Arguing with the Coloniser:
Linguistic Strategies in John Jacob Thomas's Froudacity (1889)

1. Introduction

In the West Indies there is indefinite wealth waiting to be developed by intelligence and capital; and men with such resources, both English and American, might be tempted still to settle there, and lead the blacks along with them into more settled manners and higher forms of civilisation. But the future of the blacks, and our own influence over them for good, depend on their being protected from themselves and from the schemers who would take advantage of them. […] As it has been in Hayti, so it must be in Trinidad if the English leave the blacks to be their own masters. […] [T]he keener-witted Trinidad blacks are watching as eagerly as we do the development of the Irish problem. They see the identity of the situation. (Froude 1888, 79; 86; 87)

Anyhow, Mr. Froude's history of the Emancipation may here be amended for him by a reminder that, in the British Colonies, it was not Whites as masters, and Blacks as slaves, who were affected by that momentous measure. In fact, 1838 found in the British Colonies very nearly as many Negro and Mulatto slave-owners as there were white. Well then, these black and yellow planters received their quota, it may be presumed, of the £20,000,000 sterling indemnity. They were part and parcel of the proprietary body in the Colonies, and had to meet the crisis like the rest. They were very wealthy, some of these Ethiopic accomplices of the oppressors of their own race. Their sons and daughters were sent across the Atlantic for a European education. These young folk returned to their various native Colonies as lawyers and doctors. Many of them were also wealthy planters. The daughters, of course, became in time the mothers of the new generation of prominent inhabitants. (Thomas [1889] 2006, 45)

In 1889, John Jacob Thomas, the Trinidadian teacher and administrator, Creole linguist and journalist (1840-1889), went to London to rework his locally published articles on James Anthony Froude's The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses (1888) into a book for a mainly metropolitan readership. In this travelogue, Froude, the conservative historian, follower and biographer of Thomas Carlyle, functionalises his observations about the British West Indies after abolition to vent his discontent with what he perceives as Britain's neglect of its colonial responsibilities. With his political pamphlet Froudacity: West Indian Fables by James Anthony Froude. Explained by J.J. Thomas (1889), Thomas repudiates the racist stereotypes of the dominant colonial discourse by putting specific Trinidadian and general West Indian concerns first. As a member of the developing black and brown professional middle class, he identifies with the desire for more local political participation in the administration of the colony voiced mainly by the white middle-class of Trinidad. Reprinted in 1969 by the (then newly founded) Caribbean-British publisher New Beacon Books, Thomas's "spirited rebuttal" of Froude has been singled out by Bill
Schwarz in 2003 as “the formative text of black West Indian self-determination” (Schwarz 2003, 4).¹

Froude and Thomas published in what Faith Smith calls “a post-post period” (Smith 2011, 198): after Spanish rule and French (Caribbean) settlement, Trinidad had been taken by the British in 1797 and made a crown colony in 1802; the enslaved had been freed in 1834/38; since 1839 indentured labourers from India were being brought in to replace the African Caribbeans as cheap labour on the large sugar plantations. From the metropolitan perspective, crown rule ostensibly prevented the economically dominant planters from ruling in their own interests disregarding those of the black and brown sections of the population. By the 1880s, however, several governors (not only in Trinidad but also in Jamaica) had proved incapable of negotiating the increasingly conflicting interests between the unpropertied and the propertied classes as well as the black and brown commercial and professional middle classes. The latter subsequently fought to reform the system “to provide for a greater degree of local participation and control in government” (Benn 1987, 59). With the exception of Barbados, which had kept its Assembly, the majority of the dispossessed black and brown West Indians, however, remained disenfranchised. In Britain, the Third Reform Act of 1884 had extended the franchise to ever larger sections of the male lower middle classes but was far from making it universal as demanded by the Chartists. Against the background of the Irish struggle for Home Rule and Gladstone’s First Home Rule Bill in 1886 Froude articulates the fears of the conservative British establishment with regard to the West Indian colonies and what he understood as an undue campaign for black suffrage. In The English in the West Indies he advocates modernisation through attracting foreign and particularly American capital (Froude 1888, 222) and improved crown rule by “the English race in their special capacity of leaders and governors of men” (87). He aims at stable conditions for investors in an island which otherwise merely becomes “a community of negro freeholders” engaged in non-profit subsistence farming (85).²

Coming to it from a different regional, social and political angle, Thomas grounds his hopes for the future in a particular reading of Trinidad’s past. From the beginning, Thomas challenges Froude’s reductive “White-master and Black-slave theory” (Thomas [1889] 2006, 6) by pointing out that black and brown people “constituted a very considerable proportion of the slave-holding section of those communities” (7). In the long-standing reception of Thomas’s text in political studies, this claim has been read as an expression of his “strong humanism:” “Thomas overstated the class-economic basis of slave-ownership and understated the race dimension” (R. Lewis

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¹ The Website of the London-based George Padmore Institute, which still houses New Beacon Books and until 2016 housed the New Beacon Bookshop, advertises the reprints of both Froudacity and The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar ([1869] 1969) to a world-wide audience.

² Of the three major late 19th-century travel writers on the Caribbean, Trollope, Kingsley and Froude, only the Christian socialist Charles Kingsley promoted the peasantry (Ledgister 2010, 126). Despite his racist views on African Caribbeans, Kingsley met with Thomas in Trinidad (118) and helped him when Thomas visited Britain in 1873 (Wood 1969, 15).
1990, 52). But why should he want to do so? What induced him to inscribe the ascendant African Caribbeans into the slave-owning class, thus neglecting the impoverished majority of them? Why is it important to him to point out African Caribbean wealth and the subsequent cultural and social capital? Bridget Brereton, who pioneered the historiographic appreciation of Thomas after Caribbean independence, suggests that "he seems to be out of touch with reality" (Brereton 1977, 32) and asks: "Did he believe what he wrote, or was he essentially making a political case for Reform?" (35).

Until today, historians, political scientists and literary scholars have been preoccupied with Thomas's work but have failed to comment on the conspicuous linguistic aspects which shall therefore function as my entry-point. I propose that John Jacob Thomas employs several intertwined argumentative strategies in his pamphlet to negotiate a specifically Caribbean understanding of the colony. On the political level, the volume opposes Froude by pointing to the economic achievements of African Caribbeans before and after emancipation and draws attention to the formation of a local brown and black middle class as its proof. Discursively, he repudiates racism but leaves the existing relations of private property and class undisputed. Rather than argue for black and brown landownership as the basis of future prosperity (cf. R. Lewis 1990, 56), Thomas relies on middle-class liberal ideology with its belief in the power of the (male) individual – independent of skin colour – to better himself through work, education, and the Christian faith. On the generic level, he changes the loquacious travelogue for the pointed pamphlet combined with elements of the analytical treatise structured along regional and historical, political and sociological concerns. Arguing with the coloniser, Thomas transgresses the boundaries of speech communities geographically and socially. He inserts himself into metropolitan middle-class political discourse to strengthen the anti-racist element within liberalism by a paradoxical strategy. On the linguistic level, he parries Froude's racist excess with stylistic excess emulating Thomas Carlyle's semantic and syntactic extravagance. On the one hand, these elements bespeak the heroic struggle of the African Caribbean writer against the intellectually and politically stifling effects of racism. On the other, Thomas's style endows his text with a utopian quality reaching beyond what can be said under the liberal agenda the text proposes on the political level.

2. The Reception of Froudacity: The Issue of Language

Thomas's pamphlet was well reviewed in British newspapers catering to a large social spectrum of readers, from the lower middle-class Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper with its mass circulation and radical bent, via the liberal Glasgow Herald to the elitist but liberal London Pall Mall Gazette, to name but three. The reviews often serve as an obituary as Thomas had died immediately after the publication of Froudacity leaving the planned reworking of Creole Grammar (first published in 1869) undone. Thus the Daily News, a reform-oriented and pro-Irish Home Rule newspaper, writes on 24 October 1889: "The recent death of Mr. J.J. Thomas, the author of Froudacity: West Indian Fables by James Anthony Froude. Explained by J.J. Thomas' [...] gives a
melancholy interest to this, his last work. Mr. Thomas was a West Indian negro, and an ardent champion of his race.” The Graphic, a mass circulation weekly with a special interest in fine arts (cf. Brake and Demoor 2009, s.v. ‘Graphic’), recommends Thomas’s book as “well worth reading, not only for its own sake (and it does prove its point), but also as being the work of one of those whom Carlyle, the Apostle of Mr. Froude’s ‘Gospel of Force,’ scoffed at under the provoking title of ‘Quashee’” (The Graphic 12 October 1889, 447). While most reviewers stress the fact that Thomas was an educated black and “a gentleman of colour” (The Pall Mall Gazette 19 October 1889, 3) only one comments explicitly on Thomas’s idiosyncratic style which another one simply calls “powerful language” (The Graphic 12 October 1889, 447). Thus, the Glasgow Herald writes:

Mr Thomas’s book would have been a more effective reply to Mr Froude’s “Bow of Ulysses” if its tone had been less violent and its English less vicious. It must, however, be admitted that any intelligent black man could hardly be expected to accept quietly Mr Froude’s somewhat partisan pictures of West Indian affairs and his patronising schemes of political and social reform. […] It is to be hoped that the negroes will use their political power when they get it with a little more moderation than their present champion does the language of controversy. (22 August 1889, 4)

To the reviewer, Thomas’s use of English produces a “vicious,” that is a “deliberately cruel or violent” effect, to use the Oxford English Dictionary’s modern paraphrase of the term. This, however, does not prevent him from approving of Thomas’s political agenda when he continues:

Mr Thomas has large hopes for the future of his race, and in prophetic vision sees a time when the negroes shall be the dominant people, when the “dominant cuticle” shall be black, and when Africa for the Africans will be the rallying cry of all true patriots. (Glasgow Herald 22 August 1889, 4)

Similarly, the reviewer of The Pall Mall Gazette claims that Thomas “will carry most English readers with him in his claim that negro rulers and politicians shall be fairly judged” (The Pall Mall Gazette 19 October 1889, 3). Given the liberal orientation of these publications, the praise for Thomas does not come as a surprise. Politically, he is in accordance with John Stuart Mill’s 1850 refutation of Thomas Carlyle’s racist “Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question” (1849, republished in 1853 with “nigger” instead of “negro” in the title). The argument between Carlyle, the eminent conservative, and Mill, the figure-head of mid-19th-century bourgeois liberalism, was intensified in the mid-1860s during the Governor Eyre Controversy. Representing opposing views on the affair, the two intellectuals led committees that lobbied both the public and the government in defence and in persecution of Edward John Eyre, the suspended governor of Jamaica who had cruelly suppressed the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865 (Hall 1992; Ledgister 2010). While Mills had died in 1873, the very year Thomas was elected a member of the London Philological Society to honour his linguistic achievements, Carlyle died only in 1881, six years before Thomas published Froudacity in London. Despite the dominance of aggressively racist views underpinning Britain’s imperial policy (with the Berlin conference of 1884/85
negotiating the "Scramble for Africa"), there existed a seemingly less racist counter-discourse within which Thomas positioned himself, based on his explicit regard for British liberalism (Brereton 1977, 36; Smith 2002, vii; 86). This move, however, was his undoing with Wilson Harris almost a hundred years later, when the Guyanese writer examined the local traditions to establish what could be used to re-create Caribbean literature as a national endeavour after independence (Harris 1970; Smith 2002, viii). In a brief summary of Thomas's 20th-century reception Faith Smith explains:

For Wilson Harris, who was impatient with modes of nationalist and postcolonial protest that celebrated vindication, Thomas and others shared the same ideological terrain as his Victorian interlocutors, and that kind of conservatism could only exacerbate a kind of stasis, instead of generating productive, imaginative solutions to our regional dilemmas. In such contexts, claiming the imperial as productive, as someone like Thomas did, could only be seen as old-fashioned and misguided. (Smith 2013, 1f.)

While Harris rejected Thomas, others appreciated and re-edited his works as important contributions to black thought in the on-going struggles for cultural decolonisation in the Caribbean and in Africa in the 1960s (James 1969; Wood 1969). In her essay "What is a West Indian?,” published in Bill Schwarz's West Indian Intellectuals in Britain, historian Catherine Hall assesses the late 19th-century significance of Froudacity from an early 21st-century point of view: it "provides one of the symbolic starting points for a new West Indian identity – one in which brown and black men, and it was mostly men, could claim collective rights as islanders, as diasporic Africans, as West Indians, and as Britons, citizens of the empire" (Hall 2003, 46). Consequently, Thomas has been extensively studied by historians (Brereton 1977; Campbell 1976), political scientists (Ledgister 2010; before him R. Lewis 1990) as well as by literary studies scholars (Cudjoe 1980, 298-306; Smith 2002; 2011; 2013; before them Gordon Rohlehr 1971).

Except for Harris, there are no overtly disapproving responses despite the contradictions the text displays. Although some scholars list problematic points (Brereton 1977, 32ff.), the majority avoids such outspoken political judgements as Gordon Lewis’s echoing Brereton’s:³ "[…] Thomas is no revolutionary. He takes the English connection for granted; he is no nationalist […] Nor is he an advocate of popular rule anywhere" (G. Lewis 1983, 314). The most recent example of such reserve is Faith Smith's comprehensive study Creole Recitations. John Jacob Thomas and Colonial Formation in the late Nineteenth-Century Caribbean (2002), which inspired several

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3 "Thomas rejected any idea of universal suffrage. Like all the other Trinidadian Reformers he assumed that the franchise would be limited to people with both education and property – to the ‘colonists’ or sometimes ‘colonizers.’ The phrase meant the respectable, educated, property-owning inhabitants whether black, brown or white, whether Creole or foreign-born, who identified with Trinidad and made it their home. The great mass of the population, African or Indian, were not ‘colonizers’ because they were neither respectable nor educated, nor property-owning” (Brereton 1977, 36).
review essays in *Small Axe* in 2011 and a follow-up by herself in *Anthurium* in 2013. In *Creole Recitations*, Faith Smith explores Thomas's writings "to get a clearer sense of how situations familiar to me in the twentieth century [...] might appear from the vantage point of the latter half of the nineteenth century" (2002, xiii). Concentrating on networks and connections, she questions the teleological narrative of Caribbean nationalism but nevertheless "facilitates a reading of Thomas as a protonationalist" (Cobham 2011, 174). Given her impressive expertise in the field, it is striking that she refrains from a clear research question or thesis statement but retells *Froudacity* with long quotes following the text's not immediately self-explanatory structure (Smith 2002, 158-172). She reads it as an effort "to spread knowledge of West Indian history" (158) that comes "out of a regional need for a history of slavery and emancipation, made more pressing by the plans for the celebration of the jubilee anniversary" (172). With regard to language, she follows Thomas's Othello-like understatement with which he ironically pays tribute to Froude's reputation as a writer of elegant prose: "Happily, a quarrel such as ours [...] cannot be finally or even approximately settled on the score of superior literary competency, whether of aggressor or defender" (Thomas [1889] 2006, 8). Mockingly, he rejects "undertaking a contest in artistic phrase-weaving" (ibid.) even though "our author is the bondslave of his own phrases" (11) preferring "artistic perfection of style" (ibid.) over verity. Using Thomas's words, Faith Smith claims for her study: "'literary competency' is not the issue here, and to judge Thomas's work solely on that 'purely artificial' score would be wrong since this text, indeed the whole body of his work, clearly indicates that this is not his priority" (Smith 2002, 160). It may not have been his acknowledged priority but it certainly was something that the successful philologist with an acclaimed publication on Trinidadian Creole to his credit was acutely aware of. Both the trope of irony and the denigrating metaphors of "phrase-weaving" and – even worse in the context of post-slavery – the "bondslave" suggest that he intends to take up Froude's language. It is the very tool in which to deliver the historical truth of post-emancipation West Indian society from an African Caribbean perspective to a speech community unfamiliar with it.

3. *Froudacity*: The Linguistic Meta-Argument

Applying Homi Bhabha's well-known concept of *mimicry* brings out the subversive function of Thomas's style. Thomas's defamiliarising exaggeration functions as Bhabha's "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 1984, 126f.; emphasis in

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4 "Thomas, although renowned for his attack on Froude and his codification of Trinidad French Creole, aspired to the cultural sophistication of the Victorian man of letters, not the 'authentic' relationship to the land and peasantry that a later generation of nationalist elites would profess" (Cobham 2011, 176).

5 In the council scene (Act 1, scene 3) Othello uses an inversion to draw attention to the very opposite of what he is saying: "Rude am I in my speech / And little blest with the soft phrase of peace" (Shakespeare 1997, 1.3.83-84) to then deliver a long monologue in polished English (1.3.129-171).
original),⁶ which disturbed Thomas’s reviewer in the Glasgow Herald. But why subvert the very liberalism on whose political culture Thomas depends to make his opinion public? Could this be a strategy to point to its limits or even its crisis in the colony?⁷ F.S.J. Ledgister has recently demonstrated "the limits of Victorian liberal views on racial equality" esp. in John Stuart Mill who, as an almost life-long employee of the East India Company, "had no objection to colonialism" (Ledgister 2010, 125). Rather, his "liberal imperialism" sees it "as promoting both material and moral development of the colonized" which then serves as the main criterion to evaluate colonial rule (ibid.). Similarly, literary critic Belinda Edmondson (drawing on Patrick Brantlinger) has highlighted the convergence between British conservatism and liberalism when it comes to race and colonialism as "imperial ideology could attach itself as easily to radical as to conservative attitudes" (Edmondson 1999, 26).

As an educated middle-class black, with responsible posts as teacher and administrator (cf. Campbell 1976), John Jacob Thomas was praised by the local coloured press (Brereton 1977, 26ff.; Smith 2002, 63ff.) as a prime example not only of the potential of blacks (as Mill would have it) but as its realisation. Instead of economic capital he wields the cultural capital⁸ that allows him to refute Froude’s racist claims with a vengeance: mastery of the English language, culture and rhetoric to an extent that enabled him to play with its conventions. The achievements he has to his credit are his printed articles and books with the outstanding Froudacity published at his life’s end. His power over language points to the richness of language itself and in its turn, to the symbolic wealth of the master linguist, on a par with white wielders of discursive power.⁹

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6 “The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha 1984, 129; original emphasis).

7 Discussing this issue the political scientist Rupert Lewis asked in 1990: "To what extent then was Thomas a nineteenth century liberal? He was undoubtedly influenced by 19th century [sic] liberal ideology and would have known the writings of John Stuart Mill. The influence of English liberalism on nineteenth century Caribbean intellectuals deserves some research. […] Thomas was influenced by English liberalism but he was not engaged in applying these ideas in a mechanical or Afro-Saxon way. He had absorbed the values underlying liberalism and would have been responding from the confidence of his knowledge of the potential of people of his race and of the new nationalities that had been formed" (R. Lewis 1990, 55; 56). Relying on David Theo Goldberg, the political scientist F.S.J. Ledgister has taken up Lewis’s demand and supplied a close reading of Froudacity with regard to this issue.

8 Faith Smith, too, uses Bourdieu in her discussion of Englishness (Smith 2002, 31ff.) and refers to Thomas’s “educational capital” (42) but does not specify it linguistically.

9 The connection between the linguist and the political writer becomes even more obvious with The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar (1869). It was written for an English audience on the French-based Creole spoken by (largely illiterate) African Trinidadians Thomas himself had first to learn along with the French against which he explains it. The study codifies an oral language and demonstrates Thomas’s identification with black culture. He adds an annotated collection of proverbs and sayings ‘to prove that the Africans are not the dolts and intellectual sucklings that some would have the world believe them.

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The title’s catchy neologism was not coined by Thomas himself, however, but by a white Caribbean critic of Froude. It combines the surname “Froude” with the noun “audacity” to bring out the presumptuousness of the English writer’s uninformed judgements on the Caribbean producing nothing but fables, falsehood and lies. On the first page of the preface to *Froudacity* Thomas puts Froude in place with a self-confident and politically alert claim to successful emancipation and subsequent African Caribbean achievement, a move which is designed to “effectually exorcise this negrophobic political hobgoblin” (Thomas [1889] 2006, 6). "Since Emancipation, the enormous strides made in self-advancement by the ex-slaves have only had the effect of provoking a resentful uneasiness in the bosoms of the ex-masters" (4). Thomas counters the goblin’s fearful fables by subjecting them to the intellectual rigour of a scholarly treatise informed by comprehensive historical, sociological and cultural knowledge. Quoting at length from him, Thomas takes Froude by his word only to turn him against himself (67; 69; 85). With relish, he exposes Froude’s logical inconsistencies, contradictions (17; 50ff.; 57; 59; 65; 67) and “audacious absurdities” (59).

In the following, I will analyse the central chapter “Social Revolution” with its complex and non-chronological representation of enslavement and emancipation. It demonstrates best the emotionally and politically most effective linguistic strategy of the text: *Froudacity* lampoons Froude by ventriloquizing Froude’s mentor Carlyle adopting the conservative sage’s idiosyncratic way of creating new words. Infuriated by “Mr. Froude and his fellow-apologists for slavery” (62), Thomas vents and contains his fury at the same time by transforming it into stylistic excess. This technique points to the constructed nature of all language and discourse and by ostentatiously referring to such a meta-level, the text’s richness opens up questions beyond speech and text. Who has access to education and the acquisition of such linguistic skills? Who is allowed to speak, and for whom? Alluding to Carlyle’s concept of “hero-worship,” Thomas rejects Froude’s “worship of the skin” (14) by excessive synony-
my. Bringing out Froude’s racist audacity by exaggeration, Thomas strings together German-style compound nouns such as “skin-superiority” (55), “skin-dominancy” (70), “colour-dominance” (71), “skin ascendency” (77), or, combined with pleonasm, “the miserable skin and race doctrine” (93). Moreover, to expose his opponent’s pro-slavery attitude, Thomas employs excessive antonomasia replacing Froude’s proper name by a host of derisive epithets such as “this conjuror-up of inconceivable fables” (6), “apostle of skin-worship” (58; similar 79), “our cynical defamer” (ibid.), “this prophet of evil” (ibid.), “our new instructor in Colonial ethics and politics” (55), “our political sportsman” (65) and “this suggester of extravagances” (68) who “is no respec
ter of persons” (82).13

These stylistic features produce the ironic distance Thomas needs to advance his own arguments against Froude’s “Negro repression campaign” (47) to expose the excessive cruelty of enslavement and the on-going post-emancipation discrimination against African Caribbeans (Amerindians and Indo-Caribbeans are not mentioned). To cater to his Caribbean readers, who had celebrated the jubilee anniversary of emancipation only a year before, in 1888, Thomas’s text endorses the romance mode as a “heroic narrative of struggle and redemption” (Goyal 2010, 13). Having established “what is real” for him in the British West Indies, he concludes on “what is possible” (ibid.). Thomas ends his pamphlet with utopian visions of “the African race” as one of the “prominent actors on the world’s stage” (86), of the West Indies as characterised by “intercommunion and intercomprehension […] intercourse and unity” concluding on the (rigorous Protestant) imperative “Work, Hope, and Wait!” (Thomas [1889] 2006, 260).

From the beginning, Thomas bases his argument against racism on the classical liberal appreciation of individual achievement and extends the claim to the African Caribbeans as a group (46). He employs the liberal discourse speaking of “self-advancement” (4; 21; 57)14 and of the “capital” the African Caribbeans can use on their way up (90) such as “money,” metonymically mentioned “brains,” and the “energy in their limbs” (57; also 86). Later, he dedicates a two-page chapter to “The Negro as a Worker” in order to counter the Carlylean accusation of laziness repeated by Froude (74f.) calling them “active improvers and embellishers of [West Indian] soil” (47) instead. This stylistically hyperbolic acknowledgment of black progress (also 66; 71), allows Thomas to envision a unified colonial “we” (55; 61) that includes

13 In addition, Thomas uses designations less emotionally charged but equally forcefully accusing Froude of “slander,” “defamation,” and “intentionally malicious ravings” (Thomas [1889] 2006, 29f.).

14 In the preface, Thomas thanks Charles Spencer Salmon, who had published a repudiation of Froude in 1888, whose work was “gratefully accepted by myself as an incentive to self-help” (Thomas [1889] 2006, 8).
West Indian-identified whites (66) as well as coloureds. Adopting derisive Carlylelese again, he sets this union apart from "that Anglo-West Indianism, or rather, Colonialism" (55) Froude champions, which denies the region's progress after emancipation. From here, the argument is increasingly dominated by romance in the sense of utopian desire, which shows in the use of excessive exaggeration on the level of content. Thus again language is used to point out the lack of capital, power, and education, which inspires this kind of utopian desire for something that is not (yet) available in neither material nor in symbolic terms.

In the service of this future vision, Thomas repeatedly resorts to euphemistic invocations of a harmonious multiracial society (for Trinidad under Governor Gordon 25; more generally 55ff.; 66) that is divided by social class and wealth rather than by race (71). Relying on parallelism, hypotaxis and, finally, synecdoche, Thomas writes:

[T]here has been wealth for hundreds of men of Ethiopic origin, and poverty for hundreds of men of Caucasian origin, and the reverse in both cases. We have, therefore, had hundreds of black as well as white men, who under providential dispensation, belonged to the class, rich men; while, on the other hand, we have had hundreds of white men who, under providential dispensation, belonged to the class, poor men. Similarly, in the composition of a free mixed community, we have hundreds of both races belonging to the class, competent and eligible; and hundreds of both races belonging to the class, incompetent and ineligible; to both of which classes all possible colours might belong. […] There is no government by reason merely of skins. (71)

For Thomas, all-powerful "providential dispensation" answers for the unequal distribution of property in West Indian society. But it is not the injustice of capitalist property relations with its domination of private property concentrated in the hands of the large planters and the concomitant power structures that provoke Thomas to "excess in both form and content" (Goyal 2010, 13). Rather, it is the racially prejudiced colonial policy, which Thomas marks out with his caustic synecdoche in the simple main clause at the end of the quotation. Thomas's strategy of repudiating Froude's binary racist opposition culminates in the existence of "Ethiopic accomplices of the oppressors of their own race" (Thomas [1889] 2006, 45; also 7; 59), that is, of black and coloured slave owners duly compensated after emancipation (59). Here, Thomas presents a euphemistic and patriarchal image of miscegenation during enslavement in order to highlight the role of mulattos as metaphorical "cement" for the region's social structure in the present and the future (88; also 90). More importantly, miscegenation produced the region's economically successful coloured professional middle-class (45; 93) that is claiming political participation (90) in the 1880s. Employing this strategy of ironic distancing again, Thomas seeks to draw the reader's attention away from miscegenation because to him "the blending of the races is not a burning question" (16). Rather, his concern is "social development" (ibid.) for African Caribbeans in the post-emancipation West Indies. But Thomas's hyperbolic language paradoxically betrays the exploitative white planter masculinity to which he subscribes and which all his irony cannot mask: "Love, too, sheer uncalculating love, impelled not a few Whites to enter the hymeneal state with the dusky captivators of their affections" (ibid.). They met "Ethiopic damsels, under the title of 'housekeeper,'
on whom they lavished a very plethora of caresses” (ibid.). The sociologically valid point, however, is ironically challenged by litotes, metonymy, and euphemistic antonomasia producing a stylistic excess, which underlines rather than covers up the embarrassing sexual directness of racialised gender relations “in those days” (ibid.).

4. Conclusion

Thomas's strategy of linguistic exaggeration serves three purposes: Firstly, it writes back to both the British colonialist traditions of aggressive conservative racism as embodied by Carlyle and his disciple Froude and the implicitly racist liberalism in the vein of John Stuart Mill. Secondly, Thomas skilfully appropriates Carlyle's idiosyncrasies to re-signify and re-situate them in the service of his Caribbean middle-class political agenda. Excessive synonymy and antonomasia function to create the ironic distance Thomas needs to advance his anti-racist argument. His generic hybrid of pamphlet and treatise asserts that British colonial administration needs to shed its racist attitudes and quit its racist policies. This is the precondition which would allow the Trinidadian colonials – white, black and brown – to develop a functioning polity of their own based on "intercommunion and intercomprehension […] intercourse and unity" (Thomas [1889] 2006, 94). With these neologisms, however, the text mobilises romantic excess to draw attention to the educational achievements of post-emancipation African Caribbeans and especially of their emergent professional middle class. Thomas's exceptional linguistic abilities which show in his playfully excessive language-use demonstrate the colonial disempowerment of the local black and brown middle class. As a self-confident representative of this very class, Thomas uses language on a meta-level to prove it worthy of colonial leadership. Thirdly and most interestingly, the text's hyperbolic representation of African Caribbean success produces a semantic surplus that subverts the very political claim Thomas advances on the content level of his pamphlet. The inherent subjunctive mood questions Thomas's explicit praise of liberal colonial society as based on private property independent of race. On the discursive level, Thomas effectively disposes of racial difference and discrimination. On the political level, however, his linguistic strategy exposes the limits of his egalitarian vision for a society, which equates social success with economic capital. Material success may be the aim for the black and brown middle-classes but it proves to be an elusive one. Thomas died a poor man whose London friends had to pool their resources to pay for his funeral.

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