells expressed such fear of anarchy in ‘Morals and Civilisation’, writing that, since civilization was merely ‘a fabric of ideas and habits’, the loss of these would plunge humanity back into primitive violence and disorder. He imagined ‘the suddenly barbaric people wandering out into the streets, in their night-gear, their evening dress, or what not, as chance may have left them at the coming of the change, esurient and pugnacious, turning their attention to such recondite weapons as a modern city affords – all for the loss of a few ideas and a subtle trick of thinking’ (1975, 221). Wells had earlier written that humans carried in their bodies ‘the rapid physical concentration, the intense-self forgetfulness of the anger burst, the urgency of sexual passion in the healthy male, the love of killing’. Instead of effacing these instincts, convention had only diverted them into less destructive channels, so that ‘what we call Morality becomes the padding of suggested emotional

habits necessary to keep the round Paleolithic savage in the square hole of the civilised state. And Sin is the conflict of the two factors' (1975, 217). Language shaped mental suggestions that underpinned civilization. As Chapter Two illustrated, Wells's utopianism and socialism were technocratic and authoritarian, relying on scientific authority to mould minds and speech into harmony. Conversely, less verbal regulation would allow the resurgence of primitive instincts, with speech degenerating into unconscious noise.

Wells first realized this vision in *The Time Machine* in which a Victorian scientist travels far into the future, discovering a shrunken, childlike population with only rudimentary speech. The timetraveller states:

Either I missed some subtle point or their language was excessively simple – almost exclusively composed of concrete substantives and verbs. There seemed to be few, if any, abstract terms, or little use of figurative language. Their sentences were usually simple and of two words, and I failed to convey or understand any but the simplest propositions. (92)

With machines providing for their needs, the Eloi have lost their mental-verbal powers, degrading speech into a mere form of play. They coo meaninglessly to each other, passing their days in 'a melodious whirl of laughter and laughing speech' (58). Wells makes explicit the link between art for art's sake and language degeneration, suggesting that, when not used as practical tools, words lose their meanings. The narrator comments: 'This has ever been the fate of energy in security; it takes to art and to eroticism, and then comes languor and decay' (76). In a community where language has no unifying purpose, used merely as a toy to evoke sensations, it ceases to connect speakers with each other or their predecessors. The narrator states: 'all the traditions, the complex organizations, the nations, languages, literatures, aspirations, even the mere memory of Man as I knew him, had been swept out of existence'; 'I grieved to think how brief the dream of the human intellect had been. It had committed suicide' (145, 186). The tale links this degeneration with the loss of writing, which had once fixed meanings and usage. Only the 'decaying vestiges of books' are now to be found, a 'sombre wilderness of rotting paper', the uses of which humanity has long forgotten (161). Without authorities controlling the usage of words, the long accumulations of knowledge and ideas fall away, returning humans to raw instinct. This

nightmarish consequence of language-as-play shadows the possibility, later propounded by Wittgenstein, that all language is a game without validation beyond its own internal rules (1986, 5-9). Wells tries to avoid this equivalence by portraying Eloi speech as without rules: the unconscious, bodily cooing and laughter of infants. This is contradicted, however, by the parallel example of the underground Morlocks, descended from the industrial working class. While equally degraded, the speech of these creatures comes not of a lack of rules but of too many of them. The repetitive actions which operate their machines have gradually rendered the Morlocks 'ant-like', a mass of unthinking parts working together mechanically (148). Cannibalizing the Eloi, the Morlocks demonstrate the return of humanity to bestial violence and amorality. Yet, Wells is vaguer in his description of their language. They seem to have one, as the narrator states, 'I tried to call to them, but what language they had was apparently different from that of the Over-world people' (127). Elsewhere, however, their vocalizations appear mostly limited to moans and 'murmuring laughter' (190). The vagueness of Wells's descriptions points to the uncertainty of his model of primitive language, wavering between anarchy and dogmatic rigidity.

This conflict continues to inflect representations of primitive language in Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896). The eponymous Moreau is a scientist who vivisects animals to resemble humans then trains them to talk. Shipwrecked on Moreau's island, the narrator Prendick at first fails to realize that the doctor's creations are not human and holds some limited conversations with them (see Mclean 2008). By whip and torture, Moreau has forced them to repeat a parody of the Ten Commandments: 'Not to go on all fours – That is the law. Are we not men?' (107). This system of verbal rituals collapses when the animals revert to their primal instincts, killing Moreau and losing the power of speech. As in *The Time Machine*, moral and intellectual categories and institutions disintegrate in tandem with word-definitions. Without fixed forms and meanings, speech becomes mere instinctive noise. Prendick observes of the 'beast-folk' during their reversion: 'Imagine language, once clear-cut and exact, softening and guttering, losing shape and import, becoming mere lumps of sound again' (230). The novel repeatedly images the beast-folk's speech as shapeless and blurred, with Prendick observing during a saying of the Law: 'The speaker's words came thick and sloppy, and though I could hear them distinctly I could not distinguish what he said. He seemed to me to be reciting some complicated gibberish' (74). Wells indicates the importance of linguistic authority in controlling instinct by Moreau's law against 'jabbering', branding creatures on the hand when they succumb to it. The novel ends on a

Swiftian note, with Prendick returning to England, only to be horrified at the atavism of its people. On London's streets 'prowling women would mew after me; furtive, craving men glance jealously at me', while, in church, 'it seemed that the preacher gibbered "Big Thinks", even as the Ape-man had done' (247). Shunning humans, Prendick limits his life to books and chemistry experiments, concluding that it will be 'in the vast and eternal laws of matter ... that whatever is more than animal within us must find its solace and its hope' (248). Wells implies that, without some authority maintaining conventional distinctions of meaning, civilized speech threatens to degenerate into bestial noise.

Yet, the tale also challenges scientific authoritarianism over language. As Chapter Two showed, Wells worried about the specialization of scientific technical dialects, associating them with dogma. 'The man trained solely in science falls easily into a superstitious attitude', Wells wrote; 'he is overdone with classification. He believes in the possibility of exact knowledge everywhere. What is not exact, he declares is not knowledge' (1908, 46). Moreau exemplifies the cruelties that science may talk itself into when disconnected from the common stream of speech, becoming as unsympathetic as Wells's Martians or Morlocks.<sup>18</sup> 'To this day I have never troubled about the ethics of the matter', Moreau tells an appalled Prendick: 'The study of Nature makes a man at last as remorseless as Nature'. He reduces Prendick's moral objections to his treatment of the animals as mere primitive instinct, arising from personal experience of pain. Moreau declares, 'This store which men and women set on pleasure and pain, Prendick, is the mark of the beast upon them ... You cannot imagine the strange, colourless delight of these intellectual desires! The thing before you is no longer an animal, a fellow-creature, but a problem! Sympathetic pain, all I know of it I remember as a thing I used to suffer from years ago' (137). If primitive language has no concept of morality or sympathy then Moreau's speech is no more advanced than the noises of the creatures that later kill him.

In this way, Wells's early scientific romances equivocate on the nature of primitive, instinctive signs, sometimes suggesting that they might be necessary to certain forms of 'progress'. While threatening semantic chaos, they also offer adaptability. Leon Stover argues that Wells rejected Huxley's division between nature and society as much as he followed it, influenced by W. Reade's model of monistic biological and social development (123). 'Nowadays we do not resist and overcome the great stream of things, but rather float

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<sup>18</sup> Mclean argues for a similar anxiety about the moral alienation of scientists from the populace through specialist language in Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897). See Mclean 2008, 66-71.

upon it,' Wells wrote in *A Modern Utopia*: 'We build now not citadels, but ships of state' (5). Wells's narrators Prendick and the timetraveller survive through their ability to switch between bodily instinct and conscious intelligence. Fending off the Morlocks, the timetraveller recalls: 'I stood there with only the weapons and the powers that Nature had endowed me with – hands, feet, and teeth' (129). He defeats them by harnessing his inner bloodlust, admitting that 'the strange exultation that so often seems to accompany hard fighting came upon me ... I stood with my back to a tree, swinging the iron bar before me' (177-78). Equally, his ability to communicate and sympathize with the Eloi depends on the common instinctive sign-systems they have inherited. Apparently marooned in the future world and endangered by the Morlocks, he retains his spirits and sanity by cuddling, playing and dancing with the Eloi Weena. As a Morlock attack looms, 'to Weena's huge delight, I solemnly performed a kind of composite dance ... in part it was a modest cancan, in part a step dance, in part a skirt-dance (so far as my tail-coat permitted), and in part original. For naturally I am inventive, as you know' (162). Further, Prendick avoids being killed by the beast-folk through his ability to read their instinctive signs, anticipating the breakdown of their engrafted society. His instincts seem to realize the truth about the beast-folk before his conscious mind, detecting malevolent beasts while their conventional speech and appearance denote humanity. The vision of a hairy, strange-faced servant 'struck down through all my adult thoughts and feelings, and for a moment the forgotten horrors of childhood came back to my mind. Then the effect passed as it had come. An uncouth black figure of a man, a figure of no particular import, hung over the taffrail against the starlight' (36). When he looks upon three others in the group, 'there was something in their faces I knew not what that gave me a queer spasm of disgust. I looked steadily at them, and the impression did not pass, though I failed to see what had occasioned it' (47). Instinct is not simply chaos but a form of knowledge and a sign system in parallel to conventional speech with unique uses. Humans are only able to control nature by persisting as part of it, illustrated by Prendick's confrontation with one of the beast-folk who chases him through the forest. His instinctive fear enables him to recognize and exploit the same instinct in his pursuer: 'Setting my teeth hard, I walked straight towards him. I was anxious not to show the fear that seemed chilling my backbone ... I advanced a step or two, looking steadfastly into his eyes ... He turned again, and vanished into the dusk' (77-78). The human ascendancy comes of a combination of instinctive with conventional signs, instead of one obliterating the other. The narrative confirms Moreau's claim that sympathy springs from

bodily instinct rather than reason. While Prendick grieves for the howling victims of Moreau's vivisection, 'Yet had I known such pain was in the next room, and had it been dumb, I believe I have thought since I could have stood it well enough. It is when suffering finds a voice and sets our nerves quivering that this pity comes troubling us' (68). The passage chimes with Eduard von Hartmann's comment in *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1868) that newspaper reports of 10,000 men killed in battle rouse little feeling, 'but when we ourselves go about among the pools of blood, the corpses and the limbs, and the groaning and dying men, then indeed a deep horror overcomes us' (211). Instinctive vocal signs of emotion do not destroy but sustain sympathetic society. As Chapter Five explores in more detail, language sometimes appeared for the young Wells as a site of collaboration between instinct and convention.

The linguistic edifice of civilization is similarly threatened by destabilizing primitive instinct in a number of Jack London's later tales. Yet, London also frequently presents primitive instinct as a dynamic force in language, enabling a Nietzschean individualism that breaks through mass conformity. London's life and intellectual influences contributed to conflicts in his writing between supporting traditional cultural authorities and rejecting them. He lived as a seaman, tramp and gold prospector before becoming a writer through a difficult process of self-education. Although mainly an autodidact, London briefly studied English at the University of California, Berkeley, dropping out after six months due to financial difficulties. London's biographer John Perry notes that, although he criticized the university as dry and passionless, London had planned to return one day to attain his diploma (50). His often autobiographical novel *Martin Eden* (1908) implies the necessity of linguistic authority, even as it challenges the privileged social classes typically associated with such authority. The rough-mannered, sailor protagonist Eden seeks academic tuition to improve his language, with the middle-class English undergraduate Ruth instructing him to study 'grammar'. London depicts Eden's discovery of abstract knowledge and stable expression in books as an awakening, so that, when he reads poetry criticism: 'as the grammar had shown him the tie-ribs of language, so that book showed him the tie-ribs of poetry... beneath the beauty he loved finding the why and wherefore of that beauty' (66). London believed in physiological foundations for verbal meaning, advocating Spencer's 'Philosophy of Style' throughout his career (Lundquist 99-104). Spencer conceived language as a form of energy conversion, transmitting the material force of ideas between minds with progressive precision and efficiency (see Chapter Two).

Such theory depended on the ideal of perfect expression, achieved through complex, precisely controlled tools. Eden develops the same ideal shortly before reading Spencer, deciding that ‘the great writers and master-poets ... knew how to express what they thought, and felt, and saw ... had discovered the trick of expression, of making words obedient servitors, and of making combinations of words mean more than the sum of their separate meanings’ (89-90). As Eden’s reading expands, he questions the dogmas of Ruth and a narrow-minded professor whom he previously revered, and ultimately commits suicide out of alienation. Yet, he only rejects these authorities over language in favour of a higher scientific one. He idealizes Spencerian system-building ‘reducing everything to unity, elaborating ultimate realities, and presenting ... a universe so concrete of realization that it was like the model of a ship such as sailors make and put into glass bottles’ (108). London’s visions of primitive language from around the same time reflect a similar faith in rigidly controlled Standard English as the prerequisite to higher knowledge and reason. In contrast to such acquired, conventional language, instinctive expression fragments knowledge and the self into automatic processes without intelligence or volition.

London presented primitive speech as the disintegration of prescriptive authority, unleashing wild instincts, in his post-apocalyptic tale *The Scarlet Plague*. After a pandemic annihilates most of humanity, an ex-professor of English, Smith, impotently watches his language degenerate through successive generations of survivors. Without literacy or regulatory institutions, words lose their precision and blur with each other as survivors return to a superstitious, hunter-gatherer existence. Much of the narrative concerns Smith’s futile attempts to pass on his knowledge and memories to his grandchildren, whose speech has withered to ‘monosyllables and short, jerky sentences that was more a gibberish than a language’ (40). Hearing them, Smith muses to himself: ‘Strange it is to hear the vestiges and remnants of the complicated Aryan speech falling from the lips of a filthy little skin-clad savage’ (177). To render this speech intelligible, the omniscient narrator claims to report it in partial translation: ‘The boy did not exactly utter these words, but something that remotely resembled them and that was more guttural and explosive and economical of qualifying phrases’ (22). Like the roads and buildings of California’s cities, modern literary English has crumbled into isolated monosyllables without the linguistic infrastructure to support abstract ideas. Modern English was kept artificially stable through education and literature. Without them, the narrator explains, English has ‘gone through a bath of corrupt usage’. Once-distinct words and concepts have merged into each other so that speakers can

no longer imagine any difference between them. Smith's grandson reprimands him for over-complicating the colour-scheme with words like 'scarlet' and describing crab as a 'toothsome delicacy': 'Crab is crab, ain't it?', 'Scarlet ain't anything but red is red' (22, 35). The abstract, scientific ideas of civilization depend on a stable, authoritative centre directing language-use. Deprived of this central control, language loses its complex categories of expression built up by generations of science and culture. Without the abstraction of writing, the 'savages' understand words only through reference to the body. They replace abstract terms with concrete nouns and verbs, turning scavengers into 'food-getters', and the scarlet plague into 'red death' (53). Like the survivors' numeracy, shrunk to the number of fingers on their hands, their nomenclature is unable to retain nouns that do not equate to familiar physical actions.

London's apocalyptic vision reflected his fear of primitive speech resurging among the barely-educated working class from which he had risen. In an earlier book about his explorations of London's East End, he had described a poor, illiterate and amoral 'people of the abyss', 'a new species, a breed of city savages' who 'whined insolently ... leering and gibbering, overspilling with foulness and corruption'. London claimed that modern capitalism engineered such reversion by confining people to artificial, urban environments without intellectual or emotional stimulation. 'And woe the day', he warned, 'when England is fighting in her last trench, and her able-bodied men are on the firing line! For on that day they will crawl out of their dens and lairs' (1907, 286). *The Scarlet Plague* envisages this event, with a working-class 'perfect brute' dominating his band of survivors and setting a trend for the society that follows. 'In the midst of our civilization, down in our slums and labor ghettos', Smith laments, 'we had bred a race of barbarians, of savages; and now, in the time of our calamity, they turned upon us like the wild beasts they were and destroyed us. And they destroyed themselves as well' (105-6; qtd. Berkove 251-52). While sympathetic to the poor, London's socialism sometimes veered toward Wellsian authoritarianism, suggesting that their thought and language must be directed by elites.<sup>19</sup> In this vein, Smith stores a hoard of books in a cave and prophesies: 'Some day men will read again; and then, if no accident has befallen my cave, they will know that Professor James Howard Smith once lived and saved for them the knowledge of the ancients' (175-76). Language and society are teleological developments which can only develop towards the

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<sup>19</sup> London cites Wells's *Anticipations* and *Mankind in the Making* in *The Iron Heel*, praising their author as 'a sociological seer, sane and normal as well as warm human' (201).

current Western scientific and literary institutions. London suggests this through Smith not only classifying his descendants' current state but also predicting future regression. Cassandra-like, he states: 'You are true savages. Already has begun the custom of wearing human teeth. In another generation you will be perforating your noses and ears and wearing ornaments of bone and shell. I know' (39). London seems to attack the image of the working class as uncultured creatures of instinct in his novel of socialist revolution *The Iron Heel*. The narrator mocks the upper class that 'looked upon themselves as wild-animal trainers. ... It was their belief that if ever they weakened, the great beast would engulf them ... anarchy would reign and humanity would drop backward into the primitive night out of which it had so painfully emerged' (242). Yet, the narrative later echoes this view of the working class: it is perhaps not social control that degrades them but lack of it, as capitalism fails to develop them emotionally and intellectually. The narrator Avis states of the proletariat: 'Common school education, so far as they were concerned, had ceased. They lived like beasts in great squalid labor-ghettos, festering in misery and degradation ... In all truth, there in the labor-ghettos is the roaring abysmal beast the oligarchs fear so dreadfully – but it is the beast of their own making' (245). Avis presents the speech of this degraded folk as instinctive noise, requiring regulation by higher authorities. She knows that the current revolution is doomed (although a future one will succeed) upon hearing the bestial shouts of the 'mob' confronting the army. This 'awful river... surged past my vision in concrete waves of wrath, snarling and growling, carnivorous ... dim ferocious intelligences with all the godlike blotted from their features and all the fiendlike stamped in, apes and tigers' (265). In London's contradictory vision, primitive speech is both a reversion to primordial nature and product of artificial society.

Alongside London's belief in the need for institutional authority over language ran a conflicting reverence for primitive instinct as a motor of mental-verbal individualism. Besides Darwin and Spencer, London was also strongly influenced by Nietzsche, claiming in 1914 that he had 'been more stimulated by Nietzsche than any other writer in the world' (1988, 1485). Jonathan Berliner argues that in 'his recurrent praise of primordial supermen, London presents nature as a brutal force but crucially one that could be harnessed for socialistic purposes' (56). Future progress would arise not from humanity wholly repressing its natural instincts but from rediscovering them. Nietzsche argued that society created metaphorical 'intuitions' which overrode natural instincts (98-99). The coming *Übermensch* would rediscover these natural instincts, 'the will to power', and, by following

them, break through artificial dogmas (Kaufmann 552). *The Iron Heel* describes its socialist hero Ernest Everhard as ‘a Superman, a blond beast such as Nietzsche has described’, who shatters the logic of capitalism and Christianity with powerful oratory (5). While well-read in history and science, Everhard is also a creature of the body with bulging muscles and instinctive passion behind his convictions. Ernest’s future wife, Avis, writes of one of his speeches: ‘It was not so much what he said as how he said it. I roused at the first sound of his voice. It was as bold as his eyes. It was a clarion-call that thrilled me. And the whole table was aroused, shaken alive from monotony and drowsiness’ (6). Ernest’s closeness to the body renders him a stubborn materialist, dismissing the language of ‘metaphysics’ as sophistry. Like Reade and Lubbock’s savages, words are to him mere shadows, as he tells one conservative rival, ‘You’ve got to put it in my hand. ... The wise heads have puzzled so sorely over truth because they went up into the air after it’ (13). Such an apparently primitive perspective enables Ernest to break through the worship of words which maintain the status quo. Contradicting her images of the masses as a primitive rabble, Avis elsewhere describes them as ‘phrase slaves’ blinded by vague abstractions. ‘The utterance of a single-word’, she states, ‘could negative the generalisations of a lifetime of serious research and thought. ... Vast populations grew frenzied over such phrases as “an honest dollar” and “a full dinner pail”’ (62). Conversely, as in *Before Adam*, instinctive feeling and vocalization form the basis of solidarity, as Everhard says of his conversion to socialism, ‘I was in touch with great souls who exalted flesh and spirit over dollars and cents, and to whom the thin wail of the starved slum child meant more than all the pomp and circumstance of commercial expansion and world empire’ (61). London’s imagined future revolution appears both to elevate language to the utopian level of pure intellect and return it to instinctive signs of sympathy.

London’s short story ‘When the World was Young’ (1910) similarly complicates primitive speech, associating it with ideals of rugged masculinity diluted by artificial modernity. The tale depicts a modern, educated American, James Ward, reverting to the behaviour of an ancient, Teutonic ancestor. He roams the forests by night, fighting beasts, and bursts into instinctive song, seemingly inherited. ‘By some quirk of atavism’, the narrator states, ‘a certain portion of that early self’s language had come down to him as a racial memory’ (83). Such vocalizations are involuntary, illustrating biological processes overwhelming the individual self and its expression. They ‘always irresistibly rushed to his lips when he was engaged in fierce struggling or fighting’ (84). Such outbreaks threaten

Ward's ability to function within conventional, modern society, filling him with the urge to violently 'paw and maul' his genteel fiancé at dinner parties (90). Yet, such instinctive speech also encodes values of bravery and self-sacrifice. During one reversion, Ward defends his new wife and dogs against a bear attacking their property. The cries of his hounds trigger Ward's instincts, first drawing him to the bear and, second, sending him berserk upon it: 'the human brute went mad. A foaming rage flecked the lips that parted with a wild inarticulate cry' (94). Yet, after slaying the bear, he sees his horrified wife and 'felt something snap in his brain' so that 'the early Teuton in him died' (95). London suggests that civilization emasculates men, with the fully 'modern' Ward fearing the dark outside, hiding behind locked doors and burglar alarms. This anxiety contrasts with Ward's state earlier in which his primitive self chased away a terrified would-be burglar. In tension with the model of primitive speech as chaotic noise, London presents Ward's instinctive vocalizations as extremely stable, enduring through 'thrice a thousand years' (93). A philologist at Ward's university classifies his songs as 'early German, or early Teuton, of a date that must far precede anything that had ever been discovered and handed down by the scholars' (84). As in Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race*, London exchanges language progressivism for vitalism, lamenting the loss of natural, Indo-European values and identity (see Chapter Two). Modern, industrialized life shrivels speakers into effete creatures of convention, divorced from the feelings that they once voiced instinctively. London's representation of primitive speech as a source of natural manliness and sympathy resonates with a wider tendency in the period to revere ancient speech as organic and, thus, of a higher truth-value than modern discourse. The following chapter will explore this counter-tendency in which fiction and philology opposed a natural, living verbal past to a dead, mechanized modernity. The perfect communication and semantic stability that progressives hoped for in the future, vitalists imagined in the lost past. Instead of threatening to destroy meaning, primitive instinct might form its natural source.

## Chapter Four. Language Nostalgia and the Organic Voice

In 1844 the dialect-poet William Barnes referred to the philologist of ‘that increasing class who wish to purify our tongue, and enrich it from its own resources’ (1). Through the second half of the century, philology fuelled interest in the imagined organic origins of English (Dowling 1986, 24). This chapter asks how fiction from the 1850s to Edward’s reign used this concept of organic language in nostalgic visions of the past. In response to the social fragmentation of industrial capitalism, many Victorians looked to history for models of a supposedly more natural order (See Chandler; Dellheim; Barczewski). Like the Edenic narrative for which it was a substitute, organicist philology posited past purity and life which had become degraded and artificial (Olender 8). The Victorian philologist J. W. Donaldson wrote in 1839 that, for ancient speakers, poetry ‘streamed freely from the breast ... replete with the richest and most significant compounds’. By contrast, centuries of writing and scientific learning had reduced modern English to ‘barren elegances of logical prose’ (70-1). Modern literary language could be manufactured, but it had ceased to grow. From the 1850s onwards, Müller theorized a ‘mythopoeic’ period early in language when speakers constantly coined words, each of which rang with its material etymology. Language ‘decayed’ and ‘died’ as abstract writing and knowledge alienated it from these organic ‘roots’ in specific soil and folk experiences (1866, I 283-88). In 1860 Müller’s contemporary William Farrar waxed nostalgic for their ancestors’ linguistic creativity: ‘our very civilization has robbed us of this happy and audacious power. Nature spoke more to them than to us’ (67-8). Several historical novelists in the period strove to reconnect language with this mythologized ‘organic’ past. Charles Kingsley and R. M. Ballantyne’s tales locate the living essence of English in the oral past before the inauthentic substitutions of writing. Ivan Kreilkamp has explored how some Victorian novelists tried to rehabilitate writing through auratic ‘storyteller’ personas. Similarly, Kingsley and Ballantyne downplay their tales’ textuality, presenting them as transcripts of speech. Such poses clashed, however, with the modern historical methods on which their genre was based, involving methodical analysis of documents.

Efforts to bring prose into an organic relation with the past often involved racializing language. Lyellian geology and, later, Darwinian biology, undermined the traditional, theological narrative of human origins. Philology offered to compensate for this

uncertainty by tracing the origins of nations, conceptualizing etymology and genealogy in parallel (Burrow 1967, 190-91). Paul du Chaillu and J. F. Hodgetts's historical fiction fetishized archaic words as expressions of Teutonic blood and stigmatized Latin-derived forms as artificial impositions, contaminating the national voice. Yet, such exclusivity contradicted the logic of racial-linguistic intermixture used to justify British imperial unity. Problems of authentic language origins are similarly refracted through invasion fiction of the late-Victorian and early-Edwardian period. Such narratives are torn between the desire for a united national voice and the anxiety that such a voice would be inorganic and susceptible to counterfeiting by outsiders. As prose fiction, these narratives of military and linguistic invasion conflict with the novel form they inhabit, with its tendency to split into dialogic voices.

Was, then, nostalgia for past organic language inevitably conservative? William Morris's prose romances combined it with socialism and internationalism. Morris's vision of self-defining speech communities existed in tension, though, with Socialism's need for international, de-localized language. Equally, Thomas Hardy's fiction is nostalgic for vanishing rural dialect that placed speakers closer to nature. Yet, Hardy's reading of Darwin and Mill undermined ideas of pastoral stasis, pure origins and 'natural' society. Hardy did not entirely abandon language nostalgia, though: his fiction yearned for past sociolinguistic diversity before the hegemony of Standard English.

### Printing Voices

Language nostalgia in mid- to late-Victorian historical fiction was characterized by negotiations of the gap between speech and writing. Macaulay summed up the commonplace association of prose with calculated, artificial modernity: 'as civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines' (1825, 306). Further, philology modeled speech as the life of language, and writing as mere dead records of it. Languages lost touch with their organic origins and creativity as 'the bit and bridle of literature were thrown over their necks', in Müller's words (1866, I 60). The very conditions of prose-writing seemed to toll the death of organic orality. Patrick Brantlinger has argued that Walter Scott's vision of ancient oral culture in the Scottish Highlands depicted 'the spread of English, of literacy, and even the popularity of his own novels, as evidence of the death of chivalry and the advent of a kind of universal mediocrity' (1998, 16). Kingsley and Ballantyne were both

heavily influenced by Scott. Kingsley opened his Conquest-era novel *Hereward the Wake* (1865) by comparing England's past to the Highlands 'embalmed for ever in the pages of Walter Scott' (2). Ballantyne came from a family of Edinburgh printers and publishers which had been closely involved with Scott's career. The authors' historical fiction similarly idealizes oral society as heroic through its closeness to nature and truth. However, both were also committed patriots, supporting British union and empire, which were only possible through writing. The organic orality that they yearned for could only be reconciled with national culture by, perversely, behaving like writing. Hobsbawm observes that print produced the 'optical illusion' of an 'eternal', homogenous national tongue (61). Rather than evolving across national boundaries or dividing within them, ancestral English needed to appear standardized to reflect the undivided national mind. Conversely, by presenting their writing as speech, Kingsley and Ballantyne distinguished it from artificial modernity, aiming to partially restore the organic oral past. How, though, could the mythopoeic spark, rooted in bodily experience of local landscapes, be revived in a language of mass print and global circulation?

Kingsley's desire for organic orality conflicted with his efforts to trace a coherent, unified national heritage only possible in writing. The vicar and professor was exposed to provincial dialect through his childhood in Devon and Northampton, and counted Müller and Barnes among his friends. In an 1848 lecture series, with which Kingsley collaborated, his colleague A. B. Strettell described words as not 'arbitrary' but 'living powers', embodying thought (1849, 162). Writing and artificial city life detached words from the organic logos that coined them, producing, as Strettell lamented, 'those hollow conventionalities of expression which we so often meet with in daily life' (161, 177). These influences would seem to set Kingsley against the perceived artifice of Standard English. However, as a member of the Christian Socialists, Kingsley sought a common language to unite England's divided classes. The narrator of his social-problem novel *Alton Locke* (1850) complains of priests' rarefied language: 'If he would only have talked English! if clergymen would only 'preach in English'! and then they wonder that their sermons have no effect!' (191). In the collaborative lecture series Kingsley claimed that the thoughts and speech of all countrymen 'pass through the same course of intellectual growth, through which the whole English nation has passed'. Each speaker is 'a microcosm' of the national tongue, drawing on the same hinterland of etymologies (1849, 57). This assumption of a common mental-linguistic heritage justified the middle-class Hampshire vicar's

ventriloquism of a working-class London Chartist as the narrator of *Alton Locke* (Lee 2). The united heritage emerges when Alton attends a boat-race and finds himself cheering along with his class-enemies: ‘The true English stuff came out there; I felt that in spite of all my prejudices the stuff which has held Gibraltar and conquered at Waterloo ... [m]y blood boiled over, and fierce tears swelled into my eyes; for I, too, was a man, and an Englishman’ (311-2). His physical reaction to the voices of his countrymen points to the organic, oral community of Kingsley’s nostalgia. The modern physical separation of classes has split the national speech into East End cockney and Oxbridge slang. Yet, the nation of empire and conquest which Kingsley celebrates could only exist through alienating, disembodied writing.

This contradictory nostalgia for face-to-face oral communities and, yet, also delocalized national unity emerges repeatedly in Kingsley’s Elizabethan adventure *Westward Ho!* (1855). The tale of the Spanish Armada’s defeat presents the speech of its Devonian heroes as natural and true in contrast to modern, mechanical writing. The narrator questions whether the rote-learning of a nineteenth-century ‘national school’ is superior to the natural, unthinking virtue of his naval hero Amyas Leigh. Amyas’s ‘broad Devonshire accent’ mirrors his ‘savage’ physical skills in outdoor practicalities. Victorian school pupils might mock his ignorance, the narrator concedes, but he is their superior in ‘manhood, virtue and godliness’ (7-9). Incapable of lying, Amyas exemplifies the logos in which speech and thought are one. Sometimes, his inner being is conveyed even without words, such as when he glances at his mother: ‘There was nothing to be spoken, for there was nothing to be concealed between these two souls as clear as glass. Each knew all which the other meant; each knew that its own thoughts were known’ (44). Kingsley’s face-to-face relations link people together like nervous tissue in a common body. The association of alienating writing culture with Catholicism figures the Reformation as a restoration of organic orality (ignoring its focus on the written word of scripture). Amyas’s Anglican faith flows naturally from him ‘not even knowing whether he is good or not, but just doing the right thing without thinking about it, as simply as a little child, because the Spirit of God is with him’ (48). Conversely, his Catholic cousin Eustace joins the Jesuits and constantly interrogates his soul, ‘according to certain approved methods and rules, which he has got by heart’. This mechanical faith causes Eustace to smuggle encrypted ‘bulls, dispensations, secret correspondences, seditious tracts’ around England (55). He attempts to lure the heroes into a trap by leaving a ‘dirty note’, warning of Irish spies. Ironically, despite being

written by a Devonian, the note arouses suspicion through its deviation from West Country dialect. Of the lines, 'By deer park end to-night ... Grip and hold hym tight', the squire comments: 'We say "to" and not "by" ... [a]nd "man", instead of "him"' (88). Catholic dogma has warped Eustace's voice (or pen) out of shape along with his native, English values, placing it, anachronistically, closer to nineteenth-century Standard English.

Kingsley's reference to dialect highlights how rarely it appears elsewhere in the novel. Speech is mostly reported in Standard English (Stitt 173) with some literary archaisms ('thou wouldst be thyself', 'spare the rash youth of yon foolish knight', 37). By confining dialectal variation to within the boundaries of accent, Kingsley gives English a unitary existence across space and time. As in *Alton Locke*, the narrator imagines a timeless 'plain English', which encodes universal common-sense, cutting through sophistry. Eustace, the narrator explains, is removed to the continent to be 'trained as a seminary priest; in plain English, to be taught the science of villainy, on the motive of superstition'. The same paragraph continues: 'he had been chosen by the harpies at home, on account of his "peculiar vocation"; in plain English, because the wily priests had seen in him certain capacities of vague hysterical fear of the unseen (the religious sentiment, we call it nowadays)' (46). Subsequent linguistic change ('we call it nowadays') is thus subordinated to superficial nomenclature: the internal spirit of English and its categories of reality are fixed forevermore. Yet, simultaneously, the rational, empiricist 'plain English' spoken by Amyas and his narrator is at odds with his folk culture. While Amyas sees through the superstitions of Catholic doctrine, the narrator informs us that 'he devoutly believed in fairies ... and held that they changed babies, and made the mushroom rings on the downs to dance in. When he had warts or burns, he went to the white witch at Northam to charm them away' (7). Amyas never speaks of such beliefs, though, and Kingsley identifies them with earlier times before the formation of the national spirit of 'plain English'. The few characters that use the alternative lexis and grammar of Devon dialect represent bygone epochs before the nation-forging reign of Elizabeth. Hence, the old seaman Gramfer Martin recalls of Henry VIII's coronation: 'I've seed mun do what few has; I've seed mun christle like any child', which Amyas translates into Standard English: 'What - cry?' (489). Equally, the speech of fortune-teller Lucy, marked by nonstandard spelling, positions dialect in the pre-literate, even pagan past: 'I'm most mazed to see ye ... you hain't made up your mind ... Ben there's a way to 't, a ure way'(71-2). As Brantlinger observes, such

nostalgia for folk culture can function as a 'proleptic elegy', neutralizing its potential challenge to national unity by prematurely mourning its death (2003, 4).

The contradiction in Kingsley's nostalgia between organic orality and national writing comes into sharpest focus when Amyas meets Edmund Spenser. Watching for Spanish ships on the coast, the Elizabethan poet tries to justify to Walter Raleigh his propensity for 'imitating the classical metres'. This debate is arrested, though, when he hears Amyas sing a song taught to him by his mother. It is a pure natural outpouring, as the warrior remarks, 'Cocks crow all night long at Christmas, Captain Raleigh, and so do I' (165). Kingsley's narration centres the conflict in the scene between artificial, foreign hexameters and instinctive English rhyme. Thanks to Amyas's example, the narrator assures us, 'the matter was finally settled, and the English tongue left to go the road on which Heaven had started it' (162). The more obvious opposition, however, which the narrator avoids discussing, is between Amyas's oral recital and Spenser's disembodied writing. Kingsley tries to obscure this opposition by placing quotations from Spenser's writing in his character's mouth, as though they were oral compositions. His rhetoric also diverts attention away from the diverse branches of English: the journey from past to present is a single 'road'. Patriotism demanded that the oral varieties of the past be standardized into the national writing of the present.

Kingsley's tale of resistance to the Norman Conquest *Hereward the Wake* is fraught by the same contradictions of speech and writing. Like Amyas, the hero Hereward seldom separates thought from speech, exploding with spontaneous, alliterative war chants during battle. He is also a poor dissembler, impulsively voicing his war-cry 'A Wake! A Wake!' (310) when enemies are near, giving away his position. When he proposes to resist King William it is through face-to-face speeches, to which his supporters respond with one voice: 'we are free men!' (180). Conversely, writing is associated with skullduggery. Hereward flees England after being outlawed for robbing a monk. Instead of judging him face-to-face, the Anglo-Saxon regime (corrupted by Catholicism) hatches his exile through a series of letters. Unlike Hereward's rebellion, mediated by speech, his outlawing is circulated via 'a parchment, with an outlandish Norman seal hanging to it' (32). The subsequent Norman regime with its Domesday Book and feudal laws contrasts with the nostalgic vision of self-governing oral communities. Kingsley glosses over this problem, though, by presenting Hereward's eventual capitulation to King William as equally oral and embodied. Hereward fights William's administration while it remains faceless but, upon their meeting, he 'put

his hands between William's hands, and swore to be his man' (340). This fantasized reconciliation of Norman king with indigenous English downplays the administrative serfdom which he introduced, and its more distant relations mediated by writing. As in *Westward Ho!*, Kingsley plays down standardization's destruction of speech varieties by charting the progress of a single language and national spirit through history. Far from dying in the eleventh century, Hereward's spirit of freedom lived on in 'Bold Outlaws' like Robin Hood. For centuries afterwards, they 'talked and sung of Hereward, and all his doughty deeds, over the hearth in lone farm-houses', keeping alive 'the spirit of Freedom' that would 'mould them into a great nation' (370). Kingsley's rhetoric of continuity suggests that Victorian literature might be restored to the line of organic inheritance rather than artificial alienation.

These manoeuvres around the disjunction between speech and writing equally characterize Kingsley's authorial voice. Seeking to present himself as heir to the oral past rather than destroyer of it, Kingsley frames his texts as transcripts of speech. Carlyle had set the template for this, privileging his writing as elevated speech through the production process of *On Heroes and Hero-Worship* (1844). Revising his lectures in book-form, he wrote: 'I am endeavouring to write down my Lectures somewhat in the style of *speech*; as they were, or rather as they might have been, and should have been, and wished to be, delivered to the people' (1990, XII 167-8; qtd. Kreilkamp 19-21). Like Carlyle, Kingsley was no natural public speaker, suffering a life-long stammer. In the 1848 lectures, he commented: 'the art of writing English is, I should say, the art of speaking English' (1849, 28). This conflation of speech and writing enabled him to present the latter as an extension of the logos. Instead of mourning the death of poetry in prose, Kingsley celebrates prose as potentially 'the highest poetry'. Coupled with 'richness and vigour' of spirit, it is 'a free and ever-shifting flow of every imaginable rhythm and metre, determined by no arbitrary rules, but only by the spiritual intent of the subject' (34-5). While 'the majority' of prose is hollow conventionality and imitation, the privileged voice is purified through it. The opening to *Westward Ho!* merges prose conceptually with speech, warning that 'if now and then I shall seem to warm into a style somewhat too stilted and pompous, let me be excused for my subject's sake, fit rather to have been sung than said, and to have proclaimed to all true English hearts, not as a novel but as an epic' (2). The acknowledgement of formal differences between novel and epic smoothes over the greater disjunction between oral recital and printed text. The tale is not a calculated, industrial product, but an outpouring

from the soul. Kingsley always wrote rapidly, as Müller recalled after his friend's death: 'He was, in one sense of the word, a careless writer. ... He did it with a concentrated energy of will which broke through all difficulties ... but the perfection and classical finish are wanting in most of his works' ('Preface', Kingsley 1913, viii-ix). The publisher Charles Kegan Paul remembered how Kingsley 'would work himself into a white heat over his book, till, too excited to write more, he would calm himself down by a pipe, pacing his grass-plot in thought, and in long strides' (qtd. A. A. Reade, 160). These anecdotes frame Kingsley's writing habits as bodily exertion and outpouring rather than mental abstraction. *Westward Ho!* further emphasizes its pseudo-orality with barbs at modern publishing culture. The narrator observes: 'story-telling, in those old times, when books (and authors also, lucky for the public) were rarer than now, was a common amusement' (216). In a similarly critical allusion to coverage of the British military in Crimea, we are told:

Battles (as soldiers know, and newspaper editors do not) are usually fought, not as they ought to be fought, but as they can be fought; and while the literary man is laying down the law at his desk as to how many troops should be moved here, and what rivers should be crossed there ... the wretched man who has to do the work finds the matter settled for him by pestilence, want of shoes, empty stomachs, bad roads, heavy rains, hot suns, and a thousand other stern warriors who never show on paper. (168)

Kingsley's antagonism to modern print culture and authorship presents his voice, by contrast, as physically embedded in the action. The speaker withdraws from the persona of a 'literary man' sitting 'at his desk' and seems, momentarily, to inhabit the soldier trudging through the battle-field (see Lee 12).

The pseudo-orality of Kingsley's narration is undercut by a scholarly register stressing the tale's historical accuracy. Kingsley would be appointed a Cambridge professor of History in 1860, and was well-acquainted with the analysis of primary documents pioneered by historians like Edward Gibbon. This methodical, evidence-based 'truth' diverged from the natural 'truth' of the logos, imagined to flow spontaneously from the human voice. Amyas's meeting with Spenser in *Westward Ho!* is introduced with a historian's distanced attention to dates, context and attribution: 'the commonweal of poetry

and letters, in that same critical year 1580, was in far greater danger from those same hexameters than the common woe of Ireland (as Raleigh called it) was from the Spaniards' (161). Similarly, in *Hereward the Wake* the narrating voice sometimes shifts from the rhetoric of oral tradition to documentary evidence, reproducing family genealogies and citing contemporary chronicles. Abstract comparisons and empirical facts replace local anecdote and organic inspiration: 'The campaigns of Hannibal and Caesar succeeded by the same tactics as those of Frederic and Wellington; and so, as far as we can judge, did those of ... William of Normandy' (206). Both narratives draw attention to themselves as textual constructs rather than inspired speech to prove their historical authenticity. Stitt argues that Victorian historical fiction separated 'the concept of language as history ... from the narrator's ability to select and footnote and explain *with* language. As long as dialects keep their strangeness, they are objects of study – and language (in the voice of the narrator's present) retains its ability to talk about itself' (38-9). In the same way, Kingsley's authorial voices place the characters' voices at a remove from the reader through imaginary acts of translation. The epigraph to *Westward Ho!* states that their words and deeds have been 'rendered into modern English' (iii). Similarly, in *Hereward* parentheses inform the reader of movements between spoken Anglo-Saxon, Danish, French, Latin and Cornish. While these tropes render the tales more historically plausible, they also alienate their tellers from the auratic oral culture of old. As Kingsley's apologies for his 'dull prose' realize, his authorial voice risks becoming Scott and Carlyle's caricature of mechanistic history-writing 'Dryasdust'.

Tensions between organic, oral 'truth' and written, evidential 'truth' destabilize language nostalgia in Ballantyne's novels of Viking ancestry *Erling the Bold* (1869) and *Norsemen in the West* (1872). Ballantyne's Viking novels resemble Scott's *Waverley* series, nostalgic for the independence, chivalry and naturalness of oral culture. In *Erling* Viking speech resists the encroaching centralization of power by the tyrant Harald Haarfager. At Viking councils Harald's sophistry is unable to sway his countrymen, whose oral culture 'accustomed [them] to think and reason closely'. They had, the narrator remarks, 'the laws of the land 'by heart', in the most literal sense of those words, – for there were no books to consult and no precedents to cite in those days; and his hearers weighed with jealous care each word he said' (236). Unlike the mass of written legislation and precedents piled up by Westminster and the judiciary, Viking law is written on, and grew from, its subjects' hearts. *Norsemen* also celebrates the natural truthfulness of oral Vikings as they discover America.

Viking deeds always match their words, as the sea-king Karlsefin counsels a youngster: ‘how contemptible it is to threaten and not perform’ (73). Crewman Hake later demonstrates this advice when he claims that his arrows never miss their target. As Karlsefin challenges him to prove it,

The words had scarcely left his lips when an arrow stood quivering in the knot referred to. With an exclamation and look of surprise Karlsefin said it must have been a chance, and Biarne seemed inclined to hold the same opinion; but while they were yet speaking, Hake planted another arrow close by the side of the first. (141)

Against such idealized speech, the Vikings foresee the untruthfulness of writing when recording their adventures in verse. Biarne is glad that they lack the Romans’ writing, for with skalds, he claims, ‘the measure and the rhyme would chain men to the words, and so to the truth – that is, supposing they get truth to start with!’ (69). Biarne’s comment points to the potential inferiority of Ballantyne’s writing, based as it is on a trail of transcriptions and translations of ancient sagas. The manuscripts had not been written until centuries after the events they described, casting doubt on their accuracy.

Ballantyne hides this problem by extending the logos to writing, enabling the scholar, like the listener, to detect a mystical ring of truth, which cannot be falsified. Despite,

man’s wellknown tendency to invent and exaggerate, it still remains likely that all the truth would be retained, although surrounded more or less with fiction. . . . Men with penetrating minds and retentive memories, who are trained to such work, are swift to detect the chaff amongst the wheat, and although in their winnowing operations they may frequently blow away a few grains of wheat, they seldom or never accept any of the chaff as good grain. (217)

Amateur scholars like Ballantyne are thus heirs to the Viking skalds through their ‘penetrating minds and retentive memories’, echoing the Vikings who ‘think and reason closely’ and remember laws by heart. As in Strettel’s claim that words were ‘living

powers', signifying beyond mere convention, the author conceives 'truth' as self-evident, independent of culture and interpretation. Ruskin similarly commented in *Sesame and Lilies* (1864-5) that, in spite of the many languages that English words had journeyed through, they retained 'a deep vital meaning which all good scholars feel in employing them' (36). Researching the written facts deeply enough will enable the privileged sage to break through them and accurately re-imagine the preceding oral culture. Ballantyne rationalized this strategy in his novel *Under the Waves* (1876). Facts do not de-romanticize, the narrator claims, but lead us back to life's 'sublime' mysteries (248). Allen Frantzen argues that Victorian Anglo-Saxon Studies blurred the distinction, observed by Said, between documented 'beginnings' and mythical 'origins' (64). For scholars like J. R. Green in *A Short History of the English People* (1874), *Beowulf* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* were only points of departure for mythologizing 'the fatherland of the English Race' in the Forests of Germany (1). Ballantyne similarly treats documents as stepping-stones to imagined ancestral experience. In a key battle-scene of *Erling* the narrative protests its fidelity to original manuscripts, yet, also claims to transcend them: 'There were scalds in both fleets at that fight, these afterwards wrote a poem descriptive of it, part of which we now quote'. The long passage, detailing the whole battle, is followed by the narrator explaining: 'In this poem the scald gives only an outline of the great fight. Let us follow more closely the action of those in whom we are peculiarly interested' (367-9). Ballantyne reverses the romantic logic of past verse, grounded in subjective particulars, giving way to the broad, objective generalizations of prose history. Instead, it is the ancient manuscript which reduces the tale to 'an outline' and the modern novelist who restores the even older subjectivity of oral storytelling. *Norsemen* suggests that the imaginative author might revive the skaldic aura by combining scholarship with personal, embodied experience. 'Minor details', the preface states, have been drawn from the author's 'own knowledge and personal experience of life in the wildernesses of America' (iv). Ballantyne's time working with trackers in Canada for the Hudson's Bay Company positions him in the oral tradition, restoring first-person testimony to the tale rather than mere repeated transcription. In order to reach mythical origins rather than mere evidential beginnings, Ballantyne's writing must reconnect with embodied speech.

Like Kingsley, Ballantyne also frames his fictions as heirs to the skaldic past through ancient speech imitating modern writing. In *Norsemen* the warrior Thorward tells his love-struck friend, 'although the course of your courtship runs smooth, there is an old

proverb – descended from Odin himself, I believe – which assures us that true love never did so run’ (46). The remark frames Shakespeare’s literary ‘genius’ as skaldic genius, inherited through generations of speakers. Equally, after the boy Olaf ventures far into the forest and is captured by natives, his self-remonstrations seem to anticipate the King James Bible: ‘If I had loved father better, perhaps I would have obeyed him better’. The narrator comments, ‘it would almost seem as if Olaf had heard of such a word as this – “If ye love me, keep my commandments!”’ (287). By imagining an unchanging linguistic spirit, Ballantyne charts a teleological path from oral Old Norse to literary English. Equally, Ballantyne traces his novel’s verisimilitude and heteroglossia to the inheritance of Nordic skald-craft. The Vikings’ poem-records are composed by the whole community, babbling with different voices and styles. After they land in America, Karlsefin recites their voyage as poetry. However, his companion Biarne objects to the omission of an episode where a whale swam near the ship, and speaks a page-worth of verse describing it. ‘Hence it appears in this chronicle’, notes the narrator, ‘and forms an interesting instance of the way in which men, for the sake of humorous effect, mingle little pieces of fiction with veritable history’ (63). Framing such narrative techniques as oral inheritance, Ballantyne narrows the gap between historical writing and oral prehistory. As the Vikings were instinctively disposed to (Protestant) Christianity, so the Victorian sage-author instinctively recognizes the living truths behind the manuscripts. Where, though, were these instincts to be located? As historical fiction struggled to close the gap between oral past and written present, language easily became conflated with race.

### Language Nostalgia and Race

Ballantyne’s *Erling* closes with the comment: ‘there is perhaps more of Norse blood in your veins than you wot of, reader ... for much of what is good and true in our laws and social customs, much manly and vigorous in the British Constitution ... dwelt in the breasts of the rugged old Sea-kings of Norway!’ (437). Racial theory offered to organicize language as a substitute for orality, locating the living power of words in the blood. From the 1850s onwards, physical anthropology increasingly divided humans into fixed types of inherited racial characteristics (Stepan 4; Hannaford 277-90). The living speech of the past was, perhaps, not lost in the wind, but lying dormant inside its speakers’ descendants. ‘Where is the Englishman,’ demanded Joseph Bosworth’s *Compendius Anglo-Saxon and*

*English Dictionary* (1848), ‘that does not feel his heart beat with conscious pride and independence when he considers his *Freedom*? ... How tame is the Romanised *Liberty*, in comparison ... This is the true, heartfelt *Freedom* and we derived it from our Anglo-Saxon forefathers’ (iii-iv). Such racialized philology framed word-meanings as instinctively felt rather than socially acquired. Carlyle had described language as a vast genealogy of forgotten ‘Hero-Poets’: ‘For every word we have, there was such a man and poet. The coldest word was once a glowing new metaphor ... Our English Speech is speakable because there were Hero-Poets of our blood and lineage; speakable in proportion to the number of these’ (1897, 183). The Teutonic nature of this originating race was popularized in the second half of the century by new translations of ancient Anglo-Saxon and Norse texts such as *Beowulf*, the *Heimskringla* and *Burnt Njal* (Wawn 6). Although Müller stressed the separation of language and race, his vocabulary of ‘stock’ and ‘roots’ often confused them (Joss Marsh 362). At the same time, increasing immigration into Britain was easily conceived as racial-linguistic invasion and contamination (Barczewski 137). The historian E. A. Freeman traced England’s social divisions to its loss of authentic racial identity through influxes of foreign elements. His *History of the Norman Conquest* (1867-73) lamented how many ‘true, ancient, and vigorous Teutonic words ... have perished from our classical speech, and now come among us as strangers’. It was owing to the invasion of Norman French, Freeman claimed, ‘that we cannot trace the history of our native speech, that we cannot raise our wail for its corruption, without borrowing largely from that store of foreign words’ (V 546-47). Forced to speak through structures of thought and feeling alien to its racial spirit, the English voice had lost much of its living power. The Viking fiction of James Frederick Hodgetts and Paul du Chaillu strove to revive this organic voice through etymology. Excavating ancient words and meanings promised to trigger racial impulses, reuniting speakers with their natural heritage. However, this strategy was as likely to collapse the myth of a united nation as reinforce it, revealing mongrel origins. Equally, Victorian imperialism clashed with the rhetoric of pure, racial-linguistic essences. A heterogeneous, global melting-pot, the British Empire threatened to uproot English from its mythical native soil and speakers.

The idea of organicizing modern English by separating ‘native’ elements from foreign impositions was put into practice by the Viking fiction of James Frederick Hodgetts. His 1885 novel *The Champion of Odin* mourns English alienation from the ancestral speech while discussing the strictness of ‘Northern honour’:

It is a strange circumstance, but one illustrating the intimate connection between thought and language, that as the keen sense of the all-important sanctity of this abstract sentiment died out, so the word for it became extinct, and we have been forced to borrow (or steal) one from the very race which we have least cause to love, the Romans! Our own word *ar* or *aer* is dead, and we use *honour*! (279)

By planting such words in his texts, however, Hodgetts challenged the ‘death’ of organic English word-roots. Perhaps, if classical learning could be replaced by ancient Norse and Icelandic, English would recover its ‘living powers’, lying dormant in the national bloodstream. Hodgetts’s preface is explicit in this aim, encouraging schoolboys to excavate their heritage: ‘English boys, as a rule, are too open and straightforward to feel any pleasure in the stories of the deities of Olympus. ... They will find the myths of their own race far less objectionable ... and they have besides the advantage of appealing directly to their own Teutonic impulses’ (iv). Hodgetts was a literature professor, and his ideas of reconnecting writing with readers’ racial predispositions cohered with justifications of English as a discipline. The Icelandic translator George Desant had argued that the ‘monstrous mosaic’ of modern English could only be purified through universities teaching the national tongue through its Teutonic parents (1843 iv-v). Matthew Arnold’s lectures *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) presented language and literature as expressions of timeless racial character. Writing in the 1880s when English Studies had become more established, Hodgetts suggests that education will reawaken the Old Norse lying dormant in the English bloodstream. He peppers his novel with Old Norse words as though to nudge English back towards its organic roots. The narrator explains that the Viking king lived in a “‘Burg”, or tower, as we now say, using a debased Norman word instead of our own dear English, though that still lives in such names as Edinburgh’ (35). The hero Orm describes his enemies as ‘nithings’, which a footnote translates as ‘a person of contempt’ (3). Further translations and contextual hints introduce the reader to more Norse words, which subsequently enter the text’s lexis: ‘a small sword, or dirk’, ‘a death-song, or “drapa”’, ‘sagas and qvidas, or legends and lays, were sung’ (46, 70, 336). Hodgetts’s Norse vocabulary mirrors the Icelandic and Scandinavian phrasebooks which became increasingly popular in England as late-Victorian tourists journeyed northwards in search of their roots

(Wawn 8). Perhaps the unity and vigour of the Viking past could live again in English speech reconnected with words and meanings of those times.

Paul du Chaillu's novel *Ivar the Viking* (1893) suggests a similar restoration of organic national voice through etymology. The French-American author and anthropologist had claimed in his historical work *The Viking Age* (1889) that English origins were Scandinavian rather than Anglo-Saxon. The subsequent novel, aimed at popularizing this view, quotes in its preface a letter from William Gladstone. 'When I have been in Norway, or Denmark, or among Scandinavians', the former Prime Minister writes, 'I have felt something like a cry of nature from within, asserting (credibly or otherwise) my nearness to them. In Norway I have never felt as if in a foreign country; and this, I have learned, is a very common experience with British travellers' (xx). The English-speaker's authentic Nordic vocabulary has been replaced by Latinate word-roots, so that his unity with Scandinavians can only be expressed through a pre-linguistic 'cry of nature from within'. Like Hodgetts, du Chaillu attempts some partial restoration of England's organic voice by reviving forgotten Norse words in his narration. The Viking women live in "'skemmas", or bowers', while the warrior Hjorvard wields a "'sax", or single-edged sword' and wears "'brynja", or chain-armour' (7). Du Chaillu also traces fragments of Norse words in modern English, reuniting them with their original material referents. Müller argued that the more senile a language became, the more arbitrary and distanced words became from their origins. Du Chaillu's etymologies restore to generic, interchangeable words their original meanings grounded in specific experiences and environments. Ship captains are referred to as 'styrmen', meaning 'to steer their own ships' (50). In the Viking community, 'all the numerous buildings formed a vast quadrangle, enclosing a large plot of grass called "'tun", or town' (3), while "'drekis" or dragon ships ... derived their names from the fact that their prows and sterns were ornamented with the head or tail of one or more dragons' (9). The organic truthfulness which du Chaillu strives to restore in language is reflected in the 'name fastening' ritual which his hero Ivar undergoes as a child. His father declares: 'Ivar shall the boy be named after his grandfather; he will of Odin's family the foremost man be called; he will fight many battles, and be much like his mother, and be called his father's son, for he will wage war from early age, and wander far and wide' (26). Unlike modern England, in which the names of ancient families could be bought, Vikings embodied the lineage of their names. Freeman traced the loss of authentic names to Norman Feudalism when serfs were named according to their French barons rather than

ancestral tribes. 'A man who bears a surname formed from an English name', he states, 'may be set down without doubt as being of Old-English descent. But when a man bears a surname formed from a Norman name, the name itself proves nothing' (V 568). While such individual names cannot be restored, Hodgetts and du Chaillu's Viking fictions strive to at least awaken unifying racial instincts and memories through fragments of the old organic speech.

The wish to purify an exclusive stock of ancient word-roots and racial memories conflicted with the popular image of English as an absorbent, heterogeneous conglomerate. Carlyle's Hero-Poets were as much Norman as Anglo-Saxon. Jacob Grimm had predicted that English would become a world language by uniting Teutonic and Romance speech (50). Citing Grimm's prediction in 1855, Trench described English as a Teutonic 'base' with a Latinate 'superstructure'. Trench contained this potential fragmentation of origins by endowing the Teutonic base with an imaginary agency. Rather than being diluted by foreign forms, Trench argued, English had 'imported' them as external material, the mere tools of a stable Teutonic mind (32-39). Hodgetts repeated this rhetoric in a lecture series at the British Museum *The English in the Middle Ages* (1885). The Normans might have conquered England militarily but, linguistically, 'instead of our becoming Norman, the Normans became English' (ix). This idea of a counter-conquest by the English language over Norman French was still being echoed later in Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906). The Norman Sir Richard, conjured from the past by the magical Puck, tells the children (in English): 'I set out to conquer England ... I did not then know that England would conquer me' (30). The continuity of English is illustrated by the schoolboy Dan's reading of H. W. Longfellow's 'The Discoverer of the Northern Cape' – a Viking tale which Sir Richard recognizes. The image of the seafaring Viking or emigrating Teuton naturalized British imperialism as an urge inherited in the blood (Kramer 752-60). Hodgetts's *Champion* notes 'the Viking boast, that the sun never sets in the land of his birth. Strange that we, descendants of those very Vikings, should boast in the same way, but with a somewhat different sense, that the sun never sets on the English flag' (1-2). Yet, this colonizing impulse led to a necessary mixture of races and cultures, which clashed with the model of purified 'roots'. Hodgetts's King Alfred triumphs through his ability to shift between tongues. 'Disguised as a skald, or minstrel, and knowing the dialect perfectly', he sings lays of Odin to Viking leaders and gathers the information needed to retake the throne (360). Alfred's plural voices imply that racial-linguistic Puritanism will be unsustainable in future

national and imperial networks of relations. Equally, du Chaillu's Viking heroes (and embryonic Englishmen) are schooled in foreign tongues, 'for it was absolutely necessary for Vikings to understand the language of the countries with which they traded or upon which they made war, for, as we have said, their commercial or warlike expeditions extended far and wide' (43). The nostalgia for local, organic language rooted in the people's lived experience is undercut by the need to engage with and absorb multiple tongues and identities. Instead of springing from a single authentic source, English becomes a heterogeneous patchwork, adding and shedding materials contingently, regardless of their origins.

Hybrid origins feature even more prominently in the racially and linguistically mixed American colonists of Ballantyne's *Norsemen* (1872). Norwegians, Icelanders, Scots and even a Turk are among the crew. While Scottish bondsmen awe the ship with songs of their homeland, the mercenary Tyrker punctuates the text with ancient Turkish exclamations. Language and national character appear even more fluid through the Viking Krake, whose time spent as a prisoner in Ireland has caused him to absorb the national accent and character. Speaking with an ineradicable 'twang', as though his native Norse were now an acquired tongue, he blithely sings Irish songs of victory against the Danes (82). His claim that he 'became an Irishman' is bourn out in his stereotypical wit and communicativeness (87). Ballantyne echoes the popular idea of Irish primitiveness (L. P. Curtis 59) through Krake's ability to communicate in gestures with Native Americans: 'Krake proved himself to be the most eloquent speaker in sign-language ... consisting not only of signs which might indeed be described, but of sounds – guttural and otherwise – which could not be spelt' (349). Yet, as Ballantyne makes clear, this Celtic blarney is not inherited but acquired through social contact. Language also detaches from race in the Icelanders' relations with Greenland savages or 'Skraelingers'. After initial skirmishes, they begin to trade with each other. Like the pidgin English associated with non-Europeans (see Chapter Three), the Skraelinger speech is represented as an incoherent distortion of Norse. Asked by the Viking Leif if he will go fishing tomorrow, one replies: 'Kite right, kite right, smorrow, yis, to-morrow'. Leif laughs at this: 'You'll speak Norse like a Norseman if you live long enough' (204). In spite of Ballantyne's attempts to differentiate Skraelinger Norse from the Norse that preceded English, the encounter problematizes linguistic heritage. Homi Bhabha argues that by repeatedly depicting the opposition between civilization and savagery, colonial discourse paradoxically revealed the

impossibility of drawing impermeable boundaries between the two (91). Similarly, by presenting Vikings as embryonic British colonizers, Ballantyne risks contaminating his pure roots of Nordic heritage. The more the Vikings absorb outsiders into their linguistic dominion, the less racially traceable their language becomes.

The image of English as a heterogeneous aggregate undermined the logic of meaning residing in the folk experiences of particular lands. For nostalgic excavators of a Teutonic past, this produced the fear that native English could no longer be differentiated from foreign impositions. Freeman lamented that pure English was irrecoverable since it had grown for nearly a thousand years in defiled forms. 'So strong a hold have the intruders taken on our soil', he complained, 'that we cannot even tell the tale of their coming without their help' (V 547). Equally, Hodgetts and du Chaillu can only render Norse words meaningful for English readers by surrounding them with explanatory words from the modern lexis. The latent organic 'impulses' which Hodgetts projected into English minds are triggered not by the old words themselves but the contextual scaffolding which he erects around them. Hence, supposedly revived words like *skemma* or *nithing* only signify as synonyms for impure modern words (bower and coward). Hodgetts's novel in particular suggests the anxiety that modern English cannot be reunited with its Nordic origins through repeated caveats regarding translation. Before battle, the heroes hear priestesses 'singing a song of which we attempt to give a translation, but it is very weak when compared with the original' (63). Later, as the sea-warriors leave land for another battle, 'they sang a rough wild strain, the words of which it is very difficult to render into modern English. The following is as near an approach as we have been able to make' (104). Freeman argued that, alienated from its organic moorings, modern English had suffered 'the loss of its old creative power' (V 597). Instead of coining new forms from its 'native' stock of word-roots, it merely imported foreign words. Hodgetts's narrator apologizes for the inadequacy of modern English to bear the heroic weight of the Norse sagas, even as he imitates their alliterative form: 'No words of ours, in our debased modern tongue, are strong enough to describe the storm of applause sounding from the shields struck by the mighty swords' (112). Chapter Two showed how predictive fictions in the period implied the superiority of future languages through their inability to translate them. These examples show historical fiction using the same technique to idealize the mythical origins of language. Semantic ambiguity and deferral could be formulated as diseases of the present, caused by speakers' estrangement from their organic 'roots'. Divorced from these pastoral origins and crossed

with foreign strains, English was left rootless and mechanical. This idea set the template for anxieties about future impositions of foreign tongues: a natural companion to fears of military invasion towards the turn of the century.

‘Es ist Verboten’: Language Invasions

Purists like Hodgetts had depicted the Norman Conquest as a linguistic invasion, chaining natives to foreign speech. ‘English’ ultimately triumphed, however, and would again, Hodgetts concluded, in a future invasion:

Imagine the consequence of such a proceeding nowadays. Suppose, after the siege of London, the successful Esquimaux should order us to resign the language of Shakespeare, and adopt their unctuous tongue. Should we, could we talk it? I trow not! The very children in the street would resist it; and though in public they might prattle a few words of the detested speech, now they would talk English in private. English people are very prone, even now, to copy foreigners as a matter of chic (as I borrow this word); but try to force them to use such expressions ... and see how the attempt would work. (1885a, 40-1)

Through the following decades, a number of authors imagined just such attempts. Victorian invasion fiction, beginning in 1871 with George Chesney’s *The Battle of Dorking*, tapped into fears of England being overrun by continental powers (notably a unified Germany). As historical fictions had nostalgized past purity, invasion narratives envisioned further contaminations of English. This trope was bedeviled by the same contradictions as the mythical organic national speech in historical fiction. Where, across regional and global variants, and when, through millennia of phonetic change, was the pure essence of English to be centred? Philology had the potential to fragment language into branching dialects without privileging a national standard or drawing definitive borders before other languages. The organic national tongue depicted in invasion fiction is often as much threatened by its own pluralism as by invaders from without.

Philology would seem to obstruct this dynamic of (typically) German invaders imposing alien speech upon England, since the two nation’s tongues had been traced to

common ‘Teutonic’ origins. The discourse of English as exclusively Nordic, though, popularized by the above-discussed Viking fictions, proved a useful means of othering German invaders and the language they brought with them. As du Chaillu wrote in *Ivar the Viking*, while people of the North shared language and customs, ‘great, indeed, was the contrast that existed between the Vikings [of England’s heritage] and the tribes of Germania’ (11). In 1864 the philologist George Stephens translated the imagined Nordic roots of English into politics, calling for Westminster to support Denmark in its war against Prussia (Wawn 223). As early as the 1850s, Stephens had attacked the annexation of Anglo-Saxon by scholars as a German dialect. ‘Our people and our language’ he warned ‘are being rapidly transferred to a race with whom we have no particular connection, and whose qualities are not such as to make any amalgamation desirable ... let us guard it from the hands of the invaders!’ (472-6). Following the Franco-Prussian War and subsequent German unification, Germanophobia continued to equate military and linguistic conquest. The conflict differed to previous wars, being followed by a long period of occupation in which Prussian soldiers were billeted among the French population. In *The Germans in France* (1874) the *Times* correspondent Henry Edwards described how the soldiers had marked these territories with their language. A number of German words, he notes, ‘will long be remembered in the provinces occupied during the war’ (246). While written messages in German were distributed among bewildered French peasants, its words infiltrated French speech. One speaker is quoted: ‘Soldat Prussienn nix capout!’ meaning ‘the Prussian soldier has not yet been done for!’ (‘nix’ being military slang for ‘nicht’). German is also inscribed in graffiti on buildings near Paris: ‘‘Nach Paris’, ‘Capout’, and ‘Napoleon Capout’, ‘Das ist gewiss Napoleom!’ (sic 247)’. The daubings allude to the ‘Kutschke Lied’, a popular song of the war, containing the lines: ‘Was Kraucht da in dem Busch herum? / Ich glaube es ist Napoleum!’ (Fitz-Gerald I 118). Such imposition of alien language and cultural associations would be a recurrent trope of invasion fiction.

Lieutenant Colonel Chesney wrote *The Battle of Dorking* to agitate for the reorganization of Britain’s defences (Clarke 1965, 311). In a letter to John Blackwood, whose magazine later published the tale, Chesney suggested achieving this end by ‘describing a successful invasion of England, and the collapse of our power and commerce in consequence’ (qtd. Porter 299). He found a vivid means of portraying such disempowerment through the imposition of the German language, as had occurred in occupied France. After being routed on the battle-field, the narrator awakes in a deceased

friend's house to find it occupied by Germans. Their foreign speech is associated with plunder and desecration, as they devour the dead man's larder: "Sind wackere Soldaten, diese Englischen Freiwilligen", said a broad-shouldered brute, stuffing a great hunch of beef into his mouth with a silver fork, an implement I should think he must have been using for the first time in his life' (86). The narrator also speaks German in encounters with the enemy, citing 'my knowledge of other languages', but this is reported in English. He appeals to an officer to prevent the execution of English privates: 'is this your discipline, to let unarmed prisoners be shot without orders?' The lack of translation for German speakers highlights their otherness. The one example of a German attempting English is mangled by German syntax: "Auf dem Wege, Spitzbube!" cried the brute, lifting his rifle as if to knock me down. "Must one prisoners who fire at us let shoot?" (90). The English language appears similarly broken in the speech of the defeated natives. After the battle which has widowed her, the wife of the narrator's friend 'explained in broken sentences how matters stood' (88). The privates in danger of being shot are even more voiceless, able only to 'cast an imploring glance at me ... utterly unable to make themselves understood' (90). Their testimony can only be made through the narrator when he translates it to the captain, without any reported speech of the privates themselves. The subjugation of English to a powerless provincial dialect is indicated by the narrator's implied audience, which is not England as a whole but merely 'my grandchildren' (17) who are preparing to emigrate.

Fears of German hegemony grew stronger three decades later as the new state expanded its navy. Saki's (or H. H. Munrow's) *When William Came* (1913) reflected this anxiety through an invasion of the English tongue in parallel to the country. Returning from abroad, the Englishman Murrey Yeovil finds London 'a bilingual city, even as Warsaw' (31). A series of laws in the expanding German empire had imposed the German language upon public signage and administration in Polish, Danish and Alsatian areas (Abrams 24). In Saki's tale, Victoria Street has become 'Viktoria Strasse', and when Yeovil requests a cab journey to 'Twenty-eight, Berkshire Street', the driver corrects him: 'Berkschirestrasse, acht-und-zwanzig' (30). England's changing patterns of speech index the invasion of German bodies. This is confirmed by a bilingual policeman in a park who informs Yeovil that walking on the grass 'ist verboten'. This registers London's changing demographics, as the officer explains: 'About as many foreigners as English use the parks nowadays; in fact, on a fine Sunday afternoon, you'll find three foreigners to every two English' (73-4). A later scene suggests London transforming into an outpost of Germany through the

conversations of statesman Herr Von Kwarl. He dines in the Brandenburg café 'at the lower end of what most of its patrons called the Regentstrasse' (91). The sheer numbers of incoming German-speakers are imagined erasing the indigenous language and its marks upon the landscape. It is owing to 'the steady influx of Germans since the war', Von Kwarl notes, that 'whole districts are changing the complexion of their inhabitants, and in some streets you might almost fancy yourself in a German town' (101). The twin dilution of language and blood is demonstrated through English social-climbers marrying into the newly dominant German aristocracy. To Yeovil's disgust, the newly-wed socialite Mrs. Mentieth-Mendlesohnn is now 'wont to describe herself' as 'one of the Mendlesohnns of Invergordon' (148). The etymologies and family names in which historical fiction located English identity are to be suppressed, and foreign names and words implanted. In this way, Von Kwarl explains, they must 'coax' England's youth 'to forget' their separate history so that 'Anglo-Saxon may blend with German ... under the sceptre of the Hohenzollerns' (106-7). Saki implies in the final scene, though, that English voices will not so much blend with German ones as be silenced by them. When crowds at an official parade begin to sing and whistle subversively, 'uniformed police and plainclothes detectives sprang into evidence on all sides; whatever happened there must be no disloyal demonstration. The whistlers and mockers were pointedly invited to keep silence, and one or two addresses were taken' (320-1). The English have been devoiced.

Saki's vision of German replacing English is as much a critique of modern urban and print culture as it is a warning of future invasion. Artificial city life empties words of meaning and speakers of independent thought. Cut off from its rural roots, speech becomes 'shrill, mechanical repartee' (127) uttered by 'parrot men and women that fluttered and chattered through London drawing-rooms and theatre foyers' (223). At his wife Cecily's dinner parties, Yeovil notices 'an incessant undercurrent of jangling laughter, an unending give-and-take of meaningless mirthless jest and catchword. ... a noisy, empty interchange of chaff and laughter' (126). Yeovil's friend Dr Holham explains that most Londoners are happy 'saying nothing worth saying, but ... saying it over and over again ... echoing the same catchwords' (60). Words become dead fossils, exchanged mechanically. A clergyman at Cecily's parties Canon Mousepace is described as hewing platitudes from the 'inexhaustible quarry' of 'the dictionary of the English language' (236). Mousepace opines of a pianist that such talent brings 'responsibility'. He fails to define such responsibility, though, and the German-appeasing milieu in which he moves betrays the hollowness of his

words. Embarrassingly, his platitude is later repeated by another reveller, the narrator remarking: 'The quarry of the English language was of course a public property, but it was disconcerting to have one's own particular barrow-load of sentence-building material carried off before one's eyes' (254). Mechanized print turns speakers and writers into parasites upon the authentic past, and their audiences into passive consumers. This passivity is illustrated through the exorbitant taxes and curbs on freedom, which Londoners impotently read of in newspapers. Modern English seems ill-equipped for outbursts of strong emotion, with Yeovil fuming in the tongue of his Siberian travel companions: 'Yeovil said something which was possibly the Buriat word for the nether world' (60). Dr Holham confirms his friend's alienation from artificial English language and life, observing: 'There is more music to you in the quick thud, thud of hoofs on desert mud ... than in all the dronings and flourishes that a highly-paid orchestra can reel out' (59). Despite suspending plans to resist the invasion, Yeovil still appears to reject the artificial culture which enabled it by moving to the country. Even this pastoral idyll is a corrupted imitation, though, the estate having been sold off by its hereditary owners. Purchased through a parasitic middle-man who keeps its details on a stylograph, the property is one of many vacated and on the market, mainly to rich Germans. Yeovil's idyll is as artificial as urban phrase-making, bearing only the names of its vanished hereditary families. Saki's foreign invaders merely accelerate a long-running socio-economic estrangement of people from the land. When a local doctor regales Yeovil with tales of the village, his storytelling, or perhaps Yeovil's reception of it, seems denationalized by print culture. Listening, Yeovil's mind runs intertextually into the culture of the invading nation: 'It was a little like Hans Andersen, he decided, and a little like the *Reminiscences of an Irish R. M.*, and perhaps just a little like some of the more probable adventures of Baron Munchausen' (300). For all of the doctor's apparent authenticity, 'a living unwritten chronicle of the East Wessex hunt' (299), his auratic storytelling cannot be separated from the international flow of textual influence and interpretation. Saki's depiction of invaders de-voicing the nation clashes with the underlying anxiety that the nation has no authentic voice to lose.

Such an anxiety explains the tendency of much invasion fiction in the period to strongly differentiate the English spoken by foreign invaders from that of the natives. The anonymously-authored *How John Bull Lost London* (1882) opens with a French officer warping the English language in parallel to his destruction of the country. Drawing on defence anxieties regarding proposals for a channel tunnel, the novel imagines French

soldiers billeted in English homes and treating the owners as slaves. The officer's speech is heavily-accented and peppered with cod-French:

Now den, you von sacré Inglisman, you be kvick and make ze dinner here, or I vill make you ze pleasure of anoder cold bath. And, sacré bleu, find some odder domino, or you make von tumble out of ze window. Canaille! you tink we come here to be miserable like von John Bull, with your sacré portare-bière and your bifteck? You take my conseil, mon ami, and be kvick vit ze good wine, ze domino, and ze dinner, or parbleu you shall see somesing'. (7-8)

Victorian novels usually contained nonstandard speech within the wider, stabilizing structure of Standard English narration (Page 1988, 8). The officer's harangue disrupts this underlying order, though, through its position at the narrative's beginning, throwing linguistic norms out of joint. English characters are, again, de-voiced, suffering assault when they object to the troops wrecking their homes. The allegorical character John Smith, who owns the billeted house, bears the officer's threats and jibes silently. Bayonet-prods and a soaking teach him 'that anything like remonstrance was impolitic' (9). The bitter silence of the English common man is perhaps necessary to maintain the opposition between invaders and invaded. Smith's dumbness conceals the plurality of English variants which, diverging from the standard, would complicate the opposition between native and invaders' English. National unity is similarly posited through distorted invaders' English in a curious article published in the *Aldeburgh Lodge School Magazine* in 1909. The piece entitled 'The Child's Guide to Knowledge' forms an extract from an imaginary schoolbook of the future after a German invasion. In England, we are told, 'The official language is German' with 'the original dialect called English' surviving only 'in remote parts of the country' (Clarke 1997, 179). As Clarke notes, the piece mimics German syntax, shifting verbs to the ends of sentences and constructing enormous compound words: 'the magnificent-still-in-all-parts-of-the-Empire-annually-celebrated victory of Canterbury when the hastily organized English forces after a prolonged and sanguinary engagement were by the combined armies of the Teutonic Empire completely crushed' (180). The more that invaders are imagined warping English, the less artificial and arbitrary its standardized form will appear.

Conversely, standardization provoked anxiety that English identity could be counterfeited by foreigners. Ferguson has traced this idea through Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The Count's mastery of Standard English prefigures his attempted invasion, which is opposed by decentralized dialects and codes (2004, 237-44). As immigration into Britain increased towards the end of the nineteenth century, the popular anxiety arose that immigrants could aid invasions. Immigrants 'spoke the language of the people as understandably as they spoke it themselves', warned Walter Wood's *The Enemy in Our Midst* (1906), enabling them to infiltrate the establishment (see Clarke 1997, 113). The print media seemed equally vulnerable to ventriloquism by outsiders. Edwards noted how the Prussians had seized French newspapers and printers to publish propaganda urging natives to capitulate. 'These journals', Edwards continues, 'by a curious and somewhat bewildering fiction, were put forward as the work of Frenchmen; and one had sometimes to read a passage twice before understanding that 'our' troops (who had just been ignominiously defeated) were the troops of France' (59). Louis Tracey's 1901 novel *The Invaders* reflected this aspect of modern invasion through foreign troops occupying Britain's telegraph offices, intercepting the national network with 'perfect idiomatic English' (Clarke 1997, 105). The idea that each language had an organic centre was waning near the end of the century: Whitney argued that different groups and professions evolved specialized dialects to reflect their activities (1875, 118-21). For Erskine Childers's pioneering spy novel *The Riddle of the Sands*, such decentralized technical dialects promise to defend against linguistic infiltration. The narrator Carruthers and his friend Davies unravel a German conspiracy to invade England while yachting in the Baltic. Davies's invitation for Carruthers to join him for duck-shooting is the first of many coded messages in their adventure. A self-confessed 'duffer at sailing' (81), Carruthers learns nautical vocabulary in parallel to his gradual discovery of the conspiracy. When Davies narrates his voyage thus far in sailing terminology, Carruthers confesses, 'this was Greek to me' (79). Equally, the maps and charts which guide them appear at first to Carruthers like obscure ciphers. Their code of directions and measurements must be unraveled along with the 'riddle' of the North Sea sandbanks where the invasion is being prepared. The sands appear on the chart as 'dotted patches ... becoming unintelligible ... a confusion of winding and intersecting lines and bald spaces' (88). Davies's logbook is equally obscure, 'a mass of short entries with cryptic abbreviations' and a page torn out (48). This obscurity proves its worth, however, when Germans later ransack the vessel and its logbook. Authorial

footnotes regularly refer the reader to diagrams of the maps and charts which drive Davies and Carruthers's discussions. By sharing this frame of reference, the reader is shown the importance of context to their nautical exchanges, which bars malicious outsiders from understanding them. Yet, this fragmentation into specialized dialects also aids the invasion's conspirators. When Carruthers eavesdrops on one of their meetings, he finds that: 'Immersed in a subject with which they were all familiar, they were elusive, elliptic and persistently technical. Many of the words I did catch were unknown to me. The rest were, for the most part, either letters of the alphabet or statistical figures' (289). The standardized language of print is defended from imitation by signs rooted in technical and personal contexts.

Childers's strategies for defending the national voice also threaten to tear it apart and permeate its boundaries with other nations. Carruthers mimics German identity in order to eavesdrop on the conspirators, responding to the hails of other ships 'as gruffly and gutturally as I could' (282). Like the imagined German spy in England, he speaks 'like a native' (6). Yet, the narrative also posits an innate national vocality, which outsiders can never entirely counterfeit nor natives suppress. It is this mystical racial recognition which pricks the heroes' suspicion of the English traitor Herr Dollmann. While Dollmann speaks perfect German, Davies recognizes him as a fellow countryman through mysterious intuition. 'It was something in his looks and manner', Davies later explains; 'the way he talked – I mean about cruising and the sea, especially. ... I felt we understood one another, in a way that two foreigners wouldn't' (80). A similar inkling drives Carruthers to perceive the same in Dollmann's daughter, as he recounts: 'By her voice, when she spoke, I knew that she must have talked German habitually from childhood; diction and accent were faultless, at least to my English ear; but the native constitutional ring was wanting' (198). Against the profusion of codes and private languages which crowd the text, Childers suggests a natural, native voice which is the same across each country and sticks ineradicably to the tongues of its emigrants. This notion of a single national voice was valuable to invasion fiction because it enabled authors to present their texts as expressions of it. Chesney's *Battle of Dorking* appears as the transcribed speech of an everyman figure addressing his family, who are listening rather than reading: 'You ask me to tell you, my grandchildren, something about my own share in the great events that happened fifty years ago' (17). Simultaneously, this homely, embodied voice blurs with the nation as a whole, shifting between first-person singular and plural: 'For us in England it came too late ... We

English have only ourselves to blame'. The anonymity of the text's author in its initial publication enhanced this sense of a national voice (Clarke 1965, 308). Childers similarly speaks for the nation through the 'editor' to Carruthers's narration. His epilogue shifts into the first-person plural as in Chesney: 'nothing short of a successful invasion could finally compel us to make peace. Our hearts are stout' (335). These invocations of a monologic national voice with one will foreshadow the mass conscription and persecution of conscientious objectors in the Great War to follow. Modern war, which mobilizes the whole nation, seems to necessitate the suppression of language variation and dialogue.

The idea that language variety might defend Britain against invaders is explored most fully in P. G. Wodehouse's parody of the genre. *The Swoop!, or How Clarence Saved England* (1909) imagines simultaneous invasions by nine countries. This produces a babble of languages, undermining the unilateral logic in much invasion fiction of one tongue imposing upon another. Germans and Turks are unable to negotiate articulately with the Chinese, whose plans are equally derailed by Welsh language. The Eastern invaders wander for a week in the countryside 'having lost their way near Llanfairpwlgwnngogoch, and having been unable to understand the voluble directions given to them by the various shepherds they encountered' (21). Britain's linguistic disunity becomes an asset, disorientating the invaders as to whom or where they are invading. Similarly, the invaders are defeated not by British armies marching to one voice but the secret handshakes, passwords and slang of a group of boy scouts. The fourteen-year-old Clarence Chugwater and his friends turn the invaders against each other by fabricating snubs and insults between them in a newspaper. Upon hatching this plan, the scouts burst into a private, pseudo-savage chant, 'Een gonyama-gonyama! ... Invooboo! Yah bo! Yah bo! Invooboo!'. The narrator ironically describes this as 'The voice of Young England – of Young England alert and at its post!' (37), highlighting the instability of a national voice. Clarence embodies the everyman voice of invasion fiction ad absurdum, sighing for 'my England' while his family chatter about cricket tournaments (11). Upon arresting the German leader Prince Otto, he declares 'I am England!' only for the Prince to puncture his bombast on a point of grammar:

'England, thou art free! ... Let the nations learn from this that it is when apparently crushed that the Briton is to more than ever be feared'.  
'Thad's bad grabbar', said the Prince critically.

‘It isn’t’, said Clarence with warmth.

‘It is, I tell you. Id’s a splid idfididive’. (62)

The Prince’s jibe (incapacitated by a blocked nose) illustrates the babble of voices inherent to the novel form, which undermines a monologic voice-of-the nation. Mikhail Bakhtin argued that discourse in the novel form was uniquely ‘heterglossic’ (375). Its clash of voices, he claimed, represented the struggle of speakers to verbalize their social perspectives, appropriating and reshaping each others’ language. The foreign invader’s correction of Clarence’s English undermines the model of a united *Volkstimme*. Yet, the same dialogism also precipitates the invaders’ downfall: German and Russian generals deliver lectures in England’s music-halls, only for the opposing armies to heckle them off stage. Wodehouse similarly mocks the genre’s authorial poses, prefacing his tale with a short note from ‘The Bomb-Proof Shelter, London, W’. Parodying the sanctimony of scaremongers like William Le Queux,<sup>20</sup> he claims that the story ‘has been written and published purely from a feeling of patriotism and duty. Mr. Alston Rivers’ sensitive soul will be jarred to its foundations if it is a financial success. So will mine. But in a time of national danger we feel that the risk must be taken’ (5). Such satire undermines the idea of a single national voice which might be captured in print. Its babble of voices points to how England might defend itself not so much from foreign invaders as from its own coercive jingoism. Yet, the lack of bloodshed and comical routing of the invaders leaves this point unpronounced. Wodehouse’s carnivalesque dialogues unfold in a world in which war has no serious consequences. While mocking monologic voices which call the nation to arms, *The Swoop!* foresees none of the seismic horrors which they would soon beget.

#### Morris: Progressive Language Nostalgia

Was Victorian and Edwardian language nostalgia inherently conservative and warmongering? Thus far, fictional interest in reconnecting language with its organic roots seems to have tended towards racial exclusion, xenophobia and rule by birth or strength. However, Victorian interest in national origins could also be fitted to liberal and leftist

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<sup>20</sup> ‘I am an Englishman’, thunders Le Queux’s *Spies of the Kaiser* (1909), ‘and, I hope, a patriot’ (129).

politics.<sup>21</sup> William Morris's fiction combined nostalgia for organic language with international socialism. The London polymath was influenced by Ruskin's admiration for pre-industrial crafts and Gothic architecture, in which he imagined work and art united. Morris's letters suggest equal enthusiasm for language of the past. In 1885 he wrote to James F. Henderson:

You see things have very much changed since the early days of language: once everybody who could express himself at all did so beautifully, was a poet for that occasion, because all language was beautiful. But now language is utterly degraded in our daily lives, and poets have to make a new tongue each for himself: before he can even begin his story he must elevate his means of expression from the daily jabber to which centuries of degradation have reduced it. (1987, IIB 483)

Morris read Trench's philological works at Oxford and corresponded with Farrar and Müller through his work on stained-glass windows and church preservation (see Morris 1987, I 13, 258, 576). His idealization of past language closely resembles the latter two's vision of the 'mythopoeic' period. 'Language', wrote Farrar, 'though not the result of convention, tends to become conventional in the process of time, but this very tendency is often a mark of decay and ruin' (1860, 20). 'Words, of which the composition was originally clear' have their meanings 'worn away like the image and superscription of a coin' becoming 'mechanical (i.e. unmeaning of itself) by corruption' (55-6). For Farrar, the beauty and truth of Anglo-Saxon and Norse poetry derived from its organic, creative freedom, coining forms from common folk experiences. Instead of coining words to reflect their self-defined world, people now echoed the fixed terms and ideas of convention. Yet, what seemed inevitable for Farrar was only a product of capitalism for the socialist Morris and, therefore, potentially reversible. The challenge for Morris consisted of reconciling organic origins with socialism's rejection of national boundaries. His fiction also struggles to answer how humanity might regain organic language while retaining the history, unity and class consciousness enabled by writing.

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<sup>21</sup> See: Dellheim (16); Jan Marsh (7). Burrow argues that historians in the 1860s-1880s like Freeman and Green legitimized parliamentary liberalism by tracing it to an ancient Teutonic heritage (1981, 109-15).

Morris echoed his notion that a poet must 'make a new tongue' in his tale of the medieval peasants' revolt *A Dream of John Ball* (1886-7). The Victorian narrator, who timetravels to this epoch through a dream, hears a rousing speech by the rebel leader, and comments: 'while John Ball had been speaking to me I felt strangely, as though I had more things to say than the words I knew could make clear: as if I wanted to get from other people a new set of words' (74). Such new words turn out to be old ones excavated from ancient Teutonic roots. The peasants' natural urges for community and equality seem embedded in their ancient Teutonic vocabulary and syntax. Tales are 'foregathered' rather than collected; John Ball calls the feudal lord 'foeman' instead of enemy (35, 16). He also positions verbs near the ends of alliterative sentences, evoking Anglo-Saxon verse: 'woe worth the while! too oft he sayeth sooth' (36). Like social cooperation, poetic creation is instinctive in Teutonic speech. The narrator appears among the peasants as a minstrel, telling the Icelandic saga of Sigurd, of which Morris had earlier written a version in archaic English. 'As I told it,' he reports, 'the words seemed to thicken and grow, so that I knew not the sound of my own voice, and they ran almost into rhyme and measure as I told it' (16-7). Equally, in Morris's utopia *News from Nowhere* (1890) Teutonic languages seem to revive in parallel to organic, socialist society. Morris's vision transforms London into a garden city free of industrial labour, restoring harmony between humans and nature. Anglo-Saxon words have sprung back into the people's speech along with the old artisan crafts which industrial capitalism suppressed (Plotz 945). The antiquarian Old Hammond tells the Victorian narrator 'Guest' that older native terms have replaced Greek and Latin 'long-tailed words' (116). The Anglo-Saxon 'mote', for example, serves for administration (199, 37). This reversion to older speech mirrors the return of oral society, as Hammond mentions '[the] meeting of the neighbours, or mote, as we call it, according to the ancient tongue of the times before bureaucracy' (121). While people have forgotten most nineteenth-century books, they treasure the folk tales collected by Jacob Grimm, the imaginative roots of the Teutonic race. Morris's organic socialist future blurs with his reverence for a Teutonic past.

This concern with Teutonic origins would seem to sit awkwardly with Morris's internationalism. After co-founding the Socialist League in 1884, Morris wrote: 'For us neither geographical boundaries, political history, race, nor creed makes rivals or enemies; for us there are no nations, but only varied masses of workers and friends' (1885, 1-2). Regenia Gagnier observes that Morris conceived 'a nativist love of the land' and 'socialist

internationalism' as enablers, rather than contradictions, of each other (155). Yet, the tradition of romantic philology, growing in tandem with ideas of nationalism, threatened to undermine such 'situated cosmopolitanism'. Herder had emphasized local particularity against cultural universals, writing that word-meanings 'are so specifically national, so much in conformity with the manner of thinking and seeing of the people, of the inventor' that the foreigner was unable to 'strike them right' (1966, 150). Instead of generating alternative labels for a common reality, languages represented the socio-historical subjectivities of their speakers. In this context, international communication and cooperation demanded a common language or, at least, common set of ideas above local perspectives.

Morris's solution to this problem mirrored that of Müller. Anna Vaninskaya argues that Morris's evocations of the primitive Gothic past 'were indebted' to Müller's comparative mythology (39). Equally, his faith that natural ideas (leading to socialism) underlay all language was enabled by Müller's concept of 'roots' of speech. Unlike physical anthropology, which often linked languages to racial types, Müller's philology presented speech as proof of a united human nature. Our body is our uniform,' he wrote in 1889. 'It matters very little whether it is black or white. Language, on the contrary, is the very embodiment of our true self' (49). Similarly, for Morris the roots of organic language lay not in racial exclusion but a universal human nature, unstifled by industrial modernity. In 1886 he wrote to the *Pall Mall Gazette* that the 'Germanic tribes' of old 'had an elevated literature founded on the ideas of the dignity of life which naturally spring from the consciousness of belonging to a corporation of freemen' (1987, IIB 601). His contrasting view that the Romans were 'commercial and individualistic' derived not from the natural essence of their language but the social state that had distorted it. Latin is not innately corrupting in *News from Nowhere*, as the boatman Dick demonstrates, responding to the unfamiliar term 'education': 'I know enough Latin to know that the word must come from *educere*, to lead out' (43). The mechanical 'boy-farms' that 'education' signifies for the narrator are produced by artificial Victorian society rather than some natural essence in the word. Instead of privileging one line of ethno-linguistic descent, Morris traces all lines to a common set of general ideas. Müllerian philology provided a model to reach the universal through the particular. While words were shaped over time by particular environments, tracing their journeys backwards always led to metaphors for the same 'root' abstractions.

This faith that communal ideas naturally underlay all human speech enabled Morris to reject hegemonic centres of culture and embrace localism. He seized upon Marx's prediction that government would wither away after the revolution, imagining the future as a return to localized, transparent etymologies. In an 1888 letter to George Bainton, Morris hoped for an end to cultural homogenization. Communities after his revolution 'would grow together or dissolve as convenience of place, climate, language, &c. dictated' (1987, IIB 769-70). Languages might speciate and hybridize through the peaceful migration of speakers, as indicated by the Nowhereian commingling of tongues. Many children, Guest is told,

can talk French, which is the nearest language talked on the other side of the water; and they soon get to know German also, which is talked by a huge number of communes and colleges on the mainland. These are the principal languages we speak in these islands, along with English or Welsh, or Irish, which is another form of Welsh ... and besides our guests from over sea often bring their children with them, and the little ones get together, and rub their speech into one another. (45)

Tongues cannot conflict with each other because they are kindred, grown from the same roots. This invalidates both British colonization of Ireland and Irish nationalism. Irish 'is another form of Welsh', the same as English is another form of German. Philology seems to point the way to one nation of humans, united by categories of thought naturally predisposed (in Morris's interpretation) to a federation of socialistic communes.

Morris's notion of universal, socialist inclinations hidden in the roots of language attempted to reign in the fragmenting definitions of socialism in the 1890s (see Vaninskaya 140). He wrote *News from Nowhere* during quarrels among factions of his Socialist League, which would culminate in him leaving the organization (Mackail II 230-31). These conflicts are refracted through its dream of a common, socialist language. Although Nowhereian society accommodates different political opinions (Waithe xi), it is far more united than Victorian socialism. The narrative opens with the narrator, Guest, witnessing a shambolic debate 'up at the League' in which 'there were six persons present, and consequently six sections of the party were represented' (7). By contrast, the Nowhereians' knowledge of word-origins harmonizes their feelings, obviating institutions to enforce

them. Unlike the unstable values of capitalism, Nowhereian nomenclature breaks things down into objective material properties (Beaumont 181). An old man punctures the puffery of expensive clothes, explaining that the bourgeoisie of the past wore ‘breeches made of worsted velvet, that stuff that used to be called plush some years ago’ (59). Buildings are named to reflect the labour inside them, as Dick explains: ‘we don’t call them factories now, but Banded-workshops; that is, places where people collect who want to work together’ (66). Renaming things and unpacking their definitions challenges the petrified categories and fictions of capitalism. One Nowhereian lists ‘our units of management, a commune, or a ward, or a parish (for we have all three names, indicating little real distinction between them now, though time was there was a good deal)’ (121). Rooted in undivided material nature, their speech sees through capitalism’s nonce-distinctions and nonce-concepts (Plotz 946). The notion of ‘idleness’, used in the nineteenth century to justify wage-slavery, is to the Nowhereians an outlandish fairytale, nicknamed ‘Blue devils’ and ‘mulleygrubs’. In a society which has restored the natural pleasure of work, the concept is ridiculous and thus matched to nonsense words, as Dick laughs: ‘What a queer disease! it may well be called Mulleygrubs!’ (58-59). The Nowhereians’ reunion of words with their etymologies enables them to rediscover the communal cooperation which Morris imagined buried in human nature. In 1887 Morris predicted ‘the happy days when society shall be what its name means’; *society* deriving from the Latin *socius*, meaning comrade (1969, 216). Morris’s fellow-socialists had begun to address each other as comrade in the 1880s,<sup>22</sup> but the Nowhereians have dropped even this word with its military connotations. Instead, they are all ‘neighbours’, derived from the Anglo-Saxon *nēah* (nigh) and *būr* (dweller).<sup>23</sup> In the absence of artificial hierarchies and nations, others are defined by physical proximity. As Dick comments, French is not the tongue of a separate people but ‘the nearest language talked on the other side of the water’. Morris’s etymological unmaking of English reveals humanity as naturally of one mind, divided only by distance.

Morris denationalized English further in his last romances, forging an idiom which seemed to reunite and, yet, purify archaic threads of Indo-European speech. In a fantasy world resembling medieval Europe, Morris replaces French and Latin imports with old Germanic words and syntax. Hence, *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (1897) begins: ‘Whilom, as tells the tale, was a walled cheaping-town hight Utterhay, which was builded

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<sup>22</sup> See: ‘Comrade’, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989).

<sup>23</sup> See ‘Neighbour’, *OED*.

in a bight of the land' (1). Morris also coins compounds from Teutonic roots: people seek not *accommodation* but 'houseroom', and are not *famished* but 'hunger-weary' (4, 104). Waithe argues that Morris evolved this renewed English through translating the Icelandic sagas. He sought to open English to the 'strangeness' of ancient Icelandic, Waithe suggests, challenging narrow nationalist culture with a 'pluralistic utopianism' (93-94). Nor is this fantasy English exclusively Teutonic; it admits Latinate words, providing that they are of sufficient antiquity, such as *bestia* in the term 'way-beast' for an ass (5). Indeed, characters in *The Well at the World's End* (1896) refer to their lingua franca as 'Latin', as though it preceded the division of Romance tongues from Germanic (169; Plotz 946). In a period of popular anxiety over rising immigration and possible invasion, Morris's monoglot worlds imagine an inclusive, cosmopolitan inheritance, collapsing the binary between native and alien.

Attempting to revive such Adamic speech in print entangled Morris's late fiction in contradictions. Romantic philology located the life of language in orality, while writing caused its decay, alienating words from speakers. 'Language exists in man', Müller declared, 'it lives in being spoken'. Speech diverged into different dialects like 'parallel streams' while 'artificial' literary idioms resembled 'stagnant lakes' or 'the frozen surface of a river' (1866, I 51, 64-65). How, then, could 'natural' speech have the global homogeneity only possible in writing? This contradiction is discernible in the ignorant-yet-learned, creative-yet-moribund speech of the Nowhereians. Their creativity seems all diverted into visual arts, their language trawled from the past (see Kelvin's preface to Morris 1987, IIA xxvii-xxviii). While the narrator vaguely mentions poems and storytelling, these are typically repetitions of old folk tales. Clara complains that poets seldom write of the modern life around them, reaching either for mythology or history (140-42). Hammond turns her comment into a barb at the realist novel, but it nonetheless highlights the artistic stasis of Nowhere. Literary creation is unseen by Guest, except for vague references to 'telling stories', which might, again, be old tales recycled (187). As for narrative, so for language. As standardized print recedes, speech ought to morph rapidly into a plethora of dialects. Nowhereians blithely report that 'the plague of book-making' is waning, read little and communicate mostly verbally (30). The little language change in evidence, though, is destructive, with the loss of Victorian words and meanings. Morris stressed the necessity of such forgetting in 1888, envisaging: 'a day when . . . the words poor and rich, though they will still be found in our dictionaries, will have lost their old

meaning; which will have to be explained by great men of the analytical kind' (1962, 191; see Plotz 944). A Nowhereian girl illustrates this ideal, gaily singing the Chartist 'Song of the Shirt', 'unconscious of' the 'real meaning' of its 'terrible words of threatening and lamentation' (92). Such a return to static, pastoral ignorance is difficult to reconcile with Marx's model of revolution as a dialectical heightening of consciousness. Class consciousness did not originate in a prehistoric state of nature but developed through the contradictions of capitalism (Lukács 64). R. Jayne Hildebrand interprets the Nowhereians' unreflectiveness as a rejection of capitalist individualism, acting communally through habit rather than conscious thought. Against atomized models of 'Economic Man', Morris's utopian community remembers collectively as a social aggregate (4). Yet, the idea that Nowhereians act through unreflective habit places them close to Victorians who parrot the conventional usage of words, rather than seeking out their etymologies. If Nowhereians have forgotten capitalism and returned to a pastoral past then what is to prevent history repeating itself? Morris's incoherent answer seems to be that they have not forgotten. Characters like Dick, who seldom read, nonetheless frequently reference books in order to challenge Victorian values. The boatman alludes to Dickens and Shakespeare, calling his dustman friend 'Boffin' and pointing out a house mentioned in *Richard III*. He also refers to an 'old Jewish proverb-book', 'silly old novels' and 'idiotic old books about political economy' to prove the absurdity of capitalism (31, 69, 27). Perhaps the Nowhereians know so much Victorian writing because their 'epoch of rest' creates little new language or narrative.

Despite Morris's rhetoric of tongues emerging and dissolving freely, Nowhereian reported speech exhibits no such variation. Barring a few Anglo-Saxonisms, every character speaks Standard English. Morris abolishes class distinctions and centres of linguistic authority only to universalize the voice of the upper-class. Upon initially meeting the boatman Dick, Guest notes, 'He seemed to be like some specially manly and refined young gentleman, playing waterman for a spree' (14). Dick's refined speech reflects his apparent good breeding, asking: 'Shall I put you ashore at once or would you like to go down to Putney before Breakfast?' The discourse of his friend Bob is even more etiquette-laden: 'Guest, we don't know what to call you: is there any indiscretion in asking you your name?' (25). Dowling argues for a repressed 'ideal of aristocratic sensibility' in Morris's aesthetics, and his utopia's lack of dialectal variety, at least, exemplifies this (1996, xiii). Guest associates the bad old days with cockney speech, admonishing a man nostalgic for

the nineteenth century: 'What you mean is that you de-cockneyized the place' (209). Morris's essays often portray cockney as degenerate, blaming mechanical toil for causing the poor 'to talk coarsely and ungrammatically, to think unconsecutively and illogically, to be uneducated, unrefined, bigoted, ignorant and dishonest' (1936, II 410). Equally, despite the rhetoric of languages 'rub[bing] into each other', the unchanging tongues of Morris's utopia remain wholly separate. Maidens sing Welsh songs alongside the English, but there is no intermixture between them. National borders have fallen, yet languages remain balkanized, chained to their respective standardized centres. Such standardization is necessary for establishing a common set of truths and values to live under. Morris implies as much in his letter to Bainton, conceding that his communes would still need the shadow of a government to hold delegations with each other:

but the delegates would not pretend to represent any one or anything but the business with which they are delegated. e.g. we are a shoe making community chiefly ... are we making too ... many shoes? ... Absolute facts and information would be the main business of public assemblies ... gradually all public business would be so much simplified that it would come to little more than a correspondence: 'Such are the facts with us, compare them with the facts with you, you know how to act'. (1987, IIA 770)

Ironically, the freer and more natural Morris imagines language becoming, the more static and monologic is the result. Morris only regained his organic paradise by freezing language into fossils of its former life – the very image which Müller used to describe decayed Victorian language.

### Hardy's Dialogic Nostalgia

Thus far, language nostalgia seems to have inevitably demanded either stasis or united change, glossing over the tendency of speech to mutate and diversify.<sup>24</sup> Thomas Hardy's fiction stands out against this trend, lamenting the disappearance of regional dialects yet,

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<sup>24</sup> Stitt notes that organicist philology vacillated between images of 'the fossil and the germ' (12).

simultaneously, stressing laws of random change. Hardy's fiction-writing career coincided with a conflict in language theory between 'organicist' and 'conventionalist' models of meaning (Beer 1996, 96); from the 1870s onwards, Whitney was challenging Müller's language life-cycle in which meanings derived from ancient word 'roots' and 'died' when these were forgotten. Meaning was 'arbitrary and conventional', Whitney argued, changing through majority usage with no origin required (1875, 48). Hardy's fiction mirrors this conflict over language. The author was influenced by Barnes's organicist nostalgia for vanishing rural dialect, having grown up in Dorset and been mentored by the older dialect-poet. Yet Hardy's reading of Mill and Darwin also made him sympathetic to conventionalist arguments. The language nostalgia which emerges in Hardy's later fiction is not so much for one, fixed state as for dialogue between variants. In a conversation recorded by William Archer, Hardy attacked notions of 'English as a dead language – a thing crystallized at an arbitrarily selected stage of its existence, and bidden to forget that it has a past and deny that it has a future. Purism, whether in grammar or in vocabulary, almost always means ignorance' (qtd. Archer 49). His fiction challenges prescriptive standardization less for defiling or deviating from the 'pure' roots of English than for its intolerance of variation, forcing speakers into static, narrow-minded monologism.

Language stasis was in some ways a by-product of Hardy's challenges to the popular assumption that Standard English was superior to provincial dialects. In an 1881 letter to the *Spectator*, he expressed 'regret that, in order to be understood, writers should be obliged thus slightly to treat varieties of English which are intrinsically as genuine, grammatical and worthy of the royal title' (1981, 92-3). Dialect's genuineness hinged on the longevity of its forms, placing them closer to the 'roots' from which natural meaning apparently stemmed. Barnes described Dorset dialect as 'purer ... than the dialect which is chosen as the national speech; purer, inasmuch as it retains many words of Saxon origin, for which the English substitutes others' (1893, 16). Hardy's second published novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, similarly legitimizes dialect through its longevity in the wedding that closes the narrative. Educated bride Fancy Day 'strictly charged her father and the tranter to carefully avoid saying 'thee' and 'thou' in their conversation, on the plea that those ancient words sounded so very humiliating to persons of decent taste' (II 204). Hardy replaced 'decent' with 'newer' in subsequent editions, enhancing the opposition

between time-honoured dialect and the fashionable whims of Standard English.<sup>25</sup> The tranter's wife Mrs. Dewy scorns her relatives' dialectal talk of 'taties', boasting of how her family ate "'taters' or ' very often 'pertatoes' outright' (I 119). When she is alone with her husband, however, we find Mrs. Dewy 'leaving off the adorned tones ... and returning to the natural marriage voice' (I 124). Further, the words in which Reuben Dewey remembers proposing to her are among his more dialectal: "'Ann', said I ... 'Woot hae me?'" (II 21). While people imitate the bourgeois national language among society, dialect remains entwined with the raw urges of nature. This link between dialect and nature is further confirmed in the denouement when, in spite of her prejudices, Fancy weds the dialect-speaking Dick over the cosmopolitan vicar Maybold. Like the songs which Dick and his choir sing in harmony with the seasons, dialect appears timeless and natural.

Hardy continued to question the naturalness of the spread of Standard English throughout his career in fiction. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) the narrator refers to 'the labourers – or 'workfolk', as they used to call themselves immemorially till the other word was introduced from without' (403). Standard English represents cultural hegemony enforced through material economics as England's industrial centres expand. The same passage mocks 'the process, humorously designated by statisticians as 'the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns' ... really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery'. National education and centralized government promote Standard English over natural, ancient dialects. Hardy also uses this technique to challenge Standard English in *The Trumpet-Major* (1884), peeling back its impositions to reveal the native names they have supplanted. Overcombe resident Anne ventures to the coast and 'gazed from the cliff at Portland Bill, or Beal, as it was in those days more correctly called' (314). Hardy similarly splits the narrative across linguistic epochs in 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion' (1890), with the late-Victorian narrator offering dialectal place-names in parallel to their standardized replacements. Of the soldiers' plan to desert their regiment, we are told: 'Christoph was to go ahead of them to the harbour where the boat lay, row it round the Nothe – or Look-out as it was called in those days' (50). The expansion of national government, naming the land after a fort, has effaced the folk-name that described the land's timeless function in the community: for looking out to sea. In 'The Distracted Preacher' Hardy associates dialect with traditions of liquor smuggling. In

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<sup>25</sup> See 1898 edition, 266. All other page references are for the 1872 edition.

contrast, he associates Standard English with centralized government, which was seeking to eliminate such practices in the 1830s. The young, non-native minister Stockdale is introduced to the smugglers' dialect by his landlady Lizzy Newbury. She defines 'this dark' as 'what we call the time between moon and moon', and explains the use of a boat-towed 'creeper – that's a grapnel' to find whiskey barrels hidden in the sea. Lizzy argues that villagers have practiced such smuggling 'for generations': 'My father did it, and so did my grandfather' (193-4). Like Wessex dialect, smuggling for Hardy is not a deviation from English culture but a folk heritage preceding the modern state. Hardy suggests the ancient naturalness of smuggling by merging the offending barrels with the landscape, buried under trees to escape the detection of excisemen. Stockdale's Standard English, though, prioritizes the king's government over the local community. Ancient local language and the values it encoded are suppressed by recent national ones, as the tale's denouement highlights with Lizzy's marriage to Stockdale. Repenting her smuggling, she helps him to write a tract against the practice, which he prints in 'many hundreds of copies' (222-3). These examples show Hardy using the model of pastoral stasis to question the naturalness of Standard English and centralized administration. Depicting them as recent impositions frames the supplanted local language and customs as correspondingly timeless and natural.

The example of smuggling dialect, however, exposes the precariousness of this opposition, which Hardy would explore more in later works. While representing pre-modern ideas of local autonomy, smuggling dialect did not simply precede the culture of customs and excise but developed in parallel to it. Lizzy and her co-conspirators refer to the whiskey tubs as 'things' and talk of 'burn[ing] off' their vessels in order to conceal their activities from authorities. Rather than representing static folk culture which modernity corrupted, Hardy's smugglers' dialect suggests parallel streams of language adapting in response to their environments and each other. Darwin's model of nature replaced pastoral stasis with endless variation and adaptation with no clear origins or purpose. Hardy's reading of Darwin is discernible in his abovementioned letter to the *Spectator* defending his use of dialect. Standard English is 'the all-prevailing competitor' which triumphs in 'the struggle for existence' through urbanization. Its advantages are a matter of chance, having grown in an area which would become the capital, while other dialects' 'only fault was that they happened not to be central' (1981, 92-3). Hardy presents Standard English and provincial dialect as sibling variants, advantaged or crippled by material conditions, neither being inherently more authentic or natural. His fiction illustrates this point when switches

between Standard English narration and dialectal speech of the past reveal forgotten, short-lived linguistic fads. In 'A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four' (1882) a long-dead speaker, Old Selby, is recalled telling the narrator of his experience during the Napoleonic wars. Selby refers to Napoleon as 'that great Corsican tyrant (as we used to call him)' (34), marking the fading of Napoleonic wars in the popular memory and the slogans they coined. The nickname chimes with hyperbolic journalese, muddying the opposition between pastoral orality and fragmented print culture. Similarly in 'A Changed Man' (1900) a group of Napoleonic-era Hussars are observed singing the popular contemporary ditty, "'The girl I left behind me' (which was formerly always the tune for such times, though it is now nearly disused)' (13-4). Forgotten buzz-words and phrases are dredged up from even more recent times in 'The Fiddler of the Reels' (1893) when an old man remembers the Great Exhibition of 1851. He explains:

None of the younger generation can realize the sense of novelty it produced in us who were then in our prime. A noun substantive went so far as to become an adjective in honour of the occasion. It was 'exhibition' hat, 'exhibition' razor-strop, 'exhibition' watch; nay, even 'exhibition' weather, 'exhibition' spirits, sweethearts, babies, wives – for the time. (70)

The linkage of novel experiences with transitory fashions of speech evokes Darwin's comment that language developed through 'mere novelty and fashion' as well as utilitarian reasons (see Chapter Two). Hardy also shows the divergence of dialects in action through the idiolects of characters like Japeth Johns in 'Interlopers at the Knap' (1884) (Smith 84). The milkman, who has a supporting role in his friend Darton's thwarted marriage, speaks in a 'well-known style', which marks him off from other dialectal speakers (127). He combines Standard English vocabulary with non-standard syntax, declaring: 'I shouldn't call Sally Hall simple. Primary, because no Sally is'; 'this don't become you'; 'I was going to speak practical' (118, 133). His pronunciation also deviates from both standardized and dialect speech, as Hardy indicates by marking his words with misspellings, unlike those of other characters ('Quite the contrary, ma'am'; 'the natyves', 127, 118). Like Wells's Mr. Polly (see Chapter Five) he twists words into surprising new shapes, dismissing Darton's proposed bride as 'a red-herring doll-oll-oll' (133). Such speech-acts show the constant

change revealed by philology, which seemed to occur independently of society – rural or industrial.

Hardy also often undermines pastoral language stasis by depicting speech as social behaviour rather than natural growth. Hardy was heavily influenced by the writings of Mill (Richardson 2009, 55), whose *Logic* (1843) conceptualized language as a grid of mental associations, standardized through custom. This was underpinned from the 1858 edition onwards by a long quotation attributed to the philosopher Alexander Bain: ‘Without any formal instruction, the language in which we grow up teaches us all the common philosophy of the age. It directs us to observe and know things which we should have overlooked; it supplies us with classifications ready made’ (464). As Whitney would point out, if speech and thought were separate, then meaning depended not on ‘root’ sound-thoughts coined by distant ancestors but convention (1875, 73). Language as social activity did not, however, rule out nostalgia for the language of past societies. Hardy’s characters often code-switch between speech variants, suggesting nostalgia for times before one form dominated. In an 1898 review of *Wessex Poems*, Archer complained: ‘Mr Hardy seems to lose all sense of local and historical perspective in language, seeing all the words in the dictionary on one plane ... equally available and appropriate for any and every literary response’. Hardy subsequently replied: ‘Your happy phrase, “seeing all the words in the dictionary on one plane” ... touches, curiously enough, what I had thought over’ (1988, II 207; qtd. Taylor 42). Whitney described language as a democratic institution in which standards emerged through majority usage. Hardy’s reading of Mill, however, warned him of the potential tyranny of institutions and majorities. ‘Social tyranny’, warned *On Liberty*, was ‘more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself’ (13). Mill had also warned in *Logic* of narrow, scientific word-definitions erasing the ‘ancient experience ... thoughts and observations of former ages’ of which language was ‘the conservator’ and ‘keeper-alive’. ‘In every age a certain portion of’ linguistic distinctions ‘fall asleep’ as ‘the human mind, in different generations, occupies itself with different things’ (476-77). Future generations may well be enlightened by past word-meanings in ways contemporary knowledge cannot imagine, but only if this history has been preserved.

These ideas are manifested in Hardy’s fiction through standardization’s intolerance of alternative language varieties, often identified with a narrowing of knowledge and

sympathy. In a 1908 foreword to an edition of Barnes's poems, Hardy lamented that many a dialect word suppressed by Standard English 'dies; and ... leaves no synonym' (1997, 237). His 1887 novel *The Woodlanders* shows such change rendering the younger generation strangers to their native environment. After being educated in the town, Grace Melbury lacks the words to distinguish the subtleties of her rural home. This is in contrast to the woodsman Giles, whose dialect and life in the forest enable him to 'read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing' (398). Hardy registers the narrowing of Grace's vocabulary through her return in Giles's gig (Bate 552). On the way, he notes a pile of apples, designated 'bitter-sweets', only for Grace to glance at the fruit of another orchard, distinguished by Giles as 'John-apple trees' (45). Grace admits to having 'forgotten' the difference: in urban-centred Standard English, one apple or orchard is much like another. Language standardization also narrows sympathy, as Grace's later husband, the middle-class Fitzpiers demonstrates. He tells Grace: 'I feel as if I belonged to a different species from the people who are working in that yard' (213). His narrow egoism is manifested in transcendental philosophy, telling the old dialect-speaking Grammer Oliver: 'Everything is Nothing. There's only Me and not Me in the whole world' (54). Even the Standard-English speaking Grace fails to enter Fitzpiers's sphere of sympathy, as he courts her while indulging his desires with Suke Damson in a secluded meadow. The Standard-English speaking Alec d'Urberville is equally lacking in sympathy in his implied rape of Tess. When the wealthy heir later becomes a Christian preacher, his guilt remains self-centred, commanding his former victim to 'swear that you will never tempt me – by your charms or ways' (357). Her love Angel Clare, although seemingly a free-thinker, is similarly hemmed in mentally by dogma. The educated clergyman's son is unable to comprehend his wife's plural identities, so that upon her confession of her past 'trouble', he concludes: 'the woman I have been loving is not you' (260). Having been to national school, Tess 'spoke two languages: the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality' (18). It is perhaps this duality of voices which enables her to recognize the contradictions and plural selves in others, forgiving Angel's past fornication and distrusting the absoluteness of Alec's conversion. Angel, who speaks only Standard English, is unable to extend the same broad-mindedness to Tess. The division of speech into the correct and the deviant dovetails with dogmatic moral binaries which categorize people as saved or damned, true or false. Language standardization enforces mental and moral stasis, forcing the complex plurality of experience and identity into rigid grooves.

In view of Hardy's sympathy for rural dialect, it is initially puzzling that more of it does not appear in his fiction. Barnes's poetry required extensive glossaries to explain its dialect words and was even published in 'common English' translations. Conversely, Hardy's fiction often waters down the dialect of rustic characters. Norman Page commented that Hardy's fiction gives more impressions of dialect than examples of it (1980, 164). Wessex speech is usually marked by archaic syntax, non-standard pronunciations occasional dialect words. Some short tales such as 'A Tradition...' consist mostly of rustic speech, with Standard English narrations only introducing and contextualizing their dialectal storytellers. Nevertheless, of all such utterances, only a few words usually require a glossary (in Selby's case, 'mid', 'afore', 'climmed'). His other language, when modified at all, is marked by only minor clippings and phonetic spelling to indicate pronunciation ('Proossians', 'a-making', 'afeard', 'sperrits'). At other times, characters' speech becomes standardized mid-way through the tale, their first dialectal utterances having established nonstandard linguistic identity and thus served their purpose. At the beginning of 'The Withered Arm', Rhoda Brook drops articles and conjugates verbs differently from the narrator: 'down in barton', 'if you do see her', 'her hands be white' (58-9). Yet, in her exchanges with Gertrude Lodge, her speech loses these features. The middle-class Gertrude's long, polyclausal sentences enable Hardy to indicate Rhoda's nonstandard speech through her contrasting monosyllabic brevity, without dialectal differences: 'Did he charge much?', 'And what did you see?' (72). Critics have suggested various reasons for this watering down of dialect. The publishing industry was London-centric and the ancient rural community that Barnes had addressed was rapidly vanishing (Page 1980, 164). Hardy's wish to avoid caricatures of rural speech also caused him to downplay dialectal difference (Taylor 251). Further, scholarship on dialect in the period, such as that of the English Dialect Society, was steeped in a *Zeitgeist* of inevitable extinction. The Society disbanded in 1896 upon completing its dictionary, to which Hardy had contributed, assuming that no further dialects would emerge (Bailey 1996, 71). Hardy seemed to agree with this view in his 1908 preface to Barnes's poetry, lamenting that, 'since his death, education in the west of England as elsewhere has gone on with its silent and inevitable effacements, reducing the speech of this country to uniformity, and obliterating every year many a fine local word' (237). However, as his mention of education makes clear, Hardy sees nothing natural in linguistic uniformity. The homogeneity of Standard English is produced by social dogma and coercion. It is, like rural

emigration in *Tess*, ‘the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery’. At the heart of Hardy’s ideas about language are variation and, yet, also interconnectedness. Barnes’s ‘Dissertation’ pointedly excluded from its readership those ‘who have had their lots cast in town ... and cannot sympathise with the rustic mind’; the author ‘can hardly think they will understand his poems or their intentions’ (1893, 49). Conversely, Hardy’s mixture of dialects and registers opposes linguistic ‘purism’, provincial or standardized, nostalgic not for pastoral purity but dialogic cacophony. As English seemed to become increasingly homogenized, Hardy’s fiction would look to a larger opposition between communication systems invented by society and those inherited through biology. The following chapter will consider how for Hardy the conventional signs of grammar and vocabulary are only one medium alongside natural signs, transmitted and decoded instinctively – and potentially in conflict with the language of civilization.

## Chapter Five. Instinctive Signs: Nature and Culture in Dialogue

This chapter considers fiction towards the end of the nineteenth century that rejected both the teleology of progressivism and the belief of language vitalists in natural, Edenic etymologies. It focuses on work by Butler, Hardy and Wells which explores language as an interplay between instinct and convention, finding in this interplay a new frontier of dramatic tension. Darwin and others viewed language as a negotiation between biology and social tradition, 'half-art and half-instinct' (1871, I 106). Speech conventions codified in dictionaries and grammars represented only the visible, upper crust of communication. Beneath it, in the physical voice and body, lay primordial emotional triggers, operating separately from conscious language and thought (Ellenberger, 228-37; Hartley, 176-77). Herbert Spencer wrote that 'music arouses dormant sentiments of which we had not conceived the possibility, and do not know the meaning; or, as Richter says, tells us of things we have not seen and shall not see' (1858, 359). Darwin further emphasized the unconsciousness of such emotional signs, writing that, 'when vivid emotions are felt and expressed by the orator or even in common speech, musical cadences and rhythm are instinctively used'. The 'sensations and ideas' which such cadences excited 'appear from their vagueness, yet depth, like mental reversions to the emotions and thoughts of a long-past age' (1871, II 336). Humans communicated via plural sign systems, some conventional, some instinctive, which might cooperate or conflict with each other.

Approaching language as a dynamic struggle or dialogue between instinct and convention enabled forms of intellectual liberation and empowerment, allowing the authors to challenge contemporary institutions and customs. Instead of being justified as natural truths, morality and respectability could be interpreted more fluidly as adaptations of instinct. Butler, Hardy and Wells all challenged traditional dogmas of behaviour and morality in their writing, if not their personal lives as well. Conceiving speech as a dynamic interchange between convention and instinct helped them to destabilize these traditions. A sermon on chastity might, through its speaker's voice, evoke sexual urges that the words strove to repress. Where in communication, though, did instinct end and convention begin? Could utterances, or the thoughts that propelled them, be transmitted genetically? If not, then how did conventional signs and ideas interlock with primordial instinctive signs, forged by natural and sexual selection? Approaching speech as an imperfect, only half-

conscious adaptation would enable authors to experiment with it, as in symbolist poetry which aimed to stimulate ‘primordial ideas’ through indirect associations (Moreas 151). How, then, might fiction, steeped in realist tradition, represent unconscious dimensions of meaning? Also pertinent is the role of gender in such representations. While Butler explored instinctive signs in relation to parent-child relations, Hardy and Butler considered them as mediators of sexual desire. As previous chapters have suggested, scientific objectivity and individual thought were often identified with masculinity, portraying feminine speech as contrastingly lacking in agency. Did, then, these male authors depict the speech of the sexes as equally or unequally caught between emotion and intellect?

His Father’s Voice: Hereditary Speech and the Phonograph in  
Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh*

Harold Bloom argued that poets suffered an ‘anxiety of influence’, haunted by their predecessors. Their common language led to the voice of the earlier writer invading that of his successor, compromising his identity. Butler’s ideas about language might be read as extensions of this logic: the linguistic past threatened individual identity not only through cultural exposure but possibly also as a biological inheritance. In an 1895 lecture Butler urged his audience to imagine a group of people ‘phonographed ... so that their minutest shades of intonation are preserved’, and the record re-played ‘say a hundred years hence. Are those people dead or alive? Dead to themselves they are, but while they live so powerfully and so livingly in us, which is the greater paradox – to say that they are alive or that they are dead?’ (1908, 73). In Butler’s Lamarckian theory of heredity ancestral experience structured individual behaviour with no clear distinction between biology and society (Otis 1994, 19-23). The phonograph offered a useful image for such genetic recording; its tiny impressions seemed to visualize heredity’s transcriptions in the blood. How, though, might individuals escape the mental-linguistic grooves predetermined by their ancestors? Butler’s writing career was shaped by a series of rebellions: against his family upbringing, against organized religion, and, then, against Darwinian orthodoxy. His semi-autobiographical novel *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) repeatedly describes thoughts and speech as ‘grooves’ which people fall into and struggle to escape.<sup>26</sup> Butler recognized that

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<sup>26</sup> Overton remarks that public school limits men’s prospects, except for those ‘who are placed young in some safe and deep groove’ (25); after years of engagement to Christina, Theobald ‘had got into a groove, and the

symbols did not simply reflect innate views of the world but built new ones. Yet, social convention, perhaps more than instinct, forced people's thoughts and utterances into rigid, pre-defined grooves. In lieu of individual agency in speech, Butler emphasized the dynamic interplay between custom and heredity, with either one stimulating and repressing different threads of inheritance in the other. Gillian Beer argues that Butler found an escape from the 'claustrophobic' implications of his theory of heredity by emphasizing potential future transformations (2007, 48). For language, however, such transformations might derive as much from excavating latent potentialities in one's socio-biological heritage as from new experiences and stimuli.

Butler's notion that aspects of language were instinctive grew from his Lamarckian belief that organisms were defined by their habits, passed to offspring as instincts. He speculated in a notebook, 'perhaps reading and writing will indeed one day come by nature ... [Words] are parvenu people as compared with thought and action' (qtd. Festing Jones 1917, 94). Butler disagreed with Müller's claim that thought and speech were inseparable, concurring with Darwin and Whitney that speech was a tool of thought. Butler was well read in Spencer, Alexander Bain and G. H. Lewes, who materialized thought as a development of bodily sensations and emotions. 'Words are organised thoughts, as living forms are organised actions', his notebook states. 'How a thought can find embodiment in words is nearly, though perhaps not quite, as mysterious as how an action can find embodiment in form' (93). While words might not yet be transmitted through heredity, then, the 'ideas' they signaled could be, blending into instinct. In his 1890 lecture 'Thought and Language' Butler claimed that some ideas must be instinctive because language was unable to define them. The concept of 'thought' for example, was so entrenched in heredity that conventional words could not clearly describe it. 'Definitions', he stated, 'are useful as mental fluxes, and as helping us to fuse new ideas with our older ones', but 'we know too well what thought is, to be able to know that we know it ... Whoever does not know this without words will not learn it for all the words and definitions that are laid before him' (1908, 179). Thought is indefinable, because its semantic roots lie beneath conscious language in hereditary patterns of thought. Butler demands:

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prospect of change [marriage] was disconcerting' (56); Overton dislikes Theobald the more he visits, 'but one gets into grooves sometimes' (93); 'so deep was the groove' into which the graduate Ernest falls that 'he spent several hours a day in continuing his classical and mathematical studies as though he had not yet taken his degree' (207); Overton avoids giving Ernest his inheritance early because he is not 'fixed in any definite groove' (293).

Who has answered the question, 'What is truth?' Man cannot see God and live. We cannot go so far back upon ourselves as to undermine our own foundations; if we try to do we topple over, and lose that very reason about which we vainly try to reason. If we let the foundations be, we know well enough that they are there, and we can build upon them in all security. (184)

Like breathing, language is only superficially a matter of conscious volition; it is structured by a vast aggregate of mental habits, many of them automatic. As Butler states, 'thought, for the most part, flies along over the heads of words, working its own mysterious way in paths that are beyond our ken ... that central government ... which we alone dub with the name of "we" or "us"' (226). The conventional use of words cannot be separated from the organic development of ideas, which words by no means master. Butler's belief that heredity was organicized memory meant that individual thoughts and utterances might also be ancestral ones.

Butler wrote *The Way of All Flesh* between 1873 and 1884, but withheld it from publication until his death due to its obvious parallels with his own family. The novel follows several generations of the Pontifex family, particularly Ernest, who struggles to escape the influence of his relations. Like Butler, Ernest has a father in the clergy (Theobald) who expects his son to follow the same career path. Theobald, in turn, lives in the shadow of his more successful, domineering father, similarly as Thomas Butler was overshadowed by his bishop father. Like Butler, Ernest begins to doubt Christianity, before renouncing clerical life and later writing about evolution. Communication in the novel is haunted by ancestral voices and signs, both from the primordial past and still-living individuals. Darwin's *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) had argued that facial expressions derived from animal communication, and Butler's 'Thought and Language' implies the same: 'Eyes are verbs, and glasses of wine are good nouns enough as between those who understand one another ... for the most part it is in what we read between the lines that the profounder meaning of any letter is conveyed'. There were, he continued, 'words unwritten and untranslatable into any nouns that are nevertheless felt as above, about and underneath the gross material symbols that lie scrawled upon the paper' (194). Such instinctive signification abounds among the characters in Butler's novel. The narrator Overton recalls how 'my sisters eyed me to silence' whenever he disagreed with

his father (5); the primal pecking-order trumps conscious, rational argument. The young Theobald is reluctant to enter the clergy but does so because he ‘feared the dark scowl which would come over his father’s face upon the slightest opposition’ (31). Physical violence also emerges as an instinctive language of the ‘primitive’ family unit. Successive generations of Pontifex patriarchs beat their offspring when words fail to win their conformity. Butler also presents violence as a sub-language among the lower class, evoking the imagined embodiment of primitive speech described in Chapter Three. Ernest’s words cannot prevent his servant wife Ellen’s bouts of alcoholism; a hereditary condition. She only regains some stability after eloping with a butcher who regularly ‘blackened her eye, and she liked him all the better for it’ (352). Theobald ceases to beat Ernest as he grows older, but instinctive aggression continues to warp their conversations. Overton states, ‘As long as communication was confined to the merest commonplace all went well, but if these were departed from ever such a little he invariably felt that his father’s instincts showed themselves in immediate opposition to his own. When he was attacked his father laid whatever stress was possible on everything which his opponents said’ (413). Ernest feels unable to escape this apparent family instinct, later deciding to live apart from his own children. Hereditary feelings, and signs triggering them, lurk beneath the surface of language, operating in spite of conscious wishes.

Evolution equally rendered the voice a site of unconscious, primordial emotional triggers. Butler’s notebook describes how he reviewed his writing by speaking it to a listener, revealing new layers of meaning: ‘I feel weak places at once when I read aloud where I thought, as long as I read to myself only, that the passage was all right’ (109). The unconscious signs of speech seemed to enhance sympathy between speakers. In ‘Thought and Language’ Butler remarked: ‘The language is not in the words but in the heart-to-heartness of the thing ... [s]o it is not by the words that I am too presumptuously venturing to speak to-night that your opinions will be formed or modified. They will be formed or modified, if either, by something that you will feel, but which I have not spoken’ (195). In *The Way of All Flesh* such nonverbal impulses effect Ernest’s temporary conversion to evangelism. When he hears a Simeonite speak with ‘impressive’ voice the Lord’s Prayer and a single line from the Bible, ‘the text, familiar though it was, went home to the consciences of Ernest and his friends as it had never yet done. If Mr. Hawke had stopped here he would have almost said enough’ (222). While mocking the logic of Hawke’s speech, the narrator tracks his delivery like a piece of music, beginning with ‘singular

quietness' and building to 'greater warmth', before he 'ended rather abruptly'. These instinctive vocal signs, the narrator states, 'had produced an effect greater than the actual words I have given can convey to the reader; the virtue lay in the man more than in what he said ... their effect was magical' (226). Religious zeal is built on instinctive signs and emotions beyond conscious thought.

*The Way of All Flesh* deconstructs the individual speaker, with characters echoing gestures, speech-patterns and even phrases of their forebears. In a post-marital tiff with Christina, Theobald's smile 'was succeeded by a scowl which that old Turk, his father, might have envied' (58). He vents his frustration by stamping on the floor of their carriage; later in the narrative, his father angrily 'stamped as Theobald had done' (75). Parents loom large through their proximity to the organism in the evolutionary sequence. 'Offspring should, as a general rule, resemble its own most immediate progenitors', Butler wrote, 'that is to say, that it should remember best what it has been doing most recently' (1911, 156). When the adult Ernest meets the daughter of Dr. Skinner, a pretentious theologian, she seems to have inherited her father's 'voice and manner of speaking'. Her overblown aesthetic declarations echo her father's pretentious comments on the 'deeper meaning' of Biblical passages: 'For me a simple chord of Beethoven is enough. This is happiness' (417). Recalling his meeting with Skinner, Overton highlights the musicality of the man's delivery, lending pseudo-profundity to banal statements. Asked what he wants for supper, Skinner pauses dramatically, before intoning: 'Stay – I may presently take a glass of cold water – and a small piece of bread and butter' (114). Thirty years later, in the presence of Miss. Skinner, Ernest's:

Mind's ear seemed to hear Miss Skinner saying, as though it were an epitaph: –

'Stay:

I may presently take

A simple chord of Beethoven,

Or a small semiquaver

From one of Mendelssohn's Songs without Words'. (417)

This propensity of children to echo their parents inflects Ernest's struggle to escape Theobald's influence. As a child, Ernest often hides from his father's voice resounding

from another room. Returning home after secretly helping the disgraced ex-servant Ellen, he sneaks inside to the sound of Theobald's 'angriest tones'. These make him feel like Jack 'when from the oven in which he was hidden he heard the ogre ask his wife what young children she had got for his supper' (172). Anxious that his actions will be discovered, Ernest 'next day and for many days afterwards ... trembled each time he heard his father's voice calling for him'. Butler's non-fiction work *Life and Habit* (1878) reflects that, after one's birth, parents survive as a 'residuum', mere shells of the legacy they passed on (157). Part of Ernest's anxiety at the sound of his father's voice might derive from an anxiety, yet half-conscious, of it persisting inside him as genetic data. Biology seems to equate almost to destiny, with Overton commenting that Theobald and Christina would have to be born again 'of a different line of ancestry for many generations' to lose their mental rigidity (280). Ancestral voices appear inescapable, solidified by generations of habitual actions and suggestions.

Despite his theory of heredity, however, Butler's notion of 'habit' also emphasized the conventionality of language. John Stuart Mill, whom *The Way of All Flesh* references several times (322, 208), had continued the Utilitarian tradition of describing language as man-made 'custom'. Words and their uses were shaped by social institutions, such as family and state. Consciousness was conditioned by a 'Social Organism', as G. H. Lewes termed it in *Problems of Life and Mind* (1879), a 'fund' of past experiences, which language had solidified 'in opinion, precept and law, in prejudice and superstition'. Hence, Lewes wrote, 'our opinions are made up of shadowy associations, imperfect memories, echoes of other men's voices, mingling with the reactions of our own sensibility' (80, 167). Lewes built such arguments on Heymann Steinthal and Moritz Lazarus' 'Völkerpsychologie' model of language as a continuum of social traditions irrespective of heredity (Otis 1994, 9-11). Butler read and cited Lewes in his work, throwing a different light on his phonograph imagery.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps custom, instead of heredity, shaped the unconscious grooves into which language channeled thought. Might not mental liberation even lie in rediscovering one's hereditary predispositions that conventional language had suppressed? Lewes had described linguistic creativity as the forging of new molecular 'channels' in the brain, while convention moved always in old ones: 'inferior writers think the thoughts of others and write the phrases of others. Hence, as Goethe says, in this world

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<sup>27</sup> Butler cites Lewes multiple times in *Evolution Old and New* (1879), 25-26, 346, 350, 368.

there are so few voices and so many echoes' (1860, II 57). Butler presented language convention as limiting thought in his Swiftian satire *Erewhon* (1872), in which scholars in a Lilliput-like society scorn originality: 'A man's business, they hold, is to think as his neighbours do, for Heaven help him if he thinks good what they count bad' (218). They use words ritualistically rather than to convey ideas. One professor reprimands a student 'for want of sufficient vagueness' while another is excluded 'for having written an article on a scientific subject without having made free enough use of the words "carefully," "patiently," and "earnestly"' (220). Butler agreed with Darwin that thought and language had developed by catalyzing each other. His notebook describes words as 'scaffolding ... for the building up of imperfect thought'; they 'impede and either kill, or are killed by, perfect thought' (94). Language threatened to ossify when its speakers mistook for ultimate truth what was merely one set of conventions in the evolution of symbols. Similarly, in *Life and Habit*, Butler wrote:

The metaphors and *façons de parler* to which even in the plainest speech we are perpetually recurring (as, for example, in this last two lines, 'plain,' 'perpetually,' and 'recurring,' are all words based on metaphor, and hence more or less liable to mislead) often deceive us, as though there were nothing more than what we see and say, and as though words, instead of being, as they are, the creatures of our convenience, had some claim to be the actual ideas themselves concerning which we are conversing. (83)

Words endanger mental freedom when fetishized as ends in themselves or, as Butler would later describe them, 'covenanted symbols' (1908, 204).

In *The Way of All Flesh* Ernest perhaps flees less from a hereditary 'voice' than mindless speech convention. When, as an adult, he severs contact with his parents, Overton remarks: 'achievement of any kind would be impossible for him unless he was free from those who would be for ever dragging him back into the conventional' (299). Theobald exemplifies rigid linguistic convention, his repressed clerical existence turning him into a repository of empty clichés. His speech runs in automatic grooves, sometimes producing absurdities. He determines to buy a watch 'answering every purpose', which causes Overton to comment: 'Theobald spoke as if watches had half-a-dozen purposes besides time-keeping, but he could hardly open his mouth without using one or other of his tags,

and “answering every purpose” was one of them’ (180). Similarly, after Ernest goes to Cambridge, ‘Theobald said he was “willing to hope” – this was one of his tags – that his son would turn over a new leaf now that he had left school, and for his own part he was “only too ready” – this was another tag – to let bygones be bygones’ (199). The strong hold of convention over his personality causes him to echo and mimic the majority. Overton states: ‘the reader, if he has passed middle life and has a clerical connection, will probably remember scores and scores of rectors and rectors’ wives who differed in no material respect from Theobald and Christina’ (73). From this perspective, Theobald, and his father before him, beat their children less from primal aggression than the social pressure to conform. Butler’s narration highlights how linguistic fashion shapes this pressure, noting the popular idea that, ‘if their wills were “well broken” in childhood, to use an expression then much in vogue, they would acquire habits of obedience’ (22). Verbal conventions structure social norms, legitimizing actions which might otherwise have seemed unreasonable. Overton charts Theobald’s thought process as a young father, which is shaped by the axioms of a ‘long course of Puritanism’: ‘The first signs of self-will must be carefully looked for, and plucked up by the roots at once before they had time to grow. Theobald picked up this numb serpent of a metaphor and cherished it in his bosom’ (89). Theobald literally beats his son’s speech into the standardized shape, interpreting the infant’s mispronunciation as stubborn self-will. ‘Don’t you think it would be very nice’, he tells Ernest, ‘if you were to say “come” like other people, instead of “tum”?’ before hitting him when he continues to blur his phonemes (96). Puritan fetishizing of the written word as original truth breeds intolerance of linguistic variety. Through Theobald’s first reading lessons with Ernest, Butler indicates that such intolerance results from the false semblance of stability that writing lends to language: ‘He began to whip him two days after he had begun to teach him’ (92).

The span of Butler’s narrative across several generations enables it to historicize the growth of linguistic conventionality in the Pontifex family, tied to social status rather than biology. Theobald’s father George rejects his family’s dialect when he goes into business, advancing himself by echoing the language of respectability. His diary of a European tour reads like an assortment of quotations from fashionable writers. Overton comments, ‘I felt as I read it that the author before starting had made up his mind to admire only what he thought it would be creditable in him to admire, to look at nature and art only through the spectacles that had been handed down to him by generation after generation of prigs and

impostors. The first glimpse of Mont Blanc threw Mr Pontifex into a conventional ecstasy' (14). George's contrived effusions rely heavily on John Trumbull's 'The Prophecy of Balaam' (1773), as he recalls experiencing "'at distance dimly seen" ... this sublime spectacle'. Although language requires convention to convey meaning, too much conventionality produces intellectual parasitism. Butler emphasizes this stasis by observing how little George's early nineteenth-century writing differs from 'the rhapsodies of critics in our own times ... [b]ut I suppose that a prig with more money than brains was much the same sixty or seventy years ago as he is now' (16). Similarly, two generations later, convention stifles the natural verbal facility of Ernest's sister Charlotte. She absorbs the vocabularies of Christianity and respectability without interrogating their meanings. Overton states: 'she has fallen under the dominion of the words "hope," "think," "feel," "try," "bright," and "little," and can hardly write a page without introducing all these words and some of them more than once' (415). Butler links linguistic convention with mental stasis most absurdly in Theobald's horror at creeping Tractarian changes to Anglican services. He winces as a new generation of parishioners refer to 'the Creed' instead of 'the Belief' and use the Latin 'Alleluia' instead of the Germanic 'Hallelujah' (391-2). Despite his distress, Theobald submits to most of the changes, his habitual conventionality rendering him impotent against majority custom. Ernest is trained to behave in the same way so that, as a schoolboy, he, 'caught up, parrot-like, whatever jargon he heard from his elders, which he thought was the correct thing, and aired it in season and out of season, as though it were his own' (150). How, then, might sons escape the voices of their parents, with long-term heredity and short-term convention conspiring to rob them of mental-linguistic agency?

If speakers attain any agency, it is through their experiences reacting upon this heritage. The grooves on early phonographs warped themselves out of shape with each replay, allowing for some individuality in Butler's image (Gitelman 32). In *Unconscious Memory* (1880) he wrote that 'each individual life' added 'a small (but so small, in any one lifetime, as to be hardly appreciable) amount of new experience to the general store of memory' (53). Conventional symbols offered to accelerate this process, modified by each new generation to describe their different experiences. Butler lectured: 'The thought is not steadily and coherently governed by and moulded in words, nor does it steadily govern them. Words and thought interact upon and help one another, as any other mechanical appliances interact on and help the invention that first hit upon them' (1908, 225-6). The

meanings of words changed according to the uses speakers made of them. Each man 'appropriate[s]' the words of his predecessors, Lewes wrote, 'but he does not simply echo their words, he rethinks them. ... He cannot think their thoughts so long as his experiences refuse to be condensed in their symbols' (1879, 160). In acrimonious letters to his father, Butler often echoed the latter's words, altering their meanings. After losing money through bad investments, he quotes his father: "'Pray let no false shame hinder you from making a clean breast of it'. I have done nothing which I am ashamed of and have nothing to make a clean breast of' (1962, 146). Ernest does the same in *The Way of All Flesh*, his inner monologue interjecting as his father refers to 'your Latin and Greek': "'They aren't mine,'" thought Ernest, "and never have been"' (147). Butler also reworked his parents' words by placing them verbatim in the mouths of Ernest's parents. The wisdom which Butler's parents imagined themselves sharing is transformed into empty clichés. His father's phrase 'making a clean breast of it' appears on Theobald's lips (276). Butler's novel also appropriated a letter which his pregnant mother had written to her children in case she died in labour. Christina's letter to the Pontifex children is almost identical (1962, 29). Both assume that the meanings of their words will remain fixed through time, exhorting 'try to remember, and from time to time read over again the last words [of your mother]' (105). The message which Butler's mother imagined echoing the same truths down the ages becomes, in her son's hands, an indictment of pious delusion. Her belief that 'your father' will suffer immense 'sorrow' at her death is contradicted by Theobald's earlier hesitation about marrying her and later 'want of emotion' when she dies (394). According to Butler's friend Henry Festing Jones, Theobald's verbal tag repeated endlessly at Christina's deathbed ('I could not wish it prolonged') was taken from Butler's own father in the same situation (1919, II 4). The consistency of the aural and visual forms of the words over generations produced an illusion of mental continuity. Yet, Butler argued, words 'have no more to do with the ideas they serve to convey than money has with the things that it serves to buy' (1908, 207). Although speaking the same words as his predecessors, the individual was able to make them serve radically different trains of thought.

This semantic plasticity of symbols aids Ernest's escape from his parents' influence. It is not by discarding his father's Bible that Ernest finally loses his faith but by rereading it. His experiences enable him to see contradictions where he once found divine wisdom. 'He made the New Testament his chief study', states Overton, 'going through it ... as one who wished neither to believe nor disbelieve, but cared only about finding out whether he

ought to believe or no' (284). Later, as a writer on evolutionary topics, Ernest argues 'that though it would be inconvenient to change the words of our prayer book and articles, it would not be inconvenient to change in a quiet way the meanings which we put upon those words' (403). Words once interpreted as literal realities might instead be understood as metaphors for the limits of human knowledge. Evolutionary theory was effecting this change to the meanings of 'origin' and 'species', once imagined as definite and eternal (see Beer 2009, 49; Otis 1994, 28-33). The nexus of adaptation revealed no absolute genesis or categorical boundaries, turning these terms into hypothetical abstractions. *Life and Habit* stated: 'it is now, thanks to Mr. Darwin, generally held that species blend or have blended into one another' (102). Darwin's experience studying organisms and their environments across the world caused him to reject species essentialism. Similarly, Ernest's reinterpretation of his father's Biblical language shows that symbols can transcend the ideas they were forged to serve. As organisms are modified by their actions, so words are modified by their use. Thus single generations can transform the meanings of words, as Overton remarks of the evolutionist Ernest: 'His father and grandfather could probably no more understand his state of mind than they could understand Chinese' (420). While empowering the present generation against their elders, though, Butler leaves the question of individual agency uncertain. As a writer challenging the institution of marriage, Ernest's voice seems all his own, declaring: 'there are a lot of things that want saying which no one dares to say. ... It seems to me that I can say things which not another man in England except myself will venture to say, and yet which are crying to be said'. He undermines his autonomy, however, with the further comment: 'I am bursting with these things, and it is my fate to say them' (396-7). Has Ernest become master of his speech or are his utterances riding a larger development? Butler was uncertain of his own verbal autonomy, writing of his books: 'I never make them: they grow; they come to me and insist on being written' (Festing Jones 1917, 106). How can language rebel against its past yet also grow from it?

Butler's voices of heredity and society are not single but plural. Struggling with the puzzle of heredity and variation, Darwin had written that 'each living creature must be looked at as a microcosm – a little universe, formed of a host of self-propagating organisms, inconceivably minute and as numerous as the stars in heaven' (1868, II 405). What seemed like a rebellion against heredity could be the return of a latent strain. In a revision to *Life and Habit*, Butler wrote:

[The individual's] past selves are living in him at this moment with the accumulated life of centuries. 'Do this, this, this, which we too have done, and found our profit in it', cry the souls of his forefathers within him. ... 'Withhold', cry some. 'Go on boldly', cry others. 'Me, me, me, revert hitherward, my descendant', shouts one as it were from some high vantage-ground over the heads of the clamorous multitude. 'Nay, but me, me, me', echoes another; and our former selves fight within us and wrangle for our possession. (52)

Heredity is no united chant but an anarchic cacophony. The means of resisting one voice might lie in succumbing to another. When Theobald forces his son into a clerical education, Ernest receives contrary orders from a 'voice' of heredity, commanding: 'obey me, your true self, and things will go tolerably well with you, but only listen to that outward and visible old husk of yours which is called your father, and I will rend you in pieces even unto the third and fourth generation as one who has hated God; for I, Ernest, am the God who made you' (132-3). This voice causes Ernest to pursue his instinctive interests, such as music, diverting him from his education. As Overton remarks, while he struggled to remember the Classics, 'anyone played him a piece of music and told him where it came from, he never forgot that, though he made no effort to retain it' (196). The instinctive signs of music derail his language education so that Theobald complains, 'Why, when he was translating Livy the other day he slipped out Handel's name in mistake for Hannibal's' (124). Butler suggests that Ernest's musical 'instinct' descends from his great-grandfather, who played the organ, and also emerges in his aunt Alethea. Upon discovering the fortune which Alethea has left to him, Ernest remarks: 'If I were rendering this moment in music ... I should allow myself free use of the augmented sixth', before voicing 'a laugh that had something of a family likeness to his aunt's' (373). Ernest's escape from the groove set by his father involves returning to an older hereditary one.

Equally, conventional language could be imagined as a muddle of competing traditions rather than a monolith. Lewes called it: 'a shifting mass of truth and error, for ever becoming more and more sifted and organised into permanent structures of germinating fertility or of fossilised barrenness' (1879, 167). Similarly for Butler, individuals who seem like agents of change often turn out to be units in larger, long-running processes. Overton compares Ernest's apostasy to a moth hatching from its

‘cocoon’, accelerated by the shock of his imprisonment (284). His rejection of Christianity is not independent, but part of the broader rise of scientific scepticism. His experience germinates seeds of doubt already sown by conversations with a freethinking neighbour and reading the *Vestiges of Creation* (1844). This doubt is not simply a unitary, linear development, though, but one of many potentialities previously repressed. Overton comments how *Vestiges* had been ‘forgotten before Ernest went up to Cambridge’, yet its ideas would re-emerge, modified, in Darwin’s *Origin* (208). Ernest’s recovery of the book from the past counters the assumption of a Darwinian ‘revolution’ after 1859: ideas do not appear from nowhere in a kind of pseudo-creation; all grow from previous forms. Much of Butler’s public row with Darwin and his supporters from the late 1870s onwards stemmed from this view that Darwin was only the latest in a long line of evolutionists.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Ernest’s escape from the church recapitulates Theobald’s failed attempt to do the same as a young man. In letters to his father, Theobald requests not to be ordained, only for his father to coerce him into it with threats of cutting his allowance. Theobald’s religious doubts are feebler than Ernest’s partly because of the faith’s stronger theoretical position in the early nineteenth century. Theobald writes to his father that, although ‘I could subscribe cordially to every one of the thirty-nine articles’ and William Paley’s *Natural Theology* (1802) ‘leaves no loop-hole for an opponent. ... I do not feel the inward call to be a minister of the gospel’ (33). As Overton recalls, in this time ‘there was just a little scare about geology’, but literal belief in the Genesis narrative remained strong (52). Again, then, Ernest’s rebellion does not simply break with the language of his elders but revives and extends a previously suppressed thread of it. His interpretation of scripture as metaphorical builds on earlier shifts in geology which undermined Biblical chronology. Like heredity, conventional language is an entangled bed of idea-seeds, which sprout, wither or lie dormant through constant dialogues with their environment.

Communication for Butler is a dialogue between heredity and convention rather than parallel, preset monologues. *Life and Habit* states: ‘as it takes two people “to tell” a thing – a speaker and a comprehending listener ... so also it takes two people, as it were, to “remember” a thing – the creature remembering, and the surroundings of the creature at the time it last remembered’ (298). The organism ‘remembered’ its past lives through associations triggered by its environment. Equally, in speech, certain threads of instinct

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<sup>28</sup> Butler’s *Evolution Old and New* traced the theory back to Darwin’s grandfather Erasmus, Lamarck and even Buffon in the eighteenth century. See Amigoni 2007a, 142-60.

triggered threads of custom, and vice-versa. The unpredictability of this dialogue is shown in Theobald's turmoil after embarking on a loveless marriage. Butler associates Theobald's urge to flee his bride (which would seem more instinctive) with his conscious self, while an unconscious 'voice' compels him to see the marriage through. Eduard von Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, which Butler read, argued that the pressure on men 'to establish a household' through marriage had become unconscious instinct. This instinct overruled the conscious realization that 'he thereby ruins and makes unhappy himself and the girl whom he marries' (I 219). Curiously, unlike Ernest's later voice of heredity, which speaks in varied vocabulary and complex sentences, Theobald's voice of respectability is loud, blunt and mainly monosyllabic:

He would drive back to Crampsford; he would complain to Mr and Mrs Allaby; he didn't mean to have married Christina; he hadn't married her; it was all a hideous dream; he would – But a voice kept ringing in his ears which said: 'YOU CAN'T, CAN'T, CAN'T'.

'CAN'T I?' screamed the unhappy creature to himself.

'No', said the remorseless voice, 'YOU CAN'T. YOU ARE A MARRIED MAN' (58).

The anaphoric 'CAN'T, CAN'T, CAN'T' evokes Butler's hereditary instincts in *Life and Habit*, instructing the organism to 'do this, this, this'. Instinct and convention merge into each other along the borderland of unconscious habit. Yet, even this instant of Theobald's submission to ancestral voices prefigures his son's later rebellion against them. Slumping back in his wedding carriage, Theobald 'for the first time felt how iniquitous were the marriage laws of England. But he would buy Milton's prose works and read his pamphlet on divorce' (58). As a writer, Ernest later proposes to attack the institution of 'marriage'. Not only nature and custom blur into each other in Butler's mental-linguistic evolution but also conformity and deviation.

For all of Butler's verbal iconoclasm, challenging convention, it is worth noting that he did not seek to destroy words. Indeed, in some cases he defended old words against writers who rejected them as unscientific. While Huxley made a point of removing *God* from his explanations of the universe, Butler remarked in *Luck or Cunning?* (1886): 'What convention or short cut can [better] symbolise for us ... that which cannot be rendered – the

idea of an essence omnipresent in all things at all times everywhere[?]. The word only became misleading, Butler suggested, when it had 'been lost sight of as a convention and ... converted into a fetish, and now that its worthlessness as a fetish is being generally felt, its great value as a hieroglyph or convention is in danger of being lost sight of'. To erase 'God' from the lexicon was to repeat the mistake of religion, assuming that words could exist 'in actual correspondence with a more or less knowable reality' (136). Symbols were stepping-stones for ideas which preceded and soared beyond the conscious self. Overton suggests in *The Way of All Flesh* that speakers proceed more often by faith than definite knowledge. Interrogating the difference between 'external' and 'internal', he claims, 'will knock our whole system over'. To make any progress, the speaker must assume the separation of the two concepts 'when we find this convenient, and unity between the same when we find unity convenient. This is illogical, but extremes are alone logical, and they are always absurd, the mean is alone practicable and it is always illogical' (311). On this basis, Ernest the evolutionist author continues to take the sacrament annually and believe in 'a something as yet but darkly known which makes right right and wrong wrong' (304). In our current ignorance, Butler suggests, why not call this something God? *Luck or Cunning?* states: 'words are to ideas what the fairy invisible cloak was to the prince who wore it – only that the prince was seen till he put on the cloak, whereas ideas are unseen until they don the robe of words which reveals them to us' (34). Words which seem obsolete might signpost traces of an idea in which future generations will see a greater significance, and build upon. It was in this sense that Butler judged Darwin's theories unoriginal. 'Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck believed in natural selection to the full as much as any follower of Mr. Charles Darwin can do', he wrote. 'They did not use the actual words, but the idea underlying them is the essence of their system' (85). The future would bring words for ideas nascent and unspoken in the present. As an unpopular writer, Butler consoled himself with the notion that later generations would find new meanings in his works, writing: 'Homer and Shakespeare speak to us probably far more effectually than they did to the men of their own time, and most likely we have them at their best' (1908, 82). Their embodied lives were but 'embryonic stages', developing to their fullest centuries later in the readings of future audiences. Ernest and Butler's mental liberation from the voices of their fathers is as much a recalibration of faith as apostasy. Instead of trusting in symbols as the revealed mind of God they choose to trust in the unconscious, partly-instinctive life of 'thought' which works around language. Butler's faith in the hidden wisdom of religious

words chimes closely with Karl Jung's later comment, 'You can take away a man's gods, but only to give him others in return' (77; see also Otis 207-11). Language seems not simply analogous to heredity but part of it, collapsing instinct and custom into a monistic network of potentialities. This delegitimizes restrictive dogmas of religion and the family, conceiving language as an ongoing negotiation of forces, with 'nature' no more natural than artifice, and vice-versa.

### Speaking of Sex in Hardy's Fiction

While Butler used the concept of instinctive signs to question Victorian parent-child relations, Hardy did the same for marriage. He was influenced by Darwin and Arthur Schopenhauer, who stressed the sexual urge as a fundamental instinct. He also read Charles Fourier's arguments for free love and J. M. McLennan's theory that marriage had originated in the trading of females, undermining its legitimacy (see R. Morgan xv). The issue was close to home for Hardy: biographers agree that his passion for his first wife Emma faded over time and seems to have transferred to flirtations and obsessions with other women (Pite 328-9). In 1892 he spoke of his frustration at pressures on authors to idealize marriage and ignore debates over divorce: 'I do feel very strongly that the position of men and women in nature, things which everybody is thinking and nobody saying, may be taken up and treated frankly'.<sup>29</sup> He criticized binding marriage laws in 1894, stating: 'civilization ... has never succeeded in creating that homely thing, a satisfactory scheme for the conjunction of the sexes' (1894b, 681). Roger Ebbatson observed that Hardy's fiction 'expertly projects the non-linguistic codes which pertain in sexual matters in animal and human worlds' onto intimate scenes between his characters so that 'spoken language gives place to interpersonal communication derived from biology' (33-4). Hence, many of his characters are drawn together by music or dance. At what point, though, did language separate from such instinctive codes, forged by sexual selection? Angelique Richardson argues that nature and culture often exist 'in fertile reciprocity' in Hardy's writings, leaving him 'caught between biology and philosophy, between, in essence, Darwin and Mill, and not always able to accommodate both' (2009, 54). I will explore this tension from a communicative perspective: while Mill argued for the conventionality of speech, Darwin

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<sup>29</sup> 'A Chat with the Author of *Tess*', *Black and White* 4 (1892), 240.

posited a natural vocabulary of instinctive signs for emotions and unconscious urges. Richardson notes that for Hardy ‘instinct is often related to a greater authenticity of feeling and action, a greater truth value’ (61). Instinctive communication encodes sympathy in his fiction which conventional language suppresses. The path to a more humane society might lie in rediscovering these biosemiotics rather than stifling them. Yet, as with Butler, Hardy rejected simple dichotomies of nature and culture. Human communication emerges in his vision as multilayered, with plural sign systems pulling speakers in different directions.

The idea of instinctive emotional signs separate from words is discernible in Hardy’s fiction as early as his first published novel *Desperate Remedies* (1871). The tale suggests that some form of animal magnetism might mediate instinctive amatory signs. Hardy’s narrator translates these signs into language while, simultaneously, implying that such translation is impossible. Characters send and receive them at the speed of Helmholtz’s nerve signals without conscious deliberation. When Cythera first meets her future husband Springrove, their eyes lock together, the narrator noting: ‘a clear penetrating ray of intelligence had shot from each into each, giving birth to one of those unaccountable sensations which carry home to the heart before the hand has been touched or the merest compliment passed, by something stronger than mathematical proof, the conviction, “A tie has begun to unite us”’ (32). When a rowing trip enables the nascent lovers to be alone in close proximity, they avoid returning to shore at once. The narrator states: ‘It was the turn of his face to tell a tale now. He looked, “We understand each other – ah, we do, darling!”’ turned the boat, and pulled back into the Bay once more’ (48). Expression also functions as a parallel language in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), with the characters’ faces telling ‘tales’ outside of verbal convention: ‘There are accents in the eye which are not on the tongue, and more tales come from pale lips than can enter an ear. It is both the grandeur and the pain of the remoter moods that they avoid the pathway of sound’. The comment refers to a chance encounter between the much-pursued Bathsheba and the suitor whom she has just refused by letter, Boldwood. Their polite, stilted conversation is a mere surface, Hardy suggests, to the intense feelings communicated by Boldwood’s face and Bathsheba’s red cheeks. It is because these signs constitute an instinctive language of their own, the narrator implies, that ‘those who have the power of reproaching in silence may find it a means more effective than words’ (234).

Hardy often suggests an authenticity in instinctive signs, lacking in conventional language, by linking them to wider environmental rhythms. Mark Asquith and John Hughes

have shown how music theory influenced Hardy to conceive some characters as organic harps, resonating to the cosmos. Vocality connects humans to primal nature in *Return of the Native* when the narrator finds a ‘linguistic peculiarity’ in the winds blowing through Egdon Heath. Alone there, awaiting her lover, Eustacia Vye exhales unrestrainedly, ‘her articulation ... but as another phrase of the same discourse as’ the winds. Her vocalization exists outside the social convention of words: ‘There was a sense of spasmodic abandonment about [her sigh] as if, in allowing herself to utter the sound, the woman’s brain had authorised what it could not regulate’ (54). Hardy emphasizes the opposition between natural impulse and social restraint further when her lover appears: ‘a low laugh escaped her – the third utterance which the girl had indulged in tonight’ (60). Primordial expressions may only be vocalized in solitude or clandestine relations. Socializing in wider, public circles demands the ‘regulation’ of voice within standardized, conventional parameters. Like several of Hardy’s lovers, Eustacia becomes infatuated after hearing her future mate’s voice.<sup>30</sup> Words form only the semantic surface above the instinctive significations: ‘it was not to the words that Eustacia listened; she could not have recalled, a few minutes later, what the words were. It was to the alternating voice. ... Sometimes this throat uttered Yes, sometimes it uttered No. ... All emotional things were possible to the speaker of that “good night”’ (117). Equally, in Hardy’s last published novel *The Well-Beloved* (1897), Pierston’s infatuation with Avice, who resembles her mother of the same name, is again mediated by a vocal music separate from words:

she attracted him by the cadences of her voice; she would suddenly drop it to a rich whisper of roguishness, when ... soul and heart – or what seemed soul and heart – resounded. The charm lay in the intervals, using that word in its musical sense. She would say a few syllables in one note, and end her sentence in a soft modulation upwards, then downwards, then into her own note again. ... The subject of her discourse he cared nothing about – it was no more his interest than his concern. He took special pains that in catching her voice he might not comprehend her words’. (149)

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<sup>30</sup> Asquith notes the recurrence of this motif throughout Hardy’s fiction (97-99).

In 1870 the musicologist Colin Brown had written of a musical notation he had designed to represent speech, arguing ‘that every sound in the scale has its own peculiar and characteristic mental effect’ (4). Hardy supports this idea of a definite system of emotional vocal signals (separate from speech) by developing Pierston’s obsession through bathetically mundane conversations. He quizzes Avice on her laundry-washing methods, the narrator wryly noting: ‘Nature was working her plans for the next generation under the cloak of a dialogue on linen’ (140).

Instinctive signs sometimes also mediate sympathy for Hardy, implying that civilization dulls this faculty rather than creates it. Darwin had traced sympathy to the natural selection of united groups over individual organisms. Spencer linked such sympathy to the development of vocal ‘music’, predicting an ideal future when this ‘language of emotions’ would unite humans completely (see Chapter Two). *Return of the Native* flirts with this ideal during a secret meeting between Eustacia and Clym. As they embrace and kiss, the narrator states: ‘They remained long without a single utterance, for no language could reach the level of their condition – words were as the rusty implements of a by-gone barbarous epoch, and only to be occasionally tolerated’ (197). The passage evokes Tylor’s teleological vision of language giving way to a kind of telepathy. Yet, its context is far removed from civilization, between two lovers on the primordial heath. The sympathy between Eustacia and Clym might be read as an animal magnetism of sorts, mediating the same primordial signs as those previously transmitted between the couple (see A. Winter 256). Clym and his mother enjoy a similar oneness of feeling when she comes to accept his plans to stay in Egdon. While ‘he had despaired of reaching her by argument’, he instead does so ‘by a magnetism which was as superior to words as words are to yells’ (191). Their sympathy chimes with Julia Kristeva’s concept of the maternal *chora*, a sympathy mediated by biology rather than symbols: ‘he was a part of her ... their discourses were as if carried on between the right and left hands of the same body’ (25-26). The fullest communication might consist not of humans repressing their instincts but of submitting to them.

While Hardy was wary of idealizing dialect as ‘natural’ (see Chapter Four), his fiction nonetheless often associates its replacement by Standard English with repression of instinctive signs and sympathy. Through standardization, speech became mechanized into fixed, prescribed rules, coinciding, for Hardy, with the silencing of vocal impulses. This process is shown most clearly in Hardy’s only novel set in the city, *The Hand of Ethelberta*. Urban sophistication consists of repressing instinctive signs which go unregulated in the

country. The narrator states: 'a slight laugh from far down the throat and a slight narrowing of the eye were equivalent as indices of the degree of mirth felt to a Ha-ha-ha! and a shaking of the shoulders among the minor traders of the kingdom; and to a Ho-ho-ho! contorted features, purple face, and stamping foot among the gentlemen in corduroy and fustian who adorn the remoter provinces' (56). This suppression distances people from each other in the struggle for status. Ethelberta's bourgeois acquaintances politely agree to join her on an outing, yet: 'from first to last Ethelberta never discovered from the Belmaines whether her proposal had been an infliction or a charm, so perfectly were they practised in sustaining that complete divorce between thinking and saying which is the hallmark of high civilization' (227). In this society of appearances, Ethelberta is punished for expressing her feelings transparently. Her protector Lady Petherwin cuts Ethelberta out of her will for not continuing to publically mourn Lady Petherwin's son, who died during his honeymoon with Ethelberta. Ethelberta refuses to fake emotions in the name of respectability, remarking: 'I should have been more virtuous by being more unfeeling. That often happens' (88).

The more that social convention represses instinctive, sympathetic signs, the more emotionally atomized people often become in Hardy's fiction. In *A Laodicean* (1881) the genteel bastard William Dare exemplifies this notion to a Machiavellian extreme. He cheats and blackmails his way through life 'with the flawless politeness of a man whose speech has no longer any kinship with his feelings' (327). His speech is utterly standardized, without a trace of locality, 'in cold level words which had once been English, but which seemed to have lost the accent of nationality' (272). Somerset notes how Dare uses speech to conceal, rather than express himself: 'I never can quite make out what you are, or what your age is'. Dare replies that he is 'a citizen of the world. I owe no country patriotism, and no king or queen obedience. A man whose country has no boundary is your only true gentleman' (161). Dare's most elaborate scheme is to make heiress Paula Power fall in love with his father, securing a rich inheritance for himself. Although a great dissembler, Dare lacks the ability to transmit the instinctive signs of sexual attraction and sympathy, and so must recruit his amorous but guileless father to win Paula's heart. Without instinctive signs mediating sympathy, speakers become isolated, communicating only to advance their interests. Hardy demonstrates this further in his tale 'The Son's Veto' (1891). While the working-class, dialect-speaking widow Sophy sacrifices herself for others, her privately-educated son cares only for his ambitions. He scolds her for using dialect, before later

forcing her to live in miserable solitude rather than cheapen his name by wedding a market-man. The narrator states: 'His education had by this time sufficiently ousted his humanity to keep him quite firm' (21). Hardy earlier associates this selfishness with the encroachment of civilization upon instinct:

Somehow, her boy, with his aristocratic school-knowledge, his grammars, and his aversions, was losing those wide infantine sympathies, extending as far as to the sun and moon themselves, with which he, like other children, had been born, and which his mother, a child of nature herself, had loved in him; he was reducing their compass to a population of a few thousand wealthy and titled people, the mere veneer of a thousand million or so of others who did not interest him at all. (11)

Far from threatening sympathy, instinctive vocal signs are at the core of it.

These instinctive signs might even mediate sympathy beyond species boundaries. Hardy had a lifelong interest in animal welfare, writing in 1910 to the Humanitarian League: 'the most far-reaching consequence of the establishment of the common origin of all species, is ethical' (qtd. F. E. Hardy 141-42). In 1895 he sent the passage of the infamous pig-killing in *Jude the Obscure* (1895) to the editor of the *Animal's Friend*, suggesting that it be reproduced in the journal. He wrote that the passage 'might be made useful in the teaching of mercy in the slaughtering of animals for the meat market – the cruelties involved in that business having been a great grief to me for years' (1988, II 97). The scene, in which Jude slaughters a pig, engages with the popular idea that humans and animals shared a common language of vocalized emotions. Ferguson notes that many Victorian anti-vivisectionists drew on this notion to promote their cause, 'declaiming poignantly on the sufferings of animals that plead through their eyes, spoke with their howls, and orated by means of their cries' (2006, 115). Considering connections between Darwin and Hardy, Caroline Sumpter observes that Darwin's *Expression* had noted that pigs vocalized differently to convey pain or pleasure, as in the human voice (668). In spite of all his learning, Jude does not object with logical, reasoned arguments. He cannot explain to his wife why the pig's suffering horrifies him. His grief is triggered by the animal's vocalizations. In preparing for the slaughter, Jude's 'cheerfulness was lessened'

by the animal's 'voice [which] could be continually heard from a corner of the garden' (68). As they bind him down, the pig's 'squeak of surprise, rose to repeated cries of rage'. When Jude fetches the sticking-knife, 'the animal's note changed its quality. It was not now rage, but the cry of despair; long-drawn, slow and hopeless' (71). Bleeding to death, 'the dying animal's cry assumed its third and final tone, the shriek of agony; his glazing eyes riveting themselves on Arabella with the eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends' (71). Jude's reaction is not acquired through convention but an innate vocabulary of sympathy. He is also affected when the distant 'shrill squeak' of a rabbit caught in a trap awakes him at night. He cannot help but 'picture the agonies of the rabbit' and 'could rest no longer till he had put it out of its pain' (252-3). Voice is similarly significant in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* when the heroine mercifully kills birds wounded by a shooting party. Tess is drawn to the birds by the 'strange sound' of their suffering, 'a sort of gasp or gargle'. The vocal sign of pain prefigures gestural ones when Tess weeps at the sight of 'all of them writhing in agony' (353-4). Treating communication as apart from biology, humans narrow their sphere of potential sympathy.

We must beware, however, of simple dichotomies between selfish civilization and sympathetic nature in Hardy's view of speech. Instinctive and conventional signs often blend into each other. Asquith argues that 'the language of the intellect is relatively unimportant' to the feelings of Hardy's characters: the music of emotion is the main force (99). While there is much truth in this argument, intellect and emotion also shade into each other. Hardy presents people as negotiations of nature and culture, rather than the latter falsifying the former. Sexual attraction and sympathy are not only animal urges, but also imaginative extensions of these urges, enabled by the mental scaffolding of language. Shortly before Cytherea and Springrove's first kiss in *Desperate Remedies*, one sign system seems to invade the other, reversing the conventional meanings of words in a surge of passion. Having brought his mouth to the 'brink' of Cytherea's, Springrove whispers 'as much to himself as to her', 'May I?' The narrator states:

Her endeavour was to say No, so denuded of its flesh and sinews that its nature would hardly be recognized, or in other words a No from so near the affirmative frontier as to be affected with the Yes accent. It was thus a whispered No, drawn out to nearly a quarter of a minute's length, the O

making itself audible as a sound like the spring coo of a pigeon on unusually friendly terms with its mate. (54)

Laying aside the disturbing implication, noted by Phillip Mallett, 'that a woman's "No" is merely an erotically charged "Yes"', the passage is ambiguous about how instinctive these instinctive signs really are.<sup>31</sup> While comparing Cytherea's vowel to an instinctive mating sound, the narrator also suggests calculation, stating that she was 'conscious of her success in producing the kind of word she had wished to produce'. Although biology forges such messages, consciousness enables individuals to modify them. Cytherea's cooing is, in Darwin's words, 'half-art and half-instinct'. She is no mere slave of instinct in opposition to masculine intellect. For both her and Springrove, individual agency emerges through interferences in larger, automatic processes. If instinct forms a *langue* of unconscious emotional triggers then *parole* is empowered in the capacity of speakers to deploy, suppress and combine them in different contexts. In 1907 Hardy wrote: 'The will of man is . . . neither wholly free nor wholly unfree. . . . [W]henver it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers are free to go on playing the pianoforte of themselves when he talks or thinks of something else and the head does not rule them' (Hardy 1984, 368; see Armstrong 2004, 161). Hardy's lovers are conduits of the Will to life in their instinctive vocalizations, but their ability to manipulate these signs for premeditated effect renders them partly intentional.

*Desperate Remedies* undermines the intellectual language/instinctive noise dichotomy through the former reacting upon the latter. The mental abstraction enabled by language links signs, originally instinctive, to complex chains of association. Darwin recognized this issue, writing: 'every true or inherited movement of expression seems to have had some natural and independent origin. But when once acquired, such movements may be voluntarily and consciously employed as a means of communication' (1872, 356). The instinctive signs of attraction that draw Cytherea and Springrove together transmit along imaginative pathways enabled by language. Springrove occupies the position of prospective lover in Cytherea's thoughts before they meet: her brother's reports of him

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<sup>31</sup> Mallett 2004, 134. *Ethelberta* also describes a woman's 'Yes' as a 'No', but in purely conventional terms: 'more often than not "No" is said to a man's importunities because it is traditionally the correct modest reply, and for nothing else in the world' (174).

interact with Cytherea's instinctive receptiveness to a mate. In her 'symbol-loving girlhood', the sight of her bare ring finger conjures images of an unseen man (21). Similarly, after their meeting, thought, elaborated by language, channels her sexual instinct into endless interpretations of his words: 'she repeated [them] to herself a hundred times ... toying with them, – looking at them from all points, and investing them with meanings of love and faithfulness ... her reason flirted with her fancy as a kitten will sport with a dove' (36). Hardy blurs the line between mating ritual and imaginary fancy, turning instinctive gestures into floating signifiers and conventional movements into possible sexual signified. Hence, in the boat with Springrove: 'when his hands came forward to begin the pull, they approached so near to her that her vivid imagination began to thrill her with a fancy that he was going to clasp his arms round her. The sensation grew so strong that she could not run the risk of again meeting his eyes at those critical moments' (46). Humans' capacity to draw indirect associations destabilizes the instinctive sign system. Instinctive signs separate from the urges they once directly triggered, becoming ambiguous and open to interpretation. This dislocation of signs from instincts suggests one way of understanding the ambiguous sexuality of Cytherea's mistress Miss Aldclyffe. Having lost the man she loved, Miss Aldclyffe seems to project her unspent desire onto her maid, transmitting sexual signals and interpreting them from Cytherea like a male lover. The narrator earlier notes, *a propos* of Cythera and Springrove, 'it has been said that men love with their eyes; women with their ears' (43). Miss Aldclyffe adopts this male gaze, converting Cytherea's body and movements into triggers to her frustrated sexuality. Eliciting an angry, coquettish glance from her maid, the mistress says to herself: 'It is almost worth while to be bored with instructing her in order to have a creature who could glide round my luxurious indolent body in that manner, and look at me in that way' (64). She later reproaches herself for employing Cytherea like a man who married for lust: 'The idea of my taking a girl without asking her more than three questions, or having a single reference, all because of her good l—, the shape of her face and body!' (85). Invading Cythera's bed, she kisses her and 'held her almost as a lover would have held her' (114). Hardy suggests that, by granting people some agency over their instinctive signs, mental abstraction also renders sexual identity adaptable. Sexuality changes from a closed circuit of fixed signals and responses to a dynamic structure of interpretation, appropriation and displacement.

Instinctive signs are similarly displaced into conventional meanings in *Tess* when Alec's conversion diverts his signs of sexual desire into religious zeal. Darwin wrote how

‘the impassioned orator, bard, or musician, when with his varied tones and cadences he excites the strongest emotions in his hearers, little suspects that he uses the same means by which his half-human ancestors long ago aroused each other’s ardent passions, during their courtship and rivalry’ (1871, II 337). Hearing Alec quote the scripture, Tess notes ‘a grim incongruity’ between the words and ‘this too familiar intonation, [which] less than four years earlier, had brought to her ears expressions of such divergent purpose’. The narrator continues:

The former curves of sensuousness were now modulated to lines of devotional passion. The lip-shapes that had meant seductiveness were now made to express supplication; the glow on the cheek that yesterday could be translated as riotousness was evangelized to-day into the splendour of pious rhetoric; animalism had become fanaticism; Paganism, Paulinism; the bold rolling eye that had flashed upon her form in the old time with such mastery now beamed with the rude energy of a theolatri that was almost ferocious. ... The lineaments, as such, seemed to complain. They had been diverted from their hereditary connotation to signify impressions for which Nature did not intend them. (390)

Asquith concludes from this passage that Alec’s conversion is illusory: he is a ‘puppet’ of the instincts of his ‘brutal ancestors ... powerless to divert himself from the destiny laid out by his hereditary endowment’ (100). His new faith certainly seems to fall away when he meets Tess alone later and ‘the corpses of those old fitful passions which had lain inanimate amid the lines of his face ever since his reformation seemed to wake and come together as in a resurrection’ (412). Yet, Alec’s identity is more complicated than false piety disguising a ‘true’, unchanging nature as a sexual predator. Although tempted by the voice and gaze of Tess, Alec does not force himself upon her as before, even when his faith falters. He commands her to avert her eyes from him, before fleeing to read over a letter from the parson who helped to convert him, ‘till his face assumed a calm’ (398). Mental abstraction produced by language enables him to avoid emotional triggers. Further, the dogma of respectability acts upon him as a kind of secondary instinct, channelling sexual passion into abnegation. At a later meeting, when he moves to embrace Tess, she implores him: ‘think –

be ashamed!’ causing him to wander away ‘indeterminately’ (412). Alec schemes to possess Tess again, but through marriage: a compromise between instinct and social convention. Hardy wrote in the *Life*: ‘I am more than ever convinced that persons are successively various persons, according as each special strand of their characters is brought uppermost by circumstances’ (230). Alec’s conversion illustrates this indeterminacy of self, his instinctive signs of emotion altering their meanings under different influences.

While instinctive signs can assume the mechanics of convention, conventional words and gestures attach themselves associatively to instinct. Some characters’ utterances escape their conscious intentions, rousing contrary urges. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* the rakish Troy woos Bathsheba with calculated verbal jousting, only for her reaction to trigger the feelings which his words had counterfeited. His showy wit gives way to a simple declaration of love with, the narrator notes, ‘an intonation of such exquisite fidelity to nature that it was evidently not all acted now’ (205). As the exchange continues, ‘a factitious reply had been again upon his lips, but it was again suspended, and he looked at her with an arrested eye. The truth was, that as she now stood – excited, wild, and honest as the day – her alluring beauty bore out so fully the epithets he had bestowed upon it that he was quite startled at his temerity in advancing them as false’ (206). People are melting-pots of potential urges, producing contradictory messages from different bodily media. When Bathsheba commands her suitor-turned-employee Gabriel Oak to leave, ‘a paleness of face invisible to the eye’ is ‘suggested by the trembling [of her] words’. Striving to repress her residual feelings, which would typically convey themselves through blushing, she only diverts them to her voice. By contrast, Oak expresses undying love in ‘a steady voice, the steadiness of which was spoilt by the palpableness of his great effort to keep it so’ (225). The absence of instinctive vocal signs can be as significant as their presence, illustrating Oak’s efforts to convert his sexual desire into a principled chastity. Similarly, in *Ethelberta* instinctive emotional signs find alternative outlets when characters try to repress them. Ethelberta greets her old flame Christopher with a steady voice, but ‘the calmness was artificially done, and the astonishment that did not appear in Ethelberta’s tones was expressed by her gaze. Christopher was not in a mood to draw fine distinctions between recognized and unrecognized organs of speech. He replied to the eyes’ (105). Conversely, when Christopher later tells her that he ‘cannot conscientiously put in a claim upon your attention’ due to his precarious finances, ‘a second meaning was written in Christopher’s look, though he scarcely uttered it’ (196-7). She chooses, though, to respond to his

convention-bound words and ignore the expression imploring her to wait for him. These scenes echo Darwin's sense of conflicting bodily media reflecting a divided self. 'I have often felt much difficulty', Darwin continued, 'about the proper application of the terms, will, consciousness, and intention. Actions, which were at first voluntary, soon became habitual, and at last hereditary, and may then be performed even in opposition to the will' (1872, 357). Bodies may transmit contradictory messages simultaneously.

Perhaps the greatest of these contradictions was the mating-call function of the voice against the moral restraint it was made to preach in civilized speech. The verbal etiquette of Hardy's characters often breaks down in being uttered as the instinctive signs of voice awaken urges which their words aim to repress. Bathsheba's other suitor Boldwood attempts to propose to her with restraint, only for the performance to break away from these intentions, along with their ordered syntax: "Say the words, dear one, and the subject shall be dismissed; a blissful loving intimacy of six years, and then marriage – O Bathsheba, say them!" he begged in a husky voice, unable to sustain the forms of mere friendship any longer' (442). In moments of passion, instinctive vocal signs swamp convention, much like the psycholinguist Ivan Fónagy's model of instinctive emotion as a meaningful 'distorter' of speech (1999, 3-4). Bathsheba is quiet for fear of further inflaming not only Boldwood but also herself. Listening to his protestations, 'she strove miserably against this femininity which would insist upon supplying unbidden emotions in stronger and stronger current'. Speech similarly short-circuits in *The Trumpet-Major* when John Loveday stammers uncontrollably before Anne Garland, caught between duty and desire. Despite his unspoken love, he tries to recommend his brother Bob, only for his delivery to break up: 'B-B-Bob is a very good fel-' (336). In another exchange with her, he dares not voice certain words for fear of losing self-control, so charged are they with instinctive feeling. 'I have been thinking lately', he tells her, 'that men of the military profession ought not to m—ought to be like St. Paul, I mean' (359). Under an emotional siege, language flees into circumlocutions. By contrast, Anne's other suitor Festus Derriman simplifies the syntax and vocabulary of his proposal and jettisons etiquette with his rising passion. Speaking to Anne's mother after his first approach fails, he implores: "Ask her to alter her cruel, cruel resolves against me, on the score of my consuming passion for her. In short", continued Festus, dropping his parlour language in his warmth, "I'll tell thee what, Dame Loveday, I want the maid, and I must have her" (333). Unable to trust themselves to speech, Hardy's reluctant lovers can only resist instinct by curtailing conversations or communicating by

letter. In 'An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress' (1878), the wealthy Geraldine promises her hand to the penniless schoolmaster Egbert in a heated face-to-face meeting, only to refuse him by letter. Through a sheet slipped under her door, social convention dominates Geraldine's discourse: 'I [cannot] accept your address without an entire loss of position'. When they meet again, Geraldine admits to being engaged to a rich man whom she does not love, and can only restrain herself by arresting their talk mid-flow. The narrator states, 'a hair's-breadth further, and they would both have broken down', prevented only by her demanding, "'not a word more ... Goodnight – good-bye!'" She spoke in a hurried voice, almost like a low cry, and rushed away' (98). Writing enables the illusion of a unitary, conscious self separate from instinct, which threatens to collapse when language inhabits living bodies once more.

Yet even the binary of instinctive bodily signs versus mechanical writing proves unstable. Imagination, articulated by language, enables written signs to substitute for instinctive ones, triggering amatory feelings. In *Ethelberta* Christopher proposes to Ethelberta's sister Picotee, having gradually fallen in love with her through reading her letters. 'Oddly enough', he states, 'I got more interested in the writer than in her news. I don't know if ever before there has been an instance of loving by means of letters. If not, it is because there have never been such sweet ones written' (479). Hardy depicts this process of epistolary attraction in more detail in his later short story 'On the Western Circuit' (1891). The young lawyer Raye begins an epistolary romance with the servant girl Anna, ignorant that her letters are in fact written by her mistress Edith. These letters charm Raye to a greater extent than his brief meeting with Anne through channels seemingly beyond verbal convention. 'He could not single out any one sentence and say it was at all remarkable or clever', the narrator states; 'the ensemble of the letter it was which won him' (89). Edith's writing conceives 'pretty fancies for winning him' while Anna's dictated words leave him cold (91). The division between bodily passions and scribal intellects collapses when Raye marries Anna, only to realize, too late, that Edith authored the letters. Declaring that 'in soul and spirit I have married you', he shares a long kiss with Edith (104). The triumph of writing over the body to stir romantic feelings is illustrated in the final scene as Raye re-reads the letters during his honeymoon journey, ignoring the embodied woman at his side. The imagination invests writing with the frissons of instinct which might, ultimately, become more affecting than the bodily signs for which it substituted.

Hardy extends this idea in 'An Imaginative Woman' (1894). Here the neglected wife Ella falls passionately in love with the poet Robert Trewe, whom she never meets. When she holidays in his room, his etchings on the wall become 'the thoughts and spirit-strivings which had come to him in the dead of night ... [a]nd now her hair was dragging where his arm had lain when he secured the fugitive fancies; she was sleeping on a poet's lips, immersed in the very essence of him, permeated by his spirit as by an ether' (18). Her imaginings are shaped by instinctive drives, as the narrator comments, 'The personal element in the magnetic attraction ... was so much stronger than the intellectual and abstract that she could not understand it'. Directing her fancy is 'the instinct to specialise a waiting emotion on the first fit thing that came to hand ... being a woman of very living ardours, that required sustenance of some sort, they were beginning to feed on this chancing material'(12). Abstract thought displaces instinctive drives into symbols; Ella invests objects linked to Trewe with emotional significance. His wall-scribbles become 'so intense, so sweet, so palpitating, that it seemed as if his very breath, warm and loving, fanned her cheeks from those walls' (17). The love-signs which Ella decodes are entirely imaginary, yet, they render her embodied, present husband a mere shadow in her feelings. After Trewe commits suicide, she pines away and dies in childbirth. Hardy ends the tale by toying with the possibility that such fancies might transmute into biological realities. Ella's husband finds a photograph of Trewe and lock of his hair, and, comparing them with her last child, concludes that Trewe is the father. Despite the dramatic irony of the scene, Hardy suggests that the resemblance does not lie wholly in the widower's subjective eye: 'By a known but inexplicable trick of Nature there were undoubtedly strong traces of resemblance to the man Ella had never seen; the dreamy and peculiar expression of the poet's face sat, as the transmitted idea, upon the child's, and the hair was of the same hue' (32). The detail echoes an earlier scene when, deprived of meeting Trewe, Ella 'tried to let off her emotion by unnecessarily kissing the children, till she had a sudden sense of disgust at being reminded how plain-looking they were, like their father' (25). Could Ella's imagined love affair have somehow genetically transmitted the 'idea' of Trewe to her child? Not only might instinctive signs become conventionally symbolic, but conventional symbols might also channel instincts, and even be echoed through racial descent. Symbols blur the boundaries in Hardy's vision between organisms and their behaviour. In the place of natural truth which artificial language had seemed to falsify, Hardy's fiction reconceives language as an endless dialogue with heritage, cultural and biological. Like their users, signs and meanings

are not anchored by ultimate origins or essences but exist in a state of ongoing negotiation and becoming.

### Rigid Words and Plastic Instincts in H. G. Wells's Early Fiction

August Weismann undermined inheritance of acquired characteristics in the 1880s, arguing that individual experience was not transmitted to offspring.<sup>32</sup> If social tradition did not alter instinct then was language purely conventional? Some of Wells's early journalism suggests so, dividing human existence into the 'inherited factor', instincts which had remained unchanged since primordial times; and the 'acquired factor', traditions and ideas developed through speech (1975, 217). Nature apparently had no voice in and could be no guide to the signs and values of civilization. However, calling speech the channel of social convention did not necessarily make speech in itself purely conventional. Hartmann argued that languages emerged through 'the instinct of the masses, as exhibited in the life of the hive and the ant-hill' (298). While languages developed consciousness among speakers, 'the foundations of language could not have been consciously laid' (293). Late-Victorian psychologists studied infant babble and glossolalia among the deaf, religious and mentally ill as examples of instinctive vocalization beneath conventional language (Ellenberger 316-18; Connor 182-85). Speech seemed not separate from instinct but an adaptation of it. 'All things are integral to the mighty scheme', Wells wrote in *Anticipations*, 'but it has been left for men to be consciously integral' (316). Natural instincts might have ceased to evolve in humans, but that did not equate to them disappearing. As Chapter Three explored, the young Wells argued that humans had not lost their primitive violent and sexual instincts but only diverted them into less destructive channels. Wells the social utopian envisioned language directing instincts with increasing precision, so that, 'a living thing might be taken in hand and so moulded and modified that at best it would retain scarcely anything of its inherent form and disposition' (1975, 36). Yet, this model also produced the dystopian image of society churning out standardized citizens without individual thought. As Chapter Two discussed, the vagueness and contradictions in Wells's utopian visions of language standardization exposed his struggle to reconcile individual freedom with social unity.

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<sup>32</sup> Glendening, 48. Richardson argues, though, that Weismann's hereditarianism has been over-emphasised; the non-transmission of acquired characteristics did not rule out the influence of environment upon organisms, fostering or suppressing their predispositions (2010a, 3, 9).

Sylvia Hardy identifies ‘an unresolved conflict between Wells the social reformer, who wanted language to be unitary and universally comprehensible, and Wells the artist, who enjoyed the anarchic and subversive possibilities of linguistic diversity’ (abstract). I contend that Wells located these ‘anarchic and subversive possibilities’ in instinctive signs and urges. Fetishizing words as facts rendered speakers social automatons the same as pure instinct would render them biological ones. How, then, did Wells’s early fiction imagine language convention arresting thought, and how might instinct disrupt this automatism?

Like Butler, Wells was drawn to the phonograph as an image of language convention. In 1888 he complained in a letter to a friend of the servants he lived with: ‘THEY ARE DAMNED PHONOGRAPHS, BLOODY TALKING DOLLS’. Wells was residing with his mother, who worked in service, and the verbal automatism of her colleagues seemed to him to reflect their unthinking submission to class hierarchy. He remarked: ‘They are all dead – purely automatic. ... Each of ‘em have fifteen remarks to say over & they get through the lot each mealtime. “The days draw out nicely.” “The frost continues.” “The poor souls without coals must suffer!” & so on’ (1998, I 117). Wells returns to phonographic imagery in his early article ‘Of Conversation’, demanding why social engagements required the ‘fetish flow’ of endless conversation. Most of ‘this social law of gabble ... is akin to responses in church, a prescription, a formula’ (1898a, 36). Wells proposes that each diner fit a phonograph ‘under his chin’ to fulfill the mechanical function for him. In a later essay, he writes:

there is something of the phonograph in all of us, but in the sort of eminent person who makes public speeches about education and reading, and who gives away prizes and opens educational institutions, there seems to be little else but gramophone. These people always say the same things, and say them in the same note. And why should they do that if they are really individuals? ... There must be in these demiurgic profundities a rapid manufacture of innumerable thousands of that particular speech about ‘scrappy reading,’ and that contrast of ‘modern’ with ‘serious’ literature, that babbles about in the provinces so incessantly. Gramophones thinly disguised as bishops, gramophones still more thinly disguised as eminent statesmen, gramophones K. C. B. and gramophones F. R. S. have brazened it at us time after time (1914a, 240).

Wells's satire on clichéd public speeches taps into the imaginative association of the time, noted by Jonathan Sterne, between sound reproduction and meaningless conventional speech. Demonstrating his phonograph, Edison had quoted the nursery rhyme 'Mary had a Little Lamb' into the machine, producing 'a transmission without a message' (255). These early articles reveal a different Wells to the later social-planner who confidently prophesied a consistent, global language gaining control over nature (see Chapter Two). The 'acquired factor' of tradition can mechanize thought as well as liberate it, imposing stereotyped categories. What once gave humans agency might later rob them of it as custom became secondary instinct. Language convention atrophies thought, enabling people to echo each other mechanically.

Such echoing is often the target of Wells's Edwardian satires, identifying linguistic convention with mental stasis. *The Food of the Gods* mocks mass print culture for directing the public into stereotyped responses to scientific discoveries, missing their significance. When scientists find a way of extending the growth process, the narrator reports, "'There's always somethin' New,'" said the public – a public so glutted with novelty that it would hear of the earth being split as one splits an apple without surprise, and, "I wonder what they'll do next"' (95). This linguistic rigidity creates tautologous circles of logic when speakers encounter new phenomena unexplained by conventional language. One provincial doctor diagnoses the rise in gigantism among babies as degeneration, citing 'the most gifted ... philosopher' Max Nordau: 'He discovered that the abnormal is – abnormal, a most valuable discovery, and well worth bearing in mind. I find it of the utmost help in practice. When I come upon anything abnormal, I say at once, This is abnormal' (151-2). The image of human phonographs is repeated through parish councilors assailing the scientists with legal threats after enormous animals stampede through their villages. 'Clinging phonographically to prearranged statements', they declare: 'We hold you responsible, Mister Bensington, for the injury inflicted upon our parish, Sir. We hold you responsible' (160). They think only of narrow personal interests, restricted by the conventions of language. One of the most memorable examples of echoing in the tale occurs when a thirty-five-foot boy escapes his captives and stomps into central London. Baffled by the tiny people who divide themselves between slums and mansions, he exclaims: 'What are all you people doing with yourselves? What's it all for?' His questions parallel other giants' attempts to reform this fragmented society, devising vast housing, sanitation and

infrastructural systems. Such plans are thwarted, however, by the small-minded self-interest of local government, businesses and trade unions. Equally, instead of rousing people to unite under a common purpose, the giant-child's question only sparks a mindless 'new catchword. Young men of wit and spirit addressed each other in this manner, "Ullo 'Arry O'Cock. Wot's it all for? Eh? Wot's it all bloomin' well for?" (238). Language conventionality trains people not to imagine alternatives to the status quo, so that words questioning it are heard as absurd jokes. Rather than attempting to answer such questions, the populace can only echo them.

The phonograph's separation of vocal sound from meaning reverberates through the class privilege associated with certain accents in Wells's social comedies. They represent upper-class speech through misspellings, with rivals competing to over-enunciate socially privileged phonemes. Elocution and conversational etiquette had become industries in the nineteenth century as the *nouveau riche* strove to cover their ancestral tracks (Mugglestone 2-5). Wells lampoons these industries in *Kipps* (1905), the tale of a draper who inherits a fortune. Recruiting a bourgeois tutor, he attempts to sharpen his tongue for high society. Wells implies the superficiality of such refinement by misspelling the speech of the teacher: 'what are you doang hea?' he asks, before instructing Kipps to read 'nace novels', listen to 'Vagner or Vargner' and wait for 'a long taimé' (170, 204, 71, 236). The more precisely that Wells's bourgeoisie imitate the tones of supposed respectability the more their speech appears thoughtless sound reproduction. This continues in *Tono-Bungay* (1909) when the narrator George describes his upbringing in the provincial village of Bladesover. Residents vie for the most 'emphatic articulation', mimicking the local aristocrat Lady Drew: 'recomm-an-ding', 'great quan-ta-ties', 'extremelay', 'so am tawled' (21-2). This echoing extends from phonemes to whole conversations at high tea where, 'day after day the talk was exactly the same':

'Sugar, Mrs. Mackridge?' my mother used to ask. ... The word sugar would stir the mind of Mrs. Mackridge.

'They say', she would begin, issuing her proclamation – at least half her sentences began 'they say' – 'sugar is fatt-an-ing, nowadays'.

... 'What won't they say next?' said Miss Fison. ...

Mrs. Booch would produce a favourite piece from her repertoire.

'The evenings are drawing out nicely', she would say, or if the

season was decadent, 'How the evenings draw in!' It was an invaluable remark to her; I do not know how she would have got along without it (20-21).

These phrases echo the human 'phonographs' against whom Wells raged in his letters. Wells often genders such verbal conventionality as peculiarly feminine, opposing George's intellectual narration to Mrs. Booch's repetition of 'a small set of stereotyped remarks that constituted her entire mental range' (19). The same opposition frames George's disastrous marriage, which mirrors Wells's short-lived union with his cousin Isabel. George laments, 'she seemed never to have an idea of her own but always the idea of her class' (198). A sex life between them is all but 'impossible', because 'an enormous force of suggestion had so shaped her that the intense natural fastidiousness of girlhood had developed into an absolute perversion of instinct. For all that is cardinal in this essential business of life she had one inseparable epithet – "horrid!"' (201). She demonstrates the potential of Wells's 'acquired factor' to ossify into a kind of secondary instinct. Conventional language and behaviour has given her 'an immense unimaginative inflexibility – as a tailor-bird builds its nest or a beaver makes its dam' (227). Wells replicates the image of language vitalism of femininity as slavish adherence to convention, unlike creative, instinctive masculinity.<sup>33</sup>

Against verbal prescriptivism, the young Wells had a long-running interest in experimenting with language. Sylvia Hardy notes that Wells's reading of Darwin and William James gave him a radical scepticism of verbal representation: words were provisional tools for exploring reality rather than reality itself (26). As Wells argued in 1903, abstractions like number, class and kind were: 'merely unavoidable conditions of mental activity – regrettable conditions rather than essential facts. The forceps of our minds are clumsy forceps, and crush the truth a little in taking hold of it' (1905, 382). The seemingly eternal truths of language had been constructed arbitrarily upon instinctive vocalizations. This commingling of instinct with convention emerges in Wells's humorous early journalism. 'The Pleasure of Quarrelling' describes this activity as 'a natural function of the body. In his natural state man is always quarrelling – by instinct. Not to quarrel is indeed one of the vices of our civilisation, one of the reasons why we are neurotic and

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<sup>33</sup> In Wells's defence, not all of his phonographic speakers are female, and his 'New Woman' novel *Ann Veronica* (1909) depicts its heroine rebelling against patriarchal authority in favour of science and extramarital sex (albeit with a Wells-like male teacher).

anæmic' (1898a, 247). Another article from the same period similarly bemoans the 'decay' of 'swearing' among civilization, its 'bad words' having become 'conventional' and 'orthodox' (128). Like quarreling, 'a good flamboyant, ranting swear is Nature's outlet. All primitive men and most animals swear. It is an emotional shunt. Your cat swears at you because she does not want to scratch your face' (132). Such vocalizations are less about the abstract meanings of words than the physical body conveying its excited state. Further, as 'Of Conversation' suggested, the continuous 'babblement' of speech might represent an instinctive act, mediating friendly relations. As Chapter Three discussed, evolutionary theory had transformed infant babble into a primal force of linguistic creativity. Taine's account of a child's transition from instinctive 'twittering' to conventional speech involved much spontaneous word-creation. 'Originality and invention are so strong in a child', Taine wrote, 'that if it learns our language from us, we learn it from the child. ... [I]t is an original genius adapting itself to a form constructed bit by bit by a succession of original geniuses' (257-58). Infant coinages contradicted their parents' fixed demarcations of the world. Applying the same word to different things, they draw striking, unexpected analogies. Taine's infant applied its onomatopoeic name for a dog 'oua-oua' to a goat whose size and shape resembled the dog named (255). As Wells had argued, the primitive speaker could engage imaginatively with the infinite variety of phenomena, unlimited by preset classifications. The primordial babbling instinct gave human conceptions a plasticity essential to social and intellectual growth.

Wells subverted verbal convention from boyhood, drawing on what he would later understand as the babbling instinct to coin and modify words. His early letters resound with a cacophony of nicknames, referring to himself variously as 'Bertie', 'Buss', 'Buzz' and 'Busswhacker' (1998, I 8). He subjected his second wife Amy Catherine Robins to a 'string of nicknames', from 'Bits', 'Snitch' and 'It' to the seemingly random 'Jane' (Wells 1934, 462). He also enjoyed misspelling words for comic effect, conjuring unexpected associations. 'There r 2 wāz of comg from Portmth to R'g't', he informed A. T. Simmons (or 'Dr. S'ms) in one early letter, mocking campaigns for spelling reform. In 1888 he wrote to another friend, 'Never Scoph at God ... scophing a very unprophitable action'.<sup>34</sup> His autobiography reproduces doggerel verse written for Amy Catherine, misspelling and inventing words *a la* Edward Lear. His poem 'The Pobble', for example, evokes a

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<sup>34</sup> Wells, 1998, I 69, 77. See also his earlier letter to his brother Frank mocking spelling reform, 36-7.

mysterious monster against which Wells is the only protection: 'Me what you fink is simply Fungy/ Me what you keep so short of Mungy/ Me what you keep so short of Beer/ Is your only chance when the Pobble is near' (1934, 446). Wells attempted to justify such verbal play intellectually in an 1897 essay 'For Freedom in Spelling'. 'People are scarcely prepared to realize what shades of meaning may be got', he claimed, from treating spelling as 'an art' rather than 'a matter of right and wrong'. Demonstrating, Wells instructs the reader to

take a pen in hand and sit down and write, 'My very dear wife'. Clean, cold, and correct this is, speaking of orderly affection, settled and stereotyped long ago. In such letters is butcher's meat also 'very dear'. Try now, 'Migh verrie deare Wyfe'. Is it not immediately infinitely more soft and tender? Is there not something exquisitely pleasant in lingering over those redundant letters, leaving each word, as it were, with a reluctant caress? Such spelling is a soft, domestic, lovingly wasteful use of material. (1898a, 149-50)

Non-standard spellings access chains of connotation, which cluster around sounds and letters unpredictably. 'Try', Wells continues:

'Mye owne sweete dearest Marrie'. There is the tremble of a tenderness no mere arrangement of trim everyday letters can express in those double *r*'s. 'Sweete' my ladie must be; sweet! why pump-water and inferior champagne, spirits of nitrous ether and pancreatic juice are 'sweet'. For my own part I always spell so, with lots of *f*'s and *g*'s and such like tailey, twirley, loopey things, when my heart is in the tender vein. (151-52)

Wells is unclear about where these associations originate. Are they by-products of convention or instinct? Saussure's model of language rendered phonemes meaningless in themselves. They functioned only by combining into signifiers. In this view, Wells's misspellings might signify by evoking other whole words, but his predilection for individual 'tailey, twirley, loopey' letters ought to be meaningless. His emotions seem to

signify not directly through the English lexis but through disruptions of it by some force from without.

Wells's essay engages with a rising interest among psychologists and linguists in instinctive, perhaps unconscious, elements of speech (Ellenberger, 390-91). The work of phoneticists such as Henry Sweet, dividing speech into atomic sounds, produced the assumption that these sounds had corresponding atomic meanings. Sayce adapted Müller's concept of semantic-phonetic 'roots' into an evolutionary framework. Vague sound-thoughts preceded conventional symbols, he claimed, so that 'the ideas they convey are so wide and general as to cover an almost infinite series of derived meanings' (1880, I 348). German investigators of the 1890s such as Wilhelm Wundt and Karl Otto Erdmann argued that words signified through a mixture of conventional denotation and instinctive connotation. Erdmann formalized this distinction into the 'begrifflicher Inhalt' (intellectual content) and emotional 'Nebensinn' (connotation) which sounds triggered (120). Simultaneously, in the USA, E. W. Scripture analyzed recorded speech slowed down, concluding that the 'intellectual and emotional centres' constituted parallel sign systems. He claimed that 'the singer or speaker must feel what is to be said if he wishes to say it properly' (390). Emotional expression erupts through the cracks of conventional signs and conscious will. Hence, 'it is a familiar principle with orators and singers that to produce the full vocal effect they must first arouse the emotion itself and then allow it to find its natural expression' (391). More broadly, Freud would describe unconscious cognition as the external force inflecting Wells's scribbling. Analysing slips of the tongue in 1901, he wrote: 'Almost invariably I discover ... a disturbing influence [in such slips] of something *outside* of the intended speech ... a single unconscious thought ... [or] a more general psychic motive, which directs itself against the entire speech' (1914, 80). The elements of speech seemed to be a site of conflict between instinctive drives and conscious will. Such doubling of voice might be found in writing as well as speech, as Wells's reference to 'tailey, twirley, loopey things' suggests. Gerard Curtis observes that Victorians from Spencer to Ruskin viewed writing and drawing as offshoots of a common primordial 'language' of images (35). Wells's association of looping letters with tender feelings echoes this primal synaesthesia, triggering the emotions with a supposedly arbitrary orthography.

Instinctive babble and vocalization often disrupt conventional discourse in Wells's social fiction, diverting thought into new channels. In *Tono-Bungay* George's Aunt Susan

challenges the image of feminine verbal conventionality through her impulsive inventiveness. George relates how she ‘applied the epithet “old” to more things than I have ever heard linked to it before or since. “Here’s the old news-paper”, she used to say to my uncle. “Now don’t go and get it in the butter, you silly old Sardine!”’ (90). Her ‘extensive web of nonsense’ provokes hysterical laughing fits in her husband Edward, whose ‘slipshod’ mouth emits equally ‘curious expressions’. If the other residents of Bladesover are gramophones then Susan and Edward are broken ones, incapable of using language without warping it into new shapes. Edward speaks of ‘the stog-igschange’ and names the spurious tonic that makes him rich from the phrase ‘Ton a’ bunk, eh?’ Yet, George suggests that the phonemes in Edward’s coinage appeal to mysterious, hidden associations: ‘it was simple and yet in some way arresting. I found myself repeating the word after it had passed; it roused one’s attention like the sound of distant guns. “Tono” – what’s that? and deep, rich, unhurrying; – “BUN – gay!”’ (145). When most inspired by his business plans, Edward’s verbal ejaculations break into onomatopoeic noises, as he thunders to George: ‘Wo-oo-oo-osh! Your science and all that! Wo-oo-oo-osh!’ (152). Edward’s vocal explosions reflect the anarchic energy of capitalism, which shook up the preceding mental and social stasis of feudalism. He complains that there is ‘no development – no growth’ in Bladesover, and longs to ‘do SOMETHING ... invent SOMETHING ... I can’t stand it’ (74). Wells’s portrait of Edward contradicts liberal models of industrial capitalism as rational: rather, it emanates from instinctive drives which orderly feudalism had stifled. Social progress might not necessarily consist of language becoming ever-more regimented, but could involve rediscovering the chaotic energy of instinct. George’s classical education reflects this, as he comments: ‘Socrates rhymes with Bates for me, and ... I use those dear old mispronunciations still ... if I met those great gentlemen of the past with their accents carelessly adjusted I did at least meet them alive, as an equal, and in a living tongue’ (80). The babbling instinct helps speakers to appropriate ancestral speech, shaping language rather than language shaping them.

It might be objected that George and Edward’s instinct-driven linguistic creativity ultimately breaks with past dogmas only to enforce new ones of commodity value. Chapter Three considered the influence on Wells of Gustave Le Bon’s theory that mass communication resurrected primitive drives in the populace. It is by such linguistic sensationalism that Edward’s advertisements turn Tono-Bungay into a cash-cow, triggering unconscious urges. The texts are punctuated ‘with every now and then a convulsive jump of

some attractive phrase into capitals'. Hence, "Many people who are MODERATELY well think they are QUITE well", was one of his early efforts. The jerks in capitals were, "DO NOT NEED DRUGS OR MEDICINE", and "SIMPLY A PROPER REGIMEN TO GET YOU IN TONE" (168). George's omission of the text in between highlights the sub-linguistic sensations to which such advertizing appeals, its capitals mimicking a shout or cry. This transference of instinctive signs into writing is obviously degenerate in Wells's vision, forming part of his critique of capitalism. However, discourse in the novel is not degenerative simply through the incursion of instinctive signs: it degenerates through words ossifying into imagined realities. Edward's invention of the term Tono-Bungay invites the assumption that it must name some extralinguistic reality. Even Edward is vulnerable to this fallacy, as George observes, 'I never really determined whether my uncle regarded Tono-Bungay as a fraud, or whether he didn't come to believe in it in a kind of way by the mere reiteration of his own assertions' (177). Edward's absorption in advertizing campaigns turns him into an uncritical phonograph like the provincial bourgeoisie. Wells emphasizes this return to the dogma of old when, on his deathbed, Edward clasps at the idea of an afterlife. The scene echoes George's early life in Bladesover when, at a funeral, he heard 'the talk about souls, the strange battered old phrases that were coined ages ago' (47). Language limits thought not simply when it appeals to instinct but when it conceals its instinctive roots, presenting itself as transparent truth.

Wells explored the creative possibilities of instinct invading speech most fully in the hero of his *History of Mr. Polly*. Dissatisfied with life as a married, small-town shop-keeper, Polly burns down his shop and flees. His defiance of convention is expressed as much in his speech as his actions, mangling words to suggest new connotations. He delights in 'Sesquipedalan verboojuice' and 'Eloquent Rapsodooce', as the narrator explains:

Words attracted him curiously, words rich in suggestion, and he loved a novel and striking phrase. New words had terror and fascination for him; he did not acquire them, he could not avoid them, and so he plunged into them. His only rule was not to be misled by the spelling. That was no guide anyhow. He avoided every recognised phrase in the language and mispronounced everything in order that he shouldn't be suspected of ignorance, but whim. (28-29)

Polly's verbal innovations are not only driven by status anxiety, since he continues to coin them when speaking to himself. 'Zealacious commerciality', he whispers, as a neighbouring shopkeeper snubs him in the street. Staring into the mirror, he remonstrates with his appearance: 'you blighted desgenerated paintbrush!' (176, 7). Polly's coinages resemble the living dialects which Müller presented as revitalizing ossified writing (see Chapter One). He replaces the old, forgotten metaphors behind words with new ones, revitalizing his adjectives with vivid concrete associations. He describes young tailors as 'full of Smart Juniosity. The Shoveacious Cult', while their tired, middle-aged rivals look sadly 'de-juiced' (52). After colliding with a man in the street, he recalls engaging in 'jawbacious argument', evoking the frenzied movement of their vocal apparatuses (107). His habit of re-shaping language mirrors his gradual realization that, 'if the world does not please you, *you can change it*' (243). Words are not permanent, but improvised tools to be experimented upon. The narrator describes Polly 'the uncontrollable phrasemonger' as 'an artless child of Nature, far more untrained, undisciplined and spontaneous than an ordinary savage' (304-5). Metaphors burst out of him involuntarily, colliding with polite, regulated speech. Amidst debates with his neighbour Rusper he develops the notion

that Rusper's head was the most egg-shaped head he had ever seen;  
the similarity weighed upon him; and when he found an argument  
growing warm with Rusper he would say: 'Boil it some more, O' Man;  
boil it harder!' or 'Six minutes at least,' allusions Rusper could never  
make head or tail of, and got at last to disregard as a part of Mr. Polly's  
general eccentricity. (195)

Sylvia Hardy argues that Polly's manglings of Standard English 'create a new reality' (139), challenging traditional dogmas such as the religion embodied in Canterbury cathedral, which he dismisses as 'metrorious urnfuls' and 'dejected angelosity' (57). Although Polly's metaphoric outbursts are often comedic, he is not simply the butt of Wells's comedy. As in the above passage much of the laughter derives from the confusion which his language causes unimagined listeners. As one who 'specialised in slang and the disuse of English' (28), Polly practises the mental-linguistic 'Freedom' that Wells the essayist had preached, reconnecting with the anarchic babble of instinct.

Wells's idea of language as an experiment with instinct and convention prefigures later ideas now usually identified with Modernism. Through the Futurist movement, F. T. Marinetti developed 'sound poems' such as 'Zang Tumb Tumb' (1912-14), which consisted of onomatopoeic phrases conveying the sensations of battle. Dadaist Kurt Schwitters similarly composed poems of raw phonemes. He presented works like 'Ursonate' (1922-32) as outbursts of primitive voice unmediated by social tradition.<sup>35</sup> We might also think of James Joyce's many coinages and dismantlings of Standard English in *Ulysses* (1918-20). It is an interesting question, then, why Wells did not push his linguistic experiments further. His misspellings remain confined to the reported speech of characters, enclosed by Standard-English narration. His essay on spelling blames contemporary print culture for restricting such experiments: 'Your common editors and their printers are a mere orthodox spelling police, and at the least they rigorously blot out all the delightful frolics of your artist in spelling before his writings reach the public eye' (152). Nonetheless, Victorian publishers failed to suppress the linguistic experiments of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, who influenced Wells's private doggerel verse. While writing supportively of literary experimenters like Joyce, the older Wells withdrew from emulating them. Reviewing *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-15), he praised its author as 'a bold experimentalist with paragraph and punctuation' (1917a, 710). Yet, in 1928 he wrote to Joyce of *Ulysses*: 'You have turned your back on common men, on their elementary needs and their restricted time and intelligence. ... Your work is an extraordinary experiment. ... To me it is a dead end' (Joyce 1957, I 275). Wells's concern for a universal 'common man' points to his shifting priorities as imaginative fiction gave way to instructions for building a global state. As Chapters Two and Three demonstrated, Wells's search for rational world government required the curbing of linguistic diversity. This inevitably also meant the curbing of the babbling instincts, which threatened to divide people into private dialects.

Such fragmentation threatened to limit humankind to its primordial instincts. *The Time Machine*'s Eloi illustrate this danger, their sensual cooing cutting them off from ancestral knowledge and thought. Their instinctive, private language of lovers excludes any ambitions beyond amatory union, as the timetraveller discovers through his romance with

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<sup>35</sup> See Orban, 36-38. Wells's games with language were not unique, as Valentine Cunningham notes, Victorian 'nonsense' poets like Lear 'go to extremes which anticipate and even rival the extremes of modernist verbal experiment ... language on the compelling edge of gibberish', xlili.

one Eloi. Mediated mainly by 'smiles' and flowers, their relationship obstructs his efforts to recover the time machine. Wells maintained domestic relations with both of his wives, in spite of his absences and philandering, through what he called a 'baby-talk', which 'wrapped about the facts of life and created for us a quaint and softened atmosphere of intercourse. They falsified our relations to the point of making them tolerable and workable' (1934, 461). Couples invent private languages of intimacy to cement their union in spite of conflicting urges. In *Tono-Bungay* George repeatedly papers over the cracks in his marriage through a similar 'little language' in which 'we were "friends"', and I was "Mutney" and she was "Ming"' (223). Such lovers' babble also traps Wells's eponymous Mr. Lewisham in an unsuitable marriage, forcing him to abandon his career ambitions. He wastes hours in the laboratory inventing 'foolish terms of endearment: "Dear Wife", "Dear Little Wife Thing", "Sweetest Dearest Little Wife", "Dillywings". A pretty employment! And these are quite a fair specimen of his originality during those wonderful days. ... For Lewisham, like Swift and most other people, had hit upon the Little Language' (151). As with the Eloi, flowers mediate their relationship as an instinctive sign-system. After a seemingly irrevocable row with his wife, Lewisham spots some roses in a shop window, which possess him unawares: 'They caught his eye before they caught his mind. ... It was as if they were the very colour of his emotion. He stopped abruptly. ... Then he perceived as though it was altogether self-evident what he had to do. ... Some weak voice of indiscreet discretion squeaked and vanished' (219). Wells further emphasizes the separateness of these lovers' signs from conscious thought when the ordered flowers fail to arrive, and Lewisham is unable to reconcile with his wife verbally: 'He tried to think of something to say that might bridge the distance between them, but he could think of nothing. He must wait until the roses came' (220). Their later reunion comes not through logical discussion but when Lewisham's somnolent wife 'murmured indistinctly a foolish name she had given him', reawakening his passion (236). The novel ends in Lewisham shredding the written 'schema' on which he once planned to become a great intellectual. His ambitions of promoting Darwin and Socialism are replaced by the prosaic necessities of maintaining a household. Unlike Wells, who divorced the conventional Isabel to pursue his ambitions, Lewisham fails to break away, entrapped by passionate 'baby-talk'.

Wells did not escape his erratic desires in his second marriage, both pursuing affairs and liaisons, and sometimes pining for his first wife. In old age, he described his sexual urges as his 'lover-shadow': a Jungian unconscious which impelled him towards both

promiscuity and jealousy (Wells 1984, 54. See also Mackenzie & Mackenzie 250-59). The power which such instincts continued to hold over Wells's private life seems to have impelled him to exclude them all the more from his published work. In his younger years, he had sometimes imagined masculine speech as heroically following instinct and disrupting convention. Conversely, Wells the state-builder tended more towards the progressive, Spencerian model of masculine speech as scientific, God-like detachment from bodily urges. The binary opposite of female speech thus changed from the slavishly conventional to dangerously instinctive, identified with the bold narrative experiments of New Woman writers and their Modernist successors. The old Wells recalled criticizing his lover Rebecca West in the 1920s for allowing instinctive fancies and impulses into the rational realm of writing:

She writes like a loom producing her broad rich fabric with hardly a thought of how it will make up into a shape, while I write to cover a frame of ideas. ... She prowled in the thickets, and I have always kept close to the trail that leads to the World-State. She splashed her colours about; she exalted James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence ... and I wrote with an ostentatious disregard of decoration; never used a rare phrase when a common one would serve, and was more of a journalist than ever. (1984, 102)

The passage marks Wells's retreat from verbal experimentation, seeking a logical, united world through a common, engineered speech. 'I am English by origin', he writes in the same text, 'but I am an early World-Man, and I live in exile from the world community of my desires. I salute that finer larger world and its subtler minds across the generations – and maybe ever again someone down the vista, some lingering vestige of my Lover-Shadow, may look back and appreciate an ancestral salutation' (235). The dialogue between convention and instinct that Wells once imagined enlivening language shrinks to a whisper in his vision of a world state. Experiments with the instinctive bases of language could only be 'a dead end', obstructing the teleological march towards a united 'World Brain' and an objective, scientific language. It is interesting that, while reproducing detailed examples of his private lovers' languages in his *Autobiography*, the aging Wells

deemed them valuable only as psychological specimens.<sup>36</sup> ‘There is no need to reproduce any more of them’, the authorial narration states: ‘What matters here is the way in which they wrapped about the facts of life for us and created a quaint and softened atmosphere of intercourse’ (461). The voice that encloses these experiments in misspelling remains standardized and emotionally distant, representing the disembodied ‘brain’ of the text’s subtitle. It would be left to other, later writers to answer in earnest his light-hearted rallying call: ‘Spell, my brethren, as you will! Awake, arise, O language living in chains; let Butter’s spelling be our Bastille!’ (1898a, 153-54). The idea that communication was an interplay between instinct and convention would eventually inspire bold experiments in writing from which Butler, Hardy and Wells held back. Their tales remain sequential narrations in Standard English, privileged as somehow detached from the instinctive signs and urges they described. As Wells’s work in particular shows, such manoeuvres appealed to a dichotomy between instinctive speech and rational writing which their narratives of instinctive signs had undermined.

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<sup>36</sup> Scholars have been similarly uninterested, with Smith’s four-volume edition of Wells’s correspondence including only a few of his experiments in misspelling; the Wells Archive at the University of Illinois-Urbana holds many more. An honourable exception is Gene and Margaret Rinkel’s *The Picshuas of H. G. Wells: a Burlesque Diary* (2006), although this is more concerned with the drawings in Wells’s personal papers than his games with spelling.

## Conclusion: Widening the Lens

‘Modern science does not know how to cope with meaning. ... The real obstacle to biological progress, today, is not lack of data but a pervasive theoretical paradigm that continues to deny the semiotic nature of life’.

– Marcello Barbieri, ‘The Challenge of Biosemiotics’ (xi).

‘A potato in a dark cellar ... sees the light coming from the cellar window and sends his shoots crawling straight thereto. ... we can imagine him saying, “I will have a tuber here and a tuber there, and I will suck whatsoever advantage I can from all my surroundings” ... The potato says these things by doing them, which is the best of languages’.

– Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* (236).

In his classic work on nineteenth-century philology, Hans Aarsleff wrote: ‘To the historical understanding, the pseudo-science of an age may be as important as its science’ (3). This study has aimed to extend the point further, suggesting that, in the case of philology, what appeared mere pseudo-science to one age may prefigure earnest inquiries in a later one. The lack of clear boundaries in nineteenth-century language studies between what later became distinguished as nature and culture often produced confused, contradictory ideas about language. It sometimes enabled racist, sexist and anti-democratic agendas, in which the supposedly primitive or degraded language of different groups legitimized their disempowerment. However, the lack of dogmatic divisions between nature and culture also allowed writers to ask questions about language which researchers in recent decades have revived. Is language fundamentally different from non-human communication, and how did the former evolve from the latter? Where might we draw the line between instinct and convention in speech? Additionally, ideas of language as an organic emergence which might be corrupted or mechanized endured in the popular imagination long after the academy had rejected them. How, then, might future research explore the afterlives of these different tendencies of thought, and how are they relevant to contemporary debates about language?

A recurrent theme of this study has been the search for linguistic authorities to fix meaning and bring signs into perfect correspondence with their referents. Scientists,

philologists and creative writers from the mid-Victorian to Edwardian period looked for such ideal communication in both the past and future, nature and artifice. Yet such linguistic idealism depended on a stable reality or inner ego of the speaker to be represented. Both of these assumptions came under pressure in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The sciences diverged into numerous models for explaining the universe, and materialist psychology fragmented consciousness into myriad organic processes. The natural world and human cognition were not eternal or unified but products of these processes that might be unguided by any transcendent purpose. Many authors and investigators assumed that no truth could be ascertained without a sovereign ego translating its thoughts into words, or scientific nomenclature reducing the world to ultimate elements. Müller warned that his theory of original phonosemantic ‘roots’ was the only barrier ‘between ourselves and chaos ... [without them] there is nothing to separate language from cries and interjections, then we may play with language as children play with the sands of the sea, but we must not complain if every fresh tide wipes out the little castles we had built on the beach’ (1866, II 94). The progressive Jespersen similarly imagined an ‘ideal language’ of the future which would serve as a ‘garment’ to ‘the human spirit’, discovering a hidden natural order (see Chapter Two). Future research could explore the endurance and refashioning of these models of ideal language among later writers.

Notions of verbal efficiency and precision continued to influence thinkers and creative writers across diverse areas. Jespersen stressed the idea of progressive verbal efficiency until his death in the 1940s.<sup>37</sup> George Orwell’s essay ‘Politics and the English Language’ (1946) echoed Spencer’s arguments for precision and efficiency. It instructed writers to ‘cut out’ superfluous words, ‘never use a long word where a short one will do’ and favour Anglo-Saxon monosyllables over longer Latinate terms (228). His ideal of a clear, neutral style relied, like Spencer’s model, ‘on a naively empiricist view of language as a wholly passive, unstructured material which can be cut, like so many yards of cloth, to fit (whether well or badly) any pre-given and presumably non-linguistic thought’ (Freedman 328). Another area in which to trace the efficiency paradigm would be psychoanalysis. Freud’s interpretations of dreams, jokes and neuroses relied upon the concept of condensation, in which words or images became freighted with multiple unconscious ideas. Like composite photographs, Freud claimed, ‘the intensity of a whole

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, *Efficiency in Linguistic Change* (1941).

train of thought may eventually be concentrated into a single ideational element' (1900, V 595; qtd. Burgoyne 127). Yet, while Spencer had imagined verbal efficiency developing in tandem with mental self-control, Freud placed the two in opposition. The practical, conscious mind only skimmed the surface of verbal associations, unaware of their hidden meanings. This reworking of Spencer's concept is discernible in the 'rhetoric of efficiency' in Modernist movements such as imagism. Ezra Pound sought to condense maximum connotations into a minimum of verbal material, as though to freeze and purify moments of consciousness (Raitt 836). The aim became to concentrate efficiently into language not objective knowledge but clusters of subjective experience.

In spite of these continuities, however, the inter-war and post-war period might also be explored as a time of rising suspicion against utopian language schemes. The Third Reich enforced its power and ideology through 'Nazi-Deutsch', an extensive collection of neologisms, euphemisms and old German words (See Hutton; Michael and Doerr). Stalin's USSR similarly promoted an 'authorized vocabulary' of phrases and nomenclature that legitimized the regime and its actions (Rolf 604). While C. K. Ogden promoted a global 'Basic English' in the 1930s, Orwell would satirize such schemes, linking them with political repression in the Newspeak of *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) (Courtine 71-72). The centralized control which utopians had imagined widening verbal resources became for Orwell a means of limiting them. Winston's colleague at the Ministry of Truth Syme states: 'Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? ... there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness' (53). Edward Sapir and B. L. Whorf's arguments for linguistic relativity led to the conclusion among many dystopian writers that 'whoever controls language controls the perception of reality as well' (Meyers 163). Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) depicts a society minutely controlled by scientific elites in which language is part of the 'Neo-Pavlovian conditioning' of all citizens (19). This centralized control produces docile citizens, who parrot official maxims constantly played into their ears as they sleep. The shift from linguistic utopia to dystopia could be considered in light of the institutionalization of propaganda from the nineteenth to twentieth century. As mass psychology became a professionalized branch of the academy, government and corporate world it could be imagined as part of the power of the establishment. In 1928 Edward Bernays described propaganda as a 'science' of 'regimenting the public mind', commenting that public opinion could be changed 'by operating a certain mechanism, just as the

motorist can regulate the speed of his car by manipulating the flow of gasoline' (71-72). As Chapter Two suggested, Wells's early work is particularly interesting in this regard since it sometimes prefigured institutional language control as a means of pacifying the masses.

The persistence of such concerns over scientific technocracy curbing individual expression and thought might be traced in more recent fiction such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). In this dystopia, patriarchal control over language engineers and perpetuates the sexual enslavement of women. Patronymic naming practices encode the concept of women as property, with the narrator named 'Offred' after her Commander, Fred. Forced to produce children for the social elite, such 'handmaids' converse in prescribed Biblical maxims designed to enforce their roles and prevent subversive expression: 'Blessed be the fruit', 'May the Lord open', 'Praise be' (19; see Friebert 284). The regime trains the women to repeat these stereotyped conversations by forcing them to regularly listen to adapted versions of the Beatitudes, as Offred remarks: 'Blessed be this, blessed be that. They played it from a tape ... the voice was a man's' (89). More recently, David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) has envisaged a future in which a sub-race of human clones are trained from birth to serve in fast food restaurants, with strict linguistic controls preventing thought beyond their work. One rebel clone explains that 'orientation teaches the vocabulary we need for our work' while 'amnesiads' in their food 'erase subsequently learnt words' (191). Linguistic utopias and dystopias of the fin de siècle continue to resonate with contemporary concerns about institutions shaping thought and behaviour through language.

The progressive ideal of mechanizing language to render it consistent and efficient has since been achieved, in a way, through the rise of computer languages. Like Babbage's calculating engines, which condensed many arithmetical tasks into their notation, such code acts as shorthand for the stream of bytes running through a computer's circuitry. The translation of programming language into electromagnetic impulses realizes, in a limited sense, the utopian dream of language mapping directly onto, and merging with, the physical universe. Bruno Latour observed: 'Now that computers exist, we are able to conceive of a text (a programming language) that is at once words and actions. How to do things with words and then turn words into things is now clear to any programmer' (255). However, rather than being masters of this code, most computer-users are its subjects, engaging only with the programmes which it executes. As twenty-first century lives become increasingly mediated by unseen, computerized code, Butler's satirical vision of humans becoming

slaves of machines gains a new resonance (Dyson 121-23). Examples of the late twentieth-century 'cyberpunk' genre such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) might be explored as meditations on this possibility. The humans of Gibson's dystopian future live much of their lives in a virtual reality generated by binary codes connected directly to their nervous systems. Gibson's vision of infinitely complex computer languages producing hallucinatory worlds was popularized more recently in the film *The Matrix* (1999). In the film, intelligent machines use such hallucinations to harvest humans. People are only able to resist the machines by learning to manipulate the galaxies of code in which they have been unconsciously embedded. These modern visions of linguistic mechanization eroding individual agency might be interestingly compared with Butler's 'Book of the Machines' and Wells's lunar ant colony. Similarly as Babbage's inventions prefigured the modern computer, nineteenth-century visions of language mechanization prefigured anxieties about computers threatening human verbal-mental autonomy.

The model of language degeneration as a breakdown of prescriptive authorities, although discredited in academic circles, persisted in the twentieth-century popular imagination as a trope of apocalyptic narratives. Such representations of primitive language could be explored in relation to the continuing growth in the authority of Standard English in the twentieth century. The privileging of forms of 'Received Pronunciation' by broadcasters such as the BBC promoted the image of English as a 'crumbling castle', a perfected structure which change could only damage (Aitchison 1997, 12; Mugglestone 274). In contrast to Orwell's vision of institutional control obliterating language, post-apocalyptic English fiction after the Second World War frequently imagined language disintegrating along with social institutions. Thus in George R. Stewart's novel of American scavengers surviving a plague *Earth Abides* (1949) the new generation resembles Victorian 'savages' who could not distinguish between sex and love: 'the concept of obscenity, you might say, had disappeared, largely because there was only one words for things in their vocabulary ... possibly as a counterpart to the death of romantic love' (219). Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) imagines reversion of a different kind after a nuclear holocaust plunges the West back into medieval language and superstition. Following the destruction of the old scientific and literary world, Catholic monks in Miller's novel puzzle over surviving scraps of engineering textbooks, regarding their formulas as scholastic mysteries. As in late-Victorian depictions of primitive language, Miller's vision of degeneration wavers between lack of control over language and too much

of it. Assuming that all empirical data is resolvable into *a priori* categories and a divine, unchanging symmetry, the monks are unable to follow the intellectual possibilities suggested in the surviving archives. When one monk copies the blueprint for a 'circuit design', his brother asks of this mysterious entity: 'What is its genus, species, property and difference?' (77). Miller counters this sense of the danger of linguistic dogmatism, though, with scenes involving nomadic cannibals outside of the monasteries who barely speak at all. Their speech seems to have disintegrated together with societal values, as they attack lone travellers with the cry: 'Eat! Eat! Eat!' (116). Civil society and morality remain persistently linked in the modern apocalyptic imagination to language, with the breakdown of the latter allowing brute instinct to take hold.

Examples might also be found, however, of twentieth-century post-apocalyptic fiction that challenges the degenerationist model of language. Anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Margaret Mead and Claude Lévi-Strauss had attacked the old assumption that all meanings and concepts could be translated unproblematically into Western language. Instead, they argued, language could only be understood through the social contexts in which it was used (Erickson & Murphy 93-118). The influence of such thinking could be explored through the Anglo-Russian 'Nadsat' spoken by the teenage hooligans of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). Instead of becoming meaningless sounds, words in Burgess's Nadsat morph into polysemic puns. Hence, the Russian word *Khorosho* (good or well) forms the adjective 'horrorshow' (22). Nadsat encodes the tribal, hedonistic values of Alex's social group, excluding outsiders (and, initially, the reader) from understanding. Similarly worthy of exploration in this context would be the strange English that narrates Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980). Long after a nuclear holocaust plunged England back into the Iron Age, people speak a mangled version of English in which the old meanings of words have been forgotten. This English is not merely emptied of meaning, however, but reinvested with it as the characters adapt words to reflect their society. Computer programming signifies unseen fate driving human action, so that when the narrator liberates one imprisoned character he states: 'It wer like I jus ben programmit to go there and get him out' (77). The offices of Archbishop of Canterbury and Prime Minister have become 'the Ardship of Cambry' and 'Pry Mincer', reflecting the brute force of their autocratic rule (5, 27). 'Riddleyspeak' is not simply an impoverishment of modern English, but a foreign language encoding foreign customs, which readers must learn.

The concept of language degenerating along with morality might be traced in Anglophone film of the latter twentieth century as well as fiction. The BBC docu-drama *Threads* (1984), which depicted the effects of nuclear war upon Britain, envisioned the breakdown of linguistic standards after the cataclysm. This is linked with the collapse of law and morality as, near the end of the film, a group of youths speak (or, perhaps, merely grunt) an unintelligible argot as they rape a girl (Stockwell 60). The lack of translation for their discourse downplays the possibility of this post-apocalyptic speech community having alternative values: it is simply instinctive. The mute or groaning zombie has become a trope of modern, post-apocalyptic film, with loss of speech coinciding with cannibalistic violence (Pollock 176). George A. Romero's pioneering films of the subgenre such as *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) are often analyzed as satires on modern mass conformity. However, they might also be compared to Wells's beast-folk who revert to muteness and violence after Moreau's society fails to restrain their instincts. One scientist states in *Dawn of the Dead*: 'These creatures cannot be considered human. ... Intelligence? Seemingly little or no reasoning ability. ... There are reports of these creatures using tools. But even these actions are the most primitive. ... I might point out that even animals will adopt the use of tools in this manner. These creatures are nothing but pure, motorized instinct'. The statement, made to justify the killing of former friends and relatives, echoes behaviourist approaches to the psychology of non-humans. The argument that researchers should prefer automatic, non-conscious causes for animal behaviour unless proved otherwise maintained the privileged status of human language and thought through much of the twentieth century (Radick 2007, 5). As in Müller's earlier arguments, Romero's scientist conflates subjectivity with human speech, reducing non-speakers to mere machines of instinct. Scholars have explored *The Island of Dr. Moreau* in light of debates about the morality of vivisection in the 1890s (see Ferguson 2006, 105-30; Mclean 2008, 25-31). Romero's film might be similarly approached in relation to the contemporary animal liberation movement and experiments in primate sign language, which challenged behaviorist doctrine. Indeed, Romero toys with the language barrier used to police the human/nonhuman binary in his later *Day of the Dead* (1985). A scientist attempts to pacify the zombies by training them to speak and obey verbal commands *à la* Moreau. Like Wells's mad doctor, Romero's scientist seeks to 'condition' the non-humans into a symbolic order that represses their instincts, remarking: 'They can be tricked into being good little boys and girls the same way we were tricked into it on the promise of some reward to come'. As in Wells's tale, sympathy appears as

much instinctive as habitual, with language being used to suppress rather than develop it. The prescribed, technical language of Romero's scientists enables them to rationalize horrific violence. One in *Dawn of the Dead* suggests keeping zombies away by feeding them infected humans or dropping hydrogen bombs on major cities, telling his shocked listeners: 'We must think logically. We must deal with this crisis logically, with a calm and unemotional response'. The roles of instinct and authority in language appear to remain as vexed in the late twentieth-century popular imagination as they were in the nineteenth.

The period of this study looks forward to current debates over the evolutionary continuity between human and nonhuman communication. Linguists towards the end of the nineteenth century were increasingly critical of discussion of the origins of language as unempirical. The Société de linguistique de Paris and German 'Neogrammarians' such as Hermann Osthoff and Karl Brugmann dismissed the question as simply beyond investigation (Stam ix-xii). Yet, by refusing to discuss language origins for fear of straying beyond facts, linguists fed the equally unproven assumption that language came into existence fully formed (Radick 2007, 190-210). Later, while Saussure's theories emphasized the synchronic nature of sign systems, Noam Chomsky's universal grammar figured language as a fixed capacity, for which all human brains were hard-wired. Rather than developing incrementally from structures in the animal brain, Chomsky argued, speech derived from a uniquely human organ or 'language acquisition device' (32-33). Figures such as Derek Bickerton and Steven Pinker have refined this claim, presenting language as a unique 'instinct' albeit not located in a single part of the brain (Bickerton 190; Pinker 334). Patricia Casey Sutcliffe notes that this rhetoric of language marking a genetic break with non-humans avoids discussion of its possible development (248-9). Like Müller previously, Chomsky, Pinker and Bickerton privilege human subjecthood by presenting language as a sudden leap within the evolutionary story. Such catastrophism enables the strict compartmentalization of language into nature (inherited universal grammar) and culture (the speech which this biological programming creates) with no mutual exchange between the two. Yet no single, consistent grammar has ever been demonstrated to structure all possible utterances, suggesting that language is an activity without an essence (Sampson 2005, 69). Since the 1960s, psychologists have made numerous studies of primate communication, with recent researchers identifying as many as '66 distinct gesture types' among wild chimpanzees (Hobaiter & Byrne; for an overview, see Radick 2007, 360-80). Other researchers have observed vervet monkeys using distinct sounds to warn of

different predators, concluding that their communication is not purely instinctive but flexible and intentional to an extent (Cheney & Seyfarth 362-367). Primatologist E. S. Savage-Rumbaugh has argued, like Darwin, that much of the language faculty is evident in primates and merely extended in human activity (181-225). Psycholinguist Philip Lieberman further suggests that language 'is distributed over many parts of the human brain [...] overlaid on sensorimotor systems that originally evolved to do other things and continue to do them now'. Neural structures in the 'subcortical basal ganglia – our reptilian brain', which once served only emotional and motor functions, seem to adapt under social influences to encode symbols (1-3). As with Darwin and Garner, the more that investigators search for the origin of language the more it merges with communication systems paralleled in other species (Abberley 55).

This problem of language's missing origin can be seen continuing to complicate prehistoric fiction in the later twentieth century as it did for pioneers of the genre. William Golding's *The Inheritors* (1955) both seeks and fragments language origins through its narrative of a band of Neanderthals. Their speech oscillates between symbolism and instinctive expression of emotion, as the narrator comments of one speaker: 'He opened his mouth wide and laughed and talked at the people, though there was little connection between the quick pictures and the words that came out' (19). Although very sophisticated at reading each other's emotions, they struggle to communicate abstract ideas, demonstrated when a log which previously formed a bridge across a river disappears. While able to express that 'the log has gone away', the young Lok cannot imagine or verbalize how this might have happened; it is simply 'the log that was not there' (12-13). Their reliance on imitation and iconicity is reinforced by them observing the conversations of Cro-Magnon humans: 'They did not gesticulate much nor dance out their meanings as Lok and Fa might have done' (144-45). As in London's tale, Golding disrupts both narratives of language appearing fully formed and progressing in a linear fashion. Although driven to extinction by the new people, the Neanderthals represent an alternative evolutionary path rather than merely an antiquated one. Golding presents their instinctive emotional communication as a kind of telepathy through them sharing mental 'pictures' without words (34; De Paolo 2003, 72-73). More recently, novels such as Björn Kurtén's *Dance of the Tiger* (1980) have engaged with evidence of Neanderthals coexisting for several millennia, imagining communication between them. Such encounters might be compared with those between European and supposedly 'primitive' races in Victorian colonial fiction.

While in the search for origins Victorian racial science looked for evidence of primitive speech in colonized peoples, modern paleontologists continue to seek it in extinct subspecies of *Homo sapiens*. Some have argued that the Neanderthal jaw was only capable of producing two vowels, while their limited social organization and technology suggest some linguistic capacity (Lieberman 140-49). Kurtén's Neanderthals marvel at the 'new, full-toned speech, elastic and expressive beyond compare' of modern humans (28). In contrast, Neanderthal speech is 'slow-spoken and ritualistic' (141), evoking late-Victorian images of the savage mentally bound by custom. Kurtén's Neanderthals fill the space in the evolutionary story left by old, discredited racist hierarchies. One of them struggles against his physical and neurological deficiencies to produce a pidgin of human speech, declaring: 'Ah spahk Man talk' (41). Although seeking to challenge catastrophism and teleology in language evolution, Kurtén replicates them through his conventions of representation. Similarly as Standard English often stigmatized dialect as deviant, Kurtén's misspellings characterize Neanderthal speech as a bastardization of the human rather than an alternative. Like the imagined 'primitive' speech of Victorian anthropology, Neanderthal speech seems inevitably represented as lacking.

Another subject worthy of further research is the afterlife of linguistic vitalism in Anglophone literary and popular culture. Organicist philology was increasingly discredited in the academy by the end of the nineteenth century. However, the idea of language as a natural growth, abused and degraded by artificial uses, has retained a powerful hold on the popular imagination. Many influential authors, including Hardy, joined the Society for Pure English, founded in 1913 and mainly active between 1919 and 1946. Although eschewing provincial Anglo-Saxonism, the Society sought to conserve the literary language of Shakespeare in modern English. Its founder Robert Bridges worried that the emergence of English as a global language would cause non-native speakers to 'learn yet enough of ours to mutilate it, and establishing among themselves all kinds of blundering corruptions, through habitual intercourse infect therewith the neighbouring English' (qtd. Bailey 1991, 206). Morag Shiach notes that such organicist logic informed various 'projects of linguistic "purification" that were part of literary modernism in Britain' (2007, 21). Like the nineteenth-century novelists who desired both the authenticity of dialect and the unity of Standard English, T. S. Eliot experimented with urban dialects in his early works before later seeking 'to purify the dialect of the tribe' (1970, 204). The idea of 'return[ing] to common speech' and its imagined vitality clashed in his aesthetic with the need to 'polish

or perfect' language (1957, 31). The urge of earlier writers to reconnect with the supposed naturalness of speech was possible for Eliot through broadcast spoken performances. Yet, his precise delivery was not spontaneous or 'organic' but developed in line with elocutionary ideas of the accentless, 'pure' voice (Morrison 26-29). Gertrude Stein worried that words had lost their vitality through centuries of refined use. Like Morris, she yearned for the authentic past of Homer or Chaucer when 'the poet could use the name of the thing and the thing was really there', as opposed to the present when 'they were just worn out literary words' (qtd. Wilder 132). Yet, rather than emulating the old saga and epic styles, she sought to re-energize words by unpicking their tangled associations, such as in her famous line, 'A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose' (178). However, such experiments also undermined the concept of a golden age when words and things were organically linked, revealing instead endless layers of association.

In the 1950s, J. R. R. Tolkien directly emulated Morris's efforts to revive the supposedly organic language of the preindustrial past. Tolkien famously drew on ancient languages and myths to invent tongues such as Elvish. *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) treats indigenous folk-speech as an organic growth on par with the flora of an environment, as is emphasized through the speaking trees or 'Ents'. Their representative Treebeard tells the adventurers: 'my name is growing all the time, and I've lived a very long, long time, so my name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language' (II 68; qtd. Dickerson 129). In contrast to such natural language, the evil, industrializing Orcs are portrayed as creatively barren, as the narrator comments: 'it is said that [in past times] they had no language of their own, but took what they could of other tongues and perverted it to their own liking, yet they made only brutal jargons'. They only acquire their own language through their leader Morgoth artificially creating one and imposing it on 'those that served him', before it mutates into dialects (III Appendix F, 409). Tolkien rejected contemporary theories of an arbitrary relation between sign and referent, stating his belief in 'the fitting of notion to oral symbol' or 'phonetic fitness' (1983, 206, 211; qtd. R. Smith 4). His sentiments echo Morris's Müllerian ideal of sounds originally combining with sense in an organic union, degraded by artificial civilization. Like the idioms of Morris's late romances, Tolkien's invented languages enabled him to fix organic, original meanings of words. Raymond Williams traced a 'perpetual retrospect to an "organic" or "natural" society' through the history of English literature since the eighteenth century (1973, 96). Equally, perpetual nostalgia for a golden age of fresh, natural

connections between words and things might be explored as a continuing reaction against the mechanical reproduction of modernity. The enduring popularity of *Lord of the Rings*, and its film adaptations, could be explored as a continuation of this desire for authentic, organic language. Counter to 'postmodernist' film and fiction that self-consciously reference and pastiche other texts, Tolkein's invented languages are impossibly pristine, having never been used outside of his imaginative worlds.

The wish to reconnect with supposedly original, organic meanings of words involved the same questions of nationhood and identity that had vexed Victorian writers. Some critics have raised concerns about the possible racial logic of Tolkein's fictional visions, in which the behaviour of different peoples seems biologically predetermined (Drout 27-28). Language sometimes appears a gauge of innate characteristics, with Tolkein describing the 'Black Speech' of the Orcs: 'a base language ... for base purposes' (1996, 21). Some historians have traced the racialism of regimes such as the Third Reich to the legacy of nineteenth-century romantic philology, constructing fictions of race through lines of linguistic descent (Hannaford 16; Hutton 1-10). The continuing spread of English as a global vehicular language through the twentieth century detached it from its mythical native soil and race. However, the domination of vehicular languages has also inspired organicist rhetoric regarding minority languages. Organizations such as the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages use the rhetoric of ecology to justify protecting and maintaining minority speech variants.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Victorian anxieties about global English absorbing corrupting foreign elements can be seen to endure in some sections of the popular media. Non-academic commentators continue to bemoan linguistic variety, associating it with intellectual, if not moral, decline (for example, Humphrys 2005, and Heffer 2010). The self-appointed Queen's English Society warns of English becoming 'diluted by foreign (especially US) influences' and thus 'poorer'.<sup>39</sup> Such rhetoric of foreign elements invading the national language and causing societal decay was used to provocative effect in discussions of riots across England in 2011. In a televised debate, the historian David Starkey blamed the riots on 'black' culture and 'this language which is wholly false, which is this Jamaican patois that has been intruded in England, and that is why so many of us have this sense of, literally, a foreign country'.<sup>40</sup> Such language purism

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.livingtongues.org/> (accessed 28 September 2012).

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.queens-english-society.com/about\\_contd.html](http://www.queens-english-society.com/about_contd.html) (accessed 28 September 2012).

<sup>40</sup> *Newsnight*, BBC2, 12 August 2011.

shows the enduring political capital of the nineteenth-century philology that treated language and nation as linked organic growths. As Chapter Four explored, the ideology of an exclusive, national linguistic heritage emerged in tandem with the modern nation state. So long as governments remain divided along these lines, such ideology seems likely to remain influential.

Perhaps the most problematic question raised in this study, with which linguists and psychologists are still grappling, is the relationship between instinct and convention in meaning. The influence of Saussure's structural linguists after the Second World War produced the orthodoxy that meaning was socially and culturally constructed with no bases in nature (Magnus 24-25). The arbitrariness of the sign rendered phonemes meaningless in themselves, signifying only through combination and comparison with each other in a system. The rise of structuralist and then generative linguistics through Chomsky framed discussions of possible relations between sound and meaning as naïve throw-backs to an unscientific past. The assumption that all signs and meanings were arbitrary also became tied to a politics that was suspicious of natural explanations for human behaviour. The Marxist semiotician Roland Barthes framed cultural studies as the exposure of ideological mechanisms that turned 'history into nature' (146-47). Chomsky argued for an instinctive component in language, but only through the recognition and creation of syntactic structures: semantics in his theory remain arbitrary and conventional. Only recently have neurolinguistics seriously challenged this assumption, with evidence for cross-cultural associations of certain phonemes with certain colours and shapes.<sup>41</sup> Margaret Magnus comments that phonosemantics – the idea of natural relations between sound and meaning – conflicts with Saussurean structuralism and Chomskian generativism because 'its acceptance requires a very different view of language than is generally accepted – a view in which semantics cannot be abstracted away from language itself, and in which language as we know it cannot be abstracted away from man. ... It is similar to the observation in quantum electrodynamics that the observer cannot be meaningfully separated from the observed' (28). To separate meaning from nature is also to separate it from one's self, enabling it to be analyzed and explained objectively. In a similar vein, Jakobson traces the institutional turn against phonosemantics further back to the German 'Neogrammarians' of

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<sup>41</sup> See Ramachandran and Hubbard's experiment in which adults consistently linked the nonsense words 'bouba' and 'kiki' with rounded and spiked shapes, respectively (2001). See also Maurer *et al* (2006); Rendall *et al* (2011).

the fin de siècle, who ‘attempted to discuss sounds in a strictly naturalistic manner and to scrupulously leave aside the problem of the functions they perform in language’ (1978, 7). To approach meaning as inextricable from the mechanics of speech and human biology sacrifices the objectivity of the investigator: he or she becomes inescapably embedded in their processes. The microscope offering an objective view of language disintegrates.

While reacting against structuralism and generativism, phonosemantics might also be understood as a return to old lines of enquiry. Supporters of phonosemantics have persistently argued that neither convention nor instinct wholly determine meaning: the two collide and intersect. Romanes claimed that ‘no line of strict demarcation can be drawn between’ ‘conventional signs’ and ‘natural signs’ (102). Equally, Magnus states, summing up modern phonosemantic theory, ‘sound-meanings’ are ‘synchronically productive’ alongside arbitrary convention, rendering meaning plural and dynamic (29). From the 1960s to 1990s, the Hungarian psycholinguist Ivan Fónagy argued that an instinctive vocabulary of emotions acted as a ‘distorter’ upon speech across different languages. For example, X-rays of subjects asked to speak in an angry attitude all displayed ‘fast, spasmodic tongue movements, increased maxillary angle and labial distance, mandible withdrawn, lower incisors retracted behind upper incisors’ (1980, 168). Recent research has advanced this idea through comparisons of non-verbal communication among humans and other primates. Drew Rendall and Michael Owren highlight the interconnectedness of instinct and convention in primate vocal signals. Screams of alarm or aggression appear biologically pre-programmed, yet such signals ‘can effectively serve also to highlight or tag salient events in the world, and thereby support additional learning about them’ (180). For example, infant vervet monkeys are instinctively startled by alarm calls warning of a predator, but only learn to differentiate calls signifying different threats over time. Instinctive vocalizations acquire new associations through the material and social experiences of their users. Equally, they argue, the automatic, emotional effects of vocal signals ‘probably serve, in part, to scaffold increasing communicative complexity’, enabling humans to combine conventional meanings with instinctive ones (184). It is perhaps so difficult to distinguish communicative instinct from convention because they are not conflicting but symbiotic.

These ideas have profound implications for not only understandings of language and meaning but also interpretive practices – from literary criticism to ‘reading’ faces. The psychologist Cynthia Whissell has conducted many studies that claim to find instinctive

emotional triggers in certain phonemes, irrespective of their conventional combinations. For example, when judging the connotations of made-up words, subjects consistently ascribed 'gentle and positive associations' to *l* sounds and more 'aggressive' ones to *r* sounds. Combining close reading of texts with statistical analysis of the frequencies of certain phonemes, Whissell argues that 'texts of differing emotional effect employ different phonemes at different rates' (1999, 21). Whissell uses such computational tests of 'phonoemotionality' to analyze literature, matching its effects upon readers with frequencies of emotive phonemes (see Whissell 2002). Similarly, Paul Ekman's research has updated Darwin's arguments on expression, claiming to identify 'cross-cultural' 'emotional signals' of the face. These signals coexist, in his theory, with conventional ones, transmitted and decoded instinctively and universally (2010, 2408). Ekman has published many books and designed courses claiming to train people to read emotions through facial cues.<sup>42</sup> A potential danger of such biosemiotics, however, is that they treat emotions and their signs as discrete, fixed and universal, rather than variable predispositions that interact with culture. Whissell concedes that emotional-phonetic correspondences can only be understood in the context of their utterance; the frequency of certain phonemes might be conventionally higher in certain forms of discourse, relativizing their impact (1999, 21). She nevertheless assumes an underlying key of natural emotions which map onto phonemes, and can therefore be measured computationally, regardless of culture. She applies such analysis to literary texts, claiming to discover complex shades of emotional connotation. Intriguing as such research is, however, it seems difficult to falsify, since any cluster of supposed phonetic emotion-triggers might be made to 'make sense' in poetic interpretation. While a high frequency of 'rough', 'aggressive' phonemes in an angry harangue might be read as complementing its surface theme, a cluster of 'soft', 'passive', 'pleasant' phonemes in the same passage could be explained as revealing a hidden emotional conflict.<sup>43</sup> Equally, regarding Ekman, it seems ironic that instinctive, universal expressive signals should need to be 'learned' like a foreign language. Ekman's claims to 'unmasking the face' presuppose static, 'natural' emotions which exist separately from culturally-conditioned concealments of them (see Ekman 2010; for criticism of Ekman, see

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<sup>42</sup> See Ekman's 'F.A.C.E.' training programme, <http://www.paulekman.com> [accessed 28 September 2012].

<sup>43</sup> Hence, in an analysis of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1849), Whissell explains the rise in 'sad and passive' sounds at the end, despite the apparently cheerful event of a marriage, as an unconscious conflict in the poet's feelings: 'Contrary to Tennyson's own interpretation of increasing cheer, the sound shading of the close to *In Memoriam* echoes the grief evident in the saddest parts of the poem' (2002, 146).

Leys 74-84, and Dixon, 2011). Biosemiotics in the twenty-first century might be used to reinforce reductive nature/culture binaries as well as challenge them. Instead of acting upon each other dynamically, natural and conventional communication could be treated as separate, closed systems.

This study provides an exploration of how fiction has the potential to counter such reductive views of communication, presenting speakers as products of both nature and circumstance. Ruth Leys notes that, in opposing the dogma of universal ‘basic emotions’, stereotyped in stock photographs, ‘one finds oneself forced to provide thick descriptions of life experiences of the kind that are familiar to anthropologists and indeed novelists but are widely held to be inimical to science’ (88-89). This study has aimed to illustrate Leys’s claim by approaching fiction as a critical testing-ground for ideas from the science of language, rather than merely a passive reflector of them. Novels can undermine mechanistic theories of language by describing the particulars of daily life, exposing the inadequacy of abstract models of human behaviour. Hence, Grant Allen’s *The Great Taboo*, while claiming to illustrate Frazer’s universal stages of mythology, also undermines it, revealing disturbing parallels between Western and ‘savage’ language and thought. The imaginative worlds of Hardy, Wells and Butler situate every utterance, however apparently instinctive, in a nexus of social relations and conventions. Their characters’ emotions are not fixed to mechanistic triggers, but blend with experiential, habitual and imaginative associations. Where, for example, does instinct end and convention begin in the symbolic world of Ella’s fantasy love affair in ‘An Imaginative Woman’? Such fiction is the opposite of Whissell and Ekman’s computational abstraction that attempts to quantify and mechanize emotional signals. By exploring instinct in the context of society, and convention in the context of instinctive bodies, such fiction resists totalizing, one-dimensional models of communication. Meaning appears plural and dynamic in these tales, with conventional human signs blending into infinite dialogues between organic codes, from sexual attraction to sympathy. The conflicted speeches and signals of Butler’s Ernest Pontifex and Hardy’s Grace Melbury present instinct as a cacophony of voices or urges rather than a stable, true self. Their struggles to express or, rather, unify themselves resonate with William James’s observation that instincts ‘contradict each other. . . . *The animal that exhibits them loses the “instinctive” demeanour, and appears to lead a life of hesitation and choice, an intellectual life; not, however, because he has no instincts – rather because he has so many that they block each other’s path*’ (emphases in original, 1890, II 392-93). Ekman’s applied

psychology claims to crack the code of instinctive signs, revealing humans' 'true' intentions within. The more radical possibility explored by Butler, Hardy and Wells is that there are no unitary, true intentions to discover: the speaker dissolves into infinite, interrelated systems of transmission and reception, internal and external, biological and social.

Such visions of humans as the aggregate expressions of countless organic codes are more relevant than ever in the twenty-first century with the rise of genomics. At the same time, the field of biosemiotics has emerged in theoretical biology, approaching life as a complex of sign systems rather than physical quantities. Biosemiotician Marcello Barbieri states: 'the experimental reality is that proteins are manufactured by molecular machines based on the rules of the genetic code ... the codes are a fundamental reality of life and we simply have to learn how to introduce signs and meanings in science' (xi). This monistic approach to nature and culture has a genealogy leading back to Darwin and Romanes, who 'conceived mind as an organic development out of the phenomenon of life' (R. J. Richards 1987, 349). Consciousness need not be a divine mystery that separates humans from nature; rather, it might be reappraised as a meeting of many organic processes which 'think', 'feel' and communicate with each other on a micro-scale. As Kalevi Kull suggests, 'in living, entities do not interact like mechanical bodies, but rather as messages, the pieces of text ... Semiotic interactions do not take place of physical necessity ... but because some of the interactors have learned to do so (using the notion of "learning" in a broad sense here)' (2). Wendy Wheeler comments that literature might be understood, through biosemiotics, as expressions of 'the conjuring power' of language 'to *make* (i.e. to model) worlds anew' like the constant mutations of genetic code (183, emphasis in original). Such thinking would seem inseparable from modern molecular biology, built upon James Watson and Francis Crick's discovery of the double helix. Yet the speculations of Victorians such as Darwin and Butler reveal an older genealogy to biosemiotics. Butler's statement in the epigraph on the 'language' of a potato reveals the similarity of his ideas of hereditary transmission and adaptation to modern biosemiotics. Indeed, his Lamarckian model of two-way traffic between heredity and the life-experiences of organisms resonate with twenty-first-century theories of epigenetics. Similarly as Butler presented ideas as evolutionary growths over many generations instead of individual property, modern biosemioticians might recognize their own intellectual lineage in figures such as Butler (Forsdyke 159-63). By imagining

possible forms of interchange between heredity and environment, language and nature, he and other authors in this study prefigured future paths of exploration.

The prehistory of biosemiotics in Victorian and Edwardian science and philology remains a rich field of potential research, on which this study has only touched. How, for example, did writers and investigators in the period imagine such organic communication systems mediating relations between humans and animals? Amigoni notes that in Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* a despondent Ernest finds his spirits revived on a visit to the zoo. Watching a family of elephants, 'he seemed to be drinking in large draughts of their lives to the re-creation and regeneration of his own' (361). Amigoni interprets the scene as partly 'perhaps an enactment of the communicative "information" passed between human and animals', deriving from their common ancestry (84). Conversely, the domestication of animals might be explored as a base for the formation of new communicative systems with humans. Darwin wrote how 'the dog, since being domesticated, has learned to bark in at least four or five distinct tones' (1871, I 54). Canines seemed to have developed a signaling system specially to communicate with their human masters. Fiction such as Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) might be considered in light of these ideas. The tale states that Thornton, the master of the canine protagonist Buck: 'had a way of taking Buck's head roughly between his hands ... while calling him ill names that to Buck were love names'. Buck, equally, 'had a trick of love expression' in which he would 'seize Thornton's hand in his mouth... And as Buck understood the oaths to be love words, so the man understood this feigned bite for a caress (163-64). How might instinct and convention interlock in such visions of human-animal communication? Developing over millennia of selective breeding and training, domestication has the potential to blur oppositions between natural and artificial communication. Further, as Butler's potato example shows, a semiotics of life might be extended to organisms radically unlike humans. How then, did scientists and authors of the period imagine fauna and wider ecosystems as sites of communication? Darwin claimed that the radicle of a plant 'acts like the brain of one of the lower animals ... receiving impressions from the sense-organs, and directing the several movements' (1880, 573). Three years later, Richard Jefferies wrote of his experiences among rugged nature, seeking communion with the 'soul-life' and 'secret and meaning' of flowers, trees and the earth. His autobiography speaks of feeling connected to nature by some channel beyond words, with the birdsong and rustle of leaves echoing his inner 'prayer' (7, 10, 19). In an essay on the inadequacy of language for describing nature, Jefferies commented: 'The plant

knows, and sees, and feels', but 'language does not express the dumb feelings of the mind any more than the flower can speak ... the flower has not given us its message yet' (1887, 77). Recent evidence for auditory and gas signals between plants with context-dependent meanings highlights the re-conceptualization of the world which biosemiotics demands (Witzany 1-10). Rather than belonging solely to humans and rendering the world an open book to them, signification becomes a natural mechanism of which humans are merely products, not masters. How did Victorians and Edwardians entertain or suppress such potential challenges to anthropocentrism?

Mill commented that a fine balance needed to be struck between change and conservation in language, both codifying new knowledge and preserving the old. For language was not only a tool of expression in the present, but a 'conservator' of the mental activity of past ages. This past knowledge might 'fall asleep, as it were', but future investigators might discover new value in the old word-meanings hitherto unimagined (see Chapter Four). His comment is an apt reminder of the importance of imagination in scientific enquiry, besides mere adherence to currently recognized 'facts'. Gillian Beer has emphasized the 'two-way traffic' between Victorian literature and science, in which each supplied useful metaphors for the other. This study has contended that some of the most radical statements about language in the period were made not in theoretical literature but the imaginative experiments of fiction. By building narratives upon the ideas of specialists, such fiction was able to test their logic and speculate beyond empirical data. The possible interchange between instinct and custom in language, explored here imaginatively, would be marginalized in the academy before future generations found new value in investigating it. A century and a half after Müller's Oxford lectures, language is once again under the microscope, not as a single organism but possibly the structuring principle of all life. Spencer accused linguists of his time of turning a tool into an idol. Conversely, the emerging field of biosemiotics suggests that the organic world, which science has long approached as an elaborate machine, might be better imagined as a conversation. The old ideal of humans controlling nature through language is challenged by the possibility that nature is writing us.

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