Parallel Universes and Detonating Words: The Brixton Wonderland of Biyi Bandele's *The Street*

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Abstract

The key proposition of this article is that deep in the guts of the European languages in which many African writers communicate are the echoes of other languages, universes and knowledges, which contest European imperialist power. This is true for writers working from within the African continent but particularly acute for migrants whose multiple universes are lived experience, every day, on the streets of London, New York or Paris.

Materialist Animism, the Rhetoric of Metonymy, and the Resistance of the Everyday

African writers communicating in English – and particularly migrants living and writing in the Western world – have found ways of challenging European imperialist power through playing with language. What they struggle with, specifically, is the fact that English is saturated with the metaphors and meanings linked to imperialism. The exemplary metaphor is, of course, Africa as the dark heart of Conrad's classic. Writers struggle against the tentacles of this language of their colonisers, a language through which they themselves have been constituted as reluctant, ambivalent subjects; they therefore seize this language, with which they have a love-hatred, and attempt to manipulate its tropes and symbols in a variety of ways. These include anchoring their fictions in the visceral material realities of their previous lives and their new experiences in the diaspora; it involves infusing the sounds and words and worldviews of the other languages

into which they were born and socialised, such as Arabic, Igbo or Yoruba. To depict these literal realities and to incorporate the rhythms of other languages into their fictions, some African writers find that the rhetoric of metonymy holds the potential to interrogate the hierarchical law of dominant metaphors. What I will be demonstrating in this article is the crucial link between material culture, solid objects, language and subjectivity, as applied to Biyi Bandele's novel, *The Street*.

The connections that are metonymic include contiguity – the chance ordering of elements that find themselves next to each other, which contrasts with the deep, symbolic, figural bonds of metaphor. Rhymes and jingles, songs, the concrete and happenstance are all the stuff of metonymy. Bill Ashcroft has focussed on one particular use of this trope, what he has called "the metonymic gap" (2001: 75). He continues to emphasise how cultural differences of experience are "actually *installed* in the text in various ways" (ibid: 75, his emphasis). The metonymic gap, by means of which this installation of difference is accomplished, occurs when postcolonial writers "insert unglossed words, phrases or passages from a first language, or concepts, allusions or references which may be unknown to the reader" (ibid: 75). What then happens is that:

> Such words become synecdochic of the writer's culture – the part that stands for the whole … Thus the inserted language 'stands for' the colonized culture in a metonymic way, and its very resistance to interpretation constructs a 'gap' between the writer's culture and the colonial culture. (ibid: 75)

Ashcroft also observes that this harnessing of metonymy flies in the face of the law of the powerful, Western centre: "in the European tradition the contiguous and accidental, those characteristics which seem to accrue to the metonymic, will never have the power of truth" and truth, of course, "is the province of the metropolitan" (ibid: 75). Ashcroft, in fact, describes this "metonymic gap" as "a crucial feature of the transformative function of post-colonial writing" (ibid: 75) and goes so far as to suggest that it is "*the* distinguishing feature of post-colonial literature" (ibid: 76). Deleuze and Guattari call this kind of subcultural, combative writing a "minor literature". They explain that "minor" does not refer to a minor language but is "that which a minority constructs within a major language" (1986: 16). Specifically, with regard to Kafka, there is "the situation of the German language in Czechoslovakia, as a fluid language intermixed with Czech and Yiddish" (ibid: 20). Deleuze and Guattari describe Kafka's language as a "mélange", "a Harlequin costume in which very different functions of language and distinct centers of power are played out" (ibid: 26). The challenge is how "to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language?"(ibid: 19).

The answer to that challenge appears to lie in writing stories that bravely attempt to escape the symbolic, and so, write Deleuze and Guattari, "[Kafka] will abandon sense" and depict a character, like Gregor, as "warbling" with "blurred words" and in foregrounding "the whistling of the mouse, the cough of the ape". This creates a "language torn from sense, conquering sense, bringing about an active neutralization of sense" (ibid: 19–21). In fact, they quote Kafka as declaring in his *Diaries* of 1921, that, "metaphors are one of the things that makes me despair of literature". They elaborate that, "Kafka deliberately *kills all metaphor*, all symbolism" (ibid: 22, my emphasis). The goal and purpose of this murder of metaphor, this attempt to escape the symbolic, are to find a way of speaking in "an other tongue", which is the title of a collection edited by Alfred Arteaga, and also the title of his own paper in the collection. The "minor literature" with which he is concerned is that of Chicano poetry, which falls "in the interface between Anglo and Latin America" (1994: 10) and where hybrid words are constructed, mixing English and Spanish and creating a kind of "double voicing" and where, in one case "even the typeface speaks difference", providing Ashcroft's metonymic gap, given that "the poems are printed in the script of barrio graffiti" (Arteaga 1994: 11).

I must sound a cautionary note here. What needs to be avoided is the stereotype that suggests that women's or the postcolonial's language is the imaginary, non-rational, earthy, bubbling poetry, bodily instinct and primitive signing. This playing with metonymy, battling with loaded metaphors, struggling with new forms of expression, is no return to some pre-linguistic African idyll. Bandele produces carefully constructed narrative Molotov cocktails in which he takes the English language and subjects it to his will in a cultural political battle that began with colonialism and which has not ended. It is also important to emphasise that a cleansed metonymic, concrete language, flying free from symbols, culture and discourse, does not exist. However, some postcolonial writers focus on the everyday, the material and the concrete, which is entwined with the spiritual and the unseen. This links to my earlier work on magical realism in a West African context (Cooper: 1998) in which I described how, by definition, magical realism renders the magical/supernatural religious worlds as mundane and ordinary—as part of the daily lives of ordinary people.

Along similar lines, it is the attempt to come to grips with these parallel worlds of the living and the spirits, within an understanding of the material, physical world, that motivates Harry Garuba's use of the concept, not of magical realism, but of "animist materialism" (2003: 268) which is the perception of everyday objects as "the physical and material manifestations of the gods and spirits" (ibid: 267). This entails a refusal of binaries and hierarchies, such as the growth from the literal to the figurative, given that we have "the 'locking' of spirit within matter or the *merger of the material and the metaphorical*, which animist logic entails" (ibid: 267, my emphasis). Multiple universes, twinning, the

literal material culture of the everyday, embedding and anchoring the figurative and spiritual, abound in many African novels. The language devices attached to the portrayal of this multiplicity, moreover, are particularly conducive to the fictional purposes of migrant writers in the diaspora, whose experience of different cultures and languages is especially acute. Here we are touching upon Biyi Bandele's novel, *The Street*.

"I Want to Stop Writing About Nigeria": Biyi Bandele's *The Street*

The street referred to in Biyi Bandele's latest novel, *The Street*, is Brixton High Street. At the same time, the novel occupies parallel universes— the worlds of the living and of the dead, the lands of reality and of dreams, the Nigeria of Bandele's birth and growing up and the London of his chosen home. In the process of spanning these universes, of mixing and mingling these dimensions, Bandele Africanises Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* mode of nonsense writing and flies Amos Tutuola's West African oral tradition of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* to London. When Diez-Tagarro suggests to Bandele, "So you could say that your writing is a mixture of these Nigerian experiences and your life in London" (1995: 58), he replies:

> Yes. If you have seen I have written TV films which I always set here. … they are all set in London. For me, this is my way of responding to this environment that surrounds me and was not part of my life some years ago, but it is now. I felt I had to do this. There are writers who would not respond to a society that is not their own, but I do. It is my choice, I am here. At the same time *I want to stop writing about Nigeria because I prefer this gipsy aspect of my life*. (ibid: 58, my emphasis)

What Bandele is acknowledging is that this response to his new home might be accomplished only through the intersection between his many lives—in Africa and in Europe, in the material and the spiritual dimensions. There are many lives, many viewpoints and, therefore, a veritable profusion of narrators and protagonists in *The Street*. There is a central narrator, Dada, who is in many ways most suggestive of Bandele himself. However, there are two other characters whose life trajectories will deliver the most insight into Bandele's forays into London life. There is Dada's cousin, 'Biodun, otherwise known as "the Heckler", and Ossie Jones, an immigration lawyer from Nigeria. There is also Ossie's daughter, Nehushta, who was Dada's girlfriend for a time. Another persona of Bandele might be found in a strange, floating protagonist narrator, Mr Bill, who is a word

peddler—he collects, buys and sells words.

Through these multiple viewpoints, many worlds and word games, Bandele is seeking, playing with, and hiding his identity as a Nigerian living in London. He is doing so by means of the here and now of the daily life on the High Street of Brixton. He is not seeking it in the depths of his psyche, his roots in the past of deep symbols, metaphors and figurative language. He wishes to discover a language and an urban landscape in all its concrete reality, such that he might find a solid place, as a writer and an artist, in the environment in which he lives and works. He is playful, full of nonsense, reacting against the heavy political responsibilities that he inherited from his Nigerian tradition of anti-colonial struggle in the form of literary giants like Chinua Achebe. This is why he says – contradicting Achebe's famous words—"I do not see the writer as a teacher" (Diez-Tagarro 1995: 59).

In *The Street*, the action takes place midst exploding words – words, which detonate the boundaries between worlds and dimensions, words in all their fleshy, powerful and solid materiality. As we shall see, Bandele draws up bizarre and lengthy lists, returns the figurative into the literal, indulges in rhymes, songs and ditties, invents weird and wonderful portmanteau words, and delights in the randomness of contiguity. To what purpose all these detonating words? They clear the dross and carve out a daily reality in which the writer becomes gipsy, instead of exile hankering after a nostalgic motherland. As Bandele says, in conversation with Rosa Diez-Tagarro, "writers should be careful with words; because they can explode" (Diez-Tagarro 1995: 59). This they indeed do in *The Street*. Bullet words play the metonymic language games, with which we are becoming familiar. For example, the rhythm of the language in *The Street* is metonymically drummed out through a pastiche of non-sequiturs, as in this conversation between two characters in the book, Dada and Nehushta:

> They talked about Luddites and the digital age, of misoneists and miscegenation, of *déjà vu* and tiramisu, and of deserts and the sea, and of Quentin Tarantino films, which they loved and hated. She told him about the bird that saw an aircraft and bowed and worshipped, he told her about the radio that went into therapy because it was hearing voices. (Bandele 1999: 213 - 4)

Déjà vu and tiramisu are linked only because they rhyme; alliteration links the strange word, "misoneists", to "miscegenation". There is no meaning vested in the birds which worship aeroplanes, and in objects, like the radio which is personified through the pun—where hearing voices is both literally the nature of the radio and also tells of madness, the schizophrenia, that permeates Bandele's London where lunatics walk the street in a fog of psychosis. The conversation

between Dada and Nehushta, who talked about "*déjà vu* and tiramisu, and of deserts and the sea", echoes that between Lewis Carroll's Walrus and Carpenter, in *Through the Looking-Glass*, whose delirious topics, alliteratively entwined, include kings, cabbages, shoes and ships:

> 'The time has come,' the Walrus said,
> 'To talk of many things:
> Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—
> Of cabbages—and kings—
> And why the sea is boiling hot—
> And whether pigs have wings'. (1998: 161)

Flying pigs and boiling seas, worshipping birds and schizophrenic radios may appear nonsensical, but they point to the different worlds, the parallel universes or multiple dimensions with which these writers juggle, in the light-hearted language of play. This is what Deleuze focuses upon in his discussion of the writings of Lewis Carroll in *The Logic of Sense*. Deleuze suggests that in many of Carroll's poems "one witnesses the autonomous development of two simultaneous dimensions" (1990: 26). These different and simultaneous zones also organise the chaos of Bandele's novels as he portrays the multiple sites he occupies and explores. The worlds in Bandele are the concrete reality of daily life on a busy London street and the echoes of Nigeria; at the same time, there are the elusive dimensions of dreamland, death, the spirit world and other planets. These different worlds happily co-exist, are contiguous, and the incongruous becomes the norm. And nothing better characterises the co-existence of these many worlds than Bandele's Brixton "Undead", who exist between the living and the dead, blurring the boundary between them.

Parallel Universes, the Undead and Ossie Jones

> Brixton High Street was, as always, busy and frenetic, packed with the ever-present floating cast of the walking wounded and the clinically Undead; … damaged souls haunted by memories of past transgressions and paralysed with guilt for sins not yet committed. (Bandele 1999:11)

Floating in the space between dream and waking, hallucinatory marijuana trip and reality, there is the netherworld of the Undead. The High Street teems with a multitude of off-beat, liminal characters—migrants, madmen and nomads. These underworld characters have been transposed from Nigeria, where Bandele mingled with a variety of "shady characters":

> [Bandele] grew up in Kafanchan in the strictly Hausa-Muslim speaking north of Nigeria, amidst armed robbers, pickpockets, prostitutes and smugglers. His father, a Yoruba from the southwest of Nigeria, owned the property used by the shady characters mentioned above as their base of operation. Tales of their exploits inspired the young Biyi, and at 14, after a brief stint in secondary school, he started managing a betting shop. (Sheyin 1994: 26)

Dada writes about them for a lunatic fringe magazine; Nehushta paints them; the Heckler is one of them. These Undead, for all their psychotic ravings, paradoxically structure its anomic, chaotic, word-frenzied world of the novel. There is Mr Meletus, whom Dada interviews, whose psyche has been rebooted inexplicably, resulting in institutionalisation, shock therapy and now "a permanent prescription of non-illicit happiness drugs" (Bandele 1999: 125). He is convinced that a pigeon had said "'fuck you'" to him, an insult that he is sure his mother confirmed, a mother who has been dead for the past five years (ibid: 127 – 8). There is the old eccentric, who rides buses all day and the bag lady who "spent over twenty years compiling a list of those *not* to be invited to her funeral" (ibid: 129). Then there is the young man, tormented by spirits, whose letter to Dada's editor sounds like something straight out of Tutuola: "At least 2 or 3 spirits are around me and fly past, 1 or 2 live in my mouth and nose. More bads: they don't let me have friends or get married till death" (ibid: 130). There is the man who was convinced that he was "the restless soul of a Tamagochi tortured to death by a ten-year-old apprentice psychopath" (ibid: 168). Nehushta began painting them shortly after her father's death "as a celebration of Brixton through its used, abused and contused" (ibid: 174). These mumbo jumbo narratives and testimonies, raves and rants, weave in and out of the narrative from beginning to end. There is Ras Joseph, who rambles on for about four pages while Dada is recording him and Nehushta is sketching him. Later Dada will listen to his mini recorder "from which the lyrical cadences of a somnolent voice slurred a farrago of smooth increrudition, into his ears" (ibid: 199). Increrudition? Incredulity, erudition and confusion? The following is a typical, wordy wonderland of nonsense, referring to the Lonely Hearts column of Dada's magazine:

> Through which hypochondriacs sought out the company of pharmacomaniacs …, mythomaniacs found comfort in the arms of pseudomaniacs, pyromaniacs reached out to hydromaniacs, homicidal psychopaths (homicidomaniacs) arranged candlelit blind-dates at Sushi bars with the chronically suicidal (autophonomaniacs), and the merely pixillated received single red roses from the severely demented. (ibid: 132)

These out of control lists, crazy words and mad metonymic ramblings are at the intersection between the worlds of madness and sanity, of living and dead, of sense and nonsense. Nothing characterises these porous worlds more than the story within the story of Ossie's journey to dreamland, which is a powerful and extended section of the novel. It is significant that when Bandele adapted his *The Street* for the London stage in his play, *Brixton Stories*, the part that he used was Ossie's sojourn in parallel universes (Fisher 2001: 1). Ossie Jones is a lawyer, originally from Nigeria. He falls on a corkscrew (more about this object later) and goes into a fifteen-year coma. We move seamlessly in the novel from the reality of Ossie's life in London into his dream world, which goes on for the next thirty-three pages:

> Ossie Jones drifted from a deep, drunken sleep into a dream in which he was completely sober and in his car driving *down a strange, liminal highway* that stretched from a nebulous tunnel at the soles of his feet, past the toll-gates of his soul, where he was stopped, even his passport checked, and into the boundless openness of the universe. (ibid: 28, my emphasis).

That Ossie has entered another world is referred to more than once in the novel, with a reference like "in the parallel world, outside of this dream he was dreaming" (ibid: 39). In fact, more than anything else, this world he enters resembles the limbo place of the newly dead, the same one that the Drinkard's tapster occupies:

> old people were saying that the whole people who had died in this world, did not go to heaven directly, but they were living in one place somewhere in this world. (Tutuola 1952: 9)

Different dimensions co-exist in Ossie's life, in his waking and sleeping and in the "the monstrous munificence" of Ossie's thoughts:

> He thought of the slouching shadows of lonesome giants and the radiance of a shared moment, the syncopated silence of selective amnesia and the resonating infinitude of a done deed, the ticking of time and the hypothesis of immortality, the threat of rain and the beauty of a green landscape, the falling out of teeth and the serenity of a toothless smile, the numbing shock of a sudden disappointment and the lingering scream into which an orgasm erupts. (Bandele 1999: 116)

Lagos and London, giants and a shared moment, silence and an accomplished task, time, rain, nature, aging and teeth, a smile and an orgasm may all mingle and mix in Ossie's worlds, but perhaps he can no longer hold it all together and soon after emerging from his other world, he properly leaves this one, creeping "out of his body and into the mist" (ibid: 119). Like Ossie, who lives in parallel universes, communing with the living, the dead, and the inhabitants of dreamland, Dada's cousin, The Heckler, lives in a liminal space between the living and the dead. How does he juggle his worlds?

Parallel Universes: Words and Things and 'Biodun, the Heckler

'Biodun is an *abiku*, a spirit child that his mother had "tried but failed three times in the past to bring into the world" (ibid: 141). The belief is that infant deaths are the result of a mother carrying a spirit child in her womb, one with a foot in the land of the living and a foot in the land of the spirits, to which the child decides to return. *Abikus* torment their mothers by being born only to die and come back again and again from the land of the unborn. In addition, and more literally, 'Biodun spans life and death by being HIV positive, unbeknown to his mother:

> Within weeks of being told he was HIV positive, he quit his high-flying job with a software company, was kicked out of his flat (for not paying his rent. That's when he moved back in with his mother, and became the Heckler…). (ibid: 274)

At first glance only, then, it appears as if 'Biodun is well settled as a citizen of Brixton. Brixton, and not Lagos, from where his family originated, is his home. He will not budge from Brixton, where "the streets of his birth" (ibid: 13) are located and "the only relocation he would ever consider would be the relocation from Brixton to six-feet-under Brixton" (ibid: 13). However, this rootedness is something of a mirage; he is in denial about his health and is living recklessly on the street, is unemployed, drinks and smokes excessively without eating properly and has lost his real, Nigerian name to "the Heckler", because "he was to be found wherever there was a soapbox, matching wits and trading insults" (ibid: 12). The Heckler's world has spun as out of control as the list of words Bandele spews out in order to describe his social circle, which consists of those Undead street lunatics – "the Heckler locked horns with these mavens, gurus, roshis, lamas, shamans, revolutionaries, avatars, seers, illuminati, diviners, prognosticators, prophets and those who considered themselves the street clerisy" (ibid: 13). They are "kooks, nuts, schizoids and Meshuggenahs" (ibid: 131). 'Biodun's mother, Aunt Moni, may not know about his health, but she does know that he has lost

his way and she is frustrated with his lifestyle of being "a bum on the streets" (ibid: 158). She therefore, in one of the topsy-turvy manoeuvres so beloved of Bandele, organises him a mock "funeral" while he is still alive in order to inaugurate his spiritual recovery. Dada, who attends this bizarre ritual, tells 'Biodun about it. The ritual itself is culturally hybrid and amounts to a kind of African styled Christian exorcism. Aunt Moni had consulted with "Prophet Moses" of her Angelic Church of Christ:

> 'The Lord told him to tell me that the only way to bring back the old Abiodun is to bury the impostor that is inhabiting his soul now.'
> [Dada] asked her how the Lord proposed that they carried this out.
> 'By holding a symbolic burial and a funeral,' she said. 'I have managed to buy a plot at a cemetery, and I have spoken to an undertaker'. (ibid: 159)

In a further typical reversal, the "funeral" takes place in the section called "The Wedding". There may be no flesh and blood body, but the affair goes the whole hog, with the extended family arriving, "long term UK residents" (ibid: 132) as well as "visitors from Nigeria" (ibid: 133). There are pallbearers, the casket and the officiating priest, who provides the wedding overtones with his "long white cassock with golden tassels that trailed after him like a bridal train" (ibid: 137). We have weddings and funerals, symbolic ritual and literal solid objects as its props, life and death, spirits and humans, born-again Christians and *abikus*. Like this mock funeral, rituals for *abikus*, like 'Biodun, must be enacted if they are to stay permanently in the land of the living. Different dimensions and universes co-exist and come together at this funeral for the living. This ritual may have spiritual purposes and goals, but it is enacted emphatically by way of lavish material manifestations. The coffin itself, for example, and its exquisite trimmings are described in intricate, concrete detail:

> The coffin, stained a faint mahogany, was made of pinewood. It had brass fittings and golden handles. A felt-mattress, handmade and fit for a king, was spread inside. … A photograph of the Heckler smiled at them from the hand-quilted silk shell-shaped pillow where his head, were he in the coffin, would have rested. (ibid: 140–141)

These material objects and powerful words bond together as pillars of this ritual search for the identity of the lost 'Biodun. It is presided over by a certain Prophet Moses, employed by Aunt Moni, a man of visceral odours and powerful words.

Bandele, once again, invokes these by way of a barrage of listed words as the Prophet Moses releases "the pleasant but dizzying and overbearing scent of sandalwood, eucalyptus, frangipani, coconut, lemon grass, patchouli, cinnamon, mango and myrrh" (ibid: 141). At the same time, "he muttered a rapid and *inaudible swelter of words*, which Dada knew, having been dragged by Aunt Moni to church when he was a kid, as *a form of glossolalia, the gift of tongues*" (ibid: 141, my emphases). This "swelter of words" and tongues, the smells and the solidity of wood and pillow, are what enable the ritual to happen. The problem with the Heckler is that words and things, language and material reality, have become torn apart and dislocated. This is the profound meaning of the Yoruba elegy delivered by the Prophet Moses at 'Biodun's mock funeral:

> 'The hunter dies,' Prophet Moses was saying, 'and leaves his poverty to his gun. The blacksmith dies and leaves his poverty to his anvil. The farmer dies and leaves his poverty to his hoe. The bird dies and leaves its poverty to its nest. You have died, Abiodun, and left us abandoned in the dark. (ibid: 143 –144)

Poverty, this dirge suggests, need not destroy individuals as long as they are anchored to solid objects, which reflect their work, their endeavours are, in fact, metonyms for them – the gun, the anvil and the nest. Abiodun, however, is not centred in this way; he is a shape shifter, not anchored to his human body and lacking in an identity other than that of the empty rhetorician, the heckler.

The mastery that is sought over the everyday material stuff is imperative to the anchoring of the migrant stranger in a new society The purpose of pinning down the abstract and embedding it in the concrete realities of material culture goes to the heart of nonsense writing in Bandele or Lewis Carroll. And so "the words which Nonsense is going to employ are those referring to normal experience, shoes and ships and sealing-wax and cabbages and kings" (Sewell 1978: 99). It is for this reason that Humpty Dumpty's song includes "little fishes, a kettle, the pump, bed, a corkscrew" (ibid: 99). Sewell, in her *The Field of Nonsense*, goes on to give a lovely interpretation of Carroll's version of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star", which is rendered by the Mad Hatter as:

> Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!
> How I wonder what you're at!
> Up above the world you fly,
> Like a tea-tray in the sky. (cited in Sewell 1978: 100)[1]

Instead of the star of the original, which is compared to a diamond in the sky, "a bat has been substituted for a star, a tea-tray for a diamond"; and whereas "a star

is something exceedingly remote and beyond control" (Sewell 1978: 100), "a bat is something near at hand" (ibid: 101). These are the things, Sewell emphasises, that constitute our daily reality and "they characterise our familiar surroundings, clothes, food, furniture and houses" (ibid: 101). Interestingly, Bandele's version of the "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" re-write, can be found in his earlier novel, *The Man Who Came In From The Back Of Beyond*. As the main character in that novel, Lakemfa realizes that his teacher has been spinning him tall yarns, he is brought back to stark reality by seeing that "the moon hung far away like a football in the sky" (Bandele 1992: 136). This simile harnesses the distant planets and other dimensions of life to an everyday object, a football. The final chapter of the same novel begins with the same link between the moon and mundane objects, making it into something visceral, rather than dreamy and unattainable:

> The stars were scattered like so many pieces of *popcorn* pasted with glue to the ceiling of a room. The moon looked like a *football* that someone had kicked into the sky. (ibid: 133, my emphasis)

Popcorn and footballs, like cabbages and tea-trays, position the protagonist firmly on the planet and enable him to make sense of the world. Throughout *The Street*, one way of managing strange, new worlds, where things are never where they should be or what they seem, is by transforming – through language – the abstract and the virtual into the visible, concrete and fleshy object. This object may then be touched, held or even destroyed. For example, the mind is a real place to go to: "Dada had temporarily disappeared into his own mind and re-emerged …" (Bandele 1999: 5). We saw that "three life sentences" (ibid: 49) meant literally that—Johni had to live three lives. Johni's father, apparently, "had a smile that was so bright and warm, people dried their laundry under it" (ibid: 57). Dada says, "What I'm driving at" and his friend replies "Stop driving. You haven't got a driving licence" (ibid: 81).

This device is linked to the porous boundary between animate and inanimate objects, living creatures and solid matter, reminiscent of Tutuola and of the African traditions on which both he and Bandele draw, and which they manipulate. So, in *The Street*, "the traffic lights … developed conjunctivitis" (ibid: 5) and "the light was simply mocking them" (ibid: 20). A thought "occurred to him only fleetingly, and then it disappeared, unheeded and sulking" (ibid: 37). Regarding a nerve of Ossie's body, "it died (or committed suicide)" (ibid: 71) and there is "the tetchy clock-tower that stared stolidly at the high street" (ibid: 80). "The sun was still abroad, loitering with coruscating intent" (ibid: 103). Nehushta "tripped over something which, when she opened her eyes wide and was properly awake, turned out to be a thin strip of light that had wandered into the room

through the slits in the blinds from the street-lamps outside" (ibid: 119). Then there was "the radio that went into therapy because it was hearing voices" (ibid: 214). Look at the figurative use of a door being burglar alarmed, which becomes the literally traumatised door:

> He did not notice the sign, which read: 'WARNING: THIS DOOR IS ALARMED'. When he tried to push it open, the door—which was already bruised, traumatized and suffering from low self-esteem—cowered before him and nearly flew off its hinges. (ibid: 85–86)

For migrant writers like Bandele, moreover, words themselves become solid objects and for all their apparent lack of symbolic meaning, harness the writer to the street, the place and time, in which he, Bandele, is operating.

Made Up Words and Strange Objects at the Intersection of Parallel Universes

The nonsense lists and made up words in *The Street* constitute a different kind of metonymic gap from the insertion of indigenous languages into African fiction written in English. They serve the same purpose however, and equally point to different knowledges and cultures that make up the identities of writers, like Bandele. This accounts for the wild, weird and unhinged words that scurry along *The Street* and draw attention to its paradoxically nomadic structure. Like the Undead, who ramble and rave, appearing and disappearing throughout, crazy words weave across the entire book, dictating its style and even its purpose. For example: "Trustafarians"; "Afro-Saxon" (ibid: 17); "Nowheresville" (ibid: 34); "spindling" (ibid: 125); "pauciloquence" (ibid: 136); "lactovegetarian activist" (ibid: 145); "bizarrerie" (ibid: 167); "omphaloskepsis, or the contemplation of one's navel as an aid to meditation" (ibid: 174); "oenomaniac" (ibid: 187); "absquatulated" (ibid: 195); "exercitation" (ibid: 202); "Black Blandiloquence" and "irrefragable claim" (ibid: 203); "parannoying" (ibid: 217); "diseconomies" (ibid: 225). In other words, Bandele does not include Yoruba in his novel; instead he makes up a strange and foreign language of his own. Much of the time, Bandele's crazed language stands, like metonymic gaps, unexplained to us readers. Occasionally, Bandele explains "flatting" as in: "The student was flat on her back and he was flat on her stomach"—i.e. beyond "flirting" (ibid: 38); or "oneiroscopist", which is "an interpreter of dreams" (ibid: 102); or "The call began and ended with the poignant and alliterative 'Phew! Foockin' fired,' the first word being onomatopoeic for 'you're' when uttered in phury" (ibid: 204).

These feverish, strange words in *The Street* point to the existence of unknown worlds, and paradoxically, in their blankness, attempt to engender com-

munication. Nehushta, in attempting to break the ice with Dada, speaks with "each word tripping out fast on the heels of the last, as if fleeing from a house on fire, with no perceivable pauses between thoughts or sentences, no rhythm to the rhyme":

> … if we extrapolate from Hempel's paradox that a purple crow is a confirming instance of the hypothesis that all crows are black means I think and you best know that I'm congenitally immune to Meningitis Poliomyelitis Cirrhosis Alzheimer's Anaemia Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease pleuro-Pneumonia Parkinson's Heart diseases Yellow Fever Leukaemia Tuberculosis Repetitive Strain Disorders Restless Legs Syndrome Stiff man Syndrome and, yes, you guessed it, the common flu. (ibid: 170)

The purpose of metonymic gaps is to point to different worlds, cultures and knowledge bases. In that sense, they enable the co-existence of these different worlds. This is the role played by the made up word "snark" in Lewis Carroll's long poem, "The Hunting of the Snark", as analysed by Deleuze. In that poem there are the different worlds of the literal and the figurative. The motley crew that sets out to hunt this enigmatic Snark use any means at hand, taken from both spiritual and concrete dimensions, placed together in a metonymy of non-sequiturs:

> They sought it with thimbles, they sought it with care;
> They pursued it with forks and hope;
> They threatened its life with a railway-share;
> They charmed it with smiles and soap. (Carroll 1992: 250)

The world of solid, mundane objects – thimbles, forks, soap—is placed together with the more abstract, imponderable world of care, hope and happiness. What Deleuze foregrounds is a paradox, which is the organising principle in the midst of Carroll's apparent chaos: the "two dimensions converge only in an esoteric word … . The strange word 'Snark' is the frontier which is stretched as it is drawn by both series" (Deleuze 1990: 26). This is the paradox of the word "Snark"; it is a word with no fixed meaning and "yet opposed to the absence of meaning" (Bogue 1989: 75). The Deleuzian sense of structure, then, is again paradoxically, "structured chaos or chaos-structure: a nomadic distribution of singular points" (ibid: 77). That is to say, something blank, or gibberish or apparently meaningless like the word "Snark" draws attention to the existence of many realities which cannot be contained by the law, by symbols and meanings of dominant discourse. In fact, "Snark" may be one of Deleuze and Guattari's "pass-words" that

operate "beneath order-words" (1987: 110). Order-words are the language that is acquired with subjectivity—the language that ensures the constitution of good citizens as subjects. This process is organic to the human psyche and therefore the question is, "not how to elude the order-word but how to elude the death sentence it envelops, how to develop its power of escape" (ibid: 110). This power consists in the hunt for the pass-word beneath the order-word—a liberating, oppositional, nonsense word like "Snark".

There may not be one powerful "Snark" word in Bandele, but all of those strange, made up words and lists act as portals into the multiple worlds of the novel. And no-one demonstrates the concrete power of words, which populate Brixton in their own right, more than an enigmatic character called Mr Bill; Bandele's alter ego in the novel and who is himself a character living on the street. It is he who is the conduit, not only for all the other characters, but also for the other paradoxical elements we have been outlining. He is one of the Undead, who peddles in strange words, rhymes, lists and metonymies:

> Mr Bill, a peripatetic idiot savant who was to be found every weekday during the morning rush hour standing outside the tube station, touching commuters for money by enacting one or more of his specialities, which included reciting and offering the meanings, origins, synonyms, antonyms and, where applicable, usage and abusage of every single word under the letter H in the Oxford English Dictionary. (Bandele 1999: 181)

Why the letter H? Why not? Mr Bill and Bandele and, no doubt, Lewis Carroll, would reply. "When asked … why he made all the members of the crew [in "Hunting the Snark"] have occupations beginning with B, [Carroll] replied, 'Why not?'" (Stern 1982: 142). In fact, Mr Bill turns words into concrete, solid objects in order to harness and lasso language itself—"in the summer he sold words for a living" (Bandele 1999: 181). The average price for a word is ten pence and one man bought a whole paragraph as a birthday gift for his wife (ibid). Bandele emphasises the solidness of words. Mr Bill mends words that become damaged, such as the one that had "suffered from a fractured syllable" which he repairs "with a needle and thread" (ibid: 182). He even raids rubbish bins "for stray, homeless or discarded words" (ibid). One time, he bought words cheaply from a "second-hand words seller" because they had been damaged by rain and "he laid them out in the sun to dry" (ibid: 183). Mr Bill is the interpreter between this world and another one, along the lines of the different, parallel universes that the novel inhabits. Potentially, this other world is a scary place, an abyss, a meaninglessness, whose threat always lurks beneath the fun and language games. Mr Bill "gifted" words with wings:

> and sent them flying into the great void beyond sound or silence, where all words uttered in the universe, and in all languages on the planet, are stored for all time, or forgotten for ever. (ibid: 182)

There is also the possibility, however, that the chaos is not anchored, that the organising principle, the paradoxical entity, does not enable the co-existence of multiple, different planets and universes. Migrant writers confront the threat of the abyss, even as they search for the healing words and the bridges and connections between their multiple languages and pasts.

"Strange Interfering Objects" and the Abyss

Like these solid, living words, there are also "strange interfering objects" (Deleuze 1990: 39) that may facilitate the crossover between cultures, worlds and dimensions. Ossie, remember, one fateful night, bumped his head on "a sharp object (which, on investigation, turn out to be a corkscrew)" (Bandele 1999: 70). This corkscrew echoes Carrol in *Through the Looking-Glass*:

> "And what are '*toves*'?"
> "Well, '*toves*' are something like badgers—they're something like lizards—and they're something like corkscrews". (1998:187)

Toves, like Snarks and corkscrews, open up wonderland worlds existing just on the other side of the mirror. The corkscrew is the portal, ushering Ossie into another world. However, he charts these worlds at his peril, spending fifteen years in a coma and dying soon after he comes out of it. In other words, migrants who become unanchored from the solid daily realities of material life at home may lose their sense of identity and place in the world. Lewis Carroll, too, pointed to this awful, obliterating possibility, when the hunt for the Snark backfires and instead of the discovery of a Snark, the enabling pass-word, there is annihilation—it is the dreaded Boojum that is sighted. The Boojum is the ultimate nightmare of Carroll's "agony in eight fits", subtitle of his poem:

> "For, although common Snarks do no manner of harm,
> Yet, I feel it my duty to say,
> Some are Boojums". (1992: 239)

The terrified baker on the expedition faints on hearing this and is "roused" with muffins, ice and "with jam and judicious advice" (ibid: 239) along the lines of the varied dimensions that characterise this poem. He is utterly petrified that,

instead of a Snark, a Boojum will indeed surface from the deeps and "I shall softly and suddenly vanish away" (ibid: 241). A Boojum? Boogey man and a jumble? Peek-a-boo—a fright and a mess? Whatever it is, it is bad and the opposite of "finding yourself", asserting an identity and re-locating in the new place. The hybridity here is no happy border space of mixed parts syncretising into something new. It is the warning that Deleuze and Guattari proffer, that in the attempt to escape the death sentence of the order-word, in the hunt for the password, for the strange, esoteric object, one may fall "into a black hole" (1987: 110). This is the great danger facing 'Biodun, who loses his name and becomes merely "the Heckler", spouting mounds of words from his mouth and having to be buried in order to be re-born. Objects, material realities—from home, from the past, from the desires of the present—are never where migrants look for them and reality shifts between what they have and what they have left behind. And so, observes Bandele sadly in *The Street*:

> In the land of dreams, objects disappeared the moment you looked away. They travelled backwards and forwards in time and space, to part-time duties in distant planets or brief assignations in parallel universes. They reappeared just as soon as you turned round or opened your eyes to implicate them in your existence. (1999: 63)

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to these strange objects as having their counterparts in the imagined world of desire, a formulation which resonates powerfully with the different universes characterising Biyi Bandele's novel. Desire, in lacking its object, "produces an imaginary object that functions as a double of reality, as though there were a 'dreamed-of object behind every real object'" (1983: 25). In other words, "'the world acquires as its double some other sort of world'" a world in which the missing object of desire is imagined (ibid: 26).[2] So, too, migrants like Bandele live in a world of partial, fragmented objects, with lives in other planets and universes populated with objects which disappear the moment you look away. There are these strange objects having their counterparts in the imagined world of desire, a world that migrants have departed and re-formulated through the prism of nostalgic memory. Desire, in lacking its object, by definition, "produces an imaginary object that functions as a double of reality, as though there were a 'dreamed-of object behind every real object'" (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 25). In other words, "'the world acquires as its double some other sort of world'" a world in which the missing object of desire is imagined (ibid: 26).[3] The point about the missing object of desire is precisely that it is absent. This virtual object, as Deleuze puts it later in his *Difference and Repetition*, "is where it is only on condition that it is not where it should be" (1996: 26). The elusive object of desire is always just out of reach,

always somewhere else. It is Alice's Looking-Glass world in which "'the egg seems to get further away the more I walk towards it'" (Carroll 1998: 180).

What we have seen is that Bandele is building the connections between England and Nigeria, intellectuals and hobos; and between the languages and cultures of oral stories from West Africa and European tales, classics from Victorian England. The binaries are split apart before they hit the ground. I have been suggesting that all these lists and rhymes, narrators and languages, flying words and strange objects, constitute a politics of resistance to the hegemony of one world, or the hierarchy of one language. It is not a politics of nationalism or resistance to the particular corruptions of the Nigeria from which Bandele has migrated. Bandele, we saw, deviates from Achebe's tradition of the writer as teacher. How do the politics of *The Street*, however, relate to these questions of national healing into which Bandele's earlier fiction was inserted?

"Y'ave to Put Your Line on the Head": The Politics of the Surface

There is a profound difference between *The Street* on the one hand, and *The Sympathetic Undertaker And Other Dreams*, and *The Man Who Came In From The Back Of Beyond* on the other. Bandele's earlier novels, for all their nascent experimentation, were unambiguously uncompromising political critiques of the corruption and greed, brutality and monstrousness of the new power elite of Nigeria. While this critique lurks around the edges of *The Street*, it remains at the surface, enveloped in rhymes and irreverences, in nonsense and language games. Is it the case that Bandele has turned his back on making a serious intervention regarding the atrocities and need for political action and struggle? Or, is he experimenting in this novel with what Deleuze, in *The Logic of Sense*, refers to as the significance of the site of the surface—"a dismissal of depth, a display of events at the surface, and a deployment of language along this limit" (1990: 9)? Parallel universes, remember, are parallel and equal rather than hierarchical; they are the contiguity of metonymy, rather than the depth of metaphor. Deleuze suggests that Alice's entry into the Looking-Glass world is "her climb to the surface, her disavowal of false depth and her discovery that everything happens at the border" (ibid: 9) and, instead of traversing depths, Alice "releases her incorporeal double" (ibid: 10). Or, as Michael Holquist puts it in reference to "The Hunting of the Snark", Carroll was resisting "attempts of readers … to turn it into an allegory" (1969: 147). Nonsense writing unravels dominant cultural metaphors. For example, "a dark, wet setting" invariably lends itself to symbolise the Freudian womb, to say nothing of the cultural abundance of phallic symbols. A rejection of the depth of figurative associations, by way of the literal, funny meaningless surface, facilitates something new (Holquist 1969: 154).

The site of the surface is a highly suggestive one for African migrant writers

seeking to become part of the daily round of people and places and solid things in a new country—one, moreover, that had colonized them. They are weary of the tendentiousness of some of their forebears and wish to play, to blend and mingle in their new surroundings. There appears to be a coincidence of purpose between this postcolonial cultural struggle and the battle that Deleuze—and later with Guattari—wages against the tyranny of what they termed "psychoanalysis today" with its aspirations to be "a master of … metaphor" and they throw out the challenge of "the opposite dream" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 27).

Even when Bandele tackles the old, serious issues regarding the betrayal of the Nigerian national dream, as in the mock funeral of 'Biodun, the portrayal is flippant and funny. The historical and political realties are disguised and masked. There is the gross and absurdly wealthy Mabogunje part of the family. Dada's uncle is satirically referred to as "Chief Prince Bode Mabogunje M.Sc. Ph.D MLL. MQD. OFR (Order of the Federal Republic)" (Bandele 1999: 133). Uncle Bode, for short, had been in the Nigerian government, "during which time he managed, through sheer prestidigitation with public money, to acquire two houses in Hampstead, a golf course near Inverness, a holiday home in Provence and various businesses of questionable worth in North America" (ibid: 133). There is no torture, rape and brutality, but rather metonymic lists of pompous, fake titles and made up words. Uncle Bode, for obvious reasons, has been living in exile in England on his ill-gotten gains and so his son, Dapo, who lives off his father, is a horrible amalgam of Nigerian corruption, Cockney babble and American affectation. This renders his speech apparently exhorting political involvement in Nigeria: "Y'know y'have t'get actively involved in the oppositional struggle, so t'speak" (ibid: 138), and:

> Y'can't joost sit there and stand. Y' *'ave to put your line on the head* …y'know wha' am sayin'? You can't have your cake and swallow it, y'dig wha' am sayin', Dad? Y'get me though?'. (ibid: 139, my emphasis)

The familiar topsy-turvy of sitting and standing, and the head being where the line gets put instead of the other way round, renders Dapo hilarious at best and grotesque at worst, but not very dangerous or scary. The corruption is, in fact, portrayed in the by now, familiar language of word games and nonsense. For example, Uncle Dada had awarded a building contract to one of his mates, whose sub-contractor had omitted to install a lift in a twenty-two storey building. This man disappears, apparently imploding "from the face of the earth, turning into a kite on a string, or the echo of a fart, in some place far from Earth, pausing in Lagos only long enough to collect a substantial down-payment on the contract" (ibid: 133–134). This crook floats to another planet—a puff of badly smelling air or a kite on a string. Even Brixton's "Undead", those street wanderers, mad people, homeless seers, are described not in hell, not in the depths,

but—like the kite or the fart—they float just above the surface of the novel and the street of its setting: "this band of nameless vagrants that drifted like flotsam on the sporadically turbulent streets of Brixton" (ibid: 183). Note flotsam—the debris that floats on the surface. Right from the start, "the walking wounded" are described as a "*floating* cast" (ibid: 11, my emphasis).

The lodestone of the novel rests with the attempt to juggle parallel universes and multiple, splintered and changing identities—Mbembe's "simultaneous multiplicities" (ibid: 145) and Garuba's animist materialism (ibid: 280)—with which we began this discussion and which echo Bandele's many worlds and languages, spoken, shouted, recited and prayed in, on the street in Brixton. In other words, what this novel, at its best, is all about is the hunt for the elusive Snark: the complex, unnameable identity in the shifting scene of a Nigerian living in Brixton, buying his soap and his computer in London where he writes about the daily grind, within a Nigerian world view. In this way, Bandele aligns himself to a tradition and a style of writing about London that Sukhdev Sandhu has highlighted in relation to the fiction of both Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi:

> To map the city, *The Satanic Verses* suggests, one must first dispense with real maps. Kureishi made the same point in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. Could it be that palimpsests and psychogeographies, ghost-hunting, randomness, chains of association and misbegotten folklore are more effective ways of accessing 'London' than the sequential codification of the *A to Z*? (Sandhu 2004: 369)

The key to the politics of *The Street* relates, as is to be expected in the case of these migrant writers, to issues of subjectivity and the formation of identities, which are invariably elusive, kinetic, paradoxical and unpredictable. The term Deleuze uses here, and later with Guattari, is "becoming", rather than "being" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 232). Deleuze appreciates *Alice* and *Through the Looking-Glass* because they enact Alice's "simultaneity of a becoming" (1990: 1). What "becoming" involves is:

> to move and to pull in both directions at once: Alice does not grow without shrinking and vice versa. Good sense affirms that in all things there is a determinable sense or directions … but paradox is the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time. (1990: 1)

This paradox explains the reversals that dictate Alice's struggles over her identity: "the reversal of becoming larger and becoming smaller—'which way, which way?' asks Alice, sensing that it is always in both directions at the same time"

(ibid: 3). Deleuze enlarges: there is "the reversal of cause and effect: to be punished before having committed a fault, to cry before having pricked oneself, to serve before having divided up the servings" (ibid: 3). That is to say, Alice, in *Through the Looking-Glass*, finds cutting the plum cake impossible. "'You don't know how to manage Looking-glass cakes,' the Unicorn remarked. 'Hand it round first, and cut it afterwards'" (Carroll 1998: 203). Likewise, in *The Street*, cause and effect are also bamboozled:

> 'I'm afraid, sir, but the chef has just informed me that we have in fact run out of wine.' 'In that case,' Dada said, 'I'll have a bottle of the house red.'
> 'Right away, Sir,' the waiter said … (Bandele 1999: 6)

The Brixton riff raff are "paralysed with guilt for sins not yet committed" (ibid: 11). These multiple directions and dimensions, worlds and identities are what Carroll, Deleuze and Bandele capitalize upon in their radical explorations, not only of who we are, but how we relentlessly metamorphose. What is crucial to note about these different dimensions in Bandele or Carroll, is that they are parallel, simultaneous and equal, rather than polarities, binaries or hierarchies. Individually, each is not, thus, bigger or smaller than the other; it is not pulled into a maelstrom of dialectical gravity that will give rise to a synthesis. It is both concrete and abstract, here and now and also elsewhere; it is flesh and also spirit. It is hope, thimbles, soap and smiles.

The menacing question, however, is whether the language of the search for those worlds is mere babble and chaos, the abyss on whose edges Bandele's protagonist teeters and dances. The Brixton Undead are mad, delusional and poverty stricken. The last two paragraphs of the novel sum up many of its devices and deliberations.

> As Dada stepped out the front door and on to the street, and headed for the Brixtonioso, an alien thought began to take shape in his mind. It assumed the form of an invisible weight pulling him down and crushing him at the same time. He decided, on a whim, to flee from his mind. He soared into the night, like a scream rising, and up to the stars.
> Then he changed his mind – into a pair of eyes. They stared dimly at him, as he walked along the street. (Bandele 1999: 292)

The Brixtonioso is clearly a fusion food place—perhaps Italian mixed with the particular British that is Brixton—that is to say, down-to-earth fare. It is a Snark, a hybrid word signifying a composite restaurant, but also the mixed, hybrid

identities populating an increasingly globalized world. An alien thought becomes a solid, visceral weight; his mind becomes a place, from which one may, literally, rather than figuratively, flee. The stars become another dimension, which is accessible to the earth. The metaphorical changing of the mind becomes transformed into the literal transformation from mind to eyes, eyes that signify the fragmented self, given that they separate from the body and scrutinise it. The dimness of the gaze upon himself is away from plumbing the depths of his mind, onto watching the surface of his walking along the street—among the Undead, the shops and markets, the hecklers and preachers. Is it the dreaded Boojum which is sighted?

> They hunted till darkness came on, but they found
> Not a button, or feather, or mark,
> By which they could tell that they stood on the ground
> Where the Baker had met with the Snark. (Carroll 1992: 252)

The signs are ominous. There is no anchoring object to bridge the threat – no button or feather, no gun, anvil or hoe. We are not, therefore, surprised by the sad outcome:

> In the midst of the word he was trying to say
> In the midst of his laughter and glee,
> He had softly and suddenly vanished away —
> For the Snark *was* a Boojum, you see. (Carroll 1992: 252)

However, the promise of personal, cultural and political regeneration is worth the risk: "It suffices that we dissipate ourselves a little, that we be able to be at the surface, that we stretch our skin like a drum, in order that the 'great politics' begin" (Deleuze 1990: 72). The great politics have indeed begun. I think that *The Street* is a profoundly political project, if different from the politics of Bandele's earlier novels. By perplexing our understanding, by being familiar and also strange, by sounding rather than signifying, by being visceral rather than carrying meaning, esoteric words and virtual objects allow a contestation of received reality, which is shot through with predictable meanings and associations. *The Street* is an original, experimental novel, which invites the possibility of porousness in the boundaries between history and magic, living and dead, animate and inanimate. Always, of course, there is the risk of dissolution of sanity, sense and identity—the black hole, rather than the bright new star. And yet, the endeavour is inspirational and interesting, a cultural politics with which Bandele has opened up new vistas. The writing sights a Snark, even as that strange, new creature carries the shadow of its alter ego, the dreaded threat of obliteration of the Boojum.

It is, finally, worth ending this article optimistically, however, with one of Mr Bill's words. It had suffered a broken wrist and had "healed into a fist unable to open". It had to pass through another healing, rendering it less militant and didactic, more playful and less serious. Once Mr Bill had nursed it, "it shook hands and opened doors" (Bandele 1999: 183). English words and stories have imprisoned and oppressed some people, but once healed and warmed, perhaps still stuttering from the aftershock of their wounds and their bitterness, they may open doors and enable migrant writers and their readers to fly on their wings. These solid words, whose "average price ... is ten pence" (ibid: 181), flying between Lagos and London, the worlds of the living and the dead, are both literal, solid objects and spirits on whose wings we may also fly, if we listen to them carefully enough.

Notes

1 For the original, see Carroll 1998: 63.

2 They are quoting Clément Rosset, 1970. *Logique du pire* .Paris: Presses Universitaries de France, p.37.

3 Ibid.

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