Maxwell Philip was an author who keenly felt the stigma of his mixed-race heritage. As L.B. Tronchin notes, “his raciality as a creole and his descendence from the African blood were formidable obstacles in the way of his promotion” (Tronchin 5). This glass ceiling angered Philip enough that he was driven to write *Emmanuel Appadocca*, a pirate novel that “can also be read as a mediator of how an enslaved person ought to behave under the crushing weight of slavery” (Cudjoe xiii). Philip saw himself as battling the slavery of racial discrimination, and he uses his novel to promote a more active rebellion against it. To this end, he depicts his titular character battling his economic slavery to his father, and presents the entire novel as a battle against slavery itself. However, Philip uses the person of a pirate captain as his messenger – a figure not typically linked with that of righteous justice, unless he be on the receiving end. Philip purposefully uses this contradiction in order to promote his new conception of legitimated vengeance, through a reinterpretation of piracy. To accomplish all of this, he portrays Appadocca struggling to redefine his identity as a pirate in order to justify his vow of vengeance towards his cruel father, Willmington. However, Philip’s attempts to refashion the linguistic identification of his character only create a paradox from which Appadocca cannot escape. Thus he is forced to kill the pirate and reestablish the power of the societal codes he initially tried to break.

In the society of Appadocca’s time, piracy was conceived as “a heinous crime,” perpetrated by lawless, heartless brigands, such as Llononois or Blackbeard (Philip 94).
However, Philip presents his hero as an educated and cultured individual driven to piracy not of his own accord, but out of a feeling of thwarted justice. Consequently, Philip strives throughout the novel to unite his protagonist’s piratical actions in pursuit of his vow of revenge with his noble persona and thus legitimize Appadocca’s course of action. If the pirate’s motivation could be understood and his actions seen as acceptable, a new natural order would be established. By presenting Appadocca’s course of action as justified, Philip rejects the New Testament “turn the other cheek” ideal in favor of a return to more primitive Old Testament “eye for an eye” theory. He seeks to validate a justice system that metes out punishment in direct proportion to the deed done, protesting that “he has ventured to sketch out the line of conduct, which a high-spirited and sensitive person would probably follow” if he found himself deeply wronged (Philip 6). This then, extrapolates his cause into greater society, as not only a warning against the consequences of unjustified cruelty towards another, but also as an example of how all humans should be treated and treat each other.

In order to accomplish this goal, he uses Nature as Appadocca’s defense, as defining something as “natural” is the ultimate legitimation. This is particularly apparent throughout Appadocca’s prolonged discussions with Charles Hamilton, as the pirate continually attempts to frame his escapades and quest for vengeance against his father in terms of righteousness and naturalness – that his position is inevitable and universal. As he claims, “the whole of the civilized world turns, exists, and grows enormous on the licensed system of robbing and thieving” (Philip 113). This imbues the natural motion of the earth with a justification of piracy, and by justifying the piracy, its status as piratical is repudiated, and left at merely natural. Appadocca becomes Philip’s mouthpiece for the
conception of a new law of natural justice, a return to a more primitive conception of “right.” If the whole world is piratical, the only way to survive is to turn pirate as well. Philip uses the revelation of the evil of others to rationalize any evil Appadocca may do in his efforts to rebel against it, and thus anchors his character’s piracy as the logical response to an unjust society.

However, if Appadocca can combat evil by doing evil himself, then Philip runs into a problem. Either evil is justified because Appadocca can do it and not be seen as immoral, or evil is not justified, and thus Appadocca must fight against it instead. There is no alternative position for the pirate captain within this system that can excuse him from the true implications of his actions. As Hamilton remarks to Willmington, although this comment could easily have been made to Appadocca: “you must recollect, he justified his harshness to you precisely on the same grounds as you now do yours” (Philip 202). Thus the mortal adversaries, father and son, are brought to the same moral level of justification. Either they are both in the right, or both in the wrong – their claims are the same. From this stems the problem with Philip’s argument. Authorizing the idea that answering wrong with wrong would only create an endless cycle of retribution that society has been in a constant struggle to avoid – part of the reason that piracy was outlawed.

Therefore, due to the unique circumstances of his protagonist – namely his status as pirate captain – Philip is unable to utilize the traditional system of language, which links “pirate” to its common perception by conventional society: unnatural, unholy, vile, strange, morally wrong, and “the blackest of crimes” (Philip 94). He spends the entirety of the novel striving to cast Appadocca’s quest for vengeance against his father in a noble
and justifiable light, instead of the more negative connotations. As Appadocca’s very identity illegitimates him as a messenger for a moral right, Philip is forced to alter the system of language in an attempt to mold it into something he can use to support his character’s quest. In order to accomplish this, he utilises Saussure’s theory of the sign, which asserts that “language is a system of signals: what makes the language is the relationship which the mind establishes among these signals” (Saussure 23). This relationship can be defined through the connection of the signifier, or word, and the signified, or the understood definition of the word. When both parts are the same, the relationship works, and language becomes a functional system. Philip uses this link as a tool to legitimate his unconventional message. In particular during Appadocca’s discussion with Charles, the captain deconstructs the word “piracy” and the way the world works in order to portray piracy as logical so that he can claim “for it is clear, he who wrenches away from the hands of another, that which the holder is not entitled to, does no wrong” (Philip 115). In this way, Philip attempts to change the signified to be more in line with his reasoning and thus free Appadocca’s actions from the societal stigma of perceived piracy. However, “the signifier and signified, taken separately, are not accessible to speakers of the language; they are accessible only in their conjunction,” and so by allowing his character to alter the system of language in a small way, Philip has instead caused a breakage (Joseph 65). Allowing the signified and signifier to reference two different ideas grants language a degree of fluidity – it is now possible to say one thing and literally mean another. He starts a transition, but is unable to finish it, and thus it is left hanging loose, unable to say anything concrete.
Through Appadocca’s attempts to reconstruct the meaning of piracy, Philip calls into question the validity of names and meanings. Over and over again, Appadocca battles with “the question whether a name has any reference at all… whether anything answers to the properties we associate with that name,” and strives to demonstrate a way in which he could answer “no” to that question as applied to the name “pirate” (Kripke 160). One piece of supporting evidence is the crew Philip provides to help with Appadocca’s mission. His ship, the Black Schooner, is “manned by individuals who had been of a superior class in society, before they exiled themselves from it, chiefly men of education, they were doubly dangerous in their illicit pursuits” (Philips 121). There is an emphasis here on the claim that the pirates voluntarily rejected civilisation, and not the other way around. This implies a problem with society that caused these purportedly superior individuals to seek piracy as an escape from it. The crew represents the highest class of pirates, both socially and in effectiveness – not only are they strictly disciplined, but they also sail directly under the nose of the man-of-war three times without detection, and succeed in capturing a member of its crew without mishap. They easily outstrip the pursuing British navy, and successfully humiliates them time after time. Furthermore, when his word is questioned due to his status as a pirate captain, Appadocca declares that “if I had been inclined to be a deceiver, I should have remained in the society of mankind... I should not have openly braved the strength and ordinary notions of the world” (Philip 162). Thus he defines his own valor by pitting it against the corruption of civilization. As with the earlier quote, the idea here is that there is some sort of foulness to society, and that the pirates have not only seen that foulness, but they have renounced it by choice. Their exile as pirates is active instead of forced upon them, and is therefore
cast as more heroic. Philip’s purposeful portrayal of their piracy as an escape from the shackles of society furthers the rupturing of language, as he now seeks to legitimize them through altering the signified of society to be negative as well. This leaves the novel with two dangling signifiers, disconnected from a solid conception of their signifieds.

The fracturing continues in direct relation to Appadocca’s oath – his greatest problem with Willmington is that the planter denied him monetary support when he needed it. Appadocca situates that betrayal within the idea that “every animal carries in itself a law and undergoes the pains of retribution whenever it violates that law” and thus Willmington has violated natural law, which provides the necessary basis for Appadocca’s hatred (Philip 105). With this new interpretation, Appadocca reimagines a parent-child relationship based on economics rather than love or other aid and uses Nature to support it. He relates to both his parents through the money they owe him – his saintly mother hid from him the state of their finances, and with her death he complains “I was consequently rendered incapable of continuing my preparations for the concours, and it became absolutely necessary for me to endeavor to gain my livelihood by my own exertions” (Philip 99). His reaction to her death was not out of sorrow but out of anger that the financial support for his studies that he perceived as due to him was no longer available. Her money had allowed him to study across the ocean in Europe for most of his formative life – apparently away from her, since she is buried in Port-of-Spain. It is through the abrupt departure of his customary funds that he is forced to return to the Caribbean petition his father for money, and when that is denied him, he flies into the rage that will shape the rest of his life. By constructing his familial relationships through economic obligations, Appadocca breaks the typical signifier/signified correlation of
family, which allows him to justify his quest of vengeance; however the prevalence of money in his reasons for revenge is in line with the common perception of pirate – which he has been fighting so hard to escape. Thus his justification and the point he is justifying become circular.

This contributes to the fact that though he tries valiantly to make the distinction between the common perception of pirates as evil and his own view of piracy as a legitimate response to injustice, Philip ultimately fails, and the linguistic transition he began is denied. The most obvious strike against him is that none of his characters believe Appadocca’s arguments, even Charles Hamilton spends three chapters listening to Appadocca's catechistic refashioning of the concept of piracy and then says, "I am not surprised that such a sensitive individual as you should have been driven by so much injustice to a course which, with all my sympathy towards you, I cannot but denounce" (Philip 117). He understands Appadocca’s motivation and perhaps even grants that it is merited, but still cannot accept piracy as the correct recourse. Despite the long and drawn out forays into philosophy that Philip makes, he is ultimately unsuccessful, and Appadocca is still fettered to the original conception of the signified. It is his piratical actions that drive the novel – kidnapping the fishermen, the daring attack on the merchant vessel, capture and imprisonment at the hands of the law, unaided escape, and lastly, the final triumph over his father. Philip attempts to make his pirate into something more than the stereotype, but cannot free him from conforming to the same common perception he was meant to combat. His actions constitute support for each of the original signifieds of “pirate” instead of Philip’s new message, and prevent any actual conceptual change from occurring.
The problem at the root of this attempt to refashion the broken system of language is that Philips still forces Appadocca use words to do it. The pirate’s main manner of effecting the change is through the earlier referenced catechistic style of explanation that allows him to verbally explore his new conception in front of an audience. As he says to Charles, "it may be well to let the world know the cause of my conduct," a cause that he hopes will vindicate his piracy (Philip 98). Always, there is an emphasis on explanation, rationalization, and clarification essential to the justification of this refashioning. However, without satisfactorily knitting language back together, words are still fluid – they can now mean more than one thing to different people, and thus he has undercut his own methods. No matter how many times he explains himself or demonstrates decency and culture beyond what would be commonly expected of a pirate, people choose to affirm their belief in the original signified, instead of considering Philip’s new version. Agnes, who notes that Appadocca "seemed to be somewhat different from the heartless freebooters of whom she had heard," prefaces that statement with the fear that he will take advantage of her virtue, and follows it with a descent into despair because her love, Lorenzo, is also a pirate (Philip 77). Appadocca “seemed” different, but it was not enough; civil conduct does not have a chance against preconceived perceptions. By causing a break in language in order to accommodate his idea of a righteous pirate, Philip has cut short the logical transmission of ideas, which prevents him from being able to push his point through to conclusion and succeed in constructing a legitimate identity for Appadocca.

The pirate captain’s biggest setback is Philip’s attempt to force a performative state onto Appadocca’s explanations. Performative language “ascribes an agency to
words” through which they actually commit an action when they are spoken (Butler 1). When words reach the level of performance, they have the power to actively affect change around them – thus the reason Philip strives to achieve that. However, his reconstruction of language can never attain a performative status because the only force he has to support it is his own conviction, and thus he fails to convince anyone else of his justification of piracy. Therefore when Appadocca claims “no man can say that Emmanuel Appadocca ever fed his pirates with the lawful property of any one,” he is undercut the very moment he speaks the words, as he is being held prisoner for people saying exactly that (Philip 115). Even worse, the pirate himself doesn’t even fully believe in his own quest. After the revelation that Feliciana knows he is a pirate, he fears “that not stopping to consider whether he was actually what he was supposed to be, [his hosts] would at once immolate him, to the memory of their slaughtered and plundered countrymen” (Philip 179). He doesn’t trust that people will be able to overcome their first impressions or preconceived ideas. If even Philip’s protagonist has not been adequately convinced in the acceptability of his reconstitution of piratical identity, no one else will be either. Even through the tool of fiction, Philip is unable to create a single character that can believe Appadocca’s logic, which bodes ill for the idea’s effectiveness in the real world beyond the novel. By making Appadocca a pirate, Philip situates his protagonist in a long and well-known tradition of violating the law, not upholding it, as Philip wants. With Appadocca as a signifier, the signified is automatically destabilized, and any argument he would make is doomed to fail before completion.

The only performative Appadocca manages to make is his vow:
this miserable life I devote to vindicate the law of nature which has been violated in me, and in your child; and I swear, by the Great Being who gave me reason, that I shall not rest until I have taught my father, that the creature to whom he has given life possesses feelings and sensibility, and is capable of taking vengeance (Philip 106).

Indeed, every assertion comes to pass. His life is pared down to only what is necessary to right the wrong that has been done to him, and he doesn’t rest until he has captured his father. However, this becomes a cage for Appadocca. Twice, he doubts the righteousness of his conviction – once with Willmington’s traumatized young children, once with Feliciana in the graveyard – but each time the oath he made prevents him from granting mercy. At last, the repercussions of his rash vow begin to surface. As he admits to Feliciana, “my word is passed and I shall fulfill it. I am resolved, the sacrifice must be made,” well aware that he will lose his life in his quest (Philip 228). By dedicating his life to exacting revenge on Willmington, the reason for his existence extends only to the accomplishment of his goal. So it is that after Willmington dies, Appadocca doesn’t take the time to enjoy his triumph, but immediately throws himself off a cliff, in a moment “so sudden that Lorenzo, and Jack Jimmy, who sprang to their feet at once, were too late to hold him back and save him” (Philip 244). The swiftness of his suicide proves that he literally had nothing left to live for, once he had attained the goal of his vow.

Furthermore, this highlights the irrationality of all his attempts to rationalize his oath, as it can’t be amalgamated into normal life.

However, the author too, is caged. Through his attempt to provide an alternative to the societal wrong he saw around him, Philip binds his character irrevocably to a
conception of a justice that becomes irrational when extrapolated out of the situation. By trying to force a pirate to be moral, Philip devalues both piracy and morality. As a pirate, Appadocca is too imbedded within the system of cruelty, greed, and immorality to provide an effective commentary on social injustice. He is social injustice, however he protests. By binding him to a moral quest, Philip is forced to cut off all other aspects of his character, thus goal accomplished, he is left with a pirate captain with no purpose left in the narrative. The only option remaining is a noble death, which – however striking – effectively ends the story.

Appadocca’s suicide is followed by the dissolution of his pirate crew, as per his pre-suicide orders. Philip has finally abandoned trying to rectify the break he made in language to achieve his own ends, or to venerate the “noble pirate” ideal he so vehemently espoused earlier in the novel. In fact, he made sure to assure the integration of all Appadocca’s crew into shore life. According to the captain’s instructions, Lorenzo sets them up with respectable lives on land and they are presumably able to leave behind their days of piracy. Lorenzo in particular completely casts off his pirate identity and converts to the socially acceptable model of a hero – revealing that “he was the lineal descendent of the Carmontes, who fell fighting for the Prince,” just in time to marry his true love (Philip 247). The revelation of his noble blood explains away his exemplary decency, rather than Philip’s claim that it is characteristic of pirates. At every turn, the evidence is cut down. Thus the book closes with no pirates left at all – they are either dead or reformed. Ultimately, Appadocca’s greatest quest is a complete failure, and his attempts to reconstruct his identity by causing a shift in language serve only to shackle him to his reckless vow. Unable to reconcile his moral mission with the character he
thrust it on, Philip’s only option is to remove him from the novel, definitively. In the end, Philip’s escape attempt from language not only fails, but becomes more confining than the original societal cage, and he is forced to erase all evidence that he attempted to change it. Thus, his great revolutionary attempt ends only with the reinstatement and reaffirmation of the original societal mores.
Works Cited


