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Portrayals of translation and interpreting in an early trinidadian novel: a case study of “Warner Arundell: The adventures of a creole”

Commonly held to be the first Trinidadian novel, E. L. Joseph’s *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* was first published in 1838. Presented as a fictional memoir, the book’s wide-ranging plot spans many of the geographical, cultural, and linguistic spaces which characterised the Caribbean during the early nineteenth century. Though language and multilingualism play an important role in the novel and have been discussed in scholarly analyses, this study zooms in on the representation of translation and interpreting in the novel. With the book’s hero a gifted linguist, his skills as a translator and interpreter are often highly relevant to key moments in the work’s intricate chain of events. As such, in the first instance, a brief overview of selected historical and fictional aspects of translation and interpreting in the Caribbean context is given, as well as some remarks on the history of the Caribbean and on the biography of the book’s author. The novel’s three volumes are then analysed, and relevant scenes involving translation and/or interpreting are highlighted and discussed. Lastly, the conclusion offers some general thoughts on the role of literary analyses with regard to the history of translation and interpreting in colonial milieux.

Key words: *colonial Caribbean, Edward Lanza Joseph, interpreters in literature, nineteenth-century transfiction, translators in literature, Trinidad.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Three centuries after the region first became known to Europeans, the early nineteenth-century Caribbean was a hotbed of intrigue and instability. With the colonial powers of Great Britain, France, and Spain using the islands as pawns in their far-off European wars, the entire region was marked by the injustices and inequalities of exploitative slave-based economies [4]. This potent combination of conflict and changing political ideologies with ethnic, sociocultural, religious, and linguistic diversity is the setting for what is commonly considered the first Trinidadian novel, *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole*, which was published in 1838 [13]. Written by the author, journalist, and historian E. L. (Edward Lanza) Joseph, the novel is set in the first years of the 1800s – the three-volume work chronicles the escapades of the eponymous hero after he leaves his birthplace of the island of Grenada. The scion of a suddenly impoverished plantation-owning family who have been resident in the West Indies for generations, the young orphan intrepidly seeks his fortunes in many different places, including newly-British Trinidad, the Spanish Main, and in the British Isles, getting into various scrapes and meeting all kinds of interesting characters along the way.

Among other things, *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* is notable for its portrayal of the vibrant multilingualism which characterised the colonial Caribbean during that complex era, and the range of languages featured in the novel – including creoles – has been the subject of linguistic and literary analysis [1; 25; 26]. With so many different languages and ethnicities present, practical communication needs meant that translation and interpreting were required to varying degrees, often on an *ad hoc* basis. In the days before these domains had become professionalised, individuals with advanced multilingual skills were therefore highly sought after. In profiling the literary portrayal of young Warner Arundell's abilities in several languages, this article highlights the instances in the novel where the hero is required to translate or interpret. Among other aspects, it is intended to discuss how the skills of translation and/or interpreting are portrayed, as well as what these depictions may say about translation and interpreting (as well as general multilingualism) in the Caribbean at that time, thereby outlining some possible general implications of literary analysis for further research on the history of translation and interpreting in colonial contexts.

2. HISTORICAL AND FICTIONAL TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS: THE CARIBBEAN CONTEXT

Fictional translators or interpreters are not infrequent characters in literary works, and accordingly an associated body of research on 'transfiction' has sprung up [11; 17]. With translators and interpreters featuring as gateways between cultures and languages, these can be interesting protagonists from a creative

perspective, and thus a source – or even a mirror – of relevant historical, cultural, and social aspects. To take the context of Trinidad in the modern era, the narrator of Caroline Mackenzie's 2020 novel *One Year of Ugly* [7; 15] is also a translator, thereby offering insights into the highly topical issue of 21st century Venezuelan migration to the country.

Interest in translators as literary characters has also been accompanied by additional attention paid to the wider role of translators and interpreters in the broader historical, sociological, and sociocultural purview [18; 21]. To this end, important resources have been published in volumes like Ruiz Rosendo and Baigorri-Jalón's edited collection on interpreters in history [20], which details case studies centring on different historical eras and geographical locations. In again referring to the Trinidadian context, an example includes the author's analysis of the role of interpreters at two crucial events in Trinidadian colonial history – the capture of the island by the British in 1797 and the trial of Governor Picton in 1806 [7]. However, though studies have been published examining other Caribbean islands (for example, in the case of Cuba [5]), more attention can certainly be paid to historical and literary portrayals of translators and interpreters in both the specific Trinidadian and the wider Caribbean cases.

As mentioned previously, the Caribbean in the early 1800s was a region in great turmoil. With revolutionary beliefs increasingly espoused by the enslaved and free coloured population and their sympathisers in various colonies, the years before and after the turn of the century had seen uprisings in French-ruled St Domingue (subsequently to become independent Haiti), British-ruled Jamaica and Grenada, as well as revolutionary stirrings on Spanish-dominated mainland South America which would culminate in a series of wars of independence [16; 19]. At that time, the Caribbean was a region of great wealth but also huge inequality, fomented by the slave trade and the insatiable colonial desire for important cash crops such as sugar cane. In addition to the remnants of the indigenous Amerindian population and the numerous slaves trafficked from Africa, the population also comprised a motley crew of merchants and adventurers from across Europe who were eager to make their fortunes [3]. Thus, in addition to the plethora of ideas and ideologies present, the region could also be viewed as a distinctly multilingual and multicultural zone.

This complex construct was perhaps epitomised by the island of Trinidad, located just a few miles from the Venezuelan mainland and claimed by Columbus for Spain in 1498. With its capital first at St. Joseph then at Port of Spain, the colony remained a Spanish possession until 1797, when it was captured bloodlessly by the British forces. An attempt to increase the colony's population in the last two decades of Spanish rule had resulted in the arrival of French and French Creole-

speaking planters and their slaves. Thus, at the time that the novel was set and for several decades subsequently, Trinidad represented a complex multitude of cultures, languages, and ethnicities [2]. Though a British colony, Spanish law, customs, and traditions remained predominant for several decades afterwards, as again evidenced by the intricacies of the Picton trial [8].

Trinidad was also the adopted home of the London-born E. L. Joseph, born in 1792 to a Jewish family. From the extant biographical details [1; 23], Joseph originally travelled to the region with the aim of participating in the South American uprisings against Spain, but was thwarted in this ambition by the British authorities in Trinidad. Nonetheless, he remained on the island, among other things finding employment as an overseer and manager on plantations (despite his personal convictions which opposed slavery). A self-taught man, he overcame his humble economic and social background to become the rather polemical editor of the one of major Trinidadian newspapers, with his editorials often causing disagreements with the island society. Also distinguished as the author of the first study of Trinidad's history [12] as well as plays and other creative works, Joseph appears to have been a man of considerable intellectual curiosity and limitless energy, but lost his life in the fever epidemic that ravaged Port of Spain in 1838, aged just 45. Ironically, this sad occurrence took place when he was on the cusp of his success, with both his novel and his historical monograph appearing in print that very same year.

To offer a brief survey of Joseph's only novel, *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* is set in the first years of British rule in Trinidad – i.e., around the turn of the nineteenth century. It comprises the first-person adventures of the hero, Warner Arundell, a character in the model of the “competent man” stock figure (9, p. 10) – indeed, Trinidadian historian Anthony de Verteuil opines that several happenings in the novel may be fictionalised aspects of the author's own biography. The three-volume work has an interesting and convoluted plot: to provide a potted and much-abbreviated summary, the young hero is born in Grenada to an old English plantation-owning family but is cheated out of his fortune. He travels, via schooling in Antigua, to his uncle in Trinidad and then to a guardian in Port of Spain before studying law in Caracas. With Spanish law due to be replaced in the colony, the young Warner changes career and crosses the Atlantic to study medicine in Britain, yet events conspire for him not to receive his diploma as a surgeon. Subsequently, he voyages back to the New World to participate in the independence wars in Colombia, where he has a chaste affair with a Spanish-speaking woman. He then travels through Essequibo into French-ruled Guiana, stays in Cayenne and practises as a doctor, before returning to Trinidad where he passes the examination to practice medicine, yet then also unwittingly disrupts some criminals who are trying to steal some buried treasure; after being unjustly accused

of murder, the legal proceedings are quashed and he is made custodian of the treasure. He then tries to reunite the treasure with the original owner's relatives, finding the man's niece who turns out to be the woman he met in Colombia; at the story's conclusion they marry and live happily ever after.

In the light of the book's unique status as the first Trinidadian novel and as one of the first examples of a Caribbean novel, *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* has been analysed from many perspectives, not only with regard to language and linguistics (as mentioned previously), but also from varying historical, cultural, and societal viewpoints (for example, see [1; 24-26]). A critical edition of the work appeared in 2002 [14], which incorporated a detailed and wide-ranging scholarly preamble [1] together with annotations by important specialists. However, as far as can be ascertained, the specific role of translators and interpreters in the book has not been considered in an independent study, which therefore underscores the novelty of the present article. The chosen research approach thus draws on literary fiction as additional historical data, as outlined by Sigurd O. Schmidt [22] and Sarah Hudspith [10]. To this end, it could be additionally considered noteworthy that Joseph was also a historian (albeit an amateur), as well as a person of unusually wide intellectual interests.

3. DEPICTIONS OF TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING IN THE NOVEL

Across its three volumes, the novel's fast-moving chain of events requires frequent use of Warner Arundell's multilingual prowess, and this has been mentioned by critical analyses of the work as a whole [1; 24]. In terms of translation and interpreting skills, he uses them actively during his legal training and in medicine as well as to allow him to get out of difficult situations, to help others in need, and to provide a bridge between different parties. In terms of the historical context, this usage arguably can be said to reflect the everyday multilingualism then common not only in Trinidad, but also in other locations throughout the Caribbean. Given that the novel's setting predates the professionalisation of translation and interpreting as discrete roles, it is perhaps unsurprising that rather than self-identifying solely as a translator and interpreter, Warner views his impressive capabilities as part of an arsenal of different skills. As such, in terms of his own linguistic proficiency, Warner appears to be a native or near-native speaker of English, Spanish, French, and French Creole. As demonstrated by success in his legal and medical examinations, he has advanced proficiency in Latin and Greek. In addition, he reads and understands Italian [13, vol. III, p. 58], learns German [13, vol. II, p. 83] (which perhaps mirrors Joseph's own contacts with his German friends during his time in Port of Spain), and seemingly also understands the word for Sabbath in biblical Hebrew [13, vol. II, p. 278].

This first instance of interpreting in the novel occurs part-way through the first volume. Owing to the lack of good schools on Grenada, after his father's death the adolescent Warner is taken on a sea voyage to the British colony of Antigua, stopping off at several other islands en route and becoming familiar with their various inhabitants and customs. Noting the bellicose relations with France at that time, the ship becomes involved in a skirmish with a French vessel, and its crew are captured. Despite his young age, Warner is able to interpret between the French prisoners and the British crew: "No one answered, until I stepped up and said, I could speak French. The fact is, I spoke the jargon called in these islands, "creole French," a lingo principally made up of corrupt French, but mixed with African, Spanish, and English words. However, this *patois* is the mother-tongue of about a million and a half of people in this part of the world. Fortunately for my credit as a linguist, most of the privateer's men had been long enough amongst the islands to learn the lingo alluded to, so that I did duty as a good interpreter" [13, vol. I, p. 76].

Although, as the hero attests, his proficiency in standard French may have been questionable at that time, nonetheless he is able to deliver a performance which seems to satisfy the needs of the relevant parties. Indeed, this could be considered an example of the language brokerage which was frequently practiced in the colonial Americas [6], where untrained multilinguals often stepped up to permit communication between diverse groups.

Later on, through the hero's educational sojourns in Antigua and subsequently in Trinidad's capital of Port of Spain, his knowledge of languages becomes more formalised: "I had, naturally, great facility in acquiring languages; my knowledge of creole French made the study of good French easy, and, living with a Spanish family, I soon acquired a respectable knowledge of the Castilian tongue" [13, vol. I, p. 152]. The latter skill provides the young Warner with an invaluable attribute that will prove formative for his subsequent trajectory: "The doctor occasionally employed me in translating law-papers from Spanish into English. He had commenced studying our language late in life; so that, when he met aught, in reading English, which he did not understand, he applied for me for explanation, which I easily gave. One day I so pleased the doctor, by giving an extemporary translation of a passage in 'Coke's Institute,' that he said I would make a good lawyer" [13, vol. I, p. 168]. As such, the young man was evidently skilled in bilingual translation (in this instance, from English into Spanish), though, as with the previous incident, it is notable that the accuracy of the translation provided cannot be independently verified. However, on travelling to the mainland and beginning his legal studies (in Spanish) at the University of Caracas, Warner writes that he "was looked upon as a prodigy of the university, on account of my possessing an extraordinary memory,

and a surprising aptitude in mastering both living and dead languages" [13, vol. I, p. 176].

In the second volume, after Warner has travelled to the British Isles, trained as a medical doctor, and subsequently returned to the Caribbean to enlist in the South American wars of independence, his translation skills become important during an audience with the then Governor of Trinidad, Sir Ralph Woodford, which is interrupted by a Spanish lawyer: "The governor addressed him in Castilian, which in common with almost all European languages, Sir Ralph spoke fluently. It was evident the governor, supposing me a stranger, conceived I knew not the language he spoke; consequently, he addressed the lawyer as though he were holding a private conversation with him. I, of course, did not seem to notice what he said" [13, vol. II, pp. 160-161].

When Woodford becomes aware of the stranger's multilingual capabilities, he is certainly displeased; however, Warner's knowledge of Spanish therefore allows him to translate and relate Woodford's conversation with the lawyer to the reader, which touches on the governor's vested powers in the uniquely complicated legal situation of Trinidad at the time, being a British possession under Spanish law. Indeed, at that point in the narrative Woodford proves unwilling to assist Warner in obtaining a Trinidad medical license, despite – as the transcript of the conversation with the Spanish lawyer details – his apparent ability to do so.

The third and final volume of the novel also features several important examples of translation and interpreting amid the hero's broader multilingualism. The first instance occurs in Cayenne, where Warner asks if his examination before the medical board will be, as expected, in Latin: "No, sir," replied the doctor, "in French: you seem sufficiently to understand our language for that purpose" [13, vol. III, p. 11]. Later, Warner becomes embroiled in a dangerous situation owing to his interpreting skills, when an American captain, "a tall, slender Kentuckian, called Ezekiel Coffin – said he was going on shore to play a match at billiards with a French officer. As he knew not a word of French, he begged me to meet him at the billiard-room, to act as interpreter" [13, vol III, pp. 19-20]. Accordingly, "when a disputed stroke occurred, which created some discussion. I was appealed to by Coffin as interpreter, and by the other party as a judge; but I declined interference in the latter capacity, stating that I had no knowledge of the game" [13, vol. III, p. 20]. Here, Warner displays the impartiality of the interpreter, which is now considered *sine qua non* for professional interpreting, but in those times was perhaps not so developed. The situation subsequently develops into a much more difficult situation, involving insults, an argument, and ultimately a duel with pistols.

On returning to Trinidad, Warner is finally able to appear for examination before the colony's medical board. Here, too, translation proves fundamental, as "the

first inquiries of this body were directed to ascertain my knowledge of Latin. This they did not do by putting questions to me in that language; but they placed in my hands Gregory's 'Conspectus,' and asked me to translate a page or two. As it wanted neither a Parr nor a Porson to construe this, I easily made the extempore translation required [13, vol. III, pp. 48-49]. By extension, it could be argued that Warner's excellent translation skills here serve as a proxy example of his proficiency not only in languages, but also as a medical practitioner.

Towards the end of the novel, where Warner unwittingly disrupts a murderous scheme involving some escaped convicts, his translation skills prove useful in rendering the dialogue of the criminals he overhears: "The medium of conversation between these men was the dialect called Creole French, which, however, neither spoke fluently. When the black man was at a loss for an expression, he used one in Spanish; and when the white man hesitated for a word, he used English. Having the advantage of knowing all three of these vernaculars, I generally caught the meaning of the parties before they understood each other" [13, vol. III, p. 148]. Here, too, the narrator's translational skills allow the reader to understand the criminals' minds as they search for the buried treasure which plays a pivotal role in the novel's final stages.

At the close of the novel, after being mistakenly accused of murder and pursued through the courts, Warner becomes the custodian of the treasure and aims for it to be restored to its rightful owners: "I introduced an advertisement into the papers, to this effect : that if the next of kin to Don Juan Baptista Ojeda would apply to Dr. Lopez, of Trinidad, or Moses Fernandez, of St. Thomas, he or she would hear of something much to his or her advantage. [...] This advertisement I translated into Spanish and French, and caused it to be inserted in all the newspapers in the West Indies, and in the few published in Colombia. I even sent it to the gazette of Madrid..." [13, vol. III, p. 261]. Here, the hero's skills play a vital role, as he is able to translate his notice into the relevant languages; as such, given that the rightful owners of the treasure are Spanish speakers, it is to be presumed that the translated version of the document is the one that they read. As such, in terms of the final resolution of the novel, this translation indirectly performs the task of reuniting Warner with his beloved.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND POINTERS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON COLONIAL CONTEXTS

This summary has given a cursory overview of the portrayal of translation and interpreting in E. L. Joseph's

only novel *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole*. As outlined and discussed in the examples featured above, the skills of translation and interpreting are portrayed as part of a range of linguistic and practical capabilities utilised by the novel's principal protagonist. Accordingly, Warner Arundell's abilities in translation and interpreting are also crucial to the structure and development of the plot, as his linguistic prowess proves important at several key points in the novel. In addition to demonstrating the hero's general competence, it also makes the reader privy to insights into multilingual discussions. In terms of what these depictions represent regarding multilingualism in the early nineteenth-century Caribbean, the usage of and references to translation and interpreting ensure that the novel appears to portray the complex interplay of languages, cultures, and societies that characterised the region at that point in time.

Finally, in offering some general implications regarding the intersection of literary analysis with the history of translators and interpreters in colonial situations, further research could also seek out further examples of translation and interpreting in other creative works from the nineteenth-century in various linguistic and geographical milieux. In the Caribbean context, this could include, for example, building on analyses of other colonial-era novels [24-26] to see if translation and interpreting feature in those works, and if so, how these are portrayed. As such, a fuller picture of contemporary literary responses to relevant linguistic and cultural phenomena would be painted, thus providing a testament to an era of Caribbean multilingualism that, for the most part, no longer exists.

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ЗОБРАЖЕННЯ УСНОГО ТА ПИСЬМОВОГО ПЕРЕКЛАДУ В РАНЬОМУ ТРИНІДАДСЬКОМУ РОМАНІ: НА ПРИКЛАДІ РОМАНУ «ВОРНЕР АРАНДЕЛЛ: ПРИГОДИ КРЕОЛА»

Роман Е. Л. Джозефа «Ворнер Аранделл: Пригоди креола», який прийнято вважати першим тринідадським романом, уперше побачив світ у 1838 році. Поданий як псевдомемуари, його калейдоскопічний сюжет охоплює чимало географічних, культурних і мовних аспектів, притаманних Карибському басейну на початку XIX століття. Хоча мова й багатомовність відіграють важливу роль у творі та вже обговорювалися в наукових працях, ця стаття зосереджується на репрезентації усного й письмового перекладу в романі. Оскільки герой книжки має хист до мов, його вміння перекладача й тлумача часто відіграють суттєву роль у ключових моментах хитросплетіння твору. Тому спочатку подаються стислий огляд окремих історичних та художніх аспектів перекладу в карибському контексті, а також деякі зауваження стосовно історії Карибського басейну та біографії автора твору. Далі проаналізовано три томи роману, виділено й обговорено епізоди, пов'язані з письмовим та/або усним перекладом. Насамкінець, у висновках запропоновано деякі загальні міркування про роль літературного аналізу в історії письмового та усного перекладу в колоніальному контексті.

Ключові слова: *Едвард Ланза Джозеф; колоніальний Карибський басейн; письмові перекладачі в літературі, Тринідад; усні перекладачі в літературі; художній переклад XIX століття.*

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