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Then speech is not an impediment, a sort of brake on the wheel of intellect but like a second wheel running parallel with it on the same axle

Maria Fusco

This is an extract from my unpublished novella, *Sailor*. Set during the Blitz in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1941, it is narrated by the eponymous Sailor—a two-year-old vervet monkey, smuggled from Freetown by a merchant seaman as a Christmas present for his wife, Sailor’s adopted human parents “Mammy” and “Daddy”—written in first person Belfast dialect as an internal monologue. I am principal investigator of an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded academic project entitled “De-localising Dialect” which seeks to untether (and to test) dialect from geographical location; one of my key concerns with this ongoing project is to see if it’s possible, ethical, or even desirable to “score” dialect. As I was writing the text, I had a persistent idea that the monkey would already have a thick Belfast dialect in the Sierra Leonean jungle before he is trapped and taken to Northern Ireland: I want to question, therefore, what is a natural way to speak, and by implication for the reader, what is a natural way to read. By writing the text not only in dialect but in phonetic dialect, my method is one of deceleration. Firstly for myself as writer: I must teach myself how to write phonetically, off-the-peg solutions for this way of writing are not fit for purpose, I must use my own voice, my own dialect as an laborious editorial tool (many of us do not like the sound of our voice). Secondly for the reader: they must try to be patient, to agree not to immediately comprehend certain syntactic phrasing and specific dialect words, to read slowly. The title of this extract is borrowed from “On the Gradual Construction of Thoughts During Speech” by Heinrich von Kleist and translated by Michael Hamburger.

Me an Daddy takes ourselves oudda the house at the scrake of dawn, turned off our wee street until the Springfield Road. A tram made a stap til let more workers get on, the ones already inside all pointed an called out til me, their eyes near fell oudda their head so they did. Daddy lifted me right up off his sholder in both his hawns til give them a praper luck, but he houl me too tight roun the middle, an a noddie squeezed oudda me until the krib. That made the ones in the tram shout out even more loud, whoopin an cheerin like goodo. Daddy was nat one wee bit bathered, he put me back ondee his sholder, meself nouw wi one paw restin cross the tap of his head, holdin ontee his right ear, a loose grip but ready til grab on tight if ah needed til.

Daddy walked heavy douwn the road, ah felt the hammer of his boots on the pavement, each step jiggin up intee ma baddie. It was a clear mornin, so it was, wi no mizzle, an ah was ownee a wee bit hungry. There was plenty of folk out already, scrubbin their frontdewersteps or cleanin their windees, too busy wi their work til notice me up on ma Daddys sholder.

Shaps was openin their dewers for business. Rollin up their stripey red an white blinds was Burles, where Mammy goes til get her meat an eggs wi the ration book.

Ah jumped oer the counter in there one time til get at sumthin that smelled nice, the mawn bahine it grabbed me, held me douwn wi one hawn on his big woodblock coverd wi sticky bits, an held up a cleaver in his oer hawn like he was gonna chap ma head off. Mammy was screamin. Evrybaddie else was near laughin their own heads off.

Daddy went intee the caffy on the oer side of the road from the Burles.

Mornin Missus. Gimme two of them sausage rolls, a mug of tea, hardly no milk, plenty of shugar in it.

What in the name of God is that there?

The ould lady servin pointed at me wi the teaspoon she was houlin. Stringy bits of grey hair was hingin down oer her eyes where she hadnt tied her scarf on tight nough roun her head. She pushed the hair back wi the hawn that was houlin the teaspoon, one brown drip fell ondee her scarf.

Ach shure Missus thats Sailor, he's no bather so he's nat.

Way an chase. Its nat stayin in here so its nat.

He'll just here sit underneath the table, while ah ate those there sausage rolls.

Shure as hell its nat sittin underneath no table.

Ach.

Get it out oudda this here caffy nouw!

For Gods sake Missus. Well gimme them two sausage rolls anyway. Ahl take the tea outside so ah will.

Daddy dhrunk his tea stawnin in the street outside of the caffy, wi me sittin on the krib at the side of him. He ate thone sausage rolls in near two big bites, tearin off the corner of one of them an hawnin it til me. Daddy tuck ages til finish his tea, sipped it slow while he smoked his fegs. He kept shoutin intil the caffey, askin the ould lady for more shugar, she was ragin for she had til keep comin out til the street til put the shugar in his mug. She kept makin this scunderd chsuhhin noise thew her lips, that sounded like too much air was blowin oudda her. Evry time she did, ah just grinned up at her. There was the two of us stawnin outside the caffey. Ah hugged Daddys trouwser leg, nat cause ah was afeard ner nathin, but because ah wannad the folks passin by til know ah belonged wi him.

Wheniver Daddy was finished his tea, ah skipped back up his big baddie, houlin ontill his trouwsers an jackit, an leaped on his sholder agin. Walkin long, hardly nobaddie noticed me, for most were starin down at their feet, walkin fast on their way til work, for it was still early. Themens that did come up asked til have a pet of me, Daddy let them, an ah just sat

there still, nat even luckin at their faces. All of their hawns felt the same, coul, rough an tremblin. Daddy loves talkin til folk so he does, he'll stawn happy on the street all day, havin a yarn an smoke. Wheniver he's in the house but Daddy wants til sit quiet wi nobaddie annoyin him, he doesnt talk ner does he like Mammy talkin, ner me chuttrin, unless he's gat a dhrink in him, an then he's gebbin, singin an gigglin, eyes dancin in his head.

Walkin past the Royal Victoria ospital Daddy speeded up, near breakin his neck til get past it,

Christ sake. Will ye take a luck at all themens starin at the oul Black Marias buzzin up an down from the ospital? Evrybaddie loves their neighbor bein sick so they do, its as well folks have nathin better til be worryin bout.

The air smelled of burnin.

Tell ye what Sailor, the worlds upside down so it is.

There was sumthin bout thone ospital ah did nat like the luck of one wee bit. The buildin had hunderds an hunderds of wee windees but evry one of them was shut up tight, wi white tape crisscrossed oer the tap, or else bars oer the rest. Once we were well past the Royal, Daddy turnd left down Conway Street, an fallied it up til cross the Shankill. He talked light til himself walkin thew the wee terraced streets near underneath his breath,

Crimea.

Riga.

Paris.

Pernau.

Berlin.

Carman.

Daddy stapped, lifted me down an leaned on a lampost, wi me clamped tween his two ankles near the krib.

See the names of thone streets Sailor, well ahve been til near all of them places. The poor fuckin gathrups that lives in thone streets doesnt even know thens the names of anywhere but here.

Daddy lit up a Players, an smoked it, luckin up and down the street. Evry nouw an agin he spat on his fingers, bent down til rub the toe of his boot, an squeezed one of ma ears.

A youngstur bolted oudda the frontdewer of one of houses, a mawn fallyin her. She was skippin fast far in the front of him, one, two, three, four big jumps down the street, an wi each jump the cardboard bax hingin roun her neck knacked agin the horn buttons of her checked coat.

One, two, three, four big jumps cross the flegstones closer near Daddy, the youngstur clocked me, her mouth opened an she poked out a pink tongue.

One, two, three an on her last big jump the tap of the cardboard bax flies open, an here, this gasmask skitterd out until the krib! Ah spied two quare roun eyes rimmed white, like ma Mammys friend Therasas spectacles, an a red nose quivrin like it was smellin sumthin nice, the long black flap roun the back of the gasmask moved by itself in a sly way wheniver it landed soft on the pavement right at the side of me an Daddy. Ah clamberd until Daddys sholder sharpish. The mawn was a good bit bahine her, walkin awful slow, he stapped, planted his hawns intee his coat packits an shouted up the street angry,

For Gods sake, slow down daughtur dear, ahve nat gat the puff til keep up wi ye.

The wee gurl didnt turn roun til luck at her Da, just stared down at the gasmask, didnt go near til pick it up, an the gasmask just sits there, luckin up at the youngstur. A head fhull of nathin.

Thone gasmask put me in mind of one of them misrible craturs that was always wantin do hurt til sumthin smaller than itself. Theyd hing low in the branches, too heavy til move up the

tree, too lazy til walk on the flower below, just sittin there, waitin for food til come til them. There was this one, wi a big red slabbry nose jiggeld bout wheniver the cratur gat perturbed, wud take a notion sometime til lick its nose wi a slippry tongue in slow rough strokes. Disgustin so it was. The cratur sat still for near two weeks, ownee movin its tongue an its eyes, nathin else. Aftur the two weeks was up, well the next thing ah knew was the cratur was dead, bones scatterd clean cross the knatted farest flower.

The youngstur kneeled douwn on the flegstones til pick her gasmask up, she futterd, tryin til shove the slimy thing back intee the cardboard bax hingin agin her coat, but the it didnt wan til go back in. Daddy was stawnin at the side of the gasmask, her own Da had near caught her up, he said loud,

Come ere chile.

Wiout luckin up, the youngstur held up her hawn, an grabbed a houl of one of ma Daddys trouwser legs. Daddy made til move back, at same time the youngstur lucked up, an saw it wasnt her own Da's trouwser leg that she'd gadda a houl of. She started til make a bawl screamin. Wheniver her own Da finally made it oer, he leaned douwn slow wi one of his hawns pushin hard on his knee, he cud just bout manage til lift her up. The mawn rolled his eyes up til heaven, nodded twice at Daddy, an walked off douwn the street carryin the youngstur, wi the gasmask swingin from her shiny fist like a bannet.

Woodvale Park is nat that big but theres plenty of trees in it for climbin. Daddy tuck me here one time afore, nat long aftur ah first gat til Belfast. Ah mind thone time Daddy tied a length of rope roun ma neck in a clever knat that ah cudnt pick open, the rope rubbed ma neck near raw so it did.

There was nobaddie in the park, cept for two winos sittin very close tilgether in the banstan. One of the two of them had a brown cap pulled low til near cover the whole tap half

of his face, eyes an all, his plukey nose was the ownee thing showin. The oer one was a wee bit more tidy luckin, wi white hair flattind intee a centur partin. He had on a beige dexter that was too big for him an weighed douwn his sholders ford til they near met in front of his chest. It was him that come oer for a nosey,

For fecks sake, will ye spy the heck, heck of thone. Wee hairy basturd! Is it, is it yer own Mister?

Ah jumped douwn intee the grass til take a long poolie. Daddy lit a Players.

Aye shure it is indeed. Brought it back wi me from Freetown, that an two pound of shugar.

The two men was near killin themselves laughin at Daddys geg. Ma stream of poolie run hat thew the grass.

An like...

The mawn wearin the cap come douwn too from the banstan til examine me,

What d'ye be doin wi it squire? Does it do tricks like?

Nat at all.

Ye shud learn it, ye cud make a quare few bob oudda it. Aminah right Willie?

Willie nodded his head intil a blur.

Have ye nat saw the monkey douwn in Cornmarkit squire? Sits on the organ thone Rossi plays. Evry nouw an agin wheniver it suits us, me an Willie here tosses it a pennie weve heated up. Holy shite. Ye shud see the wee fecker jiggin wi the pennie in its paws. We near pish ourselves. Aminah right Willie?

The mawn turnd way from me, an glanced at Daddy sleakit from underneath the greesey peak of his cap. Lucked like the druth was settin in bahine his eyes.

Aye Roy, thones right. Quare geg so it is. Near pish ourselves, near, near pish ourselves so we do.

Willie pulled the belt on his dexter tighter an tighter wi each word, awful skinny underneath his coat. He plucked a near empty baddle of Powers oudda his packit, houl it out in the drection of Daddy,

Here Mister, will ye take a wee drap?

Roy thew Willie an angry luck, he licked the corner of his mouth where a long scrab started, trailin the whole way douwn his face til his neck, til it disappeared underneath his shirt callur. Daddy drapped his feg douwn intil the grass,

No thanks lads. Ahm alright so ahm. Wee bit early in the day for me.

Aye early for themens lucky nough til be feckin workin.

Me an Roys on nervous debility so we are.

Willie gimme thone here.

Roy sunk what was left of the Powers. He gripped the empty baddle in his right hawn, an leaned close intil Daddys face,

What d'ye say yer name was agin?

Daddy ner let on himself, he leaned douwn til pick me up oudda the grass but put his boot on ma tail, so ah give out a loud chudder til get him til lift it off.

Roy smirked douwn at me,

See Willie, thone wee hairy basturd knows what the fuck ahm talkin bout.

He hawnded the empty baddle back til Willie,

There's more monkeys in Belfast than there's good feckin honest people, shure arent monkeys are runnin the feckin place. Aminah right squire?

Willies mouth was drapped open like a youngsturs, a splatter of slabber on his chin catchin the sunlight, he held his hawn out near ma face, there was a quare bad smell of his dexter sleeve,

Is its hair soft?

Daddy buried me inside his jackit, way from Willies hawn,

Right ahm way on here nouw lads.

Roy wasnt movin oudda Daddys way,

Cud ye spare a couple of fegs squire?

Daddy give him a cartin of Players from his inside packit,

Here lads, near a fhull pagit left, yousons can have the rest of them.

Daddy went way quick from the two of them, ah duked up oer his sholder til see Roy tearin open the cartin an countin houw many fegs was in it. Willies eyes danced in his head wi delight, Roys jaw went tight.

Daddy was walkin awful brisk, ah near fell off. He spat ontill the krib,

Shure as hell if ah didnt need a dhrink afore, ah need a dhrink nouw.

Bio:

Maria Fusco is a Northern Irish postdisciplinary writer. Her work is award-winning and is translated into twelve languages. She is founder of *The Happy Hypocrite*, a journal for and about experimental writing and is a Professor at Northumbria University and Visiting Professor at University of Art & Design Offenbach am Main, Frankfurt, previously a Research Fellow at the University of Amsterdam (2018). Her latest works are *Legend of the Necessary Dreamer* (London: Vanguard Editions, 2017), described by Chris Kraus as “a new classic of female philosophical fiction,” *Give Up Art: Collected Critical Writings* (LA/Vancouver: New Documents, 2018) of which James Elkins wrote, “after a book like this, most nonfiction seems curiously unaware of what writing can be,” and *Master Rock* (2015), an experimental radio play written and directed by Fusco, commissioned by Artangel and BBC Radio 4, performed and recorded inside a granite mountain, which has been experienced by more than 2.5 million listeners. Visit her work at www.mariafusco.net