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**Fiction and Film: The Influence of Cinema on  
Writers from Trinidad and Jamaica  
1950 - 1985**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Caribbean Studies**

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## **Declaration:**

I declare that the research presented in this thesis is entirely my own work and that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any another university.

## **Abstract:**

This thesis considers the relationship between film and novels that were published by writers from Trinidad and Jamaica between the years 1950 - 1985. Through close textual analysis and by utilising a combination of cinematic and literary theories, the thesis examines the extent to which filmic references have been absorbed into fictional writing and reflects upon the implications for such cultural transformations. The thesis also provides a detailed, historical background to the development of cinema in both islands, with a further analysis of the specific role played by the Hindi film in Trinidad. The interdisciplinary nature of the literary analysis and the detailed historical data contained herein should be considered an original contribution to knowledge within the field of Caribbean studies.

The content of the thesis can be divided into three sub-sections. Chapters One to Three provide the theoretical framework for the research and the historical data relating to cinematic developments in both islands. The second sub-section focuses upon the interplay between cinema and literature. Chapter Four examines a specific network of connections between the films of Alfred Hitchcock and the novels of V.S. Naipaul. Chapter Five considers the ways in which women writers from both Trinidad and Jamaica have engaged with different aspects of cinematic imagery. The final part of the thesis is devoted to the Hollywood Western. Chapter Six focuses on the genre's rise and later decline in popularity along with its main thematic preoccupations. Chapters Seven to Nine consider three core aspects of the Western in turn and show how a network of linkages can be traced between that genre and many of the novels published by male writers.

The thesis concludes that the frequency with which filmic references occur in novels demonstrates that the cinema was a major influence upon the creative imagination of many local writers.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the relationship between cinema and contemporary fiction from the islands of Jamaica and Trinidad<sup>1</sup>. As an interdisciplinary project, the thesis combines literary and filmic theories to provide both a historical context, with its examination of the development of cinema in these particular islands, plus a detailed consideration of local novels that engage with cinematic imagery. The main content of this thesis is primarily concerned with examining the interplay between film and fiction through close textual analysis and, in so doing, it employs and considers both the shortcomings of a number of filmic and literary theories in the course of its observations. In addition, aspects of the interdisciplinary activity of cultural analysis necessarily inform the interpretation of such transformations from one medium to another and help to suggest some of the underlying causes of their occurrence.

For a number of practical reasons the overall scope of the thesis has been deliberately confined both geographically and temporally – covering novels from two islands that were published during the years 1950 - 1985. It was a prime consideration to select a pair of contrasting anglophone Caribbean islands that could each provide an adequate range of published material during that specified time period. This would then enable comparisons to be made between works from each island, by both male and female writers, as well as between those of differing ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis the term 'Trinidad' will be used as an inclusive reference to both Trinidad itself and the neighbouring island of Tobago.

backgrounds. During the years under consideration, eighty-seven novels were published by writers from Trinidad and a further sixty-eight from Jamaica,<sup>2</sup> giving a reasonably well balanced split between the output of the two islands that were ultimately selected for this exercise.

In Trinidad many of the fictional works from that period emanated from writers of Indian descent.<sup>3</sup> It was considered that their particular engagement with filmic imagery – some of which may have originated from Hindi rather than Hollywood cinema - might provide a contrasting sub-sample with that of writers from Jamaica who were predominantly of African or European descent. The thirty-five years in question were also a time when the cinema was the primary (often the sole) means of mass entertainment throughout these islands. The cultural significance of this should not, therefore, be underestimated and Chapter Two considers these aspects in greater detail. The frequency with which cinematic references manifest themselves in the work of local writers strongly suggests that the cinema played a pivotal role in shaping their respective imaginations. The body of the thesis will demonstrate that writers explicitly utilise filmic imagery in many of the one hundred and fifty-five novels that were published between the years of 1950 - 1985.

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<sup>2</sup> Excluding any published collections of short stories, poetry or novels for children/young adults such as C. Everard Palmer's *The Broken Vessel* (Kingston, Jamaica: Heinemann Educational Books (Caribbean) Ltd., 1982 [1951]), Andrew Salkey's *Riot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980 [1967]) or V.S. Reid's *Nanny Town* (Kingston, Jamaica: Jamaica Publishing House Ltd., 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately this only applies to male writers as no women of Indian descent published a novel during this particular period. It would have been necessary to extend the upper time limit until well into the 1990s in order to encompass any such works; thus moving away from the era in which cinema dominated mass entertainment. (See Chapter Two for more detailed consideration of these temporal matters).

Although the thesis confines its examination of novels to those published in the period specified above, within the initial Chapters that deal with the history of cinema in both islands a much wider time frame has been utilised. The upper limit has remained at 1985 but the lower date has been shifted backwards to allow for a more comprehensive examination of the industry's earlier developments. As the thesis will demonstrate, the years prior to 1950 were of particular significance in understanding how cinema became established throughout Jamaica and Trinidad. For the latter island, it was also important to cover the early development and growth of the importation of Hindi films that, as illustrated in Chapter Three, began during the 1930s.

For writers from Jamaica and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Trinidad,<sup>4</sup> the Hollywood film with its hegemonic imagery was the dominant form of filmic entertainment throughout most of the period under consideration.<sup>5</sup> Within such films, images of black characters were all too often subservient as Fanon so eloquently points out in *Black Skin, White Masks*<sup>6</sup> or, worse still, outright racist and derogatory. The sense of resentment and/or ambivalence that such imagery could generate within a non-white audience is one that the novelist Salman Rushdie has also written about in more recent times. "The imagination can falsify, demean, ridicule, caricature and wound [and]...there have been many who could testify to the pain of being subjected

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Three for a consideration of the role played by Hindi cinema in this island, a factor that lessened the otherwise dominant grip of Hollywood on film imagery.

<sup>5</sup> The Caribbean region continues, in fact, to have one of the highest levels of imported cinematic (and latterly television) content, most of which still emanates from America. Issues of 'media imperialism' and 'dependency relationships' in the Caribbean are examined in some detail in Hopeton S. Dunn (ed.): *Globalization, Communications And Caribbean Identity* (New York, USA: St. Martin's Press, 1995) especially Chapter 4 on Jamaica, pp. 56-82 and Chapter 5 on Trinidad, pp. 83-97.

<sup>6</sup> Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986 [1952] ) pp. 34 & 140.

to white society's view of them.”<sup>7</sup> Although there were undoubtedly some improvements in type casting from the early 1970s onwards,<sup>8</sup> throughout much of the specified period non-whites were either absent from Hollywood films or condemned to playing only minor, stereotypical roles.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the limited visual representation that Hollywood offered its non-white Caribbean audience, its simplified versions of ‘reality’ insidiously encouraged passivity amongst those who might otherwise have (justifiably) felt resentment towards the images presented them. Theories of mass culture, such as those promulgated by MacDonald in the late 1950s suggest that such films could only provide “...a debased, trivial culture that voids both the deep realities (sex, death, failure, tragedy) and also the simple, spontaneous pleasures, since the realities would be too real...”<sup>10</sup>. The problems associated with passive imitations of cinematic representation had already been reported on as early as 1947 in Jamaica. An article in the *Sunday Gleaner* of that year stated that: “The standards set in the illusory world of the screen are unconsciously adopted by millions of ordinary men and women for whose daily lives the glamour, luxury and adventures of Dorothy Lamour and Tyrone Power do not offer a reliable model.”<sup>11</sup> This notion that American culture (film) had been able to thoroughly ‘colonise’ the minds of its Caribbean audiences with its

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<sup>7</sup> Salman Rushdie: ‘Home Front’ in Salman Rushdie: *Imaginary Homelands – Essays & Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1992 [1991] ) p.143.

<sup>8</sup> For example, in Westerns such as *Buck And The Preacher* (1971) that starred Sidney Poitier and the later *Blazing Saddles* (1974) which completely inverts the Western paradigm. The 1970s were also the era of ‘blaxploitation’ films like *Shaft* (1971) and *Cleopatra Jones* (1973) which although considered to be somewhat problematical in their handling of race nowadays, at least gave starring roles to black actors and actresses.

<sup>9</sup> For an exhaustive study of the representation of blacks in American film see Donald Bogle: *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, And Bucks: An Interpretive History Of Blacks In American Films* (New York, USA: Continuum, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> D. MacDonald: ‘A Theory of mass culture’ in B. Rosenberg & D. White (eds.): *Mass Culture* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1957) p.72.

fantasised view of their real world is certainly one with which a number of local writers have actively engaged in their fiction. Examples of their specific concerns occur in Chapter Five on women's writing and are particularly prominent in Chapter Seven which deals with the portrayal of the Western hero and his fictional counterpart.

Issues of colonisation and its impact upon 'local' culture necessarily underpin any consideration of the role played by cinema in the Caribbean.<sup>12</sup> Edward Said, for example, has argued that colonialism had a profound effect upon all the cultures that it came into contact with. The intertextual nature of Caribbean writing that this thesis examines would strongly support this view. "Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic."<sup>13</sup> Culture is, as Fanon reminds us, 'constantly in the making'<sup>14</sup> and the powerful colonial discourses that were disseminated via the medium of Hollywood<sup>15</sup> films undeniably formed an integral part of the raw material from which those local cultures were formulated. Paul Gilroy's work has further demonstrated the complex manner in which cultural forms such as those found in the Caribbean necessarily draw upon a diverse range of influences, including the white hegemonic discourse of the cinema. "...they [non-whites] lacked a single cohesive culture which could bind them together. They set

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<sup>11</sup> 'Films and the State' in *Sunday Gleaner*, 12 January 1947, p.8.

<sup>12</sup> Throughout the remainder of this thesis, the use of the term 'Caribbean' is restricted to just the islands of Jamaica and Trinidad/Tobago within this particular context.

<sup>13</sup> Edward W. Said: *Culture & Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994 [1993] ) p.xxix.

<sup>14</sup> Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched Of The Earth* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1990 [1961] ) p.11.

<sup>15</sup> And, to a lesser extent, British films, although these formed a very small minority of works exhibited in the two islands, as Chapter Two demonstrates.

about creating it from the diverse influences which were available and which corresponded to their predicament.”<sup>16</sup>

Such theoretical formulations are somewhat different from the notions considered earlier in this Chapter, which suggested a passive acceptance of the ideological constructs of cinematic imagery upon the part of Caribbean audiences. These alternative views of cultural hybridisation would imply that Caribbean cultures – including their literary forms – did *not* simply assimilate those colonial discourses without struggling against their representational shortcomings in order to provide their own self-definitions. Instead, it could be argued that writers who utilised Hollywood’s imagery were actually engaging in acts of cultural appropriation. As Nettleford has so aptly remarked: “...the Caribbean with its record of creative acts can help to *determine* a mainstream culture rather than be expected merely to enter one that is predetermined by the cultural norms forged and recorded...in the nations that conquered, colonised and conditioned subject peoples like those who still inhabit the Caribbean.”<sup>17</sup> [My emphasis]. This suggests that rather than being demeaned by the influence of American culture, disseminated via the medium of film, ‘indigenous’ cultures had actually been able to subvert its ideological discourses through their positive acts of re-appropriation. In Bhabha’s formulation: “...the natives are both challenging the boundaries of discourse and subtly changing its terms by setting up another specifically colonial space of the negotiations of cultural authority.”<sup>18</sup> More importantly, such creative and dynamic usage of diverse cultural materials has

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Gilroy: *There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 1995 [1987]) p.161.

<sup>17</sup> Rex Nettleford: *Inward Stretch, Outward Reach – A Voice From The Caribbean* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993) p.55.

<sup>18</sup> Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location Of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995 [1994]) p.119.

resulted in a body of literature that – as this thesis will demonstrate - affirms its right to signify in a highly creative manner. In Jean D’Costa’s words: “Adaptation and innovation [have been]...worked together to achieve an original interpretation of the world that communicates with freshness and authority to the audience.”<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the body of this thesis focuses upon the closeness of the relationship between fiction and films such as the Hollywood Western, no suggestions as to *specific* sources of cinematic reference are offered other than those which the authors already provide in the text. Source material for fictional writing is necessarily eclectic and filmic references could easily consist of a blend of imaginary, combined or half-remembered scenes. It would be erroneous to try and pinpoint the precise source – if such did actually exist – from a plethora of films that those writers may have seen over an extensive number of potential viewing years.

It is also important to note from the onset that there are two quite distinct strands of references that have been traced throughout this thesis. Many are explicit, direct allusions to a particular film or genre of films such as the Hollywood Western and are, therefore, largely unambiguous in interpretation. In other instances the thesis pinpoints parallel thematic preoccupations that inform both novels and films alike. Examples of this nature occur in Chapter Four and are amongst several of the items considered in Chapters Eight and Nine. In these latter instances, Western films *could* well have been the source of inspiration for writers to create a particular tone or mood in their fictional works that closely resembles those of their filmic counterparts.

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<sup>19</sup> Jean D’Costa: *Roger Mais* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1978) p.58.

There are, however, no specific references to Westerns in these novels that enable these comments to be more than speculative in nature.

From the onset of research towards this thesis, it quickly became apparent that there was a paucity of published material that could provide detailed information on the historical development of cinema in either Jamaica or Trinidad. With the one (limited) exception of *Ex-Iles*<sup>20</sup> that was published in 1992, there did not appear to have been any systematic attempt to understand the fundamental role that cinema played in shaping the culture of both islands from its introduction in the early years of the twentieth century. The cultural significance of the cinema in other parts of the Caribbean – Cuba and some of the other Hispanic islands, in particular – has, of course, been extensively researched elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> However, apart from the occasional article<sup>22</sup> that looked at some isolated aspect of cinema in relation to either Jamaica or Trinidad,<sup>23</sup> little else was available in terms of secondary resources. As far as primary material was concerned, it also became evident that there were many difficulties – in some cases, insurmountable - involved in trying to investigate the early history of cinema in Trinidad and Jamaica. Many official records, including distribution

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<sup>20</sup> A collection of essays that primarily focused upon locally made films, particularly from the francophone Caribbean and Jamaica. Mbye B. Cham (ed.): *Ex-Iles: Essays On Caribbean Cinema* (New Jersey, USA: Africa World Press, Inc., 1992).

<sup>21</sup> For example in King's *Magical Reels* which contains a section on the Caribbean that focuses on the islands of Haiti, Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico. John King: *Magical Reels: A History Of Cinema In Latin America* (London: Verso, 1990) especially pp. 225-243. Other works have tended to focus exclusively upon Cuban film, such as John A. Lent: *Mass Communications In The Caribbean* (Iowa, USA: State University Press, 1990), Chapter 26, pp. 323-334.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Everold N. Hosein: 'The Problems of Imported Television Content in the Commonwealth Caribbean' in *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (December 1976), pp.7-25, Patrick Hoyos: 'Kung Fu and Cricket' in *Bim*, Vol. 17, No. 68 (July 1984), pp.97-100 or Harry Milner: 'Jamaica and "The New Wave"' in *Jamaica Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (December 1968), pp. 51-56.

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that Michael Anthony has published some work on the early days of cinema in his history of this island's capital, but does not provide a systematic, year by year breakdown on overall cinematic developments. (Michael Anthony: *The Making Of Port of Spain, Volume I* (Trinidad & Tobago: Key Caribbean Publications, 1978).

company archives,<sup>24</sup> were simply no longer in existence for much of the first half of the twentieth century. Those that did exist were often incomplete, contradictory or simply unavailable and/or inaccessible.<sup>25</sup> Much of the historical evidence utilised in this thesis has therefore been gleaned from newspaper archives, viewed both in the UK and in the university libraries of Trinidad and Jamaica respectively.

The findings of the research into the historical background of cinema can be found throughout Chapters Two and Three and constitutes an original contribution to scholarship within this particular field. Chapter Two is devoted to an overall consideration of the historical development of cinema in both islands, along with a broad analysis of the main genres of (Hollywood) film that were exhibited there. The history of cinema in the Caribbean was not; however, just about the development of its infrastructure as both Trinidad and Jamaica have each produced a number of 'local' films from 1970 onwards. Apart from the occasional review in film journals, little material had previously been available on this subject<sup>26</sup> aside from that contained in *Ex-Iles* as mentioned above. A more recent publication: *Cinemas Of The Black Diaspora*<sup>27</sup> contained articles on Caribbean films by both Mbye Cham and Keith Warner (see below) but similarly provided little in the way of historical background.

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter Two of this thesis for further consideration of the particular complexities involved with filmic distribution in Trinidad.

<sup>25</sup> In the course of this research, three separate trips (self-funded) were made to both islands in an effort to access as much of the available material as possible.

<sup>26</sup> Earlier works such as *Blackframes* (1988) or *Questions Of Third Cinema* (1989) had offered a critical perspective on works produced by independent, black filmmakers but neither work focused specifically upon the Caribbean. (Mbye B. Cham & Claire Andrade-Watkins (eds.): *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives On Black Independent Cinema*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: The MIT Press, 1988), Jim Pines & Paul Willemen (eds.): *Questions Of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1994 [1989] ).

<sup>27</sup> Michael T. Martin (ed.): *Cinemas Of The Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence, And Oppositionality* (Detroit, Michigan, USA: Wayne State University Press, 1995) pp. 241-273.

However, Warner's book<sup>28</sup> on cinema in the anglophone Caribbean was subsequently published in 2000 and did provide a comprehensive description (if little in the way of detailed analysis) of all the feature films that have been produced to date in both of these particular islands. There is little to be gained by simply reiterating material in this thesis that Professor Warner has already covered, so this particular aspect of cinematic development is not examined within the detailed content of Chapter Two.

Chapter Three of the thesis focuses upon the specific role that Hindi cinema played on the island of Trinidad. The rapid growth and subsequent decline in the numbers of Hindi films being imported and exhibited throughout Trinidad is analysed for a fifty year period from the early 1930s through to the mid-1980s. This Chapter also considers the highly formulaic nature and key thematic concerns of the Hindi film and reflects upon its temporal developments that are contrasted, where appropriate, with those of the Hollywood Western. The latter part of the Chapter then examines the nature of the particular relationship between Hindi film with fictional works by local writers of Indian descent. The relatively low level of appropriation from Hindi film is subsequently considered in view of its peculiarly visual and aural qualities, which help to distinguish it from its Hollywood counterparts – particularly films of the Western genre.

The main body of this thesis is then devoted to a more detailed analysis of interactions between the cinematic experience and the fictional output of writers from both islands. Chapter Four focuses exclusively upon the work of V.S. Naipaul – one of the most prolific male novelists during the years under review - and examines the

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<sup>28</sup> Keith Q. Warner: *On Location* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 2000).

thematic links between his novels and the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock had an equally prolific career as a film director spanning more than fifty years from 1925 to 1976. During that time, he directed fifty-three feature films, excluding television works, thirty of which were made in Hollywood. Between the years of 1942 and 1950 – a period when, according to Theroux, Naipaul claims to have “...seen every film that came to Trinidad...”<sup>29</sup>, Hitchcock released eight films including *Spellbound*<sup>30</sup> (1945) and *Rope* (1948). Naipaul makes specific reference to both of these films and other works by Hitchcock in his 1971 work *In A Free State*. Through close textual analysis of both film and fiction, the Chapter examines the connections between this novel and its filmic counterparts. It also demonstrates how parallels may be drawn between other works by both men through an analysis of the close similarities in ideas and issues that inform their respective work.

Chapter Five then considers the collective writings by women from both Trinidad and Jamaica. Women writers accounted for forty-two of the novels that were published during the thirty-five year period in question and the thesis will demonstrate that many of them displayed an open engagement with cinematic imagery. This Chapter looks in detail at those novels in which women have referred to cinema in an explicit manner, that seeks to challenge the stereotypes of both women and men that an imported visual culture had tried to impose upon them. Further examples of novels that appear to engage with specific filmic genres - the Hollywood Western and the thriller - are also analysed within Chapter Five, together with relevant aspects of their filmic counterparts.

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Theroux: *Sir Vidia's Shadow* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1998) p.41.

In Chapters Six to Nine respectively, particular emphasis is placed upon the generic category of films commonly known as Westerns, one of the most popular of Hollywood genres<sup>31</sup> in Trinidad and Jamaica during many of the years under consideration. As this thesis will demonstrate, the specific imagery and thematic concerns of the Western are also the most common type of cinematic references that are utilised in novels by local writers. The extent to which such narrative techniques can be considered a counter-discourse to the Hollywood Western is examined along with the cultural implications for such potentially subversive tactics. Chapter Six examines the rise and subsequent decline in popularity of the Hollywood Western and then outlines its main thematic pre-occupations. Chapters Seven to Nine focus upon three core areas of the Western - the role of the cowboy hero, the narrative function of landscape and the portrayal of women respectively – and considers those novels that have explicit and/or implicit linkages to these specific themes. It should be noted that the scope of these particular Chapters has been restricted to works by male writers only, as novels by women – including those that engage with the Western genre - are dealt with in detail in Chapter Five, as detailed above.

The Conclusion to this thesis draws together, in a summary form, the ways in which the overall interaction between film and novel has played a predominate role in the areas under investigation. It also demonstrates how tensions caused by such cultural assimilation are evident in the writings published during the years under review. Finally, the thesis considers ways in which this research might be expanded

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<sup>30</sup> Exhibited at the Globe cinema in Port of Spain during May 1946 (*Trinidad Guardian*, Friday May 24 1946, p.8).

in the future to further enhance our understanding of the cultural role that both film and fiction have played in everyday Caribbean society.

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<sup>31</sup> See Chapters Two and Six for further details on this particular category of films.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF CINEMA IN TRINIDAD AND JAMAICA

This Chapter has been designed to provide a contextual framework from within which selected fictional writings from Trinidad and Jamaica may be considered in greater detail. Although the novels covered by this thesis are, as outlined in the Introduction, confined to those published between the years 1950 - 1985, this particular Chapter will examine the development of local cinema from its earliest beginnings at the turn of the century right through to the late 1980s. By extending the time span for both this and the following Chapter dealing specifically with Indian film, the aim is to illustrate the primary nature of the influence of cinema in both islands throughout much of the twentieth century. The overall pattern of cinematic growth and subsequent decline in the latter years of the century is one that, as I shall discuss, is common – albeit with temporal variations - to both islands. As a result, the era of cinematic dominance experienced throughout the earlier years of the century is unlikely to ever occur in such an isolated manner again. This, I believe, imparts a particular level of importance to these selected works of fiction that were predominantly produced by writers who spent many of their formative years *before* the widespread introduction of alternative forms of mass entertainment. It therefore strengthens the case for a wider overview within these particular historical Chapters, rather than simply covering the precise years during which the novels under consideration were published.

For most of the local population in the Caribbean, cinema was the only affordable form of public entertainment that was widely available and frequently the

only source of ‘information’ about a world outside their present surroundings. It should also be noted that, even from a very early stage in the development of cinema, the viewing of a film was very much an interactive process where the local audience responded audibly to the images and characters projected on to the screen.<sup>1</sup> This form of behaviour was particularly prevalent amongst the ‘pit’ audience, who, according to Lieber, often responded to the film they were watching in a robust and noisy fashion.<sup>2</sup> A 1933 ‘letter to the editor’ in the *Trinidad Guardian* from one E. R. Lickfold complained bitterly about the noise levels from such pit audiences in both the Metro and Empire cinemas in Port of Spain: “..a continuous murmur of varying intensity, sometimes completely drowning the dialogue from the screen.”<sup>3</sup> Similar behaviour was to be found in Jamaica, as a postscript to a 1923 advertisement for the Palace cinema in Kingston illustrates. “Remember it [*Heedless Moths*] is an art picture! No comments allowed during the showing at Palace tonight.”<sup>4</sup> A visit to the cinema was, therefore, an enormously enjoyable, sociable and interactive event that thousands looked forward to each week. As the body of the thesis will demonstrate, many of the inherent pleasures associated with going to the cinema have consequently filtered through into the fictional writings of the region.

In Trinidad there is evidence to suggest a very early interest in the concept of ‘moving pictures’, at least amongst the wealthier (white) population in the capital Port of Spain. One of the earliest references to what was initially referred to as ‘animated

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<sup>1</sup> Such behaviour was not wholly unique to the Caribbean. King has written about similar ‘hissing and hooting habits’ amongst the audience in Mexican cinemas. (*Magical Reels: A History Of Cinema In Latin America*, p.14).

<sup>2</sup> M. Lieber: *Street Life: Afro American Culture In Urban Trinidad* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1981) p.95.

<sup>3</sup> ‘‘Pit talkies’ Again’ in *Trinidad Guardian*, Tuesday 9 May 1933, p.3.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Tuesday 9 January 1923, p.4.

pictures' appeared as a newspaper advertisement in February 1900. A nightly programme of live entertainment was provided in Prince's Building, Port of Spain, which also included Professor R. Montval's 'Projectograph': "Introducing a number of animated pictures...including '*The Man In The Moon*' and '*The Haunted Castle*'."<sup>5</sup> By 1905, Ireland Brothers were giving regular exhibitions of 'moving pictures' in Prince's Building from what they claimed to be 'the grandest collection in the world', providing a spectacle that was alleged to be: "...thrilling, beautiful, pathetic, mysterious, startling, inspiring [and] interesting...".<sup>6</sup> The price of entry was prohibitively expensive at one shilling for Gallery seats and two shillings for Front Seats. This would have prevented all but the most affluent from experiencing this new form of entertainment.

During July of the following year, Prince's Building was host to a one-night showing of footage from the great San Francisco earthquake which, it was claimed, was: "...shown for the first time in the West Indies."<sup>7</sup> By 1910 Prince's Building was still in use as the main venue for 'cinematograph' exhibitions, including a showing of Gaumont Film's footage of 'The King's Funeral' on Saturday 2 July.<sup>8</sup> Seat prices for this particular event – undoubtedly of great symbolic significance to many expatriates living in Port of Spain at that time – were as high as four shillings each. Even at this early stage in cinematic developments it appears that there was already an awareness of the growing need for a purpose-built theatre in the capital. Prince's Building was host to all the major theatrical and operatic productions that took place

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<sup>5</sup> *Mirror*, Port of Spain, Thursday 15 February 1900, p.13.

<sup>6</sup> *Mirror*, Port of Spain, Saturday 1 April 1905, p.6.

<sup>7</sup> *Mirror*, Port of Spain, Saturday 14 July 1906, p.11.

<sup>8</sup> *Mirror Supplement*, Port of Spain, Friday 1 July 1910, no page number.

in Port of Spain and this clearly limited the availability of space for exhibitions of films. Proposals for the building of a new theatre had already been discussed in open letters to *The Mirror* from as early as 1905,<sup>9</sup> even though they would not actually come to fruition until almost six years later.

According to Michael Anthony,<sup>10</sup> Marcus and Reginald Davis were responsible for opening that purpose-built theatre, the London Electric on Thursday 2 February 1911. A full-page advertisement appeared in the *Trinidad Guardian* on that day, providing details of the initial programme of nine short films including 'Leopard Queen', 'Abduction Of Louis XVI' and 'Dream Of Toyland'. Seat prices ranged from eight cents to twenty-four cents<sup>11</sup> and programmes were available twice daily – at five p.m. and eight thirty p.m. respectively. The cinema, which was based in Woodbrook, was obviously keen to emphasise its proximity to public transport as the advertisement points out that it was located: "One minute from the 'Four-Roads' Car."<sup>12</sup> By April 1913, the cost of seats had increased marginally to a maximum of thirty-six cents (or forty-eight cents if reserved in advance for what were deemed to be 'special performances').<sup>13</sup>

By 1915, St Ann's Hall had been leased and re-opened as the New City Cinema in Oxford Street, offering: "English title pictures by class-makers..."<sup>14</sup>. The cost of entry to this establishment was competitively priced at a range of between

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<sup>9</sup> See *Mirror*, Port of Spain, Thursday 13 April 1905, p.13, for example.

<sup>10</sup> *The Making of Port of Spain, Volume 1*, p. 178.

<sup>11</sup> From this point in time onwards prices in advertisements were always quoted in Dollars and Cents, rather than Sterling as used earlier in the century.

<sup>12</sup> *Mirror*, Port of Spain, Thursday 2 February 1911, p.3.

<sup>13</sup> *Mirror*, Port of Spain, Tuesday 8 April 1913, p.5.

<sup>14</sup> *Mirror*, Port of Spain, Friday 1 October 1915, p.7.

twelve cents to twenty-four cents for the best balcony seats. However, for matinee performances the range of seat prices was significantly lower – two cents pit,<sup>15</sup> four cents area and eight cents balcony – suggesting an early appeal to a far larger and less affluent audience base. 1915 was also to see the opening of the first cinema outside of the capital - the Palace Cinema in San Fernando. Three shows per week were offered in San Fernando, on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday and seats were priced between eighteen cents and forty-eight cents. By January 1916 the (New) City Cinema had already closed and then re-opened under the management of Mr F. W. Long, a former employee of the London Electric Theatre.<sup>16</sup> Seat prices were now brought in line with those of that cinema,<sup>17</sup> ranging between eight cents and thirty-six cents for the most expensive. That same year was to see the opening of another cinema – the Olympic Theatre in Belmont – under the patronage of ‘Lanky’ Belasco<sup>18</sup> and Miss Doris Legg. A further Port of Spain cinema was in operation by 1919 – the Electric Central Theatre – whilst two more outlets were to open outside the capital: The Palladium in Tunapuna and Princes Theatre in Princes Town.

The next ten years were to see only a slow increase in the number of cinemas throughout the island. The first tented cinema had already been operating at the corner of Edward Street and Tragarete Road in Port of Spain and a permanent building was then constructed in front of this tent and subsequently opened as the Empire Theatre on 25 September 1920. The Gaiety Theatre in St Joseph Road was to

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<sup>15</sup> Cinemas in the region were usually divided into these three separate sections with the front pit area being the cheapest but also the least comfortable section of the cinema. See Chapter Five for a further consideration of cinema seating.

<sup>16</sup> *Mirror*, Port of Spain, Saturday 1 January 1916, p.8.

<sup>17</sup> This outlet was to change its name to the London Theatre by 1919.

follow in July 1924, once again offering highly competitively priced seats ranging from six cents in the pit to a maximum of twelve cents for the balcony.<sup>19</sup> Although a number of the Port of Spain cinemas such as the London and Olympic continued to keep their entry prices low throughout the 1920s, by 1928 the Empire was charging almost double that of its main competitors. The Empire's range of prices now ran from thirteen cents for pit seats up to as much as sixty cents for balcony or seventy-two cents for a box seat. A comparison between the London and Olympic's range of eight cents pit to thirty-six cents balcony<sup>20</sup> (unchanged from the previous decade) suggests that the Empire was specifically targeting a more affluent sector of the potential viewing audience. In the rest of the country two additional cinemas were operational by 1920 in Sangre Grande and Couva, followed by a second outlet – the New Theatre – in San Fernando in 1921. By the end of the 1920s, however, no other additional country cinemas were to advertise or be listed in the *Trinidad Guardian* on a regular basis.

If the 1920s were a period during which cinematic growth was of a strictly limited nature, the next decade was to see a number of significant developments that caused a dramatic reversal to that tendency. In 1931 William P. Humphrey and a small group of partners formed The British Colonial Film Exchange Company Ltd.<sup>21</sup>, which was, for a number of years, to become one of the major distribution forces in the local industry (including British Guiana). This company superseded the Colonial

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<sup>18</sup> According to Anthony, 'Lanky' Belasco had previously been an accompanist to silent films and played at the opening show of the London Electric Theatre in 1911. (*The Making Of Port of Spain, Volume 1*, p.178).

<sup>19</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday 5 July 1924, p.12.

<sup>20</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday 11 August 1928, p.12.

<sup>21</sup> The formation of this organisation was front-page news in the *Trinidad Guardian* of Wednesday 13 May 1931.

Film Exchange which had been set up some years earlier by Humphrey, in conjunction with the American George Rosenthal.<sup>22</sup> The key advantage of film exchanges was that they allowed exhibitors to rent films rather than having to purchase them outright from the British producers. Humphrey's new company was responsible for building the St. James<sup>23</sup> and the De Luxe<sup>24</sup> cinemas that both opened during 1937 in Port of Spain. 1933 was another significant year for the industry with the opening in March of the Metro cinema that, with as many as one thousand seven hundred seats, made it by far the largest cinema in Port of Spain.<sup>25</sup> The Metro was reputed to have cost a massive one hundred and fifty thousand dollars<sup>26</sup> to construct and boasted 'cooling and ventilation', long before any of its major competitors were to offer similar facilities. One of the leading American film studios - MGM - provided the funding for a local businessman of Indian descent; Gookal Meah, to build this cinema for the exclusive exhibition of their films. This relationship proved, however, to be short-lived as Meah split from MGM within one year, took over the Metro himself and renamed it The Globe.<sup>27</sup> Two other large cinemas were to open in Port of Spain during that same decade, both of which were built by another key figure in the industry, Timothy Roodal. The Roxy which had a seating capacity of nine hundred was opened in October 1934 and the even larger Royal Cinema (one thousand two hundred seats) was subsequently opened in May 1937. With such a large increase in total seating capacity, prices remained relatively stable throughout this period as the

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<sup>22</sup> Rosenthal had, in fact, been actively involved in Trinidad's cinematic industry since at least 1915, having provided the funding for the City Cinema that opened during that year (see above).

<sup>23</sup> This cinema was sold in the early 1940s and renamed the Rialto.

<sup>24</sup> This particular cinema was still in operation in 1999 and remained under the ownership of the Roodal family, who bought out the Humphrey business in the 1940s following the death of William P. Humphrey in 1941. (Interview by the author with Dr. Yvonne Morgan (granddaughter of Timothy Roodal), De Luxe Cinema, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 20 October 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Its nearest competitor at that time was The Empire that had one thousand, two hundred seats.

<sup>26</sup> *The Making Of Port of Spain, Volume 1*, p.179.

figures for 1939 illustrate. During that year both the St. James and the Roxy were offering a range of seats from twelve cents pit to thirty-six cents balcony whilst the Royal was even cheaper at just eight cents pit to twenty-four cents balcony.

As far as developments in the rest of the island were concerned, the 1930s also saw a steady rise in the total number of country outlets. By 1938 there were as many as fifteen,<sup>28</sup> with a combined seating capacity of over eight thousand (compared with six thousand seven hundred in Port of Spain during that same year)<sup>29</sup>. Seating prices tended to be somewhat cheaper than in the capital, although there were clearly different pricing policies between some of the cinemas, especially when several were located within the same town. The Palace in San Fernando, for example, was offering a range of seats prices from four cents pit to twelve cents balcony during 1932, whilst the local Gaiety ranged from fifteen cents pit to as much as sixty cents for balcony seats. Even at the end of the decade (1939) the Globe in San Juan had a maximum seat price of just twenty-four cents whilst the New Theatre in San Fernando ranged from eight cents pit to thirty-six cents balcony.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike the island of Jamaica – whose cinematic development is considered later in this chapter - Trinidad continued to enjoy a period of steady growth in the construction of cinemas throughout the 1940s. The presence of the US military undoubtedly played a key role in this factor as by 1943 their Army and Navy alone had erected a total of sixteen outlets on the island. V.S. Naipaul recalls having one

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<sup>27</sup> *Sunday Guardian*, 11 February 1934, p.2.

<sup>28</sup> The complete list for 1938 was San Juan, Tunapuna, Sangre Grande, Arima, Chaguanas, Couva, Princes Town, San Fernando (3), Fyzabad, Siparia, Penal, Point Fortin and La Brea.

<sup>29</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Friday 11 February 1938, p.13.

such cinema at the end of the road in Port of Spain where his family lived during that time. “At night the soundtrack of the open-air American cinema thundered away.”<sup>31</sup> This increased the total seating capacity throughout Trinidad, which had previously stood at around twenty-two thousand, by more than one-quarter to just over thirty thousand overall.<sup>32</sup> By that same year the number of civilian cinemas in Port of Spain had increased to eleven whilst the country outlets had also risen again to twenty-two. These included two additional Globe outlets – one in San Fernando and another in San Juan. The 1946 census was to show a total population of just over five hundred and fifty-seven thousand, of which approximately one hundred thousand were resident in the capital.<sup>33</sup> This already suggests a fairly high ratio of cinema seats per head of the population, particularly in the Port of Spain region, but despite these figures the growth in new outlets was still to continue. In Port of Spain the Rio in Laventille was operational by 1947 along with the Planet in Curepe and the Rex cinema in Arouca. Three further Rex outlets were in existence by the beginning of the following decade (1950) – in Morvant, Diego Martin and on the neighbouring island of Tobago, together with the Castle in San Juan and Radio City in San Fernando.

Throughout most of the 1950s there were still only nominal increases in the costs of entry to many of the island’s cinemas. The Roxy in Port of Spain was continuing to offer a maximum seat price of sixty cents in 1951 - compared with thirty-six cents in 1939 - whilst the Globe in San Juan was just forty cents (or twenty-

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<sup>30</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Thursday 2 March 1939, p.14.

<sup>31</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *Finding The Centre* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985) p.37.

<sup>32</sup> USNA, RG83 File 834.5/G2 – 868.3 Vol. VI – ‘Required Report No. 12 on the Motion Picture Industry in Trinidad’, 1943.

four cents for 'ladies').<sup>34</sup> During that same ten year period a number of cinemas were to offer similar cuts in seat prices to encourage more women into the audience, particularly for showings of Hindi<sup>35</sup> films. Even as late as 1958 the New Theatre in San Fernando was still offering a maximum seat price of only fifty-five cents.<sup>36</sup> Despite the intensifying competition between existing cinemas, the number of outlets was to increase still further as the 1950s wore on. Port of Spain now had fourteen cinemas with the Strand operating by 1952, the Pyramid by 1955 and the Odeon by 1958. The first drive-in cinemas appeared in the latter half of the 1950s, with the Starlite in Diego Martin opening in 1957, the Twilite in Marabella in 1959 and the Hi-Way of Chaguanas together with the Bel Air of Point Fortin in 1960. The number of local cinemas also underwent a further dramatic increase to as many as forty by 1959. Most of these cinemas located outside of the capital were, however, devoted almost exclusively to the showing of Hindi films as Chapter Three considers in more detail.

This upward trend in the total number of cinemas was, unlike the situation in Jamaica, to continue right through the 1960s to the middle of the following decade. By 1976 it was estimated that there were a total of seventy-four<sup>37</sup> cinemas throughout the island, including the four drive-ins listed above. Of these, sixteen were in the Port of Spain area, including National I and 2 that were built in 1968 and the Alper cinema in St James that opened in July 1969.<sup>38</sup> A further eleven cinemas were based in San Fernando. Whilst the rise in the number of cinemas was undoubtedly excessive

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<sup>33</sup> *Trinidad & Tobago YearBook 1959-1960*, (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Yuille's Printeries Ltd., 1960) p.166.

<sup>34</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Tuesday 6 March 1951, p.8.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter Three for more detailed discussion on this subject.

<sup>36</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Thursday 13 February 1958, p.5.

<sup>37</sup> J. Black, H. Bultstein, K. Johnston & D. McMorris (eds.): *Area Handbook For Trinidad & Tobago* (Washington D.C., USA: American University Press, 1976) p.182.

throughout this period, it should be noted that the island's population had also undergone a significant increase since the mid-1940s. The 1960 census – the first to be conducted since 1946 – showed a total population of just under eight hundred and twenty-eight thousand,<sup>39</sup> an increase of approximately forty-eight per cent over the earlier census. In that same period, the number of cinemas had, in comparison, more than doubled. This disparity inevitably proved to be unsustainable and, whilst it was by no means the only factor involved, led to the onset of a decline in the number of cinemas throughout the latter part of the century.

In the mid-1970s a serious outbreak of cinema vandalism was to hit the island following the showing of the film *Victory At Entebbe* (1976). The Empire in Port of Spain was completely destroyed by fire whilst bomb threats were received by both the Strand and Empire cinemas in San Fernando.<sup>40</sup> These violent attacks contributed towards the downward trend in audience numbers that had already begun to impact the industry prior to these particular events. By the middle of the 1980s the total number of cinemas in Trinidad had dropped to sixty and that steady decline was to continue until it was estimated that only approximately one-third (twenty-six)<sup>41</sup> of the outlets operating in the 1970s remained in operation by the close of the century (1999). As in other countries the advent of local television stations – first transmitted in 1962 in Trinidad<sup>42</sup> – and the subsequent introduction of videocassette recorders

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<sup>38</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday 26 July 1969, p.4.

<sup>39</sup> *Trinidad & Tobago Yearbook July 1968 – June 1969* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Yuille's Printeries Ltd., 1969) p.113.

<sup>40</sup> Indra Ramnarine: 'The Cinema: Role & Content in Trinidad', unpublished BA English and History Thesis, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 1976/77, pp. 15-16.

<sup>41</sup> Interview conducted by the author with Mr Rasheed Ali of Goldmine Pictures, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 20 October 1999.

<sup>42</sup> Trinidad was actually the first English-speaking Caribbean country to introduce television technology, according to Lashley. (Lynette M. Lashley: 'Television and the Americanization of the (Footnotes continue on the next page.)

dramatically affected the numbers who regularly attended the cinema. By 1988, more than nine out of ten households were estimated to have a television set in their home, whilst around half that number also had a videocassette recorder.<sup>43</sup> Since the 1960s cinema attendance had steadily dropped from an average of ten visits per head of the population per year, to a situation in the late 1980s where less than half the population<sup>44</sup> ever claimed to visit a cinema. As a bizarre example of the dramatically changing nature of public entertainment, the oldest cinema in Port of Spain - the Astor (previously the London Electric Theatre) - was closed down in 1995 and converted into a church.<sup>45</sup>

Whilst these events were taking place in Trinidad, the major earthquake in Kingston, Jamaica during January 1907 undoubtedly hindered the development of cinema in that island during the early years of the century. Prior to the earthquake, the Theatre Royal in Kingston had been host to a limited number of 'animatograph' entertainments, including a 1906 visit by Captain Joshua Slocum who illustrated the story of his voyage around the world with: "...stereoptician views".<sup>46</sup> Seats for this event were priced at two shillings for the dress circle and one shilling for the gallery, suggesting a limited appeal only to the more affluent members of Jamaican society. Much of Kingston was, however, destroyed during the earthquake, including the theatre and it was not until later that decade that cinematic showings were to take place on a regular basis. From 1909 onwards, frequent advertisements appeared in

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Trinbagonian Youth: A Study of Six Secondary Schools' in *Globalization, Communications And Caribbean Identity*, p.84).

<sup>43</sup> Ewart C. Skinner: 'Mass Media in Trinidad and Tobago' in Stuart H. Surlin & Walter C. Soderlund (eds.): *Mass Media And The Caribbean* (New York, USA: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1990) p.49

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p.50

<sup>45</sup> *Express*, Port of Spain, Tuesday 22 August 1995, p.7.

the *Daily Gleaner* for 'moving picture' shows at the Rockfort Gardens Theatre, such as the February showing of the 'very exciting' film: '*The Railroad Detective*'.<sup>47</sup> It is interesting to note that the cost of admission to such shows was just sixpence in 1909, making it significantly cheaper than the Port of Spain equivalent, although still well beyond the financial reach of much of the local population.<sup>48</sup>

By 1911 a number of developments had taken place that were to rapidly increase the number of potential venues for film shows in Kingston. Plans had been submitted during 1910 for a new Kingston theatre and a nine thousand pound donation from the Hon. Colonel Ward<sup>49</sup> enabled building to begin to replace the one destroyed in the earthquake. This initial donation was subsequently followed by a further three thousand pounds<sup>50</sup> from Colonel Ward for the theatre furnishings and The Ward Theatre - as it was subsequently known - was eventually to open in December 1912. During 1911 'Covent Garden' that was located at No. 1 James & Sutton Streets, Kingston was also to begin showing 'moving pictures' on a regular basis, including footage of the '*Coronation Of George V*' during a 'special moving picture week' held in September.<sup>51</sup> In addition, The William E. Smith Kinetoscope Company of New York was to offer a week in December 1911 of 'new motion pictures every night' in St. George's School Room, Kingston at the cost of sixpence per seat or one shilling for reservations.<sup>52</sup> Regular picture shows continued at Covent Garden throughout 1912, under the auspices of the London Cinematographic

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<sup>46</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Tuesday 23 January 1906, p.2.

<sup>47</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Friday 26 February 1909, p.2.

<sup>48</sup> The cost of entry was to increase to one shilling during 1910 but still remained below that to be found in Port of Spain venues.

<sup>49</sup> *Handbook of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Government Printing Office, 1911) p.597.

<sup>50</sup> *Handbook of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Government Printing Office, 1912) p.596.

<sup>51</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Saturday 9 September 1911, p.13.

Company, where prices for the more expensive seats were offered at one shilling and sixpence each. In September of that same year, the Collegiate Hall in Church Street, Kingston was re-opened by "...a farewell performance of the Royal Marionettes accompanied by a series of Moving Pictures."<sup>53</sup> Seats for this particular event, which lasted for six nights only, were priced at one shilling each.

1913 was a particularly important year for growth in cinematic venues with the newly opened Movies Theatre<sup>54</sup> at Cross Roads offering a variety of film shows every evening at seven-thirty p.m. Its newspaper advertisements from those early days proclaimed that: "...five pictures [will be] shown nightly, of which four will be new."<sup>55</sup> Seats were again competitively priced at either one shilling or sixpence each. The Collegiate Hall which had been formally opened for cinematographic exhibitions by the Governor on the first of July also offered nightly film shows whilst Rockfort Gardens, Rose Gardens Theatre and the Ward Theatre typically screened two shows per week. Later that year the Fisher Amusement Company – responsible for many of the film shows at the Ward Theatre – were to take a significant step forward by starting to travel around the island to offer film shows at different locations. These included visits to the Town Hall in Port Antonio in November<sup>56</sup> and Spanish Town, Annotto Bay, Port Maria and Montego Bay during December 1913.<sup>57</sup> The remainder of the decade was to see the opening of three further venues in Kingston: The Electric

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<sup>52</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Monday 11 December 1911, p.16.

<sup>53</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Tuesday 3 September 1912, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> The name of this establishment was changed by the following January to 'The Movies Ltd.' (*Daily Gleaner*, Saturday 3 January 1914, p.10).

<sup>55</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Tuesday 29 July 1913, p.4.

<sup>56</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Thursday 13 November 1913, p.4.

<sup>57</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Monday 15 December 1913, p.10.

Theatre<sup>58</sup> at Duke and East Queen Street, the Palace and the Colonial Film Exchange based at 40 King Street. By 1915 a total of five outlets (including The Movies and the Rose Gardens) were offering nightly film shows in the capital. In addition, the Paramount Theatre was subsequently operating in Montego Bay in 1918, closely followed by the Triangle Theatre in Spanish Town and in 1921 the Sav-La-Mar Theatre.

The 1920s were an era that saw a dramatic expansion of cinemas into the country districts of Jamaica. By 1924 there were additional 'local' outlets in Port Antonio, Port Maria, Mandeville and a second cinema in Montego Bay plus a further venue – the Gaiety – that had recently opened in Kingston. Just one year later – 1925 – there were as many as twelve local cinemas<sup>59</sup> with a broad geographical reach across much of the island and by 1929 the numbers had increased still further to seventeen.<sup>60</sup> In Kingston, cinemas were enjoying a period of extensive growth in audience numbers as a 1925 advertisement for the Palace testifies. Audience figures for this venue alone reached twenty-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-three during June. In July it had risen to thirty-one thousand seven hundred and ninety-six and by August had showed a further marginal increase to thirty-one thousand nine hundred and sixty-three.<sup>61</sup> It is likely, however, that the audiences of this era were almost, if not exclusively, white as a 1926 newspaper article about the need for censorship suggests. "We suppose that in Jamaica we have primitive Negroes, but we

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<sup>58</sup> This establishment also changed its name as from April 21<sup>st</sup> to the Metropolitan Theatre. (*Daily Gleaner*, Monday 20 April 1914, p.11).

<sup>59</sup> The full list now extended as far as Spanish Town, Morant Bay, St Ann's Bay, Montego Bay (2), Brown's Town, Port Maria, Port Antonio, Falmouth, Mandeville, Sav-La-Mar and Highgate. (*Daily Gleaner*, Saturday 5 September 1925, p.4).

<sup>60</sup> Additional outlets were located in May Pen, Chapelton, Linstead, Black River and Christiana. (*Daily Gleaner*, Wednesday 1 May 1929, p.4).

are quite certain that these never visit moving picture shows.”<sup>62</sup> The cost of admission had also started to increase during the decade with Kingston cinemas such as the Gaiety offering a range of prices from a high of three shillings down to one shilling for the cheapest seats.<sup>63</sup>

The growth in outlets continued throughout the next ten years with a number of major venues being constructed in and around Kingston. The Tivoli Theatre opened on Saturday the thirteenth of May 1933 with a large seating capacity of one thousand “in the open air”<sup>64</sup> and offering twice nightly shows at seven fifteen and eight forty-five p.m. respectively. Seat prices were rather more competitively priced at just sixpence or one shilling each, suggesting the need to appeal to a broader-based, less affluent audience than before. On the thirteenth of April 1938<sup>65</sup> the famous Carib Theatre<sup>66</sup> opened for the first time at Cross Roads (the corner of South Camp Road and Victoria Avenue) and the Majestic followed at the end of 1939. The onset of war appears to have caused a temporary halt to this rapid expansion and it was not until the latter part of the 1940s that another new Kingston cinema – the Rialto Theatre – was to open. In the intervening years, The Movies had closed down along with the Gaiety,<sup>67</sup> although the latter was to be refurbished and subsequently re-opened.<sup>68</sup> The Ward Theatre had also repositioned itself as a ‘full-time’ cinema by 1948, offering its

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<sup>61</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Friday 4 September 1925, p.4.

<sup>62</sup> ‘The censorship purpose’, *Daily Gleaner*, Tuesday 9 November 1926, p.10.

<sup>63</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Tuesday 1 July 1924, p.4.

<sup>64</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Friday 12 May 1933, p.4.

<sup>65</sup> *Handbook of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Government Printing Office, 1939) p.629.

<sup>66</sup> According to a newspaper article, the Carib had leather-upholstered seats, a ‘system of air-conditioning’ and was reputed to be ‘the first cinema in the world to be equipped with [a] new [type of] feature projection’. (*Jamaica Standard*, 26 February, 1938, p.6).

<sup>67</sup> A major fire started in the projection room of this cinema in 1947 and a number of people lost their lives. (‘Nine Persons Burnt to death in Jamaica Cinema Fire’, *Trinidad Guardian*, Tuesday 25 November 1947, front page).

<sup>68</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Friday 7 May 1948, p.4.

patrons the added benefit of viewing in an 'air-cooled'<sup>69</sup> environment. The number of local or 'country' cinemas was also to experience a further increase during this time and by 1949 there were four further venues in Buff Bay, Frome, Lucea and Lionel Town, taking the total up to twenty-one in all.

Because the 1940s had essentially been a period of stagnation for the industry in Jamaica with only a slow level of growth starting again at the end of that time, the following years were to see a dramatic resurgence in new outlets in the capital. The Tropical Theatre was operating by 1950, the Ambassador by 1951, the Globe by 1953, the Queens and the Ritz by 1954, the Odeon at Half Way Tree by 1955, the State and the De Luxe by 1956 (July and September respectively). By 1959 a total of fourteen cinemas were competing for business in the Kingston area alone which, according to Government statistics<sup>70</sup> had a resident population of just under one hundred and eighty thousand.<sup>71</sup> A further two new venues were operating in the Kingston area by 1960, the Regal<sup>72</sup> (opened in July 1959) and the Boulevard drive-in,<sup>73</sup> the Kings Theatre followed in 1961 and the Mona Theatre in December 1962, increasing the total to eighteen overall. Rapid growth continued into the second half of the 1960s with the Premier Theatre (opened in January 1965), the Palladium, the Harbour View Drive-in and the re-opening of the Cosmo all taking place by the beginning of 1966. The number of local cinemas was also to increase during that

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<sup>69</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Saturday 1 May 1948, p.4.

<sup>70</sup> *Report on Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Government Printer, 1959) pp. 76-77.

<sup>71</sup> This figure is probably an under-estimation of the total urban population of Kingston, but even allowing for a significant under-representation of the poor and the slum dwellers, still suggests a fairly high ratio of cinema seats per head of the population.

<sup>72</sup> This cinema had one thousand, seven hundred seats and claimed to be 'the island's largest cinema house' at that particular time. (*Sunday Gleaner*, 6 August 1969, p.13).

<sup>73</sup> This cinema was opened on 6 May 1960 and had space for over four hundred cars plus five hundred pedestrians. (*Daily Gleaner*, Thursday 5 May 1960, p.3).

same period with as many as thirty advertising regularly in the *Daily Gleaner* throughout 1958 and 1959. This number continued to increase over the next few years, rising to thirty-two in 1960 and increasing again to as many as thirty-five throughout 1962 and 1963.

The end of the 1960s was to see the start of an irreversible downturn in the fortunes of Jamaican cinemas in a manner similar to that experienced in Trinidad. JBC-TV had started to broadcast during 1963 and whilst its penetration was only estimated at around thirty per cent of all homes by the mid-1970s,<sup>74</sup> its presence as an alternative means of entertainment had undoubtedly begun to impact on cinema attendance. According to Brown,<sup>75</sup> the wealthier Jamaican was also amongst the first to purchase videocassette recorders (VCRs) throughout the 1970s and by 1987 it was estimated that as many as sixty-four per cent of homes with electricity had a VCR. The 1970s were also a period of economic chaos in the island with high unemployment – soaring to thirty per cent by 1977<sup>76</sup> - whilst many of those fortunate enough to have jobs experienced a rapid decline in their disposable income as a result of rampant inflation coupled with widespread wage freezes. The combination of these factors inevitably lead to a slow decline in the number of outlets, particularly in the greater Kingston area. By 1970 the number of cinemas in the capital had dropped to fifteen and continued to decline to just twelve by 1975. Although these numbers were to briefly recover to fourteen by 1979, by 1985 there were just nine Kingston cinemas that advertised regularly in the *Daily Gleaner*.

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<sup>74</sup> 'The Problems of Imported Television Content in the Commonwealth Caribbean', p.7.

<sup>75</sup> Aggrey Brown: 'Mass Media In Jamaica' in *Mass Media And The Caribbean*, p.16.

<sup>76</sup> *Jamaica: Open For Business* (Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA: The Resource Centre, Spring 1984) p.10.

As I have discussed, the overall development and latter decline of the cinema was – broadly speaking - of a similar nature in both islands. The type of films that were shown from the 1930s onwards were, however, dramatically divergent in their overall composition as a result of both ethnic differences in the respective populations and in the prevailing patterns of distribution and outlet control. In Jamaica there was one major distribution organisation – The Palace Amusement Company - that, following its inception in 1921, was to subsequently dominate the industry until the close of the century.<sup>77</sup> The company imported films under a rental system from (predominantly) American studios and distributed them for exhibition firstly in the capital and then throughout the island. The British were, of course, the ruling power in Jamaica at that time and inevitably concerned to promote their own nationally produced films<sup>78</sup> into what was already becoming a rapidly expanding marketplace. Official estimates from the Colonial Office suggest that as many as seven hundred films per annum were exhibited in Jamaica throughout the 1920s alone.<sup>79</sup> However, by that time the American film industry was already economically dominant in terms of production<sup>80</sup> and their rental system provided a far more attractive proposition to the Jamaicans than the out-right purchase option that the British equivalent demanded.

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<sup>77</sup> Russgram Investments Ltd. was a competitive Distribution Company that formerly operated in some regions of Jamaica. However, for many years they have worked in conjunction (i.e. are merged) with Palace in Kingston. (Interview by the author with Mr Lincoln Forbes, Palace Amusement Company, Kingston, Jamaica, 4 December 1997).

<sup>78</sup> A 1919 newspaper article contained details of an early attempt by the British to promote their films overseas. The 'British and Colonial Kinematograph Company' was designed to 'popularise British films in the Colonies and America' with an aim 'to turn out healthy British plays of universal appeal'. (*Daily Gleaner*, Friday 3 January 1919, p.10).

<sup>79</sup> CSO 1B/5/79/123 – 'Draft Memorandum on Censorship of Cinematograph Films and Encouragement of British Films', 1927, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> According to Finler, the US Studios released a total of six thousand, three hundred and sixty-two films (an average of just over seven hundred per annum) between the years 1921-1929 alone. (Joel W. Finler: *The Hollywood Story* (London: Octopus Books Ltd. 1988) p.280).

Thus, although a number of (legal<sup>81</sup>) attempts were made to ensure that a proportion of British films were exhibited throughout the colony's cinemas, in practice this was never wholly sustainable. Throughout much of the century the vast majority of films shown in Jamaica remained, therefore, of American origin. An article written as late as 1968 succinctly demonstrates this precise point: "Save for the very occasional film from the U.K., we were restricted almost completely to American productions...".<sup>82</sup>

In terms of filmic genre, the Hollywood Western made an early appearance in the cinemas of Jamaica. Adaptations of Zane Grey stories such as *Riders Of The Dawn*<sup>83</sup> and *Sunset* were shown in 1924 and 1929 respectively, along with films by early Western stars like Buck Jones in *Heart And Spurs* (1925) and 'Colonel' Tim McCoy in *Riders Of The Dark* (1928). The Western film continued to entertain local audiences throughout the 1930s and 1940s with many of the new releases from those years being shown in Jamaican cinemas. These included *Cimarron* (1931), *Hidden Gold* (1932), *Hop-A-Long Cassidy* (1935), *Wells Fargo* (1937), *The Westerner* (1940), *Ride 'Em Cowboy* (1942), *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943), *My Darling Clementine* and *Duel In The Sun* (both 1946). As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, the 1950s were an era of rapid cinematic expansion in Jamaica and films from the Western genre would often be exhibited at as many as four different Kingston cinemas concurrently during that time. Whilst many of these films were re-runs of 'classics' such as the Rialto's 1952 showing of *Stagecoach*<sup>84</sup> (1939), all of the major

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<sup>81</sup> Based on the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 which 'encouraged' the exhibition of British films by imposing quotas on exhibitors. (For further details of the Act and its implications see Sarah Street: *British National Cinema*, (London: Routledge, 1997) p.7).

<sup>82</sup> 'Jamaica and "The New Wave"', p.52.

<sup>83</sup> The advertisement for this film, which was shown at the Movies Theatre in Kingston, describes it as having 'plenty of action and a wonderful finish'. (*Daily Gleaner*, Monday 14 July 1924, p.4).

<sup>84</sup> Part of a double bill shown during July of that year. (*Daily Gleaner*, Tuesday 15 July 1952, p.4).

new releases were also available to Jamaican audiences. Amongst the many exhibited throughout the 1950s and early 1960s were *Shane* and *Calamity Jane* (both 1953), *Vera Cruz* (1954), *The Last Command* (1955), *Shoot Out At Medicine Bend* and *Gunfight At The O.K. Corral* (both 1957), *Cowboy* (1958), *The Hanging Tree* (1959) and *Two Rode Together* (1961).

The 1960s and 1970s were periods during which production of Hollywood Westerns were in rapid decline, although the ‘Spaghetti’ Western that largely replaced them during the end of the former decade was enormously popular amongst Caribbean audiences, as Chapter Six of this thesis considers in greater detail. Films such as *Django* (1966), *Beyond The Law* (1967), *A Professional Gun and Killer*, *Adios* (both 1968), *Django Kill* (1969) and *They Call Me Trinity* (1970) enjoyed continual re-runs in Jamaica throughout much of the 1970s, often as double or even triple billings that continually played to packed houses. Whilst selected Westerns continued to remain popular amongst Jamaican audiences, the genre that was to overtake it during the 1970s and early 80s was that of the martial arts (Kung Fu) film. Most of these films were highly formulaic Hong Kong productions that were often poorly dubbed into English, but some works such as Bruce Lee’s *Enter The Dragon* (1973) or *Enter The Ninja* (1981) through to *Ninja III – The Domination* (1984) were American attempts to capitalise on that genre’s growing popularity. Although the martial arts film would eventually enjoy a far shorter period of popularity compared to that of the Western, its grip on Caribbean audiences throughout that era should not be underestimated. A 1984 article suggests that: “[In]...the Caribbean...martial arts movies remain top box office attractions, outdoing Westerns, horror movies,

romances and even the black hero genre in their ability to attract crowds on a consistent basis, week in and week out.”<sup>85</sup>

Whilst the martial arts film had widespread appeal in the early 1980s to predominantly young, male, audiences - irrespective of their ethnic background – newspaper advertisements suggest that the local Chinese community in Jamaica had been able to enjoy traditional Cantonese and/or Mandarin films from as early as the late 1950s. During that time, the State, the Palace and the Rialto cinemas all offered ‘Chinese’ films on an occasional basis and by 1962 both the Ward and the Regal in Kingston were providing a regular exhibition of similar works. In addition, there had been infrequent showings of Hindi films from the late 1940s in cinemas such as the Theatre Super in May Pen and (from the late 1950s) the De Luxe in Kingston. It is also interesting to note that European films (i.e. excluding Britain) were almost never screened before the 1970s (and only rarely during the subsequent years), unless it was under the auspices of the Film Society of Jamaica.<sup>86</sup> Outside of these ‘specialised’ film shows that only appealed to very limited sectors of the local population, the American film was to remain the dominant feature of Jamaican cinema throughout the entire period in which the novels under consideration were both conceived and published.

As far as Trinidad was concerned, a number of differences made its development in terms of film distribution quite unlike that experienced in Jamaica.

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<sup>85</sup> ‘Kung Fu And Cricket’, p.97.

<sup>86</sup> This society was set up in 1950 and had around three hundred and fifty members initially. On occasion it rented space in Kingston cinemas such as the Carib where *Les Perles de la Couronne* (Footnotes continue on the next page.)

The British Colonial Film Exchange Company (considered earlier in this Chapter) and its predecessor the Colonial Film Exchange had enjoyed an early monopoly in the distribution of films throughout Trinidad. However, by the end of the 1940s most of the major Hollywood studios had their own Port of Spain offices and competed with one another locally for exhibition space. Many of these offices were based in Frederick Street until a number of vault fires – at least four in the space of two years according to newspaper accounts – caused the Chief Fireman to order the removal of all (highly flammable) nitrate film stocks from the city centre. As a result, the Government provided two acres of land for lease in St James and the two hundred and fifty-thousand dollar Film Centre was constructed, financed entirely by the distribution companies<sup>87</sup> involved in the island at that time.<sup>88</sup> Films were rented from the studios on a similar basis to that employed in Jamaica, with a sixty/forty per cent split between the distributor and cinema owner, according to Ramnarine.<sup>89</sup> It should also be noted that in addition to these American organisations the first local distributor of Hindi films – International Traders Ltd. – had already been set up in 1947, leading to further fragmentation within the local distribution industry.

The local presence of so many Hollywood studios ensured that the American film was dominant throughout the island of Trinidad during those early years of the industry's development. The British had again attempted to infiltrate it with their own film productions but were as similarly unsuccessful in their efforts as they had been in

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(1937) was shown in 1951 or the State that showed the Polish work *Innocent Sorcerers* (1960) during 1963. (*Daily Gleaner*, Friday 13 April 1951 p.4 and Monday 3 June 1963, p.6).

<sup>87</sup> The complete list was Warner Brothers, Twentieth-Century Fox, Universal, Paramount, MGM, RKO Radio, United Artists, Columbia, Republic and British & General Film Distributors (agents for Monogram and Film Classics). (*Sunday Guardian*, 1 January 1950, p.3).

<sup>88</sup> In fact, the current distribution companies were still based in this Centre as of November 1999.

<sup>89</sup> 'The cinema: Role and Content in Trinidad', p.6.

Jamaica. The 1932 Cinematographic Ordinance had set a particularly high quota of twenty-five per cent for Trinidad (i.e. one in four of all films exhibited were to be of British origin), even above the prescribed twenty per cent in operation in Britain itself. According to Rohlehr,<sup>90</sup> several of the cinema proprietors who were also members of the Legislative Council in the 1930s, openly voiced the complaint that there were inadequate British films to fulfil this quota and that they were often of poor quality and failed to attract large enough audiences.

These notions are borne out by the Motion Pictures Survey of 1938 which shows that British films only accounted for around five per cent<sup>91</sup> of all those shown in the island during that year. Furthermore, despite the imposition of the quota this percentage was to continue declining throughout the following ten years. It would be wrong to imagine, therefore, that American films continued to occupy as dominant a position in Trinidad throughout the remainder of the century as that previously considered in Jamaica. Whilst the following Chapter will explore the issue in much greater depth, the introduction of Hindi films into Trinidad from the mid-1930s onwards was to have a dramatic effect on the local industry. Within twenty-five years they were to account for as many as one in three of all films imported to the island and the American share would have declined to around fifty per cent overall.

Although the Hollywood film was forced to compete in a very different marketplace in Trinidad to that experienced in Jamaica, the overwhelming popularity

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<sup>90</sup> Gordon Rohlehr: *Calypso And Society In Pre-Independence Trinidad*, (Port of Spain, Trinidad: self-published, 1990) p.286.

of the Western genre appears to have been common to both islands. William S. Hart films such as *Blue Blazes Rawden* (1918) enjoyed repeated showings during 1922 and 1923, firstly at the Olympic in Port of Spain and subsequently in the Palace cinema in San Fernando. The interest in Western themes was not solely confined to films in that period either, as a 1926 advertisement<sup>92</sup> for the 'latest novels' makes clear with its prominent display of *The Vanishing American* by Zane Grey and *Hopalong [sic] Cassidy's Protege* by Chas. Mulford. The film versions of many of these Western novels such as Grey's *The Vanishing American* (1925) and Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1929) were also exhibited in Port of Spain during that same period. Apart from these adaptations of Western novels, films such as *Arizona Kid* (1930), *Riders Of The Purple Sage* (1931), *Jesse James* (1939), *Blazing Six Shooters* (1940), *Billy The Kid* (1941) and *The Cowboy And The Senorita* (1944) were all shown to Trinidad audiences during the 1930s and 40s.

Throughout the following ten years as many as six different cinemas would be showing Westerns at any one time. A selection of films such as 'the immortal' *Shane*, the 3-D work *Hondo* and *Arrowhead* (both 1953), together with *Son Of Paleface* (1952) were all offered for viewing on the same evening in January 1954.<sup>93</sup> The 'Spaghetti' Western of the following decade appears to have enjoyed a similar level of popularity to that experienced in Jamaica, with films such as *For A Few Dollars More* (1965) and *Django* often playing in two or three cinemas simultaneously in the 1960s. In that same period MGM held a 'Western Festival' in Port of Spain with a

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<sup>91</sup> Out of a total of three thousand, six hundred and thirteen features films shown in 1938, just one hundred and seventy-six were of British origin. (USNA RG 84 File 804.5 – 850.3, Motion Picture Notes, 1938).

<sup>92</sup> *Sunday Guardian*, Port of Spain, 14 February 1926, p.2.

series of six double features that, according to Ramdass,<sup>94</sup> attracted wide audiences and was talked about for months afterwards. The genre's popularity continued into the early 1970s with the exhibition of films such as *Soldier Blue* (1970), *Trinity Is Still My Name* (1971) and *Cahill, United States Marshal* (1973), but was rapidly overtaken from 1973 onwards by martial arts films, as previously discussed in relation to Jamaica. By the mid-1970s, five or more different martial arts films were being exhibited at any one time, including works such as *Fist Of Fury* and *Kung Fu Fighting* (both 1972) or Bruce Lee's *Way Of The Dragon* (1973).

Aside from the mainstream production of Hollywood, the Hindi film was, as Chapter Three considers, a major force in Trinidad, although its sphere of influence was very much concentrated amongst those of Indian ancestry. Apart from these two dominant sources of films, only a handful of 'Chinese' and Spanish language films had been exhibited on the island from the mid-1930s onwards, but only to limited audiences and on a very sporadic basis. In common with Jamaica, very few European films were ever exhibited, apart from those shown by the privately operated Film Club.<sup>95</sup> It would therefore appear that local writers were potentially able to draw

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<sup>93</sup> This particular selection is typical of the wide range of Westerns available in Trinidad during the 1950s. (*Trinidad Guardian*, Friday 1 January 1954, p.20).

<sup>94</sup> Harry Ramdass: 'The Movies in Trinidad', unpublished BA Arts and General Studies Thesis, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 1983, p.13.

<sup>95</sup> A 1951 newspaper article demonstrates the limited appeal of this organisation which had around five hundred members at that time who paid one dollar membership and a further three dollars for each film show. (*Sunday Guardian*, 11 March 1951, p.13).

upon two quite distinct sources of cinematic imagery for their writing – American and/or Hindi. The extent to which either of these filmic traditions has been absorbed into fictional works by these local writers is considered in detail throughout subsequent Chapters of this thesis.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE INDIAN FILM IN TRINIDAD

The previous Chapter of this thesis was necessarily focused towards Hollywood and the profound impact that it had upon the development of a cinematic infrastructure in both Trinidad and Jamaica. However, although Hollywood enjoyed a monopoly in terms of distribution throughout the early years of expansion, by the mid-1930s it was no longer the only major source of films for the smaller island of Trinidad. With around one-third of its population comprising indentured Indians and their descendants<sup>1</sup> - many of whom spoke insufficient English to thoroughly understand the new American 'talkies' - Trinidad was in many ways the perfect market for the importation of films from India. Throughout the 1930s India's filmic output rapidly increased, from twenty-eight sound features in 1931 to as many as two hundred and thirty-three in 1935 before dropping again to one hundred and sixty-four in 1939<sup>2</sup>. Whilst it initially lagged behind Hollywood<sup>3</sup> in absolute numeric terms, the gaps in both availability and audience interest levels were undoubtedly narrowing. The move to bring the first Indian films to the island in the 1930s therefore coincided with an increase in both supply and local demand that Hollywood alone was unable to fulfil. The aim of this Chapter is to now extend that initial focus upon Hollywood to

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<sup>1</sup> According to Ramdin, one hundred and forty-three thousand, nine hundred and thirty-nine Indians were indentured to Trinidad and Tobago between the years of 1845-1917 compared with just thirty-six thousand, four hundred and twelve who were sent to Jamaica. By 1921 the Indian population of Trinidad comprised one hundred and twenty-two thousand, one hundred and seventeen individuals out of a total population of three hundred and sixty-five thousand, nine hundred and thirteen (thirty-three percent) whilst there were only around sixteen thousand in Jamaica in 1914 (less than two percent overall). (Ron Ramdin: *Arising From Bondage – A History Of The Indo-Caribbean People* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2000) pp. 16, 135 and 159).

<sup>2</sup> Ashish Rajadhyaksha & Paul Willemen (eds.): *Encyclopaedia Of Indian Cinema* (London/New Delhi, India: BFI/Oxford University Press, 1994) p.31.

<sup>3</sup> The major Hollywood studios released an average of approximately three hundred and fifty films per annum during the same time period. (*The Hollywood Story*, p.280).

encompass the equally dramatic impact that these films had upon both the cinematic development and a substantial proportion of the population of Trinidad. In addition, a number of novels by writers of Indian descent are subsequently examined in the light of their engagement with some aspect of Hindi films such as those exhibited on the island.

In India the cinema itself had initially developed along very similar lines to those previously considered in relation to both Jamaica and Trinidad. The Lumière Brothers had actually demonstrated the cinematograph in India as early as 7 July 1896<sup>4</sup>: "...barely six months after it took Paris audiences by storm..."<sup>5</sup>. By 1905 the production and exhibition of films in India had already been combined in the Elphinstone Bioscope Company that was set up by J.F. Madan of Calcutta. According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake, Madan and his organisation went on to dominate film production in India for many years by establishing "...a vast production empire on the lines of Hollywood..."<sup>6</sup>. Of course, the films that were shown throughout these early years were anything but Indian in their origin, although a handful of short documentaries had actually been made with some Indian participation throughout the 1910s. In 1913 the first all-Indian feature film was released – Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra*<sup>7</sup>, a mythological epic based on the life of

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<sup>4</sup> In Britain, the first public screening of a motion picture only took place in February of that same year (1896).

<sup>5</sup> Raghunath Raina: 'The context: A social cultural anatomy' in Aruna Vasudev & Philippe Lenglet (eds.): *Indian Cinema Superbazaar* (New Delhi, India: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1987 [1983]), p.4.

<sup>6</sup> K. Moti Gokulsing & Wimal Dissanayake: *Indian Popular Cinema – A Narrative Of Cultural Change* (Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire: Trentham Books Ltd., 1998) p.12.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the spelling of many film titles is not necessarily standardised and newspaper advertisements, which provided the basis for many of the references used herein, often utilised somewhat unusual transliterations. Accurate dating of an individual film can also be problematical as there is no uniform method applied – some works refer to completion of production, others to actual release date. Wherever possible I have used both the spelling and the dates as given in the *(Footnotes continue on the next page.)*

Lord Krishna - and from that point onwards the local film industry was to rapidly develop and expand. In 1920 a total of twenty-seven (silent) films had been released, by 1925 that number had risen to eighty-six and by 1930 it had more than doubled again to one hundred and ninety-four.<sup>8</sup> Just one year later (1931), the first Indian feature films with sound were released.<sup>9</sup>

It would be wrong to imagine, however, that the rapid growth in locally produced films necessarily equated with a similar domination in terms of exhibition space. Raina estimates that in 1927: "...almost eighty-five per cent of all cinema houses in India were showing only American films."<sup>10</sup> Throughout the following decade, an average of approximately three hundred<sup>11</sup> US feature films - almost the total annual output of the major studios - were imported into India per annum. This trend was to continue throughout the 1940s, even though the number of new Indian releases was actually comparable to, if not greater<sup>12</sup> than the Hollywood equivalent. The importation of Indian films into a Trinidad similarly dominated by Hollywood's output in the 1930s should, therefore, be considered a somewhat pioneering development in the ironic light of prevailing conditions in their actual country of origin.

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*Encyclopaedia Of Indian Cinema*. For further details see *Encyclopaedia Of Indian Cinema*, pp. 14-15 or *Indian Popular Cinema*, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> *Encyclopaedia Of Indian Cinema*, p.33.

<sup>9</sup> *Alam Ara* was released to the general public on 14 March 1931, closely followed by *Shirin Farhad*. By the end of the year a total of twenty-eight sound features (including these two) had already been released along with a further two hundred silent films. (*Encyclopaedia Of Indian Cinema*, pp. 31, 33, 235-236).

<sup>10</sup> 'The context: A social cultural anatomy', p.6.

<sup>11</sup> Panna Shah: *The Indian Film* (Westport, Connecticut, USA: Greenwood Press, 1981 [1950] ) p.85.

<sup>12</sup> In 1947, for example, two hundred and eighty Indian features were released compared with two hundred and forty-nine from the major Hollywood studios. In that same year, two hundred and eight (*Footnotes continue on the next page.*)

It has been previously documented elsewhere<sup>13</sup> that 1935 was the year in which the first Indian ‘movie’ - *Bala Joban* (1934) - was exhibited in Trinidad, but there had, in fact, been a handful of other films shown before then. Two silent works directed by the German Franz Osten – *Prem Sanyas* (1925) and *Shiraz* (1928) – had been shown as well as the Anglo-British production of *Karma* (1933) that was produced by the Indian Himansu Rai. The earliest of these silent films – *Prem Sanyas* - was exhibited on 29 January 1930 at the Palace cinema in San Fernando for two nights only. Admission was priced between six cents for the pit and twenty-four cents for balcony seats. Significantly, the film was advertised under its English title of ‘*The Light Of Asia*’ yet described as: “The Indian Wonder Film produced in India by the Indian Players...”<sup>14</sup>. The same newspaper advertisement went on to emphasise the unique flavour of this work as a ‘superb production of Oriental Splendour’, suggesting an appeal more to the ex-patriate population of Trinidad than to those of Indian descent. The later sound film: *Karma* was only exhibited at the Empire cinema in Port of Spain for just two performances on the first of November 1933.<sup>15</sup> With prices ranging from twelve cents for the pit to forty-five cents for box seats and advertising that promised ‘a glimpse of another world’, it also appeared to be aimed at the more affluent sector (i.e. white Europeans) of the potential viewing audience.

Strictly speaking, none of these films were wholly Indian despite their use of Indian actors and (in the case of the former two) epic narrative styles. Both of the

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Hollywood feature films were imported into India. (*Encyclopaedia Of Indian Cinema*, p. 31, *The Hollywood Story*, p.280, *The Indian Film*, p.85).

<sup>13</sup> For example Brinsley Samaroo: ‘The Indian Connection: The influence of Indian Thought and Ideas on East Indians in the Caribbean’ in D. Dabydeen & B. Samaroo (eds.): *India In The Caribbean* (London/Warwick: Hansib/University of Warwick, Centre for Caribbean Studies, 1987) p.44.

<sup>14</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Wednesday 29 January 1930, p.8.

<sup>15</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Wednesday 1 November 1933, p.16.

Osten films were essentially German productions<sup>16</sup> whilst *Karma* was actually shot in London and used English dialogue and songs throughout. In addition to these feature films, in February 1934 the Gaiety cinema in San Fernando had also presented what was billed as ‘An Indian film showing Mahatma Ghandi’.<sup>17</sup> Seats for this ‘special’ event were priced between twelve cents for the pit to forty-eight cents for balcony seats, marginally below their usual pricing policy at that time, as previously considered in Chapter Two. *Bala Joban* was therefore the first *feature film in an Indian language (Hindi)* to be introduced to the island and enjoyed an extensive run in both the Globe in Port of Spain and the Gaiety cinema in San Fernando. An article in a December issue of the *Sunday Guardian* of 1935 speaks of its popularity as the ‘Indian Talking Film Success’<sup>18</sup> and outlines the plans of the importer Ranjit Kumar<sup>19</sup> to begin distributing Indian films in earnest throughout the West Indies.

As the 1940s drew to a close, so the full extent of this pioneering work became apparent. The numbers of cinemas showing (at least occasional) Indian films had now increased to include the Roxy, London and St. James in Port of Spain, the Palace and New Theatre in San Fernando, together with a number of other local cinemas. By 1941, just six years after their first introduction to Trinidad, Indian films were to

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<sup>16</sup> Whilst this was true at the time, Osten eventually joined forces with Himansu Rai and formed the famous Bombay Talkies film studio in 1934.

<sup>17</sup> *Sunday Guardian*, Port of Spain, 11 February 1934, p.24.

<sup>18</sup> *Sunday Guardian*, Port of Spain, 8 December 1935, p.26.

<sup>19</sup> According to Basdeo, there is some dispute as to whether Kumar was actually responsible for importing *Bala Joban* in to Trinidad. Another Indian businessman, Sayed M. Hosein from San Fernando, also claims to have brought the film to the island, although Kumar is officially credited with this event. (Amrita Basdeo: ‘Indian cinema in Trinidad: role and impact’, Unpublished BA Department of Languages Thesis, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, April 1997, p.3).

account for as much as twenty-two per cent of all imports to the island in terms of linear footage.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the 1940s and 50s the market for Indian films steadily grew, as did the number of cinemas exhibiting them, particularly in the south of the island where most of the Indian population lived. By 1944 it was possible to find at least four different cinemas showing Indian films at any one time, increasing to seven by 1950 and rising to as many as fifteen<sup>21</sup> by 1959. By that latter date, two separate distribution organisations – India Overseas International (I.O.I.) and International Traders Ltd<sup>22</sup> – were actively competing against each other whilst steadily consolidating their ownership of venues that increasingly moved towards showing nothing but Indian films. In addition to these exclusive cinemas, a number of other outlets throughout the island would also show Indian films on an occasional basis. These included Port of Spain cinemas such as the De Luxe and Roxy (owned by Timothy Roodal – see Chapter Two) and the Rialto (formerly the St. James), the Olympic and the Astor (formerly the London Theatre) that were owned by another Trinidadian of Indian descent, Henry Teelucksingh. To help fill the increasing number of cinemas that were exhibiting Indian films during the 1950s, special (reduced) seating prices were occasionally offered to encourage more ‘ladies’ into the audience. The Roxy’s 1951 showing of *Ziddi* (1948), for example, offered what were

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<sup>20</sup> This figure compares with seventy per cent for US films and five per cent for British during that same year of 1941. (CO 875 10/3 – ‘Cinema Propaganda, West Indies’, 1942).

<sup>21</sup> The complete listing of cinemas at that date was as follows. The Mars Eldorado, Jubilee Chaguanas, Revue Couva, Zenith Gasparillo, State Princes Town, Universal Fyzabad, Plaza Siparia, Flavian La Brea, Cameo and Tyrol Barrackpore (all ten operating under the auspices of International Traders Ltd.) The remaining five were outlets for India Overseas: Sunset California, Carib Couva, Empress Princes Town, Sunbeam Penal and Embassy Port of Spain. (*Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday 23 May 1959, p.5).

normally forty or sixty cent seats for just twenty-four cents,<sup>23</sup> whilst the Palace in San Fernando exhibited *Dunyia* (1949) during the following year with ‘any seat for ladies at just 16c’.<sup>24</sup>

In 1960 Indian films had further increased their share of the total market in Trinidad and now accounted for just less than thirty per cent of all imported film stock in terms of linear footage. In this period, the increase in outlets offering Indian films also continued to rise throughout the island. In March 1965, for example, as many as twenty-one cinemas were offering Indian films – all different – for viewing on the same day.<sup>25</sup> A similar advertisement in July 1969 offered twenty-four different choices in twenty-six cinemas.<sup>26</sup> The late 1960s were, however, the pinnacle in terms of growth for these exclusive Indian film outlets and the following decade was to see a significant reduction in their overall numbers.

By the middle of the 1970s, the number of cinemas showing Indian films on any one day had declined to less than half that recorded at the peak in 1969. In May 1976 just nine cinemas<sup>27</sup> were offering Indian films and, in contrast with earlier years, five of these were actually showing the same film *Deewar* (1975). In mid-July 1978

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<sup>22</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Two, this was the first distribution company to be set up in Trinidad that dealt specifically with Indian films. Ranjit Kumar and Anthony Maharaj (both with Indian backgrounds) were its co-founders.

<sup>23</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Thursday 1 March 1951, p.8.

<sup>24</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Tuesday 1 July 1952, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Monday 1 March 1965, p.4.

<sup>26</sup> The cinemas in question were The Starlite, Hi-Way and Twilite Drive-ins, Empire Fyzabad, Silk Sangre Grande, Plaza Siparia, Reno Couva, Princess Arima, Rex Diego Martin, Radio City San Fernando, Venus La Romain, Pax Carapichaima, Phoenix La Brea, Sunset California, Astor Port of Spain, Metro San Fernando, Sanz San Juan, Metro Couva, Sunbeam Penal, Universal Fyzabad, Tivoli Cedros, Crown Rio Claro, Hummingbird Debe, Zenith Gasparillo, Diana Arouca and Tyrol Barrackpore. (*Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday 5 July 1969, p.4).

<sup>27</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Thursday 27 May 1976, p.4.

only seven cinemas were showing Indian films<sup>28</sup> and as many as six of these were carrying the same title – *Khoon Pasina* (1977). Significantly, five different martial arts films<sup>29</sup> were also available for viewing on that same day. Just one month later the Metro Cinema in Couva – previously a major outlet for Indian films – was put up for sale by its owner Roopnarine.<sup>30</sup> This steady decline in outlets was to continue during the 1980s, both in the overall number of cinemas throughout the island, as previously considered in Chapter Two and particularly in those only offering Indian films. By the close of 1984 only three or four cinemas were regularly advertising Indian films in the newspapers whilst the number showing martial arts films had actually overtaken them.<sup>31</sup> Statistics on Indian film exports to the ‘West Indies’ during that decade demonstrate just how dramatic that decline was. In the years 1980 - 81, ninety-two films were recorded as being exported to the region, in 1983 - 84 the number had dropped to only nineteen and for 1984 - 85 had declined still further to just ten in total.<sup>32</sup>

The above discussion has demonstrated the primacy of the role played by Indian film in the expansion and subsequent decline of the cinematic infrastructure throughout the island of Trinidad. However, whilst this factual information provides the necessary background material it is also important to consider the type of Indian films that were usually exhibited in order to understand how their content may have been utilised by local writers. In the case of Indian films, ‘type’ not only refers to

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<sup>28</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday 15 July 1978, p.4.

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter Two for further discussion on the rapid rise in popularity of the martial arts film during the 1970s.

<sup>30</sup> *Trinidad Guardian* Classified Advertisements, Wednesday 16 August 1978, p.14.

<sup>31</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday 1 December 1984, p.12.

<sup>32</sup> Dr. Ram Awatar Agnihotri: *Social & Political Study Of Modern Hindi Cinema (Past, Present And Future Perspectives)* (New Delhi, India: Commonwealth Publishers, 1990) p.160.

genre but also encompasses the language of the films shown. Language is a factor that must be taken into consideration as it has, I believe, played a major role in determining the level of popularity of Indian films in the island. The vast majority of works that were shown in Trinidad up to 1985 were actually Hindi language films, although it is important to note that the overall output from India was by no means exclusively confined to this one language. As an example, in 1960 slightly less than forty per cent of the feature films produced in India were in the Hindi language and by 1985 this proportion had dropped to just below twenty per cent.<sup>33</sup> In that latter year, works in Tamil and Telugu outnumbered those made in Hindi whilst a further significant number were made in Malayalam and Kannada.<sup>34</sup>

The indentured labourers who originally came to Trinidad had been drawn from a number of regions in India and spoke, therefore, a whole range of different languages including those listed above. According to Ramdin, 'many' of the younger Indians whose main language was now (creolised) English, spoke at least some Hindi and/or Urdu by the 1950s. This was primarily in order to communicate with the older generation that had adopted Hindi as a '*lingua franca*' when they first arrived in Trinidad.<sup>35</sup> The Hindi film was thus more likely to be understood by a greater number of its potential audience than any of the other Indian language films, at least during the early years of its introduction to the island. However, by the middle of the 1960s the proportion of this population who thoroughly understood Hindi was necessarily in decline as younger descendants turned increasingly towards English as their main, if not only, language of communication. In 1965 Kumar took a significant step in trying

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<sup>33</sup> *Encyclopaedia Of Indian Cinema*, pp.32-33.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

to widen the appeal of the Hindi film by the introduction of English sub-titles.<sup>36</sup> Within a short period of time, all the Hindi films imported into Trinidad were similarly sub-titled and prominently advertised as such, as an example from May 1967 demonstrates: “[This film (*Ayee Milan Ki Bela*) has been] ...specially subtitled in English for every citizen of Trinidad to understand and enjoy.”<sup>37</sup> Whilst it is unlikely that the introduction of sub-titles encouraged many of African descent to experience Indian cinema, it undoubtedly helped to extend the appeal amongst its primary target audience.

In terms of genre, the films shown in Trinidad largely reflect the mainstream (popular)<sup>38</sup> trends that developed in Hindi film, as might have been expected. Initially film production had been dominated by mythological or religious subject matters, inspired by the *Ramayana*<sup>39</sup> and *Mahabharata* epics. Dharap estimates that mythological subjects accounted for “...more than forty per cent of the [Hindi film] production...”<sup>40</sup> during the years 1931 - 34; and whilst this proportion was eventually to decline in relative importance, it still remained a significant element in Indian film production right up to the early 1960s. In Trinidad a considerable number of such films were shown throughout the 1940s and 50s. These included works such as

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<sup>35</sup> *Arising From Bondage*, pp. 207-210.

<sup>36</sup> Some years prior to this introduction of sub-titles, the English-language film *The Court Dancer* (1941) had enjoyed several extensive runs in Trinidad as the ‘First all-English talking picture produced in India’. (*Trinidad Guardian*, Wednesday 16 December 1942, p.6 and Thursday 12 October 1944, p.4).

<sup>37</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday 13 May 1967, p.4.

<sup>38</sup> There appears to have been little or no demand in Trinidad for less mainstream works such as the films of Satyajit Ray or the later ‘New Cinema’ directors whose films were mostly of a more artistic nature.

<sup>39</sup> For an extensive consideration of the influence of the *Ramayana* on East Indians see Clem Seecharan: *Tiger In The Stars* – *The Anatomy Of Indian Achievement In British Guiana 1919-1929* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1997).

<sup>40</sup> B.V. Dharap: ‘The mythological or taking fatalism for granted’ in *Indian Cinema Superbazaar*, p.81.

*Ghopal Krishna* (1938), *Bharat Milap/Bharat Bhep* (1942), *Ramrajya*<sup>41</sup> (1943), *Naulakha Haar* (1953), *Tilottama* (1954) and *Bajrang Bali* (1956). Apart from these mythological works the other major genre to develop in the early years of sound was that which has subsequently become known as the 'social'. In Sarkar's definition, the 'social' film was essentially a melodramatic romance, placed in a modern setting where the boy and girl are illogically matched (i.e. very rich/very poor, high caste/low caste etc.), thus highlighting the nature of prevailing social conventions.<sup>42</sup> Some of the most famous examples of this genre that were shown in Trinidad include *Achhut Kanya* (1936), *Duniya Na Mane* (1937), *Andaz* (1949), *Daag* (1952) and *Devdas* (1955).<sup>43</sup>

Following the advent of sound in 1931 the role of song and dance came to play an increasingly important function within the Hindi film. With very few exceptions,<sup>44</sup> almost all such films were henceforth to make extensive use of song and dance as an integral story-telling device, irrespective of their narrative structure. Whilst it would therefore be wholly inaccurate to describe the 'musical' as a separate genre within Hindi film production, it is certainly true that a great many films were advertised as such in Trinidad, often with details of the precise number of songs and dances contained therein. Throughout the 1950s and 60s in particular, a significant number of Hindi films were marketed in Trinidad solely on their musical content,

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<sup>41</sup> According to Dharap this was reputed to be the only film ever seen by Ghandi. ('The mythological or taking fatalism for granted', p.82).

<sup>42</sup> Kobita Sarkar: *Indian Film Today – An Analysis* (New Delhi, India: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1975) p.19.

<sup>43</sup> The latter three works all starred the same actor Dilip Kumar in similarly melodramatic roles, although only *Devdas* had an untypically tragic ending.

<sup>44</sup> Chopra's *Kanoon* (1960) is indeed now celebrated for the fact that it contained no songs at all yet was still highly successful. It was exhibited in Trinidad at the Venus cinema in La Romain during December 1962. (*Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday 8 December 1962, p.4).

rather than focusing upon their specific genre.<sup>45</sup> Each of the following films that were shown during this era, for example, were all simply advertised by the cinemas as ‘musicals’: *Madhumati* (1958) - a reincarnation story, *Deedar* (1951) - a melodrama and *Humlog* (1951) - a realist ‘social’. For many other works, the emphasis was placed upon the *quantity* of songs and/or dances that they contained, above all else. Examples include the 1951 film *Ada* that was shown at the Palace in San Fernando during March 1955 and described as a ‘musical with ten songs and six dances’<sup>46</sup> whilst *Mr Sampat*<sup>47</sup> (1952) was similarly depicted as having ‘twelve songs and ten dances’.<sup>48</sup> The popularity of a particular song or songs from a film could, of course, have a profound impact upon its level of success and many films from that era are now chiefly remembered solely for their music. These include *Barsaat* (1949) which enjoyed two runs in Trinidad during 1951 and again in 1955 and *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* (1971) which was shown at the Twilite drive-in during 1973.<sup>49</sup> The soundtrack to this later film was to become one of the best selling LP’s ever (at that time).

The advent of English sub-titles in 1965 had been a major development in the exhibition of Hindi films in Trinidad, but it should also be noted that another significant change had taken place at around that same time. Several of the more recently released films that were imported from India had finally moved into the use of colour. Before the middle of the 1960s black and white film stock had been the

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<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note that this heightened emphasis upon the musical content was still thriving in India at the close of the century. According to Seetaram, musical highlights from the soundtrack have now completely replaced the use of trailers in India as promotional tools for new Hindi films. (Interview by the author with Dean Seetaram, D.S. Pictures, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 21 October 1999).

<sup>46</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Tuesday 1 March 1955, p.12.

<sup>47</sup> An adaptation of R. K. Narayan’s novel of the same name.

<sup>48</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday 27 February 1954, p.8.

norm for the majority of Hindi films and the first colour prints were only exhibited on the island shortly after the introduction of sub-titles. Amongst the titles seen in colour during 1966-67 were the famous *Sangam* (1964) that broke all previous box office records in Bombay, *Jabse Tumhe Dekha Hai* (1963), *Khandaan* (1965) and *Mamata* (1966). The majority of Hindi films exhibited in the 1960s still remained, therefore, in black and white. Not surprisingly, the limited number of films that did use colour<sup>50</sup> were heavily promoted as such by exhibitors in Trinidad. It would appear likely that this late move into colour was a further factor influencing the steady decline in popularity of the Hindi film that subsequently took place on the island.

As the use of colour spread to encompass almost all new Hindi releases during the early 1970s, so a significant shift also took place in a rapid movement away from the 'social' melodramatic genre with its familiar pattern of song and dance routines. Instead of yet another variation on the romantic theme with its naive, passive hero, audiences were suddenly confronted by the dubious world of the thriller, complete with its violent anti-hero whose sole motivation was either money or revenge (or occasionally both). The parallels between the changes that took place in Hollywood Westerns during the 1960s<sup>51</sup> and this particular development in Hindi cinema are strikingly similar. In addition to this startling move into a violent world with, in Nandy's words, its "...growing emphasis on individual evil and heroism..."<sup>52</sup>, a further significant shift occurred in the decreasing usage of song and dance as an

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<sup>49</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Thursday 1 November 1973, p.4.

<sup>50</sup> By way of contrast, more than eight out of ten US feature film releases were in colour during that same year (1966). (*The Hollywood Story*, p.281).

<sup>51</sup> See Chapters Six and Seven for further details on the movement towards the anti-hero in the Hollywood Western.

integral part of a film's narrative structure. Instead of the eight or more songs and dances that typically featured in a 'social' film, the new thriller genre used only three or four. Furthermore, these songs no longer functioned as a fundamental component of the film but were now mere embellishments that, if anything, diverted attention away from the main narrative thrust.

The actor most often associated with the 1970s thriller film was, of course, Amitabh Bachchan. A great deal of critical analysis<sup>53</sup> has already been written about both him and the films in which he starred so it is not my intention to repeat similar material here. What is interesting to note, however, is the extent to which the films in which he starred were popular in Trinidad. From the mid-1970s onwards, almost every film he appeared in was exhibited in the island and many such as *Deewar*, *Sholay* (1975), *Adalat* (1976) and *Don* (1978) played in five or more cinemas at the same time whilst also enjoying lengthy repeat runs.<sup>54</sup> The 1970s, it should be remembered, were the years in which the general popularity of the Hindi film in Trinidad was already in rapid decline. The similarities between the type of character portrayed by Bachchan – amoral, violent and reticent - with the immensely popular Clint Eastwood persona of the 'Spaghetti' Westerns does help to explain his (otherwise) almost unique appeal.<sup>55</sup> In 1981, when *Suhaag* (1979) was playing at the

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<sup>52</sup> Ashis Nandy: 'Indian Popular Cinema as a Slum's Eye View of Politics' in Ashis Nandy (ed.): *The Secret Politics Of Our Desires – Innocence, Culpability And Indian Popular Cinema* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.9.

<sup>53</sup> For example, Ranjani Mazumdar: 'From Subjectification to Schizophrenia: The 'Angry Man' and the 'Psychotic' Hero of Bombay Cinema' in Ravi S. Vasudevan (ed.): *Making Meaning In Indian Cinema* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 238-264, Fareeduddin Kazmi: 'How Angry is the Angry Young Man? 'Rebellion' in Conventional Hindi Films' in *The Secret Politics Of Our Desires*, pp. 134-155 or *Indian Popular Cinema*, pp. 104-106.

<sup>54</sup> *Sholay*, for example, was already being advertised as enjoying its fourth consecutive week of exhibition in June 1977. (*Trinidad Guardian*, Wednesday 8 June 1977, p.4).

<sup>55</sup> It should also be noted that the narrative of films such as *Sholay* was essentially that of a Western reworked into an Indian setting ('Curry' Westerns, as they became colloquially known).

Kay-Donna drive-in at Curepe, Bachchan actually visited Trinidad to give four shows and, according to newspaper reports was "...mobbed at Piarco [airport]..."<sup>56</sup>. Even his later works such as *Coolie* (1983) were still being shown in three different cinemas<sup>57</sup> consecutively, at a time (1984) when only two other cinemas were still regularly exhibiting Hindi films. Without the advent of these Bachchan thrillers it is, in fact, difficult to see how the Hindi film could have continued to attract mass audiences in Trinidad much beyond the early 1970s.

The above discussion has outlined some of the more prominent features of the popular Hindi film up to the mid-1980s; in particular those associated with the 'social' and the later thriller genres. It is, however, necessary to consider this aspect in somewhat greater detail before examining those novels that appear to reflect (at least some of) these main thematic issues and pre-occupations. A number of broad generalisations can initially be made about the popular Hindi film, irrespective of its particular genre. Firstly, the films were usually significantly longer than their Hollywood counterparts, often running to one hundred and fifty minutes in length or above.<sup>58</sup> In addition they rarely relied upon a strictly linear narrative structure, preferring instead to utilise a more circular technique such as that famously employed in *Achhut Kanya*, for example. Generally speaking, there was significantly less reliance upon 'realism' as employed in the classical Hollywood film and a correspondingly greater dependence upon elements of fantasy. Furthermore, it was extremely rare for a Hindi film to have anything but a happy ending, even those works

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<sup>56</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Tuesday 20 October 1981, p.16.

<sup>57</sup> The Twilite drive-in in Marabella, the Metro in San Fernando and the Central in Chaguanas (*Sunday Guardian*, 1 January 1984, p.10).

that appear to be heading for a tragic conclusion – *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), for example – effect a dramatic reversal in the closing scenes. Finally, they mostly shared a heavy reliance upon star actors or actresses whose personalities were frequently utilised to promote a particular film, over and above its individual narrative qualities.<sup>59</sup>

In the ‘social’ genre, some permutation of the ‘boy-meets-girl’, romantic formula was an essential component of the narrative structure. The costumes of the leading players were typically extravagant (luxurious) and often inappropriately matched to the general *mise-en scène*, leading to an increasing sense of unreality or fantasy. The distinction between the hero and the villain was consistently clear-cut and overly obvious, with an emphasis upon stereotypical characters that always behaved in a familiar fashion. The acting style was frequently overplayed and exaggerated whilst dialogue was usually ornate and sentimental. There was often an emphasis on verbal puns and songs, in particular, frequently carried a double meaning within many of their lines. Above all else, song and dance routines played a central role in the unfolding of the plot, with most of the songs performed by playback singers rather than the stars themselves. In Sarkar’s words: “The conventions attached to the song in the Hindi film have a significance they have nowhere else... It is a vehicle for an assortment of confessions and impressions – from the stirrings of incipient emotions to an indication of storm warnings.”<sup>60</sup> Finally, both the camera

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<sup>58</sup> *Deewar*, for example, was actually one hundred and seventy-four minutes long whilst *Sholay* was significantly longer at one hundred and ninety-nine minutes. (*Encyclopaedia Of Indian Cinema*, pp. 394 & 397).

<sup>59</sup> This latter point is, of course, an aspect that the Hindi film had in *common* with its Hollywood counterpart rather than differing from it.

<sup>60</sup> *Indian Film Today – An Analysis*, p.6.

work and the editing techniques were designed to draw attention to themselves rather than ‘hiding’ their presence from the audience as in their Hollywood counterparts.

For the thriller film of the 1970s onwards, many of the thematic issues so important to the ‘social’ genre had been reversed, overturned or simply discarded altogether. Instead of a focus upon the romantic hero and heroine, the thriller exalted the role of the individual anti-hero who was “...strong, handsome, courageous, quick-witted – a man... of exceptional abilities [who can]... take on not only several villains at a time, but even the whole of society.”<sup>61</sup> In place of melodramatic romance there was now a dangerous cocktail of anger, violence, revenge, sexuality and excitement.<sup>62</sup> The role of music, as considered earlier, was dramatically diminished along with the primacy of the dubbed voice of the playback singer.<sup>63</sup> The acting style was more natural with a shift towards an economy of words rather than the elaborately verbose mannerisms of the romantic hero of old. Distinctions between the ‘heroes’ and villains were also much less precise, with many establishment figures – the police or legal system - who were now portrayed as being inherently corrupt instead of the eye-rolling dacoit of the past. Even the technical conventions in terms of camera usage and editing styles were no longer so highly stylised, having moved much closer to the anonymity employed in the typical Hollywood film of that same era.

It is readily apparent that many of the features which made the earlier Hindi ‘social’ film so distinctive were no longer discernible in the later thriller genre. The

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<sup>61</sup> ‘How Angry is the Angry Young Man’, p.143

<sup>62</sup> Parallels to the ‘Spaghetti’ Western are again apparent in this description of narrative focus.

<sup>63</sup> Bachchan, for example, actually sang a number of the songs in his films rather than miming to playback singers.

thematic preoccupations of the Hindi thriller had, in fact, little to distinguish them from the Hollywood (or Italian 'Spaghetti' Western) model and it is therefore hardly surprising to find that specific references to this genre were rarely to be observed in fictional writing. As far as the 'social' genre was concerned, whilst it was undoubtedly quite different in both conception and format to its Hollywood counterpart of that era, many of its features were essentially visual and did not translate easily into the written word. It was only that genre's most powerful and memorable feature – music and song - that seems, in fact, to have been utilised by writers to any real extent at all. The references to Hindi film that do occur in novels from Trinidad tend, therefore, to be somewhat limited in number and confined to just a small group of writers,<sup>64</sup> all of whom were of Indian descent themselves.

There appear to be two quite distinctive types of reference that can be traced in a handful of novels from the years 1950 – 1985 by these writers in question. Firstly, the influence of Hindi music and songs on Indian characters is examined in a small number of works, most notably in novels by V.S. Naipaul that were published in the late 1950s or 60s when the Hindi film was at its peak of popularity in the island. Secondly, it is possible to discern some more general allusions to Hindi film in the interplay between Indian characters and the cinema. This manifests itself in issues relating to cinema ownership and location, the methods by which many Hindi films were advertised on the island and in the abiding interest in film stars that is conveyed through photographs/booklets etc. from Hindi films. References to these specific points can be found right throughout the works of V. S. Naipaul, from his first novel

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<sup>64</sup> Sam Selvon, V.S. Naipaul, Shiva Naipaul and Harold Sonny Ladoo.

in 1957 to *A Bend In The River* that was published twenty-two years later, in three of Sam Selvon's novels and, briefly, in Shiva Naipaul's 1983 work *A Hot Country*.

In its most simplistic form, the powerful appeal of Hindi film music provides the reader with additional background information that helps to define what is distinctively 'Indian' about the characters in question. The homosexual Tailor in Ladoo's 1974 novel *Yesterdays* is one such individual for whom a brief mention of his extensive knowledge and obvious joy in film music helps to partly flesh out his otherwise sketchy character. "...Tailor knew a lot of Indian film songs. All night he had whistled and sung downstairs."<sup>65</sup> It is, perhaps, unfortunate that Ladoo did not utilise this aspect of Tailor's character to the full, in order to make him somewhat more appealing to the reader or to elaborate on his shady past that apparently included regular visits to see Hindi films. In V.S. Naipaul's novels the references to Hindi film music are utilised to far more subtle effect and often carry an element of irony in their very deployment. When Owad sings a Hindi song in *A House For Mr Biswas*, for example, the very act itself is one of deceit and deception, designed to give a false impression to anyone that happens to overhear him. "Owad was in the bathroom, singing a song from an old Indian film. This was part of his virtue: it showed how untainted he had been by England and flattered everyone."<sup>66</sup>

In Naipaul's earlier novel *The Suffrage Of Elvira*, there are two characters – Mrs Chittaranjan and Ramlogan, the rumshop owner, who are cleverly linked together by the fact that they either sing (or hum) a song from the same Hindi film. "...Mrs

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<sup>65</sup> Harold Sonny Ladoo: *Yesterdays* (Toronto, Canada: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1974) p.43.

<sup>66</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *A House For Mr Biswas* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1992 [1961]), p.553.

Chittaranjan [was] singing the theme song from the Indian film *Jhoola*<sup>67</sup>...He [Ramlogan] dressed leisurely, humming the song from *Jhoola*.”<sup>68</sup> The significance of this particular film would have been apparent to any reader familiar with that specific plot, in which two half-brothers are in love with the same woman. Even in Naipaul’s first novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, descriptions of Ganesh’s duplicity in setting himself up as a fake Hindu mystic are further highlighted by the fact that he also hums Hindi film music. “He [Ganesh] walked about the darkened room, rubbing his hands, and humming a song from a Hindi film”.<sup>69</sup> In this particular case, however, the linkage suggests a darker facet of his personality, one that readily retreats into the realms of fantasy so vividly portrayed on the screens of the Hindi cinema, in order to dupe his unsuspecting ‘clients’.

Cinema owners were well aware of the tremendous attraction that Hindi film music had for the Indo-Trinidadian population and, as already mentioned, often used newspaper advertisements<sup>70</sup> to promote films solely on the number of song and dance numbers they contained. However, in the mid-1940s, many members of their potential audience were still illiterate<sup>71</sup> in some of the more remote country districts or had, at best, only limited access to newspapers. As a result, vans with loudspeakers were often employed to broadcast details of forthcoming attractions, complete with recordings of their most catchy tunes. This rather unusual feature of Hindi film

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<sup>67</sup> A 1941 black and white Hindi film directed by Mukherjee.

<sup>68</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *The Suffrage Of Elvira* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969 [1958] ) pp.91 & 105.

<sup>69</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *The Mystic Masseur* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964 [1957] ), p.133.

<sup>70</sup> A tradition that Ganesh also hopes to exploit in the launch of his publication *The Dharma*. (Ibid. p.176).

<sup>71</sup> Ramdin suggests that ‘at least 60 per cent of the Indians in Trinidad were illiterate in any language’ in 1945. (*Arising From Bondage*, p.210).

promotion is highlighted in three novels, each by different writers, which capture the essence of this somewhat unique Trinidadian experience.

Sam Selvon's description of one such operation in *The Plains Of Caroni* is probably the most straightforward of the three, despite the pseudo-Indian film titles that it contains. "If a film in the nearby town was being advertised, the announcers heralded their approach with loud Indian music which reverberated throughout the village. Then there was a loud click as the music was switched off and: 'Don't miss a master Indian double at the Rivoli this evening. "Karam Kay Malda" and "Darum Catchodee", starring your favourite stars Abdul Lala and Divi, India's greatest singer'."<sup>72</sup> In V.S. Naipaul's *The Suffrage Of Elvira*, the brief description of Lorkhoor's similar operation is somewhat undercut by the ironic authorial comment that precedes it. "Lorkhoor was the brightest young man in Elvira...He was only two-and-a-half years older than Foam *but he was already making his mark on the world.* He ran about the remoter districts of Central Trinidad with a loudspeaker van, advertising for the cinemas in Caroni."<sup>73</sup> (My emphasis). Despite the implication that such a job really amounted to nothing of importance, there is at least no sense of distaste contained within the very act of advertising films in this fashion. In Shiva Naipaul's later novel *A Hot Country* (1983), however, any sense of inherent pleasure that might have been associated with these events has been totally stripped away from the relevant passage, leaving the reader (and listener) only with a sense of intrusion and extreme distaste. "A van with loudspeakers attached to its roof emitted a screech

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<sup>72</sup> Sam Selvon: *The Plains Of Caroni* (London: MacGibbon & Kee Ltd., 1970) p.16.

<sup>73</sup> *The Suffrage Of Elvira*, p.18.

of Bombay film music. In a voice hoarse with exertion, the driver shrieked the glories of forthcoming Indian films.”<sup>74</sup>

Throughout Shiva Naipaul’s novels a similarly negative attitude can be found towards anything to do with the cinema. Instead of being places of entertainment that could offer pleasure and a measure of escapism to his characters, Shiva Naipaul’s cinemas are places of darkness and decay, located in the seediest parts of town. In *Fireflies* the Lutchmans (an Indian family) are described as living in “...a decrepit area of boarding houses, cinemas, gambling clubs and, as the police and more prosperous residents joyfully suspected, brothels.”<sup>75</sup> It comes as little surprise; then, to discover that Aubrey’s bookshop in *A Hot Country* is located in a similarly poor and run-down area, along with the local cinema. “...it occupied a corner site on a busy main road lined with rum-shops, cheap eating-houses, grimy workshops devoted to repairing the irreparable and ‘guest houses’ of dubious intent...Directly opposite was a *decaying cinema*.”<sup>76</sup> (My emphasis). Whilst several of these references to cinemas do not necessarily spell out the fact that they were outlets that exhibited predominantly Hindi films, that information is implied *implicitly* given the ethnic origin of the characters in question and/or their particular locations. When another Indian character: Tiger, in Selvon’s *A Brighter Sun*, goes to the cinema in San Juan,<sup>77</sup> for example, we are not specifically told that he went to see Indian films. Nevertheless, we can imply as much by the fact that Tiger is an Indo-Trinidadian and

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<sup>74</sup> Shiva Naipaul: *A Hot Country* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995 [1983] ) p.92.

<sup>75</sup> Shiva Naipaul *Fireflies* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970 [1970] ) p.36.

<sup>76</sup> *A Hot Country*, p.24.

<sup>77</sup> Sam Selvon: *A Brighter Sun* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Caribbean Writers Series, 1993 [1952] ) p.179.

that there were as many as six exclusive Indian outlets in that town at the peak of their popularity.

The ownership of many of these exclusively Indian cinemas was, as considered earlier, often in the hands of entrepreneurs of Indian descent and therefore associated with the notion of being rich or having 'made it' in the island. Sam Selvon makes this explicit connection between exhibiting Hindi films and making money when two of his characters in *The Lonely Londoners* – Galahad and Moses – reminisce about life in San Fernando. " 'And how about Palace Theatre<sup>78</sup>? Is still there? Boy, when I was there the film used to burst every minute.' 'Yes man, the Palace still there, but they showing a set of Indian pictures now *to make money*'."<sup>79</sup> (My emphasis). In *A House For Mr Biswas* V.S. Naipaul makes, once again, rather more ironic use of this connection between money and Indian cinemas when he describes the search for a suitable bride for Owad. "The oil families, whatever their original condition, were too grand. So they searched among the families in soft drinks, the families in ice, the transport families, the cinema families, the families in filling stations. And at last, in a laxly Presbyterian family with one filling station, two lorries, a cinema and some land, they found a girl."<sup>80</sup> In Naipaul's example, the ownership of cinemas has been downgraded, precisely because of its associations with 'trade' and 'making money'; aspects of life that the higher-caste Tulsi family liked to consider themselves superior to.

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<sup>78</sup> The Palace Theatre in San Fernando had, in fact, moved over to showing Indian films from as early as 1940.

<sup>79</sup> Sam Selvon: *The Lonely Londoners* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Caribbean Writers Series, 1994 [1956]) p.37.

Naipaul's sentiments about cinema ownership do not end with the single example quoted above. In his later novel *The Mimic Men* he equates the purchase of a cinema that 'showed mainly Indian films' with being a 'perverted asceticism', something that was, in fact, considered a 'frivolity to the rest of the world'. The owner's son, Cecil is duly parodied for his delight in such a mundane possession, along with his failure to even be able to 'make money' from such an obviously easy source of revenue. "The cinema became Cecil's toy. It was Coca-Cola all over again: unlimited access to a delight for which the rest of the world had to pay. It was also another place to drive to. He was in and out of the cinema with his valet, harassing the manager; it gave him pleasure to be recognized in the village as the man who owned the cinema."<sup>81</sup> Even when writing about cinema ownership outside of Trinidad in his 1979 novel *A Bend In The River*, Naipaul still displays a similar level of disdain for those of Indian descent who became involved in that particular line of business. "What I [Nazruddin] was trying to do was run a movie theatre, [in Canada where many Indo-Trinidadians had emigrated] an ethnic theatre...Business wasn't too good. An ethnic theatre downtown wasn't such a good idea...[However] the pictures that did well were the Indian pictures."<sup>82</sup> The reader can sense the fact that Nazruddin is doomed to failure in this enterprise and when the previous owner of the cinema simply tells him to abandon his investment and '...go back to the Indian Ocean', it comes as little surprise.

The final references to Hindi cinema that occur within this particular group of novels are again to be found in the works of V.S. Naipaul. The Indian film industry

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<sup>80</sup> *A House For Mr Biswas*, p.230.

<sup>81</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *The Mimic Men* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969 [1967] ) p.166.

made extensive use of the star system to promote their output, as mentioned previously and this included a whole package of promotional materials such as pamphlets, posters and photographs (stills) that featured stars in glamorous poses. What Naipaul seems to find of particular concern is not that there was a market for such products but rather that these items were used or displayed indiscriminately by many of the people who owned them. In both *The Mystic Masseur* (p.157) and *A House For Mr Biswas*, he highlights the fact that both Ganesh and Mr Biswas proudly display photographs of (unidentified) Indian film actresses. In the case of the latter the 'enormous framed photograph' is jumbled up with "...religious pictures [that] ...were crowded out by calendars from the distributors of American and English motor vehicles...".<sup>83</sup> He returns to reconsider this peculiar mixture of secular and religious imagery once again in *The Mimic Men* when describing how Ralph had recently been disappointed in Cecil's father. "I admired his lack of show... I noted his quiet, sincere taste. In his back veranda, where other people would have had things like thermometers from the tyre companies and calendars from various firms, he had religious pictures and photographs of Indian film actors... the Indian actors in his back veranda were on a level with the religious pictures: together they were an act of piety towards his past, a reverencing of the land of his ancestors."<sup>84</sup> What this passage seems to suggest is that Ralph is really as lacking in taste as Cecil's father, whose ignorant elevation of mere actors to the same level as that of Hindu deities is really too crass to warrant further comment from Naipaul.

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<sup>82</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *A Bend In The River* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1980 [1979] ) p.244.

<sup>83</sup> *A House For Mr Biswas*, p.243.

<sup>84</sup> *The Mimic Men*, pp. 98-99.

The ironic and essentially contemptuous tone that Naipaul adopts when writing about Hindi cinema may well be significant in understanding the general paucity of references in novels to the subject in general. Of the writers from Trinidad who published novels between the years 1950 – 1985, Sam Selvon and V.S. Naipaul were by far the most prolific, accounting for as many as eighteen works out of the total of sixty-nine that appeared during that period. Yet, as the above observations have demonstrated, Selvon only made very limited references to Hindi cinema and V.S. Naipaul's comments on the subject were typically of a derogatory nature, suggesting his general lack of empathy with that medium. Little or no references to Hindi cinema can be found in novels published during that same time span by other writers of either an Indo- or Afro-Trinidadian background. It is more than likely that the Hindi film had limited appeal to those writers who were not of Indian descent themselves and even those who were from such a background may simply have preferred to watch Hollywood films. Of course, with the elements of song and dance playing such a prominent role in the Hindi films of the earlier decades, it is hardly surprising that writers were less willing to draw inspiration from this particular source, given the difficulties of translating these facets into a written format. It also suggests that writers were perhaps unable to find *other* sorts of memorable imagery in Hindi films that they were willing or able to utilise in their works of fiction, unlike the Hollywood Western, for example, that is considered in greater detail later in this thesis.

## CHAPTER 4

**AUTEUR AND AUTHOR – A COMPARISON OF THE WORKS OF  
ALFRED HITCHCOCK AND V.S. NAIPAUL**

In Chapter Three a number of works by V.S. Naipaul were examined along with their specific linkages to some aspect of Hindi cinema. As that Chapter demonstrated, Naipaul's fiction undoubtedly contained *more* explicit references to Hindi film than can be found in any of his contemporaries' novels but, generally speaking, his usage of such references was still fairly limited overall. This is not to suggest that all of his novels are similarly devoid of allusions to *other* aspects of cinema, in particular the Hollywood films that dominated Trinidad during much of Naipaul's childhood. In Naipaul's own words: "Nearly all the films shown [in Trinidad], apart from those in the first-run cinemas, are American and old."<sup>1</sup> It is, instead, possible to trace many linkages to Hollywood cinema throughout his body of work and, in particular to the works of Alfred Hitchcock, as the ensuing discussion will demonstrate.

Naipaul's most sustained use of cinematic imagery can be found in the 1971 'novel'<sup>2</sup> *In A Free State*. Within this particular work the films to which Naipaul makes repeated, explicit reference, are primarily those of the film director; Alfred Hitchcock. The decision to compare the works of these two men in this Chapter has, therefore, been far from arbitrary. Instead it has been based upon a detailed textual

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<sup>1</sup> V.S. Naipaul: 'Trinidad' in V.S. Naipaul: *The Middle Passage* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969 [1962]) p.63

<sup>2</sup> The particular form of this work is not, strictly speaking, that of a novel even though there are parallels to be found between its various sections and the title section is essentially a novella in its own (Footnotes continue on the next page.)

analysis which suggests that a great many similarities exist between the thematic preoccupations that occur in both their respective works. The main focus of this Chapter is to examine the nature of that particular relationship that appears to exist between Naipaul's writing and the works of Alfred Hitchcock. This has been primarily conducted through a detailed comparison of the specific and recurrent issues that have informed the work of both men throughout much of their respective and lengthy careers.

The basic premise behind this analysis has been to adopt a structuralist approach to examine the films and novels of Hitchcock and Naipaul respectively. Whilst acknowledging that such an approach is not without its difficulties, I would argue that structuralism *per se* does at least provide a tool that enables comparisons to be made between the output from two distinctively different types of media such as those under consideration. Furthermore, despite there being a great deal of overlap between critical theories that inform the analysis of both film and fiction, few attempts seem to have previously been made that directly compare works from these two distinct forms of expression.<sup>3</sup> Literary structuralism, as Eagleton reminds us, 'flourished in the 1960s'<sup>4</sup> although its domination of literary criticism had waned significantly by the end of that decade, largely due to the developing work of French critics such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. In the area of

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right. However, for the purpose of this exercise I have treated the work as if it were a novel and it has been included as such in the tally of published works considered throughout the thesis as a whole.

<sup>3</sup> The one exception to this would be the plethora of works that compare and contrast filmic adaptations of novels, such as George Bluestone: *Novel Into Film* (Berkeley, USA: University of California Press, 1957), M. Klein and G. Parker (eds.): *The English Novel And The Movies* (New York, USA: Ungar, 1981). R. Giddens, K. Selby and C. Wensley, (eds.): *Screening The Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1990) or Jonathan Bignell (ed.): *Writing And Cinema* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 1999).

film studies, the structuralist approach enjoyed a far longer period of popularity through its adaptation, over a number of years, into what has subsequently become known as *auteur* theory. This loosely defined collection of theories could be paraphrased as suggesting that individual authorship (i.e. that of the director) could be assigned to what was essentially a collaborative and highly regulated mass medium (film). Although this basic premise underwent a number of revisions and was largely superseded by post-structuralist and historical approaches to film in more recent years, its concept was still being espoused in the 1980s by critics such as Fredric Jameson<sup>5</sup>, particularly in connection with the works of Alfred Hitchcock.

The first formalisation of *auteur* theory was contained in an article by François Truffaut, originally published in 1954.<sup>6</sup> In this article, Truffaut contrasted what he considered to be the over-literary 'quality' tradition of the French cinema with something he identified as the 'cinéma d'auteurs'. In Truffaut's view, one of the directors who qualified as an outstanding *auteur* was Hitchcock and his lengthy interviews with the director, subsequently published as a book in 1967,<sup>7</sup> was undoubtedly instrumental in establishing his status as such. Truffaut's views on *auteurism* were developed and adapted by other French critics such as André Bazin,<sup>8</sup> mostly through the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s and gained further status in the following decade with the work of the American critic, Andrew Sarris. His

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<sup>4</sup> Terry Eagleton: *Literary Theory – An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990 [1983]) p.96.

<sup>5</sup> See Jameson's 1982 article 'Allegorizing Hitchcock', for example, reprinted in Fredric Jameson: *Signatures Of The Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992) pp.99-127.

<sup>6</sup> François Truffaut: 'Une Certaine tendance du cinéma français' in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 31 (January 1954).

<sup>7</sup> François Truffaut: *Hitchcock* (New York, USA: Simon & Schuster, 1967).

article: 'Notes on the *auteur* theory in 1962'<sup>9</sup> and subsequent works throughout the 1960s, took the arguments of the French critics and used them primarily to assert the superiority of Hollywood films. Hitchcock had, of course, already established himself as a leading director in Hollywood by that time, having released as many as twenty-three films between the years 1940<sup>10</sup> to 1960.

By the end of the 1960s a theoretical shift had taken place towards a less simplistic approach to *auteurism* amongst critics such as Geoffrey Novell-Smith, Alan Lovell and Peter Wollen. In common with literature, film was now recognised as being a more complex structure than had been acknowledged by the earlier critics, with multiple determinants such as budget and genre also playing a part alongside that of the director/author. In appropriating the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, these later developers of *auteur* structuralism favoured looking for recurrent motifs and privileging thematic structures within a director's body of work, whilst also acknowledging that the *auteur* could no longer be regarded as the *sole* creative source of a particular film. Wollen's 1969 work: *Signs And Meaning In The Cinema*<sup>11</sup> encapsulated these developments by suggesting that the way to identify an *auteur* was to look, over an extensive period of time, for a combination of recurrent motifs and binary oppositions in that director's body of work.<sup>12</sup> It is this particular formulation

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<sup>8</sup> See André Bazin: 'Comment peut-on être Hitchcocko-Hawksien?' in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 44, (February 1955) or 'De la politique des auteurs' in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 70, (April 1957), for example.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Sarris: 'Notes on the *auteur* theory in 1962' in *Film Culture*, no. 27 (Winter 1962-3).

<sup>10</sup> 1940 was the year in which Hitchcock moved to Hollywood.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Wollen: *Signs And Meaning In The Cinema* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1969).

<sup>12</sup> Fredric Jameson espoused a similar approach when he suggested that one should 'see the *auteur* hypothesis in a historicist way, as the projection back over a body of texts originally produced and received within a different *episteme*'. (Fredric Jameson: 'The Existence of Italy' in *Signatures Of The Visible*, p.199).

of *auteur* theory that has been utilised throughout this Chapter to compare the films of Alfred Hitchcock with the novels of V.S. Naipaul.

There are clearly a number of difficulties associated with *auteurism* that have inevitably lead to its decline in popularity during the last thirty years. Most film critics now recognise the subjective nature of film viewing and that the identification of underlying themes will necessarily vary from viewer to viewer. This is not to suggest that such variation is wrong or that there can only be one reading of, say, Hitchcock's work, but rather to question how valid it is to use an identification of repetition as some sort of measure of 'value'. After all, there is little evidence to suggest why consistency of style should be considered more important than variety in the output of any particular director. *Auteur* theory does not – nor, indeed can it – contain any inherent criteria for value. Linkages could be found across the work of any director who had made a significant number of films over a lengthy period of time. Such recurrence would not, however, necessarily make each and every one of those directors an *auteur*. As Jean-Louis Comolli wrote as far back as 1965: "What 'thematic' can we derive when the repetition more than a hundred times over of the *same* themes, situation, relationships, roles, must clearly have led to an infinite diversity of nuances...".<sup>13</sup>

A further key limitation of *auteur* theory is, as even Novell-Smith noted in his 1967 book on Visconti,<sup>14</sup> the fact that filmic structures are not fixed in time and that a

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<sup>13</sup> Jean-Louis Comolli: 'Signposts on the trail' in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 164, (March 1965), English translation in John Caughie (ed.): *Theories Of Authorship* (London: Routledge, 1995 [1981]) p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> G. Novell-Smith: *Visconti* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967).

director's concerns undoubtedly change as his/her film career progresses.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Hitchcock, there are dramatic differences between his early works and - following his migration to Hollywood in 1940 - his later, more psychologically motivated films. *Auteur* theory, however, encourages us to ignore the director's development at the expense of identifying thematic linkages. It is extremely difficult to separate out the full extent of the director's role from those of scriptwriter, cinematographer, film editor etc. and it then becomes almost impossible to decide the degree to which one individual's personality or vision has been imprinted on a film. The most that can be reasonably said is that directors (*auteurs*) such as Hitchcock tend to be involved to a much greater extent in their films, that is, in both pre and post-production as well as on-set activities. It is interesting to note that arguments about Hitchcock and *auteur* theory still remain concurrent as several articles demonstrate in a recently published collection of essays about this director and his work.<sup>16</sup>

As anyone who has studied Naipaul's fiction will testify, literary critics<sup>17</sup> have consistently identified patterns of repetition and recurrence throughout his own body of work. Of course, as with all critical discussion, there is rarely complete agreement as to what precisely those themes might or might not be, nor the reasons for their repeated inclusion. Indeed, this plethora of differing interpretations is the inherent problem with literary structuralism as a whole and not just that of *auteur*

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<sup>15</sup> There are obvious parallels to be made with the output of a prodigious writer such as V.S. Naipaul.

<sup>16</sup> For example William Rothman: 'Some Thoughts on Hitchcock's Authorship', or Lesley Brill: 'Redemptive Comedy in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock and Preston Sturges: 'Are Snakes Necessary?'' in Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalès (eds.): *Alfred Hitchcock Centenary Essays* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999) pp. 29-42 and 205-219.

<sup>17</sup> Examples include R. Hamner (ed.): *Critical Perspectives On V.S. Naipaul* (Washington, D.C., USA: Three Continents Press, 1977), Bruce King: *V.S. Naipaul* (London: Macmillan, 1993), Chandra B. Joshi: *V.S. Naipaul: The Voice of Exile* (New Delhi, India: Sterling Publishers, 1994) and Fawzia Mustafa: *V.S. Naipaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

structuralism. Most critics have tended to home in on the notion of exile and/or alienation in Naipaul's work but beyond that core thematic, the field of interpretation becomes both wide and varied. A similar case inevitably exists within critical examinations of Hitchcock's films. Numerous film critics<sup>18</sup> have identified what appears to them to be recurrent, principal themes in his output. For some critics, his prime pre-occupation was thought to be with the notion of shifting identities whilst others believe that chaos or obsession or an interest in unstable minds were his main concerns. Once again, there is little – and indeed why should there be - consensus of opinion?

In a 1966 article by Russell, Hitchcock's view or vision of the world was defined as being: "...intensely pessimistic, in a sense almost nihilistic...".<sup>19</sup> Similar statements have been made about the writing of V.S. Naipaul. Examples include Joshi's 1994 comment that: "Naipaul's is one of the most pessimistic and bleak visions among contemporary writers."<sup>20</sup>, or King's "There is a contest in Naipaul's writing between two ways of regarding the world. One might be described as existential. Life in itself has no essential, pre-determined significance. We are born, struggle to survive, die and are forgotten...".<sup>21</sup> It is, however, the way in which Naipaul frequently uses cinematic imagery to explore that underlying pessimism, that provides the strongest linkage between the disparate output of both men.

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<sup>18</sup> For example Eric Rohmer & Claude Chabrol: *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*, translated by Stanley Hochman (New York, USA: Ungar, 1979 [1957] ), Gene D. Phillips: *Alfred Hitchcock* (Boston, USA: Twayne Publishers, 1984), Robin Wood: *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York, USA: Columbia University Press, 1989) or David Sterritt: *The Films Of Alfred Hitchcock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> Lee Russell: 'Alfred Hitchcock' in *New Left Review* (January 1966) p.92.

<sup>20</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *The Voice Of Exile*, p.x.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce King: 'V.S. Naipaul' in Bruce King (ed.): *West Indian Literature 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1995 [1979] ) p.217.

Naipaul's use of cinema and – more importantly – an inability to distinguish between film and reality – are employed throughout his novels as a powerful tool for exploring the complexity of his characters' identities. Issues of identity are never far from the surface in the works of Naipaul, as can be seen in many of his novels and short stories. Apart from the more explicit examples there is a sense in which his whole body of writing has been undercut by the notion of a loss of individuality. In numerous interviews, Naipaul has discussed his continuing struggle to retain a sense of self in a post-colonial world that insists on labelling him – 'a West Indian writer', or 'a Caribbean novelist', for example - and thus denying his true sense of identity: "...one doesn't have a side, doesn't have a country, doesn't have a community; one is entirely an individual."<sup>22</sup> The matter is further confused by Naipaul's frequent insertion of events from his own life into his fictional writing, leading to a sense of confusion between the author/narrator/character in question. It is hardly surprising, then, that so many of his characters suffer from a personality crisis of some sort, often to the extent where they can only be defined by the way others ultimately view them or, more commonly, through their own identification with the illusory world of the cinema.

As mentioned earlier, the work in which Naipaul makes the greatest use of cinematic references – and overwhelmingly to specific films by Alfred Hitchcock - is *In A Free State*. In the 'Tell me who to kill' section of that work, the nameless narrator (an overt comment on his very lack of identity) lives and operates in a world

that is formulated by half-remembered images from Hitchcock's films such as *Rebecca* (1940) and *Rope*. The latter is a particularly telling choice of memory as the film deals with issues of amorality and insidiously encourages the audience to side with the homosexual killers, Brandon and David. In a similar fashion, Naipaul encourages his readers to sympathise with the narrator - Dayo's brother – as he stabs the white boy who taunts him in his shop. At the precise moment of the fight, he blanks out reality and returns to a previously recounted nightmare that had its basis in the Hitchcock film: "Nothing making noise now. The body is in the chest, like in *Rope*..."<sup>23</sup>. In this supreme moment of crisis, his entire personality, moral standards and values are wholly subsumed into the imagery with which he identifies.

The notion of shifting identities has, as briefly considered above, also been pinpointed as one of the most recurrent themes throughout the films of Hitchcock. From early works such as *The 39 Steps* (1935) to later, more psychologically informed films like *Vertigo* (1958), *North By Northwest* (1959) or *Marnie* (1964), the issue of what constitutes identity has been explored by the director with an almost obsessive degree of interest. In many of his earlier films it was examined in a relatively straightforward physical or social sense and the disappearance of Miss Froy in *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) is a prime example of this. Her face and clothing are superimposed upon other characters in the train to reflect their confusion about who she really is and also that of the audience watching the film. In the later and much more disturbing works such as *Vertigo* and *Marnie*, however, a change in appearance

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<sup>22</sup> Adrian Rowe-Evans: 'V.S. Naipaul: A *Transition* Interview by Adrian Rowe-Evans', *Transition*, No. 40 (December 1971) pp. 56-62, reprinted in Feroza Jussawalla (ed.): *Conversations With V.S. Naipaul* (Jackson, USA: University Press of Mississippi, 1997) p.31.

<sup>23</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *In A Free State* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973 [1971]) p. 97.

is merely an accompaniment to a merging of personalities or disintegration into separate, parallel identities. In *Vertigo*, Madeleine/Judy is 'created' by Scottie Ferguson to meet his destructive desire to bring someone back from the dead. By the end of the film (and Judy's 'second' death), she not only resembles Madeleine in appearance but has been 'taken over' by the latter's personality as well. The most extreme example of changing identity must, however, be that of the character of Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960). By the closing scenes, we learn that Norman's personality has been completely subsumed by that of his mother's, the ultimate and perhaps inevitable outcome of Hitchcock's lengthy exploration of the loss of a sense of self.

It can hardly be coincidental that Naipaul also chooses to make reference to another Hitchcock film – *Spellbound* - in the title section of *In A Free State*. Both Bobby and Linda are characterised as shallow and selfish, without any true sense of identity and sexually promiscuous in a manner that is reminiscent of Jane in his later novel *Guerrillas*. Much of the time they talk at, rather than with, each other, but on one of the rare occasions when they do engage in conversation it is to discuss the above mentioned film. "I didn't know anything about anything. I thought psychiatry was an American joke and a psychiatrist was someone like Ingrid Bergman in *Spellbound*."<sup>24</sup> In the Hitchcock film to which they refer, Bergman's employer 'Dr. Edwards'/John Ballantyne is suffering from an identity crisis – he has blocked out his past and may have been a killer – and sequences of dream and reality are often blurred.<sup>25</sup> The implication seems to be that by reference to the film, both Bobby and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.153.

<sup>25</sup> The artist Salvador Dalí designed the sets for these now famous sequences.

Linda are operating in a similarly blurred fashion, with shifting identities and a failure to distinguish between reality and the fictional representations of the cinema.

In an interview conducted in 1971, the same year as *In A Free State* was published, Naipaul stated that the work: “..came out of this great panic, it went on in this enormous pain and anguish for months and months.”<sup>26</sup> The following year, Theroux went so far as to suggest that: “*In A Free State* is the first book of Naipaul’s in which a fear of death and a preoccupation with failure are considered as being final.”<sup>27</sup> Hitchcock’s *Spellbound* was itself partly based upon the mental breakdown suffered by the producer, David O. Selznick, for whom Hitchcock was working at the time of shooting the film. The sufferings with which both the film and the novel concern themselves suggest that Naipaul’s choice of reference was far from arbitrary in identifying Bobby and Linda with Dr. Constance Petersen, the character portrayed by Ingrid Bergman in Hitchcock’s film. It is also interesting to note that Hitchcock’s earlier film *Rope* was experimental in terms of its form – a series of lengthy takes without normal editing techniques<sup>28</sup> – whilst *In A Free State* also marks a distinctive move away from the conventional novel form that Naipaul had previously adopted. Whether Naipaul would have been aware of Hitchcock’s technical methods is a question of conjecture, but it does offer a further point of comparison between the works of both men.

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<sup>26</sup> ‘V.S. Naipaul: A Transition Interview’, p.34.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Theroux: *V.S. Naipaul, An Introduction To His Work* (London: André Deutsch, 1972) p.125.

<sup>28</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Hitchcock’s techniques in this film see Peter Wollen: ‘*Rope*: Three Hypotheses’ in *Alfred Hitchcock Centenary Essays*, pp. 75-85.

Although *In a Free State* is the only fictional work by Naipaul that contains specific references to Hitchcock, it is by no means the only work of his in which film is used to explore identity. In *The Mimic Men*, for example, Ralph Singh both recognises and comments upon the imposition of cinematic imagery upon the Caribbean psyche,<sup>29</sup> with its obvious implications for his own lack of self-esteem. “The island before me now: the Technicolor island of *The Black Swan*<sup>30</sup>, of cinema galleons and men-o’-war, of rippling sails and morning music by Max Steiner.”<sup>31</sup> He later returns to the same theme to demonstrate how his identity has been irreversibly tainted by the external influence of Hollywood: “The camera was in the sky. It followed the boy, ...beside the mangrove of a distant island, an island as lost and deserted as those which, in films like *The Black Swan*... appeared in the clear morning light to the anxious man on deck. Not unmarked.”<sup>32</sup> Although Naipaul does not specifically refer to Hitchcock’s work within this novel, Singh’s notion of being tracked by an ‘airborne’ camera can be seen to parallel that experienced by many of the director’s own disempowered male characters. Roger Thornhill in *North By Northwest*, for example, suffers a similar experience to that described by Singh when he is pursued (‘watched’) by a light aircraft that follows and even seems to anticipate his every move.

In several other Naipaul novels, the cinema provides a distorted mirror through which characters shape their own identity and, as result, are duly mocked by the author for their naivety and ignorance. Lorkhoor in *The Suffrage Of Elvira*

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<sup>29</sup> A key example of a writer’s concern with the filmic ‘colonisation’ of the mind, as outlined in the Introductory Chapter of this thesis.

<sup>30</sup> A 1941 swashbuckling adventure about the exploits of Henry Morgan and supposedly set in Jamaica.

explicitly alters his appearance – and presumably imagines that his personality suffers a similar transformation - as a direct result of seeing a particular film. “He had grown the moustache after seeing a film with the Mexican actor, Pedro Armendariz. In the film Armendariz spoke American with an occasional savage outburst in Spanish; it was the Spanish outbursts that thrilled Lorkhoor.”<sup>33</sup> In *A House For Mr Biswas*, Mohun repeatedly writes the beginning of stories in which the main ‘character’ (his alter ego) “...moved in a world derived from the novels Mr Biswas had read and the films he had seen.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, his brother-in-law, Owad emulates Lorkhoor in the earlier novel mentioned above, by returning from England with an altered appearance based on another film star. “Then they saw him. He was wearing a suit they had never known, and he had a Robert Taylor moustache”.<sup>35</sup> Naipaul plainly does not carry his exploration of identity to the extremes to which Hitchcock operates, but the similarities in their line of thinking are nevertheless apparent.

Whilst issues of identity provide a pivotal link between the two men, it is by no means the only thematic preoccupation that they share. Both Hitchcock and Naipaul display a sense of pessimism about human relationships that clearly pervades many of their collective works. Lesley Brill has written that “...in many of Hitchcock’s [films], distrust is inevitable in the fundamental structure of relations between women and men.”<sup>36</sup> and this is apparent right throughout his body of work. His portrayal of the inherently destructive nature of relationships is notorious for its

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<sup>31</sup> *The Mimic Men*, p.31.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 111-112.

<sup>33</sup> *The Suffrage Of Elvira*, p.67.

<sup>34</sup> *A House For Mr Biswas*, p.344.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p.536.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Redemptive Comedy in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock and Preston Sturges: ‘Are snakes necessary?’’, p.211.

manifestation in films such as *Strangers On A Train* (1951) or, in its most macabre manifestation, in *Psycho*. The earlier work concerns a murder pact between two strangers who agree to 'swap' murders – Guy's promiscuous wife Miriam in exchange for Bruno's domineering father. Bruno quickly murders Miriam, thus ensuring that she is punished for her infidelity, but Guy fails to keep his side of the 'bargain' and Bruno's father is spared. In the later work *Psycho*, Norman Bates' murder of Marion in the infamous shower scene – far too well documented elsewhere to warrant further consideration within this particular context - is eventually shown to have arisen as a direct result of the unnaturally 'close' relationship between Norman and his late mother.

Naipaul's own vision of relationships bears a marked resemblance to several of the scenarios visualised by Hitchcock. In its most extreme manifestation, the sodomy and brutal murder of Jane in *Guerrillas* is portrayed by the writer as the inevitable outcome for a life of casual sexual encounters and failed relationships. In a similar fashion to Judy in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* or Marion in *Psycho*, the promiscuous female in Naipaul's novel is made to pay the ultimate price. In addition, the doomed nature of Jane's dalliance with Jimmy is ironically contrasted with the idealised images of interracial sex<sup>37</sup> that Bryant – Jimmy's homosexual partner – watches so avidly in the local cinemas. "When he was younger he used to go to the interracial sex films with Negro men as star-boys; they were exciting to see but depressing afterwards... Watching the film, he began to grieve for what was denied him..."<sup>38</sup>

The failure of relationships between members of different racial groupings is a

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<sup>37</sup> Previously prohibited by the US Production Code of 1930 as being unsuitable for public display.

<sup>38</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *Guerrillas*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976 [1975] ) pp. 36-37.

recurrent theme in several other novels by Naipaul. Mustafa has suggested that: "...Naipaul seems impelled to depict the betrayal of postcolonial history in stylized scenes of sexual humiliation between men and women, or men and men, of different races."<sup>39</sup>, and relationships in *The Mimic Men*, *In A Free State* and *A Bend In The River* would bear this out. In the latter two works, there is an overwhelming sense of disgust at their very nature in both Bobby's humiliation by the young Zulu (*In A Free State*) and in Salim's degradation and the beating of his lover, Yvette (*A Bend In The River*).

Yet it is not just interracial relationships that fail to work in Naipaul's fiction. There is a pervading sense of dislike for marriage itself, when Mr Stone views his wife Margaret in the novel *Mr Stone And The Knights Companion*. "Twice a day...he faced her across the dining table; and these moments...were moments of the greatest strain. She, the feeder, ate with voracious appetite... He could see the powder on the hairs of her taut cheeks. Her lipstick became oily; then, as it grew fainter, spread over areas not originally painted. Reflecting at the dining table on her idleness and frivolity... he feared he might say something offensive."<sup>40</sup> Hitchcock's views on the state of marriage are imbued with a similarly pessimistic tone. His 1954 film *Rear Window* is riddled with couples whose relationships have failed, whilst the main protagonist Jeffries views his impending marriage to Lisa as an unwarranted encumbrance and a serious threat to his freedom. Through the 'rear window' of the film's title, the viewer is forced to adopt a voyeuristic stance in looking with Jeffries at the tenants opposite, each of whom offers a frightening glimpse of what his

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<sup>39</sup> V.S. Naipaul, pp. 151-152.

relationship with Lisa might become. As Wood has written: "Each apartment offers a variation on the man-woman relationship or the intolerable loneliness resulting from its absence... The difficulties of human relationships, the horror that marriage can be and the comparable horror of frustrated singleness, are much stressed..."<sup>41</sup>

Such a negative view of relationships occurs repeatedly in both Hitchcock's and Naipaul's work, even from an early stage in their respective careers. In Naipaul's 1958 novel: *The Suffrage Of Elvira*, female sexuality is already being portrayed as a threat to both fathers like Chittaranjan and husbands like Baksh. The desire (and need) to exercise control over women is encapsulated in Ramlogan's little ditty: "When girl children small, they does crawl, as the saying goes. Then they does start walking. Then they does lie down. As the saying goes."<sup>42</sup> Other married couples in Naipaul's fiction, such as Ganesh and Leela in *The Mystic Masseur* and Mohun and Shama Biswas in *A House For Mr Biswas* endure relationships in which neither is fulfilled and lengthy separations plus the occasional beating are depicted as the norm. Even Salim's engagement to Kareisha in *A Bend In The River* offers neither partner any sense of fulfilment – he instantly returns to Africa, picking up a whore en route, whilst she simply awaits him in London if, and when, he should eventually decide to return. As with Hitchcock's films such as *Vertigo*, *The Birds* (1963) or *Marnie* it is almost impossible to find a relationship in Naipaul's fiction that offers any true sense of satisfaction to either partner, be it parent and child, husband and wife or lovers of either sex.

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<sup>40</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *Mr Stone And The Knights Companion*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973 [1963]) p.37.

<sup>41</sup> Robin Wood: 'Rear Window' in *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, p.102.

<sup>42</sup> *The Suffrage Of Elvira*, p.109.

The very broad-reaching subject of guilt is a further area in which Naipaul and Hitchcock's works appear to have a high degree of correlation. It could easily be argued that, by generic categorisation alone most of Hitchcock's films ('thrillers', as they are typically known) are inherently linked to this very motif. Whilst this is an accurate description, it would equally appear that some of his works most definitely engage with the issue in a much more sustained and provocative fashion than such a simple classification would imply. As far back as 1957, Rohmer and Chabrol wrote that the leading Hitchcock theme was 'the transfer of guilt'.<sup>43</sup> Spoto's more recent and exhaustive biography of Hitchcock<sup>44</sup> goes one step further in suggesting that guilt should be considered one of *the* great themes of contemporary art, especially when connected to the burdens placed on an individual by religion. Hitchcock's work clearly displays many of the Catholic notions that freedom from corruption can only come about by guilt, via the path of enduring punishment. The ways in which Melanie is repeatedly tortured in *The Birds*, for example, is a prime example of Hitchcock's working out of this very notion, while his 1953 work, *I Confess*, explores the equally sensitive idea of moral guilt. A Catholic priest, Michael Logan, is prepared to face the death penalty rather than break the secrecy of confessional. Although he is finally cleared of murder, his personal guilt remains as his enduring punishment for the rest of his life.

Whilst Naipaul's novels are clearly of a quite different nature to that of Hitchcock's films, there is nevertheless a high degree of correlation in the way in

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<sup>43</sup> *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*, p.11.

which notions of personal guilt permeate their narrative structure. Several of his characters – Bobby (*In A Free State*), Ralph (*The Mimic Men*) and Salim (*A Bend In The River*), are racked with personal disgust and guilt at their compulsive use of prostitutes. Ralph’s encounter with a particularly fat prostitute encapsulates the guilty feelings that all three feel impelled to repeat, time and time again: “She unbound, untied, released herself. Flesh, striped, indented, corrugated, fell helplessly about her...She was ghastly, tragic, a figure from hell with a smiling girl’s face...I knew I would never touch; and I feared being touched.”<sup>45</sup> Sexual failure is quickly followed by the physical reaction to guilt and degradation: “As soon as I was in the bathroom I was sick: all the undigested food and drink of the previous day.”<sup>46</sup>

Prostitutes or illicit relationships are by no means the only causes for an overwhelming burden of guilt in Naipaul’s novels. Mohun Biswas is weighed down by a sense of guilt in both his relationship with his eldest son, Anand and particularly his wife Shama. Seeking an outlet for his pent-up emotions, he takes to writing fantasies about a parallel life, freed from the burdens of poverty, marriage and parenthood: “Still, at the typewriter, he wrote of his untouched barren heroines. He began these stories with joy; they left him dissatisfied and feeling unclean.”<sup>47</sup> If the act of writing alone leaves him with a sense of guilt, he is further appalled when he discovers that Shama has read his wistful musings: “Mr Biswas recalled with horror and shame the descriptions of the small tender breasts of his barren heroines. Shama

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<sup>44</sup> Donald Spoto: *The Dark Side Of Genius – The Life Of Alfred Hitchcock* (London: Plexus Publishing Ltd., 1994 [1983]).

<sup>45</sup> *The Mimic Men*, p.236.

<sup>46</sup> *The Mimic Men*, p.237.

<sup>47</sup> *A House For Mr Biswas*, p.345.

sucked her teeth loudly. If she had laughed he would have hit her.”<sup>48</sup> However, despite his overwhelming sense of guilt, Mohun continues to return with unremitting regularity to his typewritten fantasies in the same way that Ralph, Salim and Bobby continue to return to their prostitutes.

The repeated portrayal of compulsive behaviour and its accompanying guilt in Naipaul’s novels leaves the reader with a sense – if not of complicity – then at least of ambivalence towards the characters in question. With little or no moralistic point of view to his novels, Naipaul fails to condemn or condone and the reader is left to share in or dismiss the notions of guilt as they choose. A parallel situation can be found to exist in several of Hitchcock’s films. In *The Wrong Man* (1956), for example – the audience itself is compromised by its identification with the hero who, although wrongly accused, could very well have been guilty of the crime in question – guilt is therefore implied by association. In both *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* guilt prevents the main character from acting in a positive fashion that might have saved another’s life. The audience is again implicated in the guilt, despite the fact that it is passivity rather than specific action that is blamed for its collective association. In *Rope* and *Strangers On A Train*, characters play with relish at the idea of murder without knowing that they are conversing with someone who has already committed such an appalling crime. As in many of Hitchcock’s films, there is no clear delineation between guilt and innocence – it is only the actions of murderers that separates them from the rest, who thus remain ambivalently tainted or morally implicated by their words alone.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. pp.345-346.

Guilt and fear are often treated as related, if not synonymous emotions in art and, as a result, are technically difficult to separate one from the other. Yet certain types of fear can be manifest without an accompanying burden of guilt, particularly in the visual medium of film. The fear of pursuit, for example, could almost be considered a compulsory element in most filmic thrillers and it would certainly be true to say that many of Hitchcock's works are indebted to it as a narrative device for maintaining the audience's interest. Early films such as *The Lady Vanishes* or *Rebecca* are clearly dependent upon the pursuit/fear motif but its role as a major element in Hitchcock's work is most evidently displayed in several of his films from the 1950s – *Rear Window*, *Vertigo* and *North By Northwest* – in particular.

*North By Northwest* and *Vertigo* are both overtly concerned with pursuit and its pervasive presence in each film intertwines with a disturbing loss or lack of identity that accompanies the main characters. In the former work, Roger Thornhill is being wrongly pursued as a result of a case of mistaken identity and the scene in which he is hunted from a light aircraft – as mentioned earlier in this Chapter - is particularly memorable for its visual impact upon the audience. In the latter film, Scotty is initially employed to follow (pursue) Madeleine but after her tragic death pursues another woman (Judy) because she happens to remind him of the dead Madeleine. *Rear Window* addresses pursuit from a different perspective with the wheelchair-bound Jeffries using his girlfriend Lisa to pursue a murderer (Thorwald) that he thinks he has seen through the window of the film's title. The film ends with an inverted pursuit when the murderer stalks Jeffries in a particularly powerful scene that uses light as a threatening element in binary opposition to the real and implied darkness of Thorwald's physical presence.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that pursuit is a major theme in many of Naipaul's novels, although it certainly plays a key role in both *Guerrillas* and *In A Free State*. Interestingly, the main characters in each work suffer from a high degree of ambiguity as far as their identities are concerned which links them thematically with those in Hitchcock's films. In addition, both works utilise filmic references to explore issues of identity as considered earlier in this Chapter. The character of Jane in the former novel is, I would argue, deliberately lacking in definition because she is perceived as an empty, dissatisfied person who drifts in and out of relationships, totally lacking in any conviction with which the reader could empathise. Nevertheless, like Hitchcock's Jeffries in *Rear Window* she also operates as both the pursuer and, eventually, the pursued.

Jane's role as pursuer holds true for both her initial relationship with Roche, whom she perceives as some sort of trophy in her list of lovers and her later sexual encounters with Jimmy. "In London Roche had seemed to her an extraordinary person; and she had prided herself on her perception in picking him out".<sup>49</sup> Within a few months and now utterly bored with Roche, she quickly turns to alternative ways of filling her time and eagerly agrees to meet the younger Jimmy. Whilst Jimmy is inclined to believe that he is the aggressor, it soon becomes apparent that it is really Jane who is pursuing him: "He put his hands on her shoulders, and he was astonished at her response. She fixed her mouth on his, her lips opened wide."<sup>50</sup> It is Jimmy, however, who has the final say in their ill-fated relationship when he reverses their

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<sup>49</sup> *Guerrillas*, p.47.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p.77.

roles and offers her up as a literal sacrifice to his former lover, Bryant. “Jimmy locked his right arm about Jane’s neck and almost lifted her in front of him...Sharp steel met flesh. Skin parted, flesh showed below the skin... and then all was blinding, disfiguring blood...”<sup>51</sup>. Most tellingly of all, the horrific fate to which Jane is subjected serves no redeeming purpose in the narrative. She is simply buried by her murderers and is assumed by others to have already left the island.

Jane’s sacrificial role has echoes in another Hitchcock film, *The Birds*, in which the violence of nature (birds as opposed to a misguided youth) is used to inflict serious physical punishment upon a similarly self-centred young woman. Melanie Daniels actively pursues a man (Mitch) she has only briefly met in a pet shop, following him to his family home and tricking herself into favour with his younger sister Cathy. Her singularly bold behaviour is immediately punished by a series of increasingly ferocious bird attacks on both herself and the unsuspecting townsfolk into whose midst she now appears to have brought death and destruction. Despite being seriously injured by the birds, Melanie does not actually seem to die at the end of this film and its concluding scenes are, as Paglia suggests, deliberately ambiguous. “Melanie is now damaged goods... (she) has been whipped back to her biological place in the pecking order”.<sup>52</sup> Close-up shots of her broken fingernails and uncomprehending eyes emphasise, however, that her days as a chaser of men are essentially over. Her erstwhile lover Mitch and his family drive away to an unknown destination with Melanie lying helpless in the back of their car. Like Jane in

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. pp.242-243.

<sup>52</sup> Camille Paglia: *The Birds* (London: BFI Publishing, 1998) p.86.

*Guerrillas* her punishment has served little purpose other than to offer a moral 'warning' to others inclined to a similar mode of behaviour.

The characterisation of Bobby in the title section of *In A Free State* offers a number of parallels to that of Jane in *Guerrillas* and equally to the inversion of pursuit portrayed in the Hitchcock films discussed above. The homosexual Bobby is first introduced in a bar, pursuing a young Zulu boy whom he hopes to pick up for a casual sexual encounter. The language used by the narrator displays a quiet distaste for his behaviour in its singular lack of compassion, particularly when Bobby is ultimately spurned. "The Zulu didn't stir. His face, when he lifted it to Bobby's was without expression... Then, without moving his hand or changing his expression, the Zulu spat in Bobby's face."<sup>53</sup> Undeterred by his lack of success with the Zulu, Bobby is foolish enough to try and pick up another African boy at the Colonel's, with a similar loss of money and unsuccessful sexual outcome. "[And] as soon as Carolus began to walk to the door... Bobby knew that he had misread the boy's face, had seen things in it that were not there."<sup>54</sup>

Bobby plays the role of aggressor in his erstwhile sexual encounters, although away from such pastimes he is shown to be racked with inner worries and fearful of both real and imaginary pursuers. "It was only when he undressed that he became disquieted. Intruders: there might have been a crisis, and he might have been without his car, trapped."<sup>55</sup> His fear of becoming hunted escalates as he and Linda head back for the compound and the narrative elongates to emphasise the nightmarish quality of

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<sup>53</sup> *In A Free State*, p.107.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* p.197.

their journey. "He was alone; he was inviting reprisal. But still he raced. There was danger at the end of the road, danger in his solitude. But still he allowed time to pass."<sup>56</sup> The supreme irony is, of course, that the attack which eventually befalls him is largely self-inflicted and not as the result of having been followed at all. His final punishment, apart from his physical injuries, is to suffer humiliation at the hands of Luke, another African servant boy. Naipaul's lack of sympathy for his character, coupled with the ambiguity of the novel's ending echoes strongly back to Hitchcock's closing scenes with Melanie in *The Birds*.

To date, Bobby from *In A Free State* and Jimmy in *Guerrillas* are the only overtly homosexual characters about whom Naipaul has written. Equally, Hitchcock's *Rope* with its linkages to the former work and *Strangers On A Train* are his only films to have seriously explored the subject, albeit in less explicit detail in keeping with notions of taste (and censorship) prevalent at that time. It would not be true to suggest, however, that the somewhat homophobic attitudes which are manifest in these works, are in any way balanced out by a celebration of heterosexuality elsewhere. As I have already discussed, there is a significant level of negativity displayed towards male/female relationships in the works of both men, with much ambiguity towards women and female sexuality in particular. One might therefore have expected to find a celebration of male heterosexuality embodied in their films and novels to counterbalance such views. Instead, as any study of their works will show, they are usually based around one or more disempowered men, who lack

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p.195.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.221.

control over their personal relationships, their family, their careers or ultimately their very destinies.

Within Hitchcock's body of work, there are numerous examples that serve to illustrate his pre-occupation with exploring the fragility of the male psyche. Scottie in *Vertigo*, for example, suffers a complete nervous breakdown on the screen – graphically illustrated with striking colour and camera work - due to his inability to act positively when called to do so. Christopher Balestrero in *The Wrong Man* or Roger Thornhill in *North By Northwest* are both powerless victims of circumstances over which neither can exert any control. Jeffries in *Rear Window* is disempowered both physically (by his broken leg) and mentally through his inability to commit himself to his girlfriend, Lisa. In *Spellbound*, the psychiatrist John Ballantyne is shackled to his past with a misguided guilt complex over which he is – ironically, given his profession – unable to liberate himself. Even at the closing stages of his career, Hitchcock continued to explore the subject at length, with his darkest rendition of the impotent male (both literally and metaphorically) in his last but one film, *Frenzy* (1972).

Naipaul's own vision of the disempowered male is so pervasive that it is difficult to think of any of his novels in which a less pessimistic view is adopted. From his first published novel,<sup>57</sup> *The Mystic Masseur*, the tone had been set in which his leading male character – Ganesh, in this particular instance - suffers set-backs,

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<sup>57</sup> *Miguel Street* was actually published later (1959) but is technically speaking the first work written by Naipaul. However, it is more a collection or sequence of short stories than a novel and has not, therefore, been included in this thesis despite its explicit references to Hollywood cinema. V.S. Naipaul: *Miguel Street* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971 [1959]).

defeat and humiliation at the hands of his family, friends and even the local populace. Although this particular novel ends on a positive note for its protagonist, the mocking, ironic tone that the narrating voice adopts only serves to highlight Ganesh's futility in struggling against forces far more powerful than himself. Despite his failure as a benevolent politician, Ganesh possesses the one attribute (dishonesty) that allows him to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and turn his failure into a measure of personal success. "Ganesh called a Press conference at the end of the week. He said Providence had opened his eyes to the errors of his ways".<sup>58</sup> The novel that followed just one year later: *The Suffrage Of Elvira* plays out a similar scenario of personal inadequacy in a tragi-comic tone. Chittaranjan fails in his role as both a father and husband and, once again as a would-be politician who loses much of his money, his daughter and ultimately his political ambitions in a ceaseless round of personal incompetence. Significantly, aspects of the behaviour of both of these characters are linked to some element of film – either Hindi<sup>59</sup> or Hollywood – along their respective paths to self-destruction.

The twin themes of failure as a man and failure as a politician are picked up again in the later novel *The Mimic Men*. In this work, the overall tone is significantly more pessimistic with Ralph Singh eventually losing his marriage, his money, his status and his homeland in a narrative of personal helplessness, devoid of hope. In place of the honorary title that is conferred upon the compliant Ganesh, Singh's failure as a politician forces him into an ignominious role, permanently exiled from the country of his birth. The novel ends with him in Britain as an anonymous failure,

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<sup>58</sup> *The Mystic Masseur*, p.218.

<sup>59</sup> As considered earlier in Chapter Three.

alone and with no perceivable prospects for the future. "My life has never been more physically limited than it has been during these last three years...I do not wish to be re-engaged in that cycle from which I have freed myself. I fear to be continually washed up in this city".<sup>60</sup> Once again, a character that Naipaul had earlier portrayed as defining himself through Hollywood is ultimately seen to fail in his quest for a true sense of identity.

Although men with political ambitions are singled out and duly mocked by Naipaul for their failure to exert any real control over their lives, other leading male characters in his novels are made to suffer a similar level of impotence in their own respective spheres of life. In *A House For Mr Biswas*, Mohun Biswas struggles in vain to break free from the financial control exerted by Hanuman House and his wife's extended family. His failure to make anything of his life away from their influence, causes him to have a breakdown that is reminiscent of that suffered by Scottie in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. "Every morning the period of lucidity lessened. The bedsheet, examined every morning, always testified to a tormented night."<sup>61</sup> In the one novel that is set wholly in England: *Mr Stone And The Knights Companion*, Naipaul paints a similarly depressing picture of a man unable to break free from a lifetime of routine and tedium, albeit self-imposed. "His habits were converted into rituals; they grew sacred even to him."<sup>62</sup> Ralph Salim in *A Bend In The River* is another character who is portrayed as incapable of acting in a positive fashion, despite the political turmoil that has taken his livelihood away and now threatens his life. "I

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<sup>60</sup> *The Mimic Men*, p.251.

<sup>61</sup> *A House For Mr Biswas*, p.270.

<sup>62</sup> *Mr Stone And The Knight's Companion*, p.45.

thought you knew what you were doing, Salim.’ ‘I didn’t. I don’t know now’.”<sup>63</sup>

Further examples of an inability to take control could similarly be found in Roche’s behaviour in *Guerrillas* or Bobby’s in the title section of *In A Free State*.

Whilst it would be possible to extend the list of examples that could illustrate any of the above points, a degree of repetition would inevitably start to occur that would detract rather than add to the issues under consideration. The selection of topics for comparison has therefore been restricted to those primary thematic recurrences that appear to inform the respective works of both men. The detailed analysis contained within this Chapter has clearly demonstrated how Naipaul made extensive use of cinematic imagery –including explicit references to a number of films by Hitchcock - to explore the key thematic issue of identity in several of his novels from the period under consideration. A similar preoccupation with issues of identity has been traced throughout a large number of Hitchcock’s films. That is not, of course, to suggest that they deal with the topic in an altogether similar fashion nor that their moralistic points of view (if, indeed they can be said to hold any) is necessarily the same for the varied issues under discussion. Certainly, with the output of a film director, the notion of ‘authorial’ influence is somewhat problematical anyway, as has been considered earlier in this Chapter. It would be wrong, therefore, to imagine that Hitchcock necessarily had the artistic freedom to determine the *precise* nature and content of every one of his films in the way that a writer such as Naipaul would have had over the characterisation and events in his novels. However, if it is possible to generalise over such a broad body of work – a comment that encompasses the output of both men – then it has to be said that Hitchcock’s work is

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<sup>63</sup> *A Bend In The River*, p.285.

generally of a more didactic nature, with little room for ambiguous interpretation on the part of the audience. By way of contrast, a work of Naipaul's such as *In A Free State*, for example, offers little or no clues as to how it can or should be interpreted. Even Naipaul's early novels like *The Mystic Masseur* fail to provide the level of narrative closure that characterises most of Hitchcock's output. Nevertheless, despite such stylistic differences a high degree of correlation has been found to exist in the choice of themes that their respective works repeatedly explore.

## CHAPTER 5

### WOMEN WRITERS AND THE CINEMA

The literary scope of the two preceding Chapters was purposely concentrated upon the works of a small number of male writers, all Trinidadians of Indian descent. Its filmic focus was similarly limited to a consideration of their specific interactions with Hindi cinema and, in the case of V.S. Naipaul, with the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Within this particular Chapter both the literary and the cinematic scope has been shifted and expanded. In literary terms, the range of this Chapter has moved away from novels by men to encompass the fictional output of women writers from both Jamaica and Trinidad collectively. In term of films, the Chapter examines a wide range of material – excluding Hindi works<sup>1</sup> - and looks at the variety of ways in which women writers have engaged with cinema in many of their novels published during the years 1950 - 1985.

For reasons of simplicity, any female writer from either of the two countries, irrespective of their original place of birth,<sup>2</sup> race, colour or subsequent place(s) of domicile has been included in the following discussion if their work(s) engage with cinematic imagery. It could be argued that there are quite distinctive differences between several of the women covered in this particular Chapter, but I believe it would be inappropriate to try and segregate or otherwise distinguish their writings from one another on the basis of race or any other discriminatory factor. Furthermore,

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, no women writers of Indian origin had published a novel by 1985 and no references to Hindi film were found in any of the other novels that were under consideration in this particular Chapter.

the relatively small sample sizes from each island make it impractical to try and differentiate between minority sub-samples in a way that could produce a sound and valid basis to any conclusions that might be drawn as a result. I would suggest that despite their inherently diverse backgrounds and the varying nature of their written works, it is only by *combining* their respective voices that the overall nature of the female Caribbean writer can really be studied in sufficient detail.

During the thirty-five year period under consideration, women writers accounted for forty-two novels<sup>3</sup> or twenty-seven per cent of the overall total of one hundred and fifty-five that were published. In Jamaica they accounted for twenty-four novels or thirty-five per cent of the total, whilst in Trinidad their proportion was somewhat lower at just twenty per cent or eighteen novels from that island's overall output of eighty-seven publications. Whilst the balance between the literary output of Jamaica and Trinidad - given their respective population sizes - is not particularly noteworthy in itself, it is important to understand that certain key writers accounted for multiple publications during that time period which could distort the overall picture somewhat. Amongst the Jamaicans, Jeanne Wilson had six novels published; Lucille Iremonger had four and both Nancy Marr-Johnson and Rosalind Ashe a further three each. In the case of Trinidad, Rosa Guy accounted for as many as nine of the total published works and Clara Rosa de Lima a further four. Whilst three of Rosa Guy's novels are described as being written for 'young adults', they have been

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, three of the 'Jamaican' writers - Nancy Marr-Johnson, Esther Chapman and Jeanne Wilson - were actually born in the UK but subsequently spent most of their lives in the island and writing about its people.

<sup>3</sup> Excluding any works written specifically for children, biographical or historical studies such as Nancy Marr-Johnson's *Home Is Where I Find It* (Gateshead on Tyne: Northumberland Press Ltd., 1950) or Lucille Iremonger's: *The Ghosts Of Versailles* (London: White Lion Publishers Ltd., 1975 [1957]).

included in this Chapter because there is little in their respective narratives to distinguish them from her more 'adult' works. In addition, almost all of her novels make reference to some aspects of either film or the cinema in general. Of the remaining thirteen novels, nine were single publications by each of their respective authors, whilst Marion Patrick Jones and Yvonne Jack (both from Trinidad) had two novels apiece.

The pattern of distribution over that period in time similarly highlights trends that any simple comparison would otherwise tend to disguise. A relatively small total of seven novels by women writers were published during the 1950s and a further four in the 1960s. With the exception of one 1966 release – Rosa Guy's *Bird At My Window* - all the novels that were published in the twenty years prior to 1970 were by Jamaicans. It is not until the following decade - the post-Independence era for both countries - that a dramatic increase in publication is recorded. Seventeen novels appeared between 1970 and 1979 with a peak of six in 1976 alone. As many as eleven of these seventeen were by women writers from Trinidad, a startling fact given their relatively recent move into fictional publication. A further fourteen novels were published in the first five years of the 1980s<sup>4</sup>, with Trinidadian women accounting for six of them. The relative importance of Trinidad as a source of women's literary works can thus be seen to be on an upward trend.

In generic terms, most of the novels tend to fall into a number of relatively distinctive categories. Of the seven novels published during the 1950s, four of them

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<sup>4</sup> Although the second half of the 1980s is outside of the scope of this thesis, a total of twenty novels were published up to 1989, indicating a continuing trend of overall increase.

had narratives that centred around the Second World War and its devastating effects upon the lives of individual men and women. Interestingly, Nancy Marr-Johnson's novel *Nigger Brown*<sup>5</sup> is, however, the last work to concern itself specifically with this topic, suggesting a rapid move away from universal themes to areas of more specific concern to the Caribbean woman writer as the decades progress. The largest number of novels – nine in total – had a narrative structure that revolved around the difficulties of teenage life, with an emphasis on the issues of poverty, racism and cultural constructions of identity. Rosa Guy's work tends to dominate in this genre although later novels such as Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* from 1985 still concerned itself primarily with similar thematic preoccupations. Historical romance accounts for a further seven novels – four of which were written by Jeanne Wilson – and contemporary romance another four. Seven novels fall into the category of thrillers and a further two are fantasy. The remaining nine cover a range of contemporary or historical issues but are difficult to confine wholly to one or another specific generic category without denigrating the essence of their often complex narrative construction.

Given the diverse nature of the subject matter(s) that they wrote about, it is hardly surprising that women's engagement with cinematic imagery should also be highly variable. Both the way in which filmic images are employed in their fictional works and the extent to which cinema operates as a defining role for their characters are of a somewhat different nature to that found amongst novels by their male counterparts.<sup>6</sup> In an effort to understand the underlying causes for women's

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy Marr-Johnson: *Nigger Brown* (Gateshead on Tyne: Northumberland Press Ltd., 1953).

<sup>6</sup> As considered in Chapters Three, Four and Seven to Nine respectively.

engagement with explicit filmic imagery, it is perhaps useful to consider a small number of inter-related factors that may have contributed to their responses towards cinema, before looking at specific examples from within their respective novels.

Economic factors would have played a key role in affecting a woman's ability to attend the cinema in either Trinidad or Jamaica, particularly during the earlier years under consideration. Familial constraints would inevitably have made it far more difficult for single women to visit the cinema than men and, certainly amongst the poorer communities, a lack of financial independence would equally have had a significant impact. Cinemas in the region were, as considered earlier in this thesis, typically divided into three distinctive sections – the balcony, house and pit – but the prohibitive cost<sup>7</sup> and class/colour stratification of the former area would have rendered it out of reach for all but a privileged (white) few. The front pit area was always the cheapest - albeit shabbiest section of the cinema with its plain, wooden benches - but therefore technically within the financial reach of at least some women. This, however, remained the almost exclusive domain of young men, as Marion Patrick Jones perceptively notes in her 1973 novel *Pan Beat*. “He [Lesley, a priest] was amused at the spectacle of a heavenly pit, like Globe theatre on a Saturday night, only with Globe theatre the pit was filled mainly with men...”<sup>8</sup>.

In writing about social conditions in Port of Spain, Lieber focused upon the cinema as a microcosm of Trinidadian society and his comments serve to qualify and elaborate upon those made by the priest in *Pan Beat*. “The composition of the pit is

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter Two for further details on this subject.

<sup>8</sup> Marion Patrick Jones: *Pan Beat* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Columbus Publishers Ltd., 1973) pp.82-83.

nearly exclusively black, male, poor and young. Women rarely sit in this section...”<sup>9</sup> His observations could easily be applied to cinemas throughout Jamaica as well and highlight the fact that a woman’s experience of cinema tended to be inherently different from those of her male counterparts. Thus when a woman did actually see a film it was frequently at the invitation of a man, implying a lack of personal viewing choice in many instances or, at least, a compromise in selection that both partners might enjoy seeing. With both the pit and the balcony areas unsuitable for most couples, women would typically have occupied the (rear) house seats in a cinema which, with its intimate, sexually-charged darkness and its very geographical location, served to further distance them from interacting with the on-screen action like their male companions.

With young men dominating the audience - at least in the more affordable seats – it is hardly surprising that cinemas rarely offered films of specific interest to potential female viewers. Hollywood action or adventure films, particularly Westerns as considered in Chapter Six, were by far the most popular genres in both Trinidad and Jamaica right through until the mid-1970s. According to Jaikaransingh, throughout the 1950s and 60s cinema owners actually ‘classified’ films either as “...pit films...with an emphasis on violence or sensationalism, or a “balcony” film, accentuating melodrama or spectacle.”<sup>10</sup> The former ‘category’ obviously offered greater appeal to men whilst the latter might potentially appeal more to a female audience. Apart from action films, many other Hollywood works that were exhibited

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<sup>9</sup> *Street Life: Afro-American Culture In Urban Trinidad*, p.95.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Jaikaransingh: ‘Film Censorship in Trinidad and Tobago – Development, Analysis, Issues’, unpublished BA Caribbean Studies Thesis, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 1991/2, p.23.

in both islands during that period tended to be highly innocuous films such as those produced by the Walt Disney Studios. Films such as *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Fantasia* (1940), *Cinderella* (1949), *Old Yeller* (1958) or *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) were all shown in the islands throughout these decades. Walt Disney himself had actually visited US troops stationed in Trinidad during October 1941,<sup>11</sup> which suggests that even ten years earlier the island had already attained a level of importance as an outlet for his Studio's films.

Disney films, especially the cartoons or mixed animation and action works that formed the Studio's main output until the early 1950s, were able to offer viewers glimpses of a fantasy world quite unlike anything else they might encounter elsewhere. With their moral didacticism and commitment towards upholding the societal status quo, these films provided a highly appealing, albeit extremely limited view of the world that offered little or no space for personal fantasies. As Sklar has commented, Disney's works: "...structure all effects so there is no room for the viewer's imagination to operate."<sup>12</sup> The particularly curious imposition of Disney's brand of popular culture upon the Caribbean psyche<sup>13</sup> certainly offered some cause for concern to Clara Rosa de Lima in *Not Bad, Just A Little Mad*, her 1975 novel that is set in Trinidad. Although she does not stress the point, the sight of a black servant sporting Disney characters on her clothing offers some disquiet - perhaps even distaste - to Anne, the English protagonist. "She [Sheila's servant] was in a blue

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Anthony: *Port of Spain In A World At War 1939 – 1945*, Volume II (Trinidad & Tobago: Columbus Publishers, 1983) p. 57.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Sklar: *Movie-Made America* (New York, USA: Vintage Books, 1994 [1975] ) p.202.

<sup>13</sup> V.S. Naipaul expresses similar concerns about Disney in the 'Tell Me Who To Kill' section of *In A Free State*. He relates a father's incongruous gift of '...a Mickey Mouse wristwatch' to Stephen's son as an ironic demonstration of the older man's misplaced respect for the boy. Later on, he similarly  
(Footnotes continue on the next page.)

apron, customary for the day, over a dress covered with a Mickey Mouse pattern. Later Anne was to recognise another with Donald Duck.”<sup>14</sup> The very fact that Anne even comments upon the servant’s choice of clothing serves to highlight the peculiar juxtaposition of these all-American Disney characters with the otherwise unremarkable appearance of a black Caribbean maid servant.

In the 1970s feminist film theory<sup>15</sup> espoused the notion that cinema reinscribes the structures of patriarchy by emphasising sexual differences between the (male) viewer and the (female) object of desire. Borrowing heavily from psychoanalysis, particularly the work of Sigmund Freud, Laura Mulvey suggested that film form was structured around male visual pleasure, with the twin scopophilic pleasures of narcissistic identification with the male protagonist and sexual voyeurism towards a passive female subject. Mulvey argued that, within film, women were given some degree of superficial freedom of action but that ultimately they lacked control over both their bodies and even their very lives.<sup>16</sup> As a result, female characters were therefore positioned as either the possessors of an overtly aggressive sexuality or as a passive icon of male fantasy. If the former, they would typically be punished as the guilty party or saved by, of course - a male - or in the latter case, glamorised into an erotic fetish. In either case, their extreme portrayal made it almost impossible for female viewers to successfully identify with their screen counterparts.

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ridicules Stephen’s family for ‘..living like Snow White and the seven dwarfs...’. (*In A Free State*, pp. 68 and 75).

<sup>14</sup> Clara Rosa de Lima: *Not Bad, Just A Little Mad* (Ilfracombe, Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1975) p.69.

<sup>15</sup> In particular, works such as Laura Mulvey’s 1975 article: ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ in *Screen* 16 (3) (Autumn 1975) pp. 6-18 reprinted in Bill Nichols (ed.): *Movies And Methods Volume II* (Berkeley, USA: University of California Press, 1985) pp.303-315.

Several feminist critics<sup>17</sup> have subsequently disagreed with many of the premises in Mulvey's work and it necessarily fails to address the particularly complex issues of double alienation for the post-colonial woman. Whilst I would not, therefore, suggest that it offers an ideal theoretical framework within which Caribbean women's responses to cinema might be considered, there is undoubtedly a sense in which many of the women writers under discussion appear to have negotiated with the essence of her arguments. Without wishing to imply that all – or, indeed any – of these writers necessarily set out to deliberately attack patriarchal values, the numerous occasions in which female characters in their novels attempt to negotiate the disparity between cinematic representations of their sexuality and reality, serves to highlight their inherent concerns.

A specific notion of filmic femininity appears to colour the lives of many of the characters that populate the novels in question, based almost exclusively upon physical appearance. Because they lacked role models from their own immediate surroundings, both fictional men and women in several of these novels turned to the cinema to provide them with an idealised representation of beauty. Such fantasies about the 'ideal' female body inevitably lead to both disappointment and disillusionment for men and women alike. Michelle Cliff's heroine in the 1984 novel *Abeng*, for example, can only visualise 'true' femininity in cinematic terms, none of which she can possibly aspire to herself. "To Clare's mind a lady was someone who

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<sup>16</sup> This particular point is reiterated by Robert Sklar, who suggests that early talking films gave women a 'superficial boldness and freedom of action', but that this apparent freedom was dramatically reduced in films of the post-Depression era. (*Movie-Made America*, p.178).

dressed and spoke well... Above all, a lady was aloof – Clare knew all of these criteria from the Hollywood movies she saw...”.<sup>18</sup> For the priest Leslie in *Pan Beat*, it was film that provided his only images of the female body and his inability to distinguish between fiction and reality were to disturb him for the remainder of his short life. “He had looked at the advertisements for cinema shows on the bill-boards, fascinated at the size of the women’s breasts and the heaviness of their hips; he would sit up at night trying to get it all out of his mind – how did a woman look, how did she feel?”<sup>19</sup>

The comparisons that are made between female characters and film stars are often couched by the writer in somewhat satirical terms, implying the impossibility of living up to such an idealised notion of feminine beauty. A particularly ironic example of this is encapsulated in Marion Patrick Jones’ 1976 novel *J’Ouvert Morning*, where a girl’s appearance is commented upon by her mother who can only summon up two extreme examples of comparison – the idealised screen model and that of her less than perfect next-door neighbour. “She [Sheila] is a real screen star, come straight out of Hollywood. Not like that bandy-legged Mrs. Fergus.”<sup>20</sup>

Several of Rosa Guy’s female characters also suffer a humiliating comparison with screen icons, usually at a vital moment in their lives when such a contrast carries a particular, yet unspoken weight, of criticism. For Dorine in *A Measure Of Time*, her failure to ‘act her role’ as a member of a boosting gang is greeted with scornful

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<sup>17</sup> See D.N. Rodowick: ‘The Difficulty of Difference’ in *Wide Angle* 5 (1) (1982) pp. 4-15 or Gaylyn Studlar: *In The Realm Of Pleasure* (Urbana, USA: University of Illinois Press, 1988), for example.

<sup>18</sup> Michelle Cliff: *Abeng* (New York, USA: The Crossing Press, 1984) pp. 98-99.

<sup>19</sup> *Pan Beat*, p.103.

derision by a male counterpart: "Here she is... our big motion-picture star."<sup>21</sup> In her 1973 novel *The Friends*, Guy similarly satirises Ruby for blatantly trying to imitate female behaviour as portrayed on film. " 'This isn't living. This is merely existing', she said throwing back her head. Ruby had seen some movie actress or other go through the appropriate dramatic scene and this *pathetic imitation* was all she could come up with in her inner struggle against Calvin!"<sup>22</sup> (My emphasis). Edith, the young, black and less than attractive heroine of another Rosa Guy novel *Edith Jackson*, is another character who is overwhelmed by the appearance of the white folks who adopt her sister Minnie. Unable to comprehend the physical contrast between herself and them, she can only resort to cinematic references with a poignant sense of irony: "They both looked like moving picture folks. She, small with blond hair, full lips. He, tall, thin, handsome."<sup>23</sup>

It is not just the outward physical comparisons with filmic models that cause disquiet amongst several of the novels' characters. The distinction between film and reality often becomes confused in their minds and they temporarily fuse both themselves and events from their mundane lives with the idealised world of cinema. Mary, the heroine of *The Dark Divide* voices an opinion that many others share: "...you can't see a movie without making him the hero and yourself the girl..."<sup>24</sup>. Lourdes, the mulatto maid in *Countdown To Carnival* goes even further across that divide every time she visits the cinema. "Lourdes was in a world of her own... Jaracy's caresses went unnoticed as the action of the feature film stole her complete

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<sup>20</sup> Marion Patrick Jones: *J'Ouvert Morning* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Columbus Publishers, 1976) p.103.

<sup>21</sup> Rosa Guy: *A Measure Of Time* (London: Virago Press 1984 [1983]) p.96.

<sup>22</sup> Rosa Guy: *The Friends* (New York, USA: Bantam Books 1983 [1973]) p.157.

attention. She was oblivious to all things when in the movies; they were her favourite pastime.”<sup>25</sup> Lourdes’ inability to separate the strands of fantasy from events that surround her is echoed in another scene from *Pan Beat* that carries the analogy even further. “The procession went its way to the cemetery, and the streets were lined with curious people who regarded the funeral [of Louis] with the same feelings that they regarded a super cinema show.”<sup>26</sup> Jones’s image of an island population, defining events as they in turn are defined by the images that are imposed upon them, has a particularly chilling tone to it.

In addition to highlighting the ways in which the cinema permeates the lives of individual fictional characters, there is an even more insidious undercurrent in some of these works that inverts the entire relationship between the two media. The novels by Rosalind Ashe provide particularly explicit examples of such a reworking of the cinematic paradigm, although they are by no means the only works to do so.<sup>27</sup> Her 1977 novel *The Hurricane Wake* is concerned with the narrative of a young woman, Liz, who is driven mad by the murderous actions of her brother Tom and eventually imprisoned in the turret of their family home. Although set in the present century, numerous parallels can be identified between this novel and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, in both Ashe’s choice of topic (female madness and incarceration), the Caribbean setting and the sympathetic tone with which the main female character

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<sup>23</sup> Rosa Guy: *Edith Jackson* (New York, USA: Viking Press, 1978) p.104.

<sup>24</sup> Nancy Marr-Johnson: *The Dark Divide* (London: Museum Press Ltd., 1951) p.99.

<sup>25</sup> Clara Rosa de Lima: *Countdown To Carnival* (Ilfracombe, Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1978) p.53.

<sup>26</sup> *Pan Beat*, p.142.

<sup>27</sup> Other examples occur in Rosa Guy’s novels: *The Disappearance* (New York, USA: Delacorte Press, 1979) and *Bird At My Window* (London: Virago Press 1989 [1965] ), in Elaine Simon’s *Nectar* (Kingston, Jamaica: Rollington Printing House, 1982) and in Nancy Marr-Johnson’s *Adam* (London: Museum Press Ltd., 1952).

is portrayed. However it is the unique way in which Liz's vision of the tragic events is portrayed that makes the novel of specific interest within this particular context.

Liz, who provides the narrative voice throughout *The Hurricane Wake*, predominantly uses filmic terminology to distance herself from the horrors of the specific reality that both threatens – and eventually succeeds – in overwhelming her. Instead of crossing between the boundaries of film and reality, Liz is shown to view events as if they actually *were* a film, unfolding on an imaginary screen behind her very eyes. "...I can close my eyes and watch the frames flicker past on the screen of my shuttered lids."<sup>28</sup> As the horrors continue to mount throughout the night of the hurricane, so Liz retreats further from reality into her cinematic imagination: "Images flashed onto the dark safety curtain; at first only the points of light that swim behind closed eyes."<sup>29</sup> By the time that both her admirers Maurice and Edward have suffered terrible deaths through the actions of her twin brother Tom, even Liz's imaginary world of film is starting to fall apart: "We all started forward again, like a film that had broken and been mended in mid-reel..."<sup>30</sup>

Zena in Lucille Iremonger's 1952 novel *The Cannibals* also resorts to viewing a particularly tragic event from her own past in similarly cinematic tones to those used by Liz. "Pictures farther back came first, and then ones from near at hand, but soon they all came together in a rush, like a film running too fast across the screen."<sup>31</sup> In the former novel *The Hurricane Wake*, it appears that Liz can only continue to

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<sup>28</sup> Rosalind Ashe: *The Hurricane Wake* (New York, USA: Warner Books, 1977) p.235.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p.269.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p.102.

<sup>31</sup> Lucille Iremonger: *The Cannibals* (London: Hammond, Hammond & Co., 1952) p.248.

function as a human being if she can view herself as a screen icon, in order to distance herself from a reality far worse than any nightmare conjured up by Hollywood could ever be. "...my impressions were precise – so that I could draw it now, choosing a frame here, a frame there, to illustrate each phase...".<sup>32</sup> Both Liz and, to a lesser extent, Zena are thus characterised as being entirely without identity unless others can define (view) them. "Like nearly all women she had depended for her existence, her identity, on her importance to other people. She [Zena] was not important to anyone any longer, and so she was nothing."<sup>33</sup>

Whilst *The Hurricane Wake* contains Ashe's most sustained usage of filmic imagery, similar examples occur in both her other two novels from that period - *Moths* (1976) and *Take Over* (1982). The latter novel features a chameleon-like female character that manipulates and controls the lives of others in a manner reminiscent – as she herself comments - of a Hollywood mogul. "Amaryllis saw that now the light touch was called for, to cut the drama. I've more power than any film director, she thought: This life-and-death soap opera is for real...".<sup>34</sup> In *Moths* it is the male narrator Harry who relates key events as if he were describing scenes from a number of different films. Despite its idyllic location in a leafy Oxfordshire hamlet, a terrifying series of events at the Dower House project Harry into a distorted world where reality and the paranormal become increasingly blurred. Although Harry's narration falls short of that total cinematic immersion experienced by Liz in *The Hurricane Wake*, he still relies heavily on the use of film images to convey his

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<sup>32</sup> *The Hurricane Wake*, p.266.

<sup>33</sup> *The Cannibals*, p.214.

<sup>34</sup> Rosalind Ashe: *Take Over* (Canada: Fontana, 1982) p.189.

confusion instead of more conventional narrative techniques. “They were jerky paste-board figures from an old silent film, a series of stills...”<sup>35</sup>

As Harry becomes entangled with the mysterious Nemo Boyce and her ‘possession’ by the actress Sarah Moore, so his particular choice of filmic imagery reflects the increasingly nightmarish quality of events that he subsequently witnesses. “I walked up to my room like the doomed zombie of a Hammer film, gravid with its terrible secret.”<sup>36</sup> Bertie, another sexual partner of Nemo/Sarah (and very nearly another victim of her murderous hatred) is also forced to rely upon cinematic terminology to describe his own experiences with her in the dairy: “... I tell you, it was like a nightmare by Buñuel – just his thing...”<sup>37</sup> The whole series of dramatic events which culminates with Nemo’s death are, in fact, identified in Harry’s mind with cinematic images of the thriller genre: “I always associate the house with sun – sun as Hitchcock uses it, as a cover, a front for something else...”<sup>38</sup> The reader of Ashe’s novel is forced to draw upon their knowledge of films such as those of either Hitchcock or Buñuel, in an effort to fully grasp the imaginative world that they are being invited to enter. In a final ironic twist that reinforces the novel’s linkages with the world of film, the house is put up for sale after Nemo’s death and Harry tellingly relates that “...a film star is interested [in purchasing it].”<sup>39</sup>

If the representation of women in film is a cause for concern to many of the novelists included in this discussion, excessive identification with the male

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<sup>35</sup> Rosalind Ashe: *Moths* (New York, USA: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976) p.56.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* pp.130-131.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p.145.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p.67.

protagonist provides a related issue that a number of others consider in some detail. In Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis I have elaborated upon the thematic preoccupations of the Western and the extent to which many of the novels by male writers contain characters who identify with the cowboy hero. For women writers, however, defining masculinity in terms of cinematic identification offers at best some cause for irony and at worst an undercurrent of threat or violence that several find inappropriate, if not outrightly offensive.

A 1977 article by Marjory Thorpe on Merle Hodge's novel *Crick Crack, Monkey*,<sup>40</sup> highlights the way in which this work focuses upon the tensions caused by adopting the value systems of an external culture, no matter how inappropriate to self-realisation. Much of the novel is primarily concerned with the effect this has upon women, Tee being the main victim of her Aunt Beatrice's destructive behaviour. However, Hodge also makes some telling points in the novel about men and the ways in which film defines their masculinity in Caribbean society. Her narrative tone initially begins ironically; emphasising the juvenility in identification with figures from (predominantly) the cinema. "The fellows mainly discussed last weekend's Tarzan picture or Western, or passed around the latest Danger Man comic book..."<sup>41</sup>. Both Tarzan films and Westerns were highly popular amongst young, male audiences in the 1950s and 60s, and double or occasionally triple bills of such works were shown to packed houses in both islands, as the following example from *Abeng* illustrates. "Down the road was a movie house, the Rialto, which showed triple

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p.238.

<sup>40</sup> Marjory Thorpe: 'The Problem of Cultural Identification in *Crick Crack, Monkey*', *Savacou*, No. 13 (1977) pp.31-38.

features of American gangster movies and B-grade westerns and jungle serials starring Johnny Sheffield.”<sup>42</sup>

Distinctions between the world of the cinema and reality and, by implication, their real and pretend personalities rapidly become blurred in *Crick, Crack, Monkey* as the men start to recreate scenes from the latest Western. “Lamp-post was enthusing. ‘Western in yu arse, boy, Western in yu arse!’ and Joe was recreating the climax with a lively pantomime: ‘ ‘ey boy, forty-million o’them against the star-boy and the rest o’them ridin comin and then he bullets run-out...’ ”.<sup>43</sup> Inevitably, their enthusiasm for the film’s violence erupts into a fist fight, albeit of a somewhat friendly nature. However, by the time that Tee describes her ‘step-uncle’ Mikey in similar terms in a subsequent scene, the imaginary cowboy violence has crossed over into reality with dangerous implications for everyone around him. “His [Mikey’s] jersey was of an indefinable colour and the hem of it half torn loose was draping his hips drunkenly like a gunbelt...the expression on his face told that he would willingly batter the rest of us into the earth if we looked at him too hard.”<sup>44</sup>

There is little explicit acknowledgement of filmic influence on male characters in Rosa Guy’s *Bird At My Window*, although the scene in which Wade’s father is killed certainly offers parallels to a Western poker game, with its inevitable violent ending. “The little fellow really wanted to run, but he was too scared. He was hemmed in by sitting near the wall instead of the door and all he could do was sit and

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<sup>41</sup> Merle Hodge: *Crick Crack, Monkey* (Oxford: Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series, 1981 [1970]) pp. 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> *Abeng*, p.16.

<sup>43</sup> *Crick Crack, Monkey*, p.8.

look as Big Willie approached, but when Big Willie was almost upon him, the stud stuck his hands in his pocket and came out with a gun. He fired right at Big Willie's chest."<sup>45</sup> The dangers often associated with poker in the Western are exemplified in Sturges's 1957 film *Gunfight At The O.K. Corral*, in which the gambler Doc Holliday (Kirk Douglas) similarly faces death on a number of occasions as he plays cards.

Of course, the use of names for characters such as 'Big Willie' or 'Bullseye' in *J'Ouvert Morning* certainly suggests linkages to the world of cinema, even if only tentatively. Bullseye, in fact, openly acknowledges the power of Western imagery upon his own character in the latter novel, even though he is not directly associated with violence in the way others such as Willie are. " 'I used to play at cowboys', Bullseye had said in an interview in the *Guardian*, 'and I learned never to have my back to an open door or window'."<sup>46</sup> Even Ruby, the teenage heroine in Rosa Guy's novel of the same name, similarly equates her fear of urban violence with a scene from numerous cowboy films: "Walking to the bus stop was like walking through an open field in a Western shoot-out."<sup>47</sup>

As considered earlier in this Chapter, the boundaries between film and fiction were blurred to the extreme in Ashe's novel *The Hurricane Wake*. The author also carries the analogy between Tom, the evil brother in that novel and the archetypal cowboy figure to an even higher level of fused and confused identity than can be found in other similar works. Operating beyond the reach of both the law and normal

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.9.

<sup>45</sup> *Bird At My Window*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>46</sup> *J'Ouvert Morning*, p.168.

<sup>47</sup> Rosa Guy: *Ruby* (New York, USA: Viking Press, 1976) p.94.

reason, Tom's character looks, speaks and acts like a gunslinger from a Western, yet lives in a twentieth century world where his cousin Edward flies over to visit them both in his private plane. "Tom stood by the railing, holding his precious pistols, and as I looked – because I looked – blew on the barrels, Western style, to cool them."<sup>48</sup> In many Westerns, violence and sex are linked in a tenuous effort to provide the viewer with a heightened sense of (visual) satisfaction. The linkage between gun and penis is effectively used in this particular novel to demonstrate the ambiguity that exists between Tom and the intensity of his incestuous feelings for Liz: "Always loaded and at your service, marm", he said, grinning suddenly."<sup>49</sup> Any doubts that the reader may have harboured about the ultimate nature of their relationship are finally spelt out in the closing passages of the narrative: "He [Tom] carried me up the big staircase.... and across the threshold of this room, fourteen by fourteen, *like a bride*."<sup>50</sup> (My emphasis).

For many commentators on the Western, the land or landscape in which the narrative is set plays a pivotal role in the dramatic structure, as considered in greater detail in Chapters Six and Seven respectively. Cawelti, for example, has stated that: "The symbolic landscape of the western formula is a field of action that centers upon the point of encounter between civilization and wilderness..."<sup>51</sup>. In Ashe's novel, Tom is placed in absolute control of the plantation house that provides the only centre of shelter from the external chaos inflicted by the hurricane (or civilisation and wilderness in the Western formulation). In deciding who can enter his 'landscape' of

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<sup>48</sup> *The Hurricane Wake*, p. 27.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 219.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p.286.

safety, Tom is able to offer life or death as he sees fit, in the savage style of a degenerate outlaw: “He [Tom] was in the hall, stretched out with a drink beside him on the wicker sofa. His holster belt was hanging over the back: it was all wrong for the pistols - far too Wild West, too raw and bright...”<sup>52</sup>. It would be no exaggeration to state that Tom’s character is offered up as an extreme portrayal of narcissistic identification with the cowboy,<sup>53</sup> yet it does serve as a portentous warning of where such male behaviour might lead. The violent and extreme nature that Tom embodies in this novel equally serves to point out the inherent dangers to women that can ultimately lay in the wake of such indiscriminate, imitative behaviour.

An insight into psychoanalytic film theory, however limited, may help to explain some of the issues that inform women’s writing from the Caribbean, but inevitably it fails to encompass all of the diverse ways in which their novels deal with cinema as a prime component of their fictional worlds. As the main source of entertainment in the islands, cinema is frequently recognised in many of the novels as an inevitable constituent of their characters’ cultural backgrounds. “ ‘Take her for supper,’ his mother told him. ‘There isn’t anything else is there? Unless you wish to take her to a cinema show...’ ”<sup>54</sup> For the majority of young men and women, cinema would have provided their only glimpse of an external world, albeit the glamorised version favoured by Hollywood. A trip to the cinema would offer more than just pure entertainment and it is hardly surprising that many female characters are shown to be intimate with details of films and more than willing to visit the cinema, if given the

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<sup>51</sup> John G. Cawelti: *Adventure, Mystery And Romance* (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1976) p.193.

<sup>52</sup> *The Hurricane Wake*, p.85.

opportunity. “She [Lourdes] was thinking of how entertaining movies were, and of course, the petting and hand-holding that always went with them.”<sup>55</sup> Even the physical presence of cinemas in the islands was frequently referred to as part of the local scenery that inevitably informed and shaped the minds of the characters that populated these fictional worlds. The following example from *J’Ouvert Morning* clearly illustrates this very point: “They picked out the landmarks; the red ball of a cinema, the steamer lights in the harbour.”<sup>56</sup>

Many characters in these novels, female and male alike, display an overwhelming love for the medium because it formed such an integral part of their cultural heritage. In *Too Much Summer*, we are told that: “Mrs. Lardon...sent an occasional maternal glance to her twin boys, for whom motherly love, imposed upon a passion for the movies, had selected the names Valentine and Bing, implying who-knew-what links in her erotic education.”<sup>57</sup> Identification with and/or idolisation of a specific film star is a common feature amongst many of the characters and favourites were often championed with gusto, as the following example from *J’Ouvert Morning* again demonstrates. “They had gone for fun once to a show at Roxy Theatre, sat in pit and yelled for Humphrey Bogart. They had argued afterwards over Alan Ladd and glasses of milk at the Dairies.”<sup>58</sup> Some major film stars did actually visit the Caribbean and Anthony reported, for example, that a trip of Errol Flynn’s in 1940

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<sup>53</sup> A number of similar examples are to be found within novels by male writers, as Chapter Seven considers in greater detail.

<sup>54</sup> *Pan Beat*, p.30.

<sup>55</sup> *Countdown To Carnival*, p.26.

<sup>56</sup> *J’Ouvert Morning*, p.81.

<sup>57</sup> Esther Chapman: *Too Much Summer* (London: Chantry Publications Ltd., 1953) p.22.

<sup>58</sup> *J’Ouvert Morning*, p.166.

caused a 'near riot' when crowds of girls mobbed him in Port of Spain.<sup>59</sup> For other fictional characters, however, the insidious nature of Hollywood's cultural imposition is something to be feared and, in a particularly extreme example, is felt to encompass an embodiment of pure evil. "...No dancing, children, no movies, and no liquor. These t'ings are the work of the devil."<sup>60</sup>

For those women writers who chose to work within the thriller genre<sup>61</sup> of fiction, a whole series of linking motifs between their writing and that of the thriller film can also be identified. Literary genre and film genre theory are, of course, by no means coterminous with each other, yet there are sufficient parallels between their suppositions that make a comparison of the two different media possible within a context of this nature. Throughout the years 1950 - 1985, thriller films<sup>62</sup> formed a substantial proportion of the Hollywood output, including many 'classical' works - too numerous to enumerate here - that were exhibited in both Trinidad and Jamaica. Despite the looseness of the filmic 'thriller' category and its broadly-encompassing definition - which usually included everything from suspense to police/detective dramas to political thrillers - it still accounted for one of the most frequently produced genres of film throughout the period under consideration.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Port of Spain In A World At War*, p.16.

<sup>60</sup> *Abeng*, p.15.

<sup>61</sup> Generic terms such as these are used in the knowledge that they can only provide, at best, a shifting and unstable definition when applied to either literature or film. Recent works such as Rick Altman's: *Film/Genre*, (London: British Film Institute, 1999) contains a useful critique of the subject yet ultimately acknowledges that genre criticism, however imperfect, still provides a useful shorthand for comparing works with a similar formulaic structure. A more detailed consideration of generic definitions is contained within Chapter Six that deals with Hollywood Westerns.

<sup>62</sup> This generic category includes films such as most of those made by Alfred Hitchcock, considered earlier in Chapter Four.

Genre critics such as Tzvetan Todorov, Charles Derry or Martin Rubin have suggested that thrillers – both of the literary and the cinematic variety - contain a number of key elements which form a necessary basis to their narrative structure. These include aspects of sensationalism that are specifically intended to produce feelings of: “...suspense, fright, mystery, exhilaration, excitement, speed, [and] movement.”<sup>64</sup> within an audience or reader. Such films or novels also usually operate as highly moral forces in which: “...the struggle between good and evil is a major thematic concern...”<sup>65</sup>. Todorov’s seminal work<sup>66</sup> on detective fiction highlighted the fact that novels of this particular sub-genre typically contain intertwined stories of both the crime itself and the investigation of that particular crime. In film, parallel actions of the crime in question – usually shown in detail at the beginning of the work and subsequently returned to in a series of flashbacks – followed by the lengthy exposition of its detailed investigation, equally form the basis of most detective thrillers. Two novels from the 1960s by Jeanne Wilson: *No Medicine For Murder* and *Model For Murder*, offer strong parallels to both the related paradigms proposed above, as the following discussion illustrates.

A murder takes place in the opening pages of both works but the (initial) victim – as in most cinematic versions – plays little further role in the narrative structure. Cawelti has written extensively on the subject of thrillers and reaffirms the notion that the victim him or herself is rarely of great importance to the narrative.

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<sup>63</sup> A precise quantification is impossible but critical works such as Martin Rubin’s *Thrillers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) suggests in its preface that it is ‘perhaps the most popular and widespread movie genre...’.

<sup>64</sup> *Thrillers*, p.5.

<sup>65</sup> Charles Derry: *The Suspense Thriller (Films In The Shadow Of Alfred Hitchcock)* (Jefferson, North Carolina, USA: McFarland & Co., 1988) p.15.

“...the victim cannot really be mourned or the possible complexities of the situation allowed to draw our attention away from the detective and his investigation.”<sup>67</sup> The remainder of both novels – as outlined in the Cawelti paradigm - are primarily concerned with the investigation and solution of the crime by the chosen detective, Superintendent Rowan Rodgers. Rodgers and his lover Rachel Groome are the key characters in both novels (and in a further four similar works by Wilson that were published after 1985) and provide a sequential linkage to each of these novels in similar fashion to the Hollywood sequel.

In the first of the two novels, *No Medicine For Murder*, Rodgers begins an adulterous relationship with Rachel who is then still married to one of his colleagues. The reader is therefore provided with a highly formulaic story line – the investigation of a mysterious murder - that eventually pulls all the main characters together for a traditional closing scene<sup>68</sup> in which the detective uncovers the murderer.<sup>69</sup> Several characters have come under suspicion, although it eventually transpires that the least likely suspect, Rachel’s husband Bill, turns out to be the murderer. With Bill’s eventual suicide, the way is cleared for Rachel and Rowan to continue their relationship without its attendant guilt, thus providing a high degree of closure to the intertwined narratives of love and murder. In *Model For Murder* that was published just one year later, Rowan and Rachel continue to play out their roles as ‘lover

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<sup>66</sup> Tzvetan Todorov: ‘The Typology of Detective Fiction’ in Richard Howard (trans.): *The Poetics Of Prose*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1977 [1977] ) pp. 42-52.

<sup>67</sup> *Adventure, Mystery And Romance*, p.81.

<sup>68</sup> A filmic technique employed in numerous works such as *Murder On The Orient Express* (1974), for example.

<sup>69</sup> A similar outcome is played out in the closing pages of *Model For Murder*, when all the remaining suspects are drawn together for Rodgers to announce the outcome of his investigations. Jeanne Wilson: *Model For Murder* (Kingston, Jamaica: Kingston Publishers Ltd., 1993 [1968] ) p.199.

detectives' in a narrative that is too broadly similar in style and content to the earlier work to warrant further consideration within this particular context.

In addition to its formulaic narrative structure, *No Medicine For Murder* offers further linkages to the cinema in the way in which it places a particularly strong emphasis on sounds and their effect as a (filmic) device for increasing suspense: "A car screeched to a stop at the front steps. A door slammed. Light hurried footsteps clicked on the polished wood."<sup>70</sup> Rubin's recent study of the cinematic genre suggests that sound played a major role in boosting the sensationalism of the thriller film over and above visual action.<sup>71</sup> In Wilson's first thriller novel sound is frequently utilised instead of more descriptive prose at key moments in the narrative, as in the following example. "Immediately the night noises surrounded Rachel. The shrill insistence of the crickets, the bark of a distant dog, the muted sound of traffic from the main road."<sup>72</sup> In choosing to draw her readers' attention to the aural rather than the descriptive qualities of her writing, Wilson seems to be deliberately pointing towards the influence of the filmic thriller upon her novel.

Detective thrillers are, of course, only one component of the larger thriller genre as has already been outlined in the above discussion. Political thrillers provided a significant sub-set within that broader category, certainly as far as filmic genres were concerned in the late 1950s and throughout much of the 1960s. Films such as *Suddenly* (1955), *Intent To Kill* (1959), *Three Came To Kill* (1960) and *Advise And Consent* (1962) all focused upon the tendency of power to corrupt and the moral

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<sup>70</sup> Jeanne Wilson: *No Medicine For Murder* (Kingston, Jamaica: Kingston Publishers Ltd., 1967) p.41.

<sup>71</sup> *Thrillers*, p.75.

necessity to question government and examine social institutions. Despite an emphasis upon the inescapable nature of politics, their message was ultimately one of confidence, showing finally what Derry describes as “...the potential of individual heroism to bring about social and political change.”<sup>73</sup>

Whilst neither work contains much in the way of explicit references to cinema, two of Clara Rosa de Lima’s novels: *Kilometre Nineteen* and *Currents Of The Yuna* both offer distinctive parallels to the political thriller film as considered above. The narrative structure of the latter work, in particular, could almost be seen as an embodiment of the issues that inform so many films of that genre. With its explicit concerns about social class and poverty – embodied in the figures of Fernando and his sister Dulce - plots to overthrow the government and power struggles between rival revolutionaries and the army, the whole novel revolves around a central issue of corruption in power. Despite the fact that his best friend Rafa eventually kills Fernando along with his political idealism, his former employer Virgilio remains a beacon of hope for future change through his personal acts of courage and bravery.<sup>74</sup>

*Kilometre Nineteen*, published two years later in 1980, has a similar tone to its narrative that is focused on another abortive revolution attempt. Most of the novel is concerned with the detailed plans and build up towards the revolution, worries about informants and the need for having detailed alibis that films such as *Day Of The Jackal* (1973) epitomise. The cinema itself, is only accorded one fleeting reference at

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<sup>72</sup> *No Medicine For Murder*, p.114.

<sup>73</sup> *The Suspense Thriller*, p.104.

<sup>74</sup> Clara Rosa de Lima: *Currents Of The Yuma* (Ilfracombe, Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1978).

the first date between Nora and Antonio<sup>75</sup> but its influence as a framework for the structure of the whole novel is evident. Interestingly, both works are set outside of de Lima's native Trinidad, with the latter novel taking place in the fictitious location of Ayacucho and the former in the Dominican Republic. The implications behind her distancing in this manner can only be guessed at, but would suggest that the political criticisms contained within both works may have been intended as an analogy to broader concerns extant throughout the Caribbean during the 1970s.

Of the remaining novels that have not been included in any of the above discussion, seven were, as mentioned earlier, concerned exclusively with historical romance. As such, they necessarily had no explicit references to cinematic imagery contained within their narrative structures. Nevertheless, there is certainly a sense that Jeanne Wilson's 'Island Chronicle'<sup>76</sup> trilogy, for example, provides an image of early Jamaican society which owes as much to the Caribbean of Hollywood imaginings<sup>77</sup> as it does to historical accuracy. Her subsequent work, *The Golden Harlot*,<sup>78</sup> that was published a few years later, contains similar parallels. With an emphasis on illicit sexual relations between black (slaves) and white (masters), the swashbuckling adventures of pirates and the helpless dependence of women upon their male partners, the novels read more like Hollywood film scripts than works of historical reclamation. An over-reliance upon descriptions of male clothing and appearances further emphasises the visual qualities of her writing and its links to the

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<sup>75</sup> Clara Rosa de Lima: *Kilometre Nineteen* (Ilfracombe, Devon : Arthur H. Stockwell, 1980) p.83.

<sup>76</sup> A series of novels set in Jamaica during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries , *Weep In The Sun* ((London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1978 [1976] ), *Troubled Heritage* ((London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1979 [1977] ) and *Mulatto* (New York, USA: M. Evans and Co. Inc., 1978 [1978] )

<sup>77</sup> Contained within films such as *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Black Swan* (1942) – mentioned in V.S. Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men - or Anne Of The Indies* (1951), for example.

<sup>78</sup> Jeanne Wilson: *The Golden Harlot* (London: Macmillan, 1979)

glorification of the cinematic hero, as the following examples from two of these novels illustrate. "His [Lord Vincent's] wig was of the latest style... He wore a skirted coat of dark blue velvet frogged with silver braid, the cuffs wide, slashed and braided..."<sup>79</sup>. "She [Kate] was not prepared for perfectly tailored pale fawn breeches, a fine linen shirt with the newly fashionable stock and falling lace jabot, a flared jacket of brown and cream brocade. His [Patrick's] light-brown hair was brushed back and tied with a black ribbon."<sup>80</sup>

Without wishing to exaggerate the analogies between cinema and fiction, I would suggest that the examples cited above provide evidence that women writers have openly engaged with filmic imagery in their novels published between the years 1950 - 1985. Both male and female characters in many of the novels under consideration have been shown as struggling against cinematic representation, yet were ultimately unable to free themselves completely from its hegemonic discourse. Many of the problems associated with the use of cinema as a role model for life have been found to be of particular relevance for the fictional Caribbean woman. These have been examined both through her inability to live up to its exacting standards of femininity and in the dangers associated with men who indiscriminately ape the behaviour of their Hollywood heroes. In addition, the cinema has been highlighted as both a major source of entertainment in both islands and as a potential cause of cultural conflict. Further linkages have also been considered between the thriller

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<sup>79</sup> *Troubled Heritage* p.62.

<sup>80</sup> *Mulatto*, p.93.

genre and its fictional counterpart, although many of these have proven to be of a more implicit nature than the earlier examples cited above.

**CHAPTER SIX**

**THE WESTERN FILM –**

**DEVELOPMENT, INFLUENCE AND THEMES**

Throughout the remainder of this thesis the focus has been narrowed to concentrate specifically upon the type of film that is commonly known as the Western. By examining the rise and eventual decline in popularity of such cowboy films within this Chapter, along with their main thematic pre-occupations, my aim is to subsequently show how widespread the use of Western iconography, settings and plot structures has been amongst male writers from Jamaica and Trinidad. However, before moving into a detailed consideration of these issues, it is worth considering some of the inherent difficulties associated with genre criticism in general and reflecting upon what exactly is implied by the term ‘Western’.

Maltby and Craven have suggested that genre criticism and *auteurism* display a high degree of correlation in the way in which they attempt to “...delineate Hollywood cinema by defining sub-sets within the whole...”<sup>1</sup> and, given a collective reliance upon structuralism, this is a point of view that I would have to endorse. As I discussed with reference to Naipaul and Hitchcock in an earlier Chapter (Four), the use of *auteur* theory is undoubtedly problematical and a similar degree of caution needs to be applied when utilising genre criticism, despite its value in multi-disciplinary comparisons. Critics of genre theory<sup>2</sup> are all too ready to point out the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Maltby & Ian Craven: *Hollywood Cinema* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995) p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> For example Rick Altman's *Film/Genre* as previously considered in Chapter Five or Steve Neale's *Genre And Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000). Both of these works provide a comprehensive survey of genre theory, its exponents and many of its intrinsic pitfalls.

paradoxical nature of trying to classify films into different groups according to their dominant narrative features, given the degree of overlap and the difficulty in applying a consistent set of criteria for distinguishing between them. Nevertheless, despite the instability of generic categories, their tendency to mutate or develop over a period of time and the fluidity of their narrative structures and topics, there is still a sense in which the *repetitive* nature of genre films enables one to apply a label such as 'Western' or 'thriller' as an easily recognisable definition.

It can be no coincidence that much genre criticism has actually been carried out on the Western film because of its almost unique ability to provide recurrent, visual signifiers that make it particularly easy for a critic or audience to identify as such. As Cawelti has stated: "Audiences find satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form..."<sup>3</sup> Expectations as to the likely outcome provide a level of familiarity to the viewer that delivers excitement in a controlled format with – perhaps – just a hint of originality in plot delivery or resolution. Braudy believes that the tension created between familiarity and originality is an essential ingredient of genre film because of its ability to arouse emotions that more 'serious' works are unable to address: "Within [genre] film the pleasures of originality and the pleasures of familiarity are at least equally important."<sup>4</sup> This view is not universally held amongst critics – although Altman, for example, considers that reaffirmation is of far greater importance than novelty in genre films<sup>5</sup> and Warshow also argues that "One

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<sup>3</sup> *Adventure, Mystery, And Romance*, p.9.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Braudy: 'Genre: The Conventions of Connection' in Leo Braudy: *The World In A Frame* (New York, USA: Anchor Press, 1976), reprinted in Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy: *Film Theory And Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1974] ) p.436.

<sup>5</sup> *Film/Genre*, p.25.

does not want too much novelty [in a Western]...”<sup>6</sup> – both points of view acknowledge the importance of thematic replication in genre film spectatorship. The ideal audience for a genre film should therefore possess a cumulative level of knowledge and set of expectations about its formulaic structure in order for it to operate successfully.

In addition to their reliance upon recognisable plots and iconography, genre films frequently employ the same small group of actors<sup>7</sup> who appear on a regular basis in a limited range of roles. According to French, such actors are as much a part of the genre as its other conventions: “The physical presence and established properties of these actors have become part of the genre’s iconography, to be accepted literally or to be worked into new patterns or mined for fresh meanings.”<sup>8</sup> This dependence upon a familiar style of acting enables the portrayal of characters within the films to take on a symbolic value over and above that implied by the narrative alone. Whilst symbolism is considered in greater detail later in this chapter, it is worth noting here that the self-reflexive nature of such films provides a further level of cohesion in the argument that Westerns form a consistent, identifiable genre of film. It is, however, interesting to note that more recent scholarship<sup>9</sup> - quoted extensively in the work of Steve Neale in 1990, in particular – has suggested that generic identification tends to be applied retrospectively. Until the mid-1980s it was

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Warshow: ‘Movie Chronicle: The Westerner’ in Robert Warshow: *The Immediate Experience* (New York, USA: Doubleday & Co. Ltd., 1975 [1970] ) p.146.

<sup>7</sup> The most common examples from the Western must be John Wayne, Henry Fonda, Alan Ladd and Gary Cooper from the ‘classical’ period (1940s-1950s) or Clint Eastwood and Lee Van Cleef from the ‘Spaghetti’ Westerns of the 1960s.

<sup>8</sup> Philip French: *Westerns – Aspects Of A Movie Genre* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977 [1973] ) p.58.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Musser: ‘The Travel Genre in 1903-1904: Moving Towards Fictional Narrative’ in *Iris 2* (1984).

widely accepted that the earliest example of a Western film was Porter's<sup>10</sup> 1903 work: *The Great Train Robbery*. Musser has suggested that Porter's film would not have been viewed by contemporary audiences as falling within the Western genre, but would instead have been considered an example of the 'popular travel' genre. This is not the space within which to consider precisely how or when a particular genre of film came into being, although it does highlight the potential confusion inherent in the theory.

Whilst critics find problems in agreeing on generic categorisations, it is not necessarily true to suggest that audiences suffer(ed) from a similar level of confusion. Apart from their accumulative experience acquired from viewing similar types of films, audiences also had advertising posters and trailers that employed a necessarily simplistic manner in which to promote a particular film. An audience who viewed the promotional material for Ford's *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon* (1949) would have been in little doubt that the film was a Western, with John Wayne highlighted as the star and an explicit emphasis upon the triumphant US Cavalry pitted against assorted warring 'Red' Indian tribes. Within a Caribbean context – as in any postcolonial environment – the very term 'Western' carries an ideologically-loaded emphasis that would not have imparted a similar degree of significance to American or European audiences. There is undoubtedly a sense in which Western films glorify a particular kind of imperialism as the work of Shohat and Stam<sup>11</sup> has articulated, yet it would be false to assume that Caribbean audiences were necessarily aware of any such

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<sup>10</sup> Prior to his career as a director, Edwin Porter worked as a travelling projectionist and, according to Sklar, worked in a number of countries in the late 1890s, including the 'West Indies'. (*Movie-Made America*, p.24.)

<sup>11</sup> Ella Shohat & Robert Stam: *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (London: Routledge, 1994).

connotations nor that they would have empathised with the Indian victims as paradigms of black/white relationships within their own countries.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, as the following Chapter will demonstrate Caribbean men - as portrayed in works of fiction - identified strongly with the figure of the (white) Western hero in a manner similar to that of many of their American or European<sup>13</sup> counterparts. That position may have shifted somewhat in more recent years, but there is no evidence to suggest any significant change occurring in male Caribbean audiences between the years 1950 – 1985.

In terms of its historical development the Western enjoyed a premium position in American film production until the late 1960s, despite suffering a series of peaks and troughs in popularity during the preceding years. Buscombe estimates that around seven thousand Western films have been made in the USA since the turn of the century (1903) and that between 1926 and 1967 Westerns accounted for roughly one in four of all feature films produced.<sup>14</sup> Although there is some debate over 1903 being the date of the first ‘truly’ Western film – as previously discussed – it is now apparent that the Hollywood Western had well and truly established itself as an identifiable genre by the end of that decade. A number of Western-type films had been shot during 1907 on location in Colorado and Montana, but the move westwards by the Bison Company in 1909 was to consolidate the ‘authenticity’ of California as the subsequent location for Western films. Bison linked up with the Miller Brothers

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<sup>12</sup> Slotkin, for example, has read a series of pro-Indian films from the 1950s to early 1960s as allegories for race relationships and the civil rights struggle in the USA. (Richard Slotkin: *Gunfighter Nation* (Oklahoma, USA: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998 [1992] ), chapters 12-13 in particular.

<sup>13</sup> White carried out an extensive study amongst British working-class youth in North London and showed how they also clearly identified with cinematic ‘heroes’. (J. White: *The Worst Street In North London* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986) p.166.

101 Ranch Wild West show to form Bison 101 in 1910 and rapidly moved into large-scale production of Westerns. According to statistics again provided by Buscombe, Western films were suddenly to account for as many as just over one in five (twenty-one per cent) of all American films made during 1910,<sup>15</sup> many of which came from the newly-founded Bison 101 Company.

The next twenty years of the century showed a continuing rise in output and popularity of Western films and the first identifiable stars of the genre, of whom William S. Hart (pre-1920) and Tom Mix were the best known and most successful. Hart was arguably the first cowboy whose appearance and personality were closely linked in their austerity to the particular harshness of the Western landscape.<sup>16</sup> During the 1920s there was also a move towards longer (six reels or above) Westerns and the introduction of big-budget, historical epics such as *The Covered Wagon* (1923) which became one of the highest grossing of all silent films. By 1929 and the last few years of the silent era, Western films had begun to decline in popularity and up to 1934 were produced in increasingly fewer numbers per annum.<sup>17</sup> The only high spot for the Western was in 1931 when *Cimarron*,<sup>18</sup> an early sound film by Cecil B. de Mille, won three Oscars including that of best picture.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Buscombe (ed.): *The BFI Companion To The Western* (London: Andre Deutsch/BFI Publishing, 1996 [1988]) pp.13 and 427.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p.24.

<sup>16</sup> An element that was to be refined and re-modified over the years, peaking in the Clint Eastwood nameless character and the barren territory utilised in the 'Spaghetti' Westerns of the 1960s. See Chapter Eight for further discussion on the linkages between the landscape and hero.

<sup>17</sup> 1932 was an exception where one hundred and eight Westerns were produced but generally the numbers had fallen from one hundred and forty-one in 1928 to just seventy-six in 1934. The latter figure represents what Slotkin terms a 'nadir' for the genre as it was purely 'B' Westerns that were produced. (*BFI Companion To The Western*, Table 4, p.427, *Gunfighter Nation*, p.255).

<sup>18</sup> Exhibited in both Trinidad and Jamaica during the early 1930s.

1935 was undoubtedly a turning point in the fortunes of the Western as it saw the establishment of Republic Studios who, within two years, were making more films than any other Hollywood studio. The secret of Republic's success was in making series-Westerns (or B-Westerns) on budgets a fraction of those typical for major studios. With declining cinema attendance in the early 1930s – mostly as a result of the Depression – US cinemas had begun showing double bills to offer greater value for money to potential viewers.<sup>20</sup> As a consequence they needed a steady and quick supply of films in an effort to boost receipts and to fill the second (or B) slot in their programmes. New Republic stars such as Buck Jones, Roy Rogers and Gene Autry were quickly established as popular favourites within the B-film sector and the Western film enjoyed a significant revival in popularity.

The major studios continued to produce a small number of Westerns throughout the 1930s, although the bulk of production quickly shifted to the independent studios such as Republic, Monogram and PRC. Collectively they produced as many as fifty-eight per cent of all Western films in the years 1930 – 1938, with a peak of seventy-five per cent in the years 1934 to 1935.<sup>21</sup> It was not until the end of the decade and the (somewhat) unexpected success of two mainstream Westerns – Henry King's *Jesse James*<sup>22</sup> and John Ford's *Stagecoach* – that the major studios began to reinvest in Western films as a major component of the big-budget end of the industry. The success of these films was not, however, confined solely to

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<sup>19</sup> Significantly, no other Western was to win this particular accolade until *Dances With Wolves* in 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Double or even triple-bills were also common throughout both Jamaica and Trinidad, as examined in Chapter Two.

<sup>21</sup> *BFI Companion To The Western*, pp.427 and 428.

<sup>22</sup> A film with strong links to the gangster/thriller genre – see Chapter Five for further discussion on the latter of these two genres.

the United States. Both *Jesse James* and its 1940 sequel: *The Return Of Frank James*, were both so popular amongst audiences in Trinidad that people were turned away on a daily basis throughout their respective runs.<sup>23</sup> The former film had a small role – that of the ‘faithful’ servant Pinky – played by a black actor, which may have offered some additional appeal to Caribbean audiences. John Wayne, who starred in *Stagecoach*, was interestingly one of the very few B-Western actors who were able to make a successful transition to the major studios. Given the subsequent rapid decline in fortune of both the B-movie and Republic itself, that was to prove another major turning point for the Western genre.

Despite, or perhaps because of the war, the 1940s were to see a number of significant developments in Westerns with a perceptible shift away from the light-weight sterility of the B-movie to the start of a more psychologically-motivated narrative such as that famously employed in Raoul Walsh’s *Pursued* (1947). Sex began to creep into the genre with films such as Howard Hughes’ *The Outlaw* (1943) and King Vidor’s *Duel In The Sun* (1946), together with much more polarisation in the portrayal of women. Social issues also started to be questioned along with the morality of Western heroes, most notably in Wellman’s *The Ox-Bow Incident*, which Hardy has called “A landmark Western.”<sup>24</sup> for the way in which it tackles issues previously ignored by the genre. Bazin has suggested that these developments came about as a direct result of changing post-war attitudes and laments the fact that consequently: “...a western...would be ashamed to be just itself, and looks for some

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<sup>23</sup> ‘The Movies in Trinidad’, p.6.

<sup>24</sup> Phil Hardy: *The Western* (London: Aurum Press, 1995 [1983]) p.139.

additional interest to justify its existence...”.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the changes in the genre were there to stay and the 1950s offered a period of complexity and quality in Western films that marks, in many respects, the peak of its achievements.

Amongst the many influential films to be made in the 1950s *Shane* and *Rio Grande* (both 1950), *High Noon* (1952), *Johnny Guitar* (1954) and *Gunfight At The O.K. Corral* stand out as important examples of the revitalised genre. All of these films, along with most of the other Westerns produced by Hollywood in that decade were shown in cinemas throughout both Trinidad and Jamaica.<sup>26</sup> *Shane* is reported<sup>27</sup> to have enjoyed an especially high degree of popularity amongst audiences in Trinidad, who empathised in particular with the ‘gun-talk’ of the villain, portrayed by Jack Palance. Re-runs of this particular film were still being shown in Trinidad as recently as 1980 in the Hummingbird cinema in Debe.<sup>28</sup> The 1950s also saw the start of a new cycle of Westerns – inaugurated by *Broken Arrow* (1950) that starred James Stewart – and afforded a more sympathetic view on the native Indians and their plight. According to Mitchell, the new liberalism displayed in *Broken Arrow* could also be read as a reflection of changing racial attitudes that were beginning to emerge in the United States at that time. “[*Broken Arrow*] ...was responsible for transforming cinematic attitudes towards the Indian at the moment when sentiments for black integration were first given a national hearing.”<sup>29</sup> Despite such individual successes the next few years were, nevertheless, to see another downturn in production of

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<sup>25</sup> André Bazin: *What Is Cinema? Volume II*. Translated by Hugh Gray, (Berkeley, USA: University of California Press, 1972 [1971] ) p.151.

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter Two for further details of specific Westerns exhibited in the islands.

<sup>27</sup> ‘The Movies in Trinidad’, p.23.

<sup>28</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Thursday 10 January 1980, p.4.

<sup>29</sup> Lee Clark Mitchell: *Westerns: Making The Man In Fiction And Film* (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p.10.

Hollywood Westerns, along with the final demise of the B-Western film and the sale of Republic in 1959.

The introduction of television into the United States had played a major role in shifting production away from the feature-film Western to TV series such as *Gunsmoke*, *Maverick* and *Wagon Train*. Audiences in the Caribbean were rarely in a position to switch viewing from the cinema to the home<sup>30</sup> and their reliance upon Hollywood dictated the genre of film on offer at local cinemas which meant that, despite their popularity, Westerns were increasingly in short supply. The situation was, nevertheless, about to change again dramatically with the arrival of Sergio Leone and the Italian 'Spaghetti' Western in the 1960s. Leone's trilogy *A Fistful Of Dollars* (1964), *For A Few Dollars More* and *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly* (1966) and the numerous 'Spaghetti' Westerns that followed in their wake were to prove phenomenally successful world-wide and injected a new lease of life into the genre. According to Frayling, more than three hundred 'Spaghetti' Westerns were released in Italy between 1963 - 69<sup>31</sup> alone, whilst Hollywood produced less than half that number of Westerns during the same period. Audiences in Jamaica responded so enthusiastically to these films that a whole series of reggae songs<sup>32</sup> were released that openly celebrated their popularity, often including gunshots and quotes from the films in question on their soundtracks. Hebdige reports that the local Jamaican talk-over

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<sup>30</sup> In Trinidad, for example, ownership of TV sets was as low as twenty-one per thousand (two per cent) in the early 1960s. ('Mass Media in Trinidad and Tobago', p.47.) No comparable figures for TV ownership in Jamaica could be located for that specific period but it was estimated by Hosein that just thirty per cent of homes were reached by TV in the mid-1970s whilst coverage in Trinidad had increased to fifty per cent overall. ('The Problems of Imported Television Content In The Commonwealth Caribbean', p. 7).

<sup>31</sup> Christopher Frayling: *Spaghetti Westerns* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998 [1981] ) p.256.

<sup>32</sup> Examples include The Crystalites' *A Fistful of Dollars*, King Stitt's *Lee Van Cleef* (aka *The Ugly One*), Sir Lord Comic's *Django Shoots First* and Richard Ace's *Hang 'Em High*.

artist Eek a Mouse actually dressed as the nameless Eastwood character from these ‘Spaghetti’ Westerns when he performed in the early 1980s. “...he will appear as Clint Eastwood (this time: an enormous sombrero, a giant poncho, skin-tight pants and boots with spurs). He will strike a pose under the lights...a look of Spaghetti Western menace...on his face...<sup>33</sup>.

The Italian Western was undoubtedly the overwhelming success story of the 1960s, but there were also a small number of influential Hollywood Westerns from that period that similarly helped to shape the continuing evolution of the genre. *The Magnificent Seven*<sup>34</sup> which was released at the start of the decade (1960) and *The Wild Bunch* at its opposite end (1969) were key films in moving the focus from the centrality of the solitary hero to a group of men (‘professionals’ in Will Wright’s terminology<sup>35</sup>) who operated solely for money. This period also saw the introduction of ‘spoof’ Westerns with *Cat Ballou* (1965), British comedies like *Carry On Cowboy* (1966) and the tragi-comic *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid* (1969). Meanwhile John Ford continued to direct Westerns with a number of important works such as *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) and *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) being released during that period, of which the latter film continued and developed the pro-Indian trend started in the 1950s. One of Ford’s most interesting breaks with tradition, however, was the 1960 film *Sergeant Rutledge* that featured Woody Strode - a black actor - in the title role.

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<sup>33</sup> Dick Hebdige: *Cut 'N' Mix – Culture, Identity And Caribbean Music* (London: Routledge: 1997 [1987]) p.126.

<sup>34</sup> The title of this particular film has entered into every day usage in Trinidad, with the seven mansions along Maraval Road at the edge of Queen’s Park Savannah commonly referred to as ‘The Magnificent Seven’.

<sup>35</sup> Will Wright: *Six Guns And Society: A Structural Study Of The Western* (Berkeley, USA: University of California Press, 1975).

By and large, black actors were conspicuous by their absence in the Western genre, as indeed they were in most Hollywood films until the latter part of the century unless, as mentioned in the Introduction, it was in stereotypical, servile roles. The mythology of the American West that the genre celebrated had been careful to erase all traces of a black presence from its past, although Durham and Jones<sup>36</sup> have subsequently shown that there were actually upwards of five thousand black cowboys involved in ranching and herding cattle in the push westward. With the possible exception of Nat Love - or 'Deadwood Dick' as he styled himself - who had the foresight to publish his memoirs<sup>37</sup> as a cattleman, there is now little trace of individual black cowboys from that time. In terms of cinematic representation a handful of Westerns from the silent era featured black actors, as did a short series of musical Westerns in the late 1930s that starred Herb Jeffries as 'Black America's first singing cowboy in the movies'. Whilst these films had strictly limited distribution within the US itself, V.S. Naipaul<sup>38</sup> did make a passing reference to 'Negro Westerns' such as Jeffries' *Harlem On The Prairie* (1937), which suggests that some of these works, at least, were seen by audiences outside of America. Upon investigation, it appears that this particular film was actually exhibited at the Royal cinema in Port-of-Spain during 1943.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Philip Durham & Everett L. Jones: *The Negro Cowboys* (Lincoln, USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1983 [1965]).

<sup>37</sup> Nat Love: *The Life And Adventures Of Nat Love, Better Known In The Cattle Country As "Deadwood Dick", By Himself* (Los Angeles, USA: Wayside Press, 1907).

<sup>38</sup> V.S. Naipaul: *The Overcrowded Barracoon And Other Stories* (London: André Deutsch, 1972) pp. 238-239

<sup>39</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday May 1, 1943, p.6.

The 1960s saw a more concerted effort to address racial issues in Westerns with a small number of films following in the footsteps of *Sergeant Rutledge*. Peckinpah's 1964 work: *Major Dundee*, was followed by *The Professionals*<sup>40</sup> of 1966 which also featured Woody Strode and *100 Rifles* (1968) that starred the American ex-footballer Jim Brown. *Major Dundee* is the only one of these films to really tackle racial issues head on, but during the next ten years a few more racially-sensitive works were released. These included films such as Sidney Poitier's *Buck And The Preacher* and Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*,<sup>41</sup> both of which were popular hits amongst black audiences in the Caribbean and elsewhere. A further short-lived series of black Western films were made in the early 1970s which starred another ex-footballer Fred Williamson as 'Nigger Charley'. At least one of these films - *The Soul Of Nigger Charlie* (1973)- was exhibited in Trinidad during November of that year.<sup>42</sup> Apart from these limited examples, the trend to re-work Western generic conventions from a black perspective more or less came to an end.

Throughout the 1970s Hollywood continued to produce between fifteen and twenty Westerns a year, tailing off to just seven by 1977. Themes that had been introduced in the recent past were explored with a new intensity, particularly the emphasis on violence that the 'Spaghetti' Westerns had featured so prominently. Clint Eastwood was able to successfully transpose his Italian persona into Hollywood Westerns such as *High Plains Drifter* (1972) and *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976). The pro-Indian Western continued to develop with films such as *A Man Called Horse*,

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<sup>40</sup> According to Palace Amusement Company records, both *Major Dundee* and *The Professionals* were shown in Jamaica during the years of their respective releases.

<sup>41</sup> The most financially successful Western ever, until *Dances With Wolves* was released in 1990. (*The Western*, p. 345).

*Little Big Man* and *Soldier Blue* (all 1970), each of which employed graphic scenes of brutality, often perpetrated upon the Indian rather than by them. Typically, the Western film of the 1970s offered a much less romantic view of the West in works such as *McCabe And Mrs Miller* (1971) and *Pat Garrett And Billy the Kid* (1973). In many ways 1976 marked the end of an era for the Hollywood Western, with John Wayne's last film *The Shootist* exploring the loss of the old, mythical West in similar fashion to that employed in the slightly earlier work: *The Ballad Of Cable Hogue* (1970).

The end of the 1970s also marked a further downturn in the fortunes of the genre with fewer Westerns being produced in the next ten years than ever before. The 1980s are now chiefly remembered for the monumental flop of Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* (1980). Of the limited number of Westerns made in the 1980s, only Eastwood's two films *Bronco Billy* (1980) and *Pale Rider* (1985) plus the comic *Silverado* (1985) enjoyed any real degree of box office success. It would not be until ten years later that *Dances With Wolves* would once again revive the genre, winning a series of Oscars including best picture, followed by Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) which achieved a similar level of popular acclaim.

I have dwelt at some length on the historical development of the Western because an understanding of its evolution as a genre is essential to any consideration of its thematic pre-occupations. It also helps to explain why Caribbean writers often employed an eclectic blend of Western iconography in their novels, gleaned from their accumulated knowledge of a genre that had undergone a significant number of

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<sup>42</sup> *Trinidad Guardian*, Thursday 1 November 1973, p.3.

changes during their viewing (and writing) years. Many of the developments in filmic characterisation, for example, came about as a direct result of the need to inject new life into the genre in order to boost flagging audience figures. The thematic issues that I now consider have necessarily altered from the early days of the genre but, by and large, have a degree of continuity and consistency of style that can be traced throughout the films from the 1940s up to the present day. In an effort to avoid repetition there will be few illustrative references to film in the following discussion, as the detailed iconography of the genre and its assimilation into Caribbean fiction will be considered in greater detail – and with examples from specific films - in the following three Chapters.

The Western film (or novel) – unlike other formulaic genres - was not necessarily defined by any specific pattern of action. The plot itself was often of nominal importance so long as a conflict or challenge was posed to the cowboy hero and the narrative moved towards his final confrontation with the main antagonist(s). Cawelti<sup>43</sup> has suggested that the level of variety in Western plots may be the reason that this genre came to be labelled by its geographical location rather than by reference to the hero's form of action, i.e. gangster or detective, for example. As a result, audience identification was directed more explicitly towards the central character than in recognising a familiar plot situation, although in a genre as numerous as the Western an inherent degree of repetition in format inevitably occurred. The individual cowboy hero was therefore of paramount symbolic importance, with the central focus upon his crucial role in the mythical fight between 'good' and 'evil'. To quote Warshow: "The true "civilization" of the Western movie

is always embodied in an individual...his value must express itself entirely in his own being – in his presence, the way he holds our eyes...”.<sup>44</sup> The Western hero was, in fact, the antithesis of everything that, according to Tompkins’ more feminist perspective on the genre, the (male) viewer is really trying to escape: “...triviality, secondariness, meaningless activity.”<sup>45</sup>

The resolution of a Western plot was inevitably equated with violence, but that is not to suggest that the hero willingly engaged in killing nor that he necessarily enjoyed the violence for its own sake. The hero’s acts of violence were, instead, typically viewed as: “...less a means than an end in itself – less a matter of violating another than of constituting one’s physical self as a male.”<sup>46</sup> In *The Six Gun Mystique*, Cawelti has commented that the hero rarely killed with fists or knives, unlike ‘savage’ indigenous Indians, for example. The hero’s ‘superior’ gun fighting skills demonstrated that his art was ‘pure and orderly’, bestowing ‘a covering of aesthetic grace and moral propriety’<sup>47</sup> to his killing that distinguished him from the trigger-happy villain who would resort to any means to achieve his aims. The Western genre continually affirmed the notion that justice inevitably depended solely upon the action of the individual (hero) rather than that of the law. “[Westerns are] ...a plea for extra-legal violence as the sole bastion of true justice in a world where authority is corrupt and savagery ever ready to explode.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Adventure, Mystery And Romance*, p.193.

<sup>44</sup> *The Immediate Experience*, p.146.

<sup>45</sup> Jane Tompkins: *West Of Everything – The Inner Life Of Westerns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p.14.

<sup>46</sup> *Westerns: Making The Man In Fiction And Film*, p.169.

<sup>47</sup> John G. Cawelti: *The Six Gun Mystique* (Ohio, USA: Bowling Green Popular Press, 1971) p.61.

<sup>48</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler: *The Return Of The Vanishing American* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968) p.139.

The Western hero, of course, was not only portrayed as the deliverer of violence but often subjected to extreme physical punishment before he was able to exact his (justifiable) revenge upon its perpetrators. In Tompkins' view, the stylised manner in which the hero dealt with pain was frequently used as a signifier of inner strength and demonstrated: "...the control the man can exercise over his body and his feelings."<sup>49</sup> Several of Clint Eastwood's roles exemplify just such an ability. The hero's ordeal of pain and suffering was utilised as an essential component of the narrative structure, with the audience afforded an almost voyeuristic gaze upon his body that: "...must...be beaten, distorted, and pressed out of shape so that it can paradoxically become what it already is."<sup>50</sup> The beatings were, however, only employed in order that the hero could be seen to recover both his physical and mental strength for the fight that inevitably awaited him. This display of a successful domination of the senses ultimately served as a paradigm of the cowboy hero's unique ability to conquer the externalised forces of 'evil', whatever their shape or form. In facing and, more importantly, being seen to defeat the threat of death: "...men prove their courage to themselves and to the world..."<sup>51</sup>

As a genre that is inextricably linked with violence, the Western necessarily placed a higher degree of value on action than it typically did upon language. The hero traditionally adopted a laconic verbal style, yet nevertheless possessed a degree of mental insight that ensured his ultimate success through an: "...ability to see more

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<sup>49</sup> *West Of Everything – The Inner Life Of Westerns*, p.102.

<sup>50</sup> *Westerns: Making The Man In Fiction And Film*, p.160.

<sup>51</sup> *West Of Everything – The Inner Life Of Westerns*, p.31.

deeply into the meaning of circumstances than [his]...opponents.”<sup>52</sup> Internalised feelings were portrayed as a symbol of dignity and seriousness and as a signifier of the hero’s ability to accept the certainty of his fate. Often the hero was lacking in social graces, unable to cope with the nuances of ‘polite society’ yet, in Cawelti’s terms, it was inevitably the: “...inner spirit of men [that] counts more than the surface manners and attitudes of civilization.”<sup>53</sup>

In ‘Spaghetti’ Westerns the lack of verbal communication was taken to new extremes in, for example, Leone’s characterisation of the Eastwood ‘man with no name’ who spoke predominantly in monosyllabic tones. “[Leone seems] ...interested in the *form* of the Western hero’s personality as a series of gestures signalling little other than sheer absence, psychological lack, emotional diminishment.”<sup>54</sup>, as Mitchell terms it. The ‘Spaghetti’ Western was also largely responsible for legitimising the bounty hunter (or mercenary) as ‘hero’, shifting the emphasis from social responsibility to pure monetary motivation in a stylised format that was previously alien to the internal logic of the genre. That such a shift could be accommodated – and, indeed, widely adopted – is a further example of the genre’s inherent flexibility. As a result, the hero of the 1970s and onwards became progressively more alienated from society and much more of an isolated outlaw than his earlier incarnation as a benign but restless member of a basically settled community.

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<sup>52</sup> James K. Folsom: *The American Western Novel* (New Haven, Conn., USA: College & University Press, 1966) p.113.

<sup>53</sup> *Adventure, Mystery, And Romance*, p.220.

<sup>54</sup> *Westerns: Making The Man In Fiction And Film*, p.231.

Whilst the traditional role of the Western hero has altered little since the earliest days of the genre, character formulation has developed significantly as the above discussion has demonstrated. In turning now to consider the position of women in Westerns, it immediately becomes apparent that little comparable shifts have occurred in developing either their psychological complexity or the depth of their role to any significant extent. An idealised notion of ‘womanhood’ had been a central component of the genre from its earliest days – the cowboy hero’s role often depended upon his ability to defend women from assorted dangers, real or imaginary – and, as such, they provided a symbolic focus for his actions. In Wollen’s words: “Another important role of women, part of a loosely adapted chivalric system of pledges, missions, honour and so forth, is to be rescued from danger by the hero.”<sup>55</sup> Yet as individuals their roles remained secondary at best, and in many instances were more notable for their absence, as the following quote from Tompkins illustrates. “...Westerns either push women out of the picture completely or assign them roles in which they exist only to serve the needs of men.”<sup>56</sup>

For many Westerns, the symbolic role of women far outweighed any value that their individual characterisation could possibly contribute to the overall narrative structure. The Western director, Budd Boetticher, is quoted in Buscombe as saying that: “What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents...In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.”<sup>57</sup> Such a point of view appears to have been commonly held amongst most directors of Western films. Women were

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<sup>55</sup> Peter Wollen (Lee Russell): ‘John Ford’ in *New Left Review*, no. 29 (January/February 1965), reproduced in John Caughie (ed.): *Theories Of Authorship* (London: Routledge, 1995 [1981] ) p.106.

<sup>56</sup> *West Of Everything – The Inner Life Of Westerns*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>57</sup> *BFI Companion To The Western*, p. 241.

typically utilised as the embodiment of ‘civilisation’, yet many of the connotations that were carried with that image – ‘growing up’, settling down, and abandoning violence – were in binary opposition to those encapsulated in the hero. As a result, the hero was often fearful of women and all of the values that their femininity seemed to imply. Furthermore, in speaking out against violence, women provided a point of view that was predictably shown to be the wrong option in the usual prevailing circumstances of lawlessness. In fact, the hero’s defiance of a woman’s wishes and the way in which she invariably acquiesced to his ‘better’ judgement can be seen as a central component of the narrative structure in many Westerns. In Wollen’s terms: “Women, [for Ford], are a fundamentally lower order than men. Originally headstrong, they have to be humiliated before they earn their proper place and become devoted wives.”<sup>58</sup>

The figure of the ‘devoted wife’, the caring mother or the dedicated schoolteacher offer prime examples of the stereotypical way in which a ‘good’ woman was portrayed within the genre. If the hero’s destiny was to ultimately become integrated into a newer and ‘better’ society, then the heroine’s was to abandon any earlier pretence of independence and to defer wholeheartedly to her man. “[Women] ...may seem strong and resilient, fiery and resourceful at first, but when push comes to shove, as it always does, they crumble.”<sup>59</sup> Although a necessary component of the genre, even ‘good’ femininity could only really be tolerated once it had been subdued. Some reward for humiliation was, nevertheless, usually provided by an overt level of sentimentality about womanhood in general, as the following

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<sup>58</sup> ‘John Ford’ in *Theories Of Authorship*, p.106.

<sup>59</sup> *West Of Everything – The Inner Life Of Westerns*, p.61.

quote from Wollen illustrates: “In memory, they [women] are blessed icons, standing on the railway platform waving...”.<sup>60</sup> The rare exception to this rule was found in those few films<sup>61</sup> where femininity was allowed some minor degree of freedom from conformity. Typically, however, the woman in question had to abandon any outward signs of femininity and adopt the male code of behaviour wholeheartedly (‘become one of the boys’)<sup>62</sup>, in order to be accepted into a world that privileges masculinity above all else.<sup>63</sup>

An opposition to the idealised symbol of womanhood was frequently provided in the character of the saloon/dance hall girl or prostitute, whose primary function was to highlight the far more desirable qualities of chastity and purity embodied in her righteous female counterpart. As an explicit symbol of passion – often equated through her dark hair and sultry looks with the inherent savagery of native Indians – the sensual woman embodied desires that only served to distract the hero and remind him of his own vulnerability. As French has so aptly commented: “...[the hero] sees them [women] as sources of corruption and betrayal, luring him away from independence and a sure sense of himself...”.<sup>64</sup> To survive he must repress his own sexual needs and (ultimately) reject her advances, therefore she has to eventually be abandoned or, like Chihuahua in John Ford’s 1946 film: *My Darling Clementine*, killed to ensure that the hero is physically alert for the conflict that awaits him.

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<sup>60</sup> ‘John Ford’ in *Theories Of Authorship*, p.106.

<sup>61</sup> For example *Johnny Guitar* or *Calamity Jane*.

<sup>62</sup> *The Six Gun Mystique*, p. 62.

<sup>63</sup> See Chapter Nine for further consideration of these specific issues.

<sup>64</sup> *Westerns – Aspects Of A Movie Genre*, p.66.

The repression of sexuality was a key feature of the Western genre and symbolised the internal tension that remained unresolved between these two polarities of female representation. In Wood's words: "...sexual love is never regarded...as a value in itself."<sup>65</sup> and the hero and heroine are often drawn together by emotional yet 'pure' (i.e. chaste) forces that neither can ultimately resist. The limited scenes of sexuality that did occur were usually of a casual, hurried nature without any pretence of romance and even less for the commitments of a longer-term sexual relationship. As a recently published article on the Western has commented: "The range rider who not only sleeps but screws with his boots on defines the ideal of casual, noncommittal sexual relations, best undertaken with the occasional whore, an ideal of intermittent and interrupted sex that complements his itinerant existence."<sup>66</sup>

The indifferent attitude that the Western hero displayed towards sexuality is but another example of the centrality of male authority in the genre – control over himself, over others (both male and female) and equally as importantly, over the landscape that he inhabited. The representation of landscape was central to the ideology of the Western, just as it was to the characterisation of the hero himself. Western films frequently started with wide, sweeping shots of a barren, desert terrain that was seemingly defined by absence alone, or, in Buscombe's words: "...hovers between being and nothingness."<sup>67</sup> Such an image of (apparent) emptiness was able to provide both a symbolic framework that sanctified western expansionism whilst also privileging those who seemingly domesticated and tamed its inherent wildness.

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<sup>65</sup> Robin Wood: 'Shall we gather at the river?; the late films of John Ford': *Film Comment*, vol. 7, no. 3 (Fall 1971), reproduced in *Theories Of Authorship*, p.93.

Furthermore, by stressing the affinity between the hero and his surroundings, the notion was implied that man's self-control could eventually master anything. "[The West was portrayed] ...as a distinctive moral and symbolic landscape with strong implications of regeneration or redemption for those protagonists who can respond to its challenge..."<sup>68</sup>

The rugged and hostile nature of the landscape was inextricably linked in the genre with a fear of death whose presence was always at hand in one form or another. Tompkins has wittingly pointed out that: "The classical Western landscape is a tableau of towering rock and stretching sand where nothing lives. Its aura of death, both parodied and insisted on in place names like Deadwood and Tombstone, is one of the genre's most essential features..."<sup>69</sup> An idealised notion of fearless masculinity was therefore expressed through the merging of aspects of the landscape with that of the cowboy hero's character, as the following quote from Mitchell illustrates. "...manhood [is defined] in characteristic ways with the terrain: as hard but gentle, generous yet unforgiving, inexpressive if nonetheless capable of being read..."<sup>70</sup> Although the terrain of the Hollywood Western was far from hospitable, its peculiarly moral formulation was still able to offer the prospect of personal transformation for the hero who could somehow conquer its hostility. In the 'Spaghetti' Westerns of the 1960s the presentation of landscape was refined down to a totally lifeless form where issues of right and wrong could simply no longer resonate.

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<sup>66</sup> Jane Marie Gaines & Charlotte Cornelia Herzog: 'The Fantasy of Authenticity in Western Costume' in Edward Buscombe & Roberta E. Pearson (eds.): *Back In The Saddle Again* (London: British Film Institute, 1998) p.180.

<sup>67</sup> *BFI Companion To The Western*, p.167.

<sup>68</sup> *Adventure, Mystery, And Romance*, p.233.

<sup>69</sup> *West Of Everything – The Inner Life Of Westerns*, p.24.

<sup>70</sup> *Westerns – Making The Man In Fiction And Film*, p.185.

As a result, the audience's attention was diverted away from the setting itself to focus more specifically upon that of the main protagonists: "The implication for character is that men simply fall back on themselves...since the landscape no longer preaches, enforces, provides clues, or otherwise resonates with moral significance."<sup>71</sup>

If the landscape of the Western has always been something of a mythological construct, then one of the mythologies that it persistently portrayed was that of the dichotomy between east and west, or 'civilisation' and 'wilderness'<sup>72</sup> in Kitses' terminology. The epic power and grandeur of the landscape was frequently used to demonstrate, by way of contrast, the inherent corruption contained within town or city life (or the freedom of the individual versus the constraints of a community). The vivid contrast between the two was therefore a key component for establishing the position of the hero as a man of the 'wilderness' as French has commented. "Certainly the mood of the Western is established at the outset by the way directors place their protagonists in relation to the surroundings..."<sup>73</sup> Life in the town was typically delineated as a trap that could easily ensnare the unsuspecting hero into a way of life and social interaction that he instinctively knew must be rejected. The barren purity of the landscape was seen to offer endless possibilities for self-transformation whilst the artifice of civilisation in the towns could only constrain and corrupt.

It is hardly necessary to point out, however, that the landscape of the Western was far from barren, containing instead native Indian populations whose presence the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.229.

<sup>72</sup> J. Kitses.: *Horizons West* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969).

genre had – until fairly recently - marginalised, stereotyped, ‘civilised’ or wiped out completely. As an overt celebration of the frontier myth, Westerns have typically dealt with the Indians by inscribing their presence as part of the actual landscape, instead of portraying them as characters in their own right. By way of comparison, the settlers’ mode of life was characterised as the embodiment of ‘civilisation’, as Dyer suggests: “White cultivation brings partition, geometry, boundedness to the land, it displays on the land the fact of human intervention, of enterprise.”<sup>74</sup> The Indian way of life was rarely depicted as a viable alternative to that proposed by ‘civilisation’ and was always viewed as being in terminal decline, thus only offering a temporary threat that, once defeated, could be safely remembered with nostalgic sentimentality.

Fiedler has suggested that the fear of confronting the Other – embodied in the figure of the native Indian – was actually far more threatening to the genre’s mythology than any encounter with the landscape itself. “The heart of the Western is not the confrontation with the alien landscape...but the encounter with the Indian...”.<sup>75</sup> Many critics of the genre share a similar point of view<sup>76</sup> because it highlights the necessity of marginalising and belittling the Indian presence as an essential component of the expansionist mythology: “Native Americans are usually portrayed as mean-spirited enemies of the moving train of progress.”<sup>77</sup> The role of the hero was to resolve the conflict between the opposing sides of progress and

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<sup>73</sup> *Westerns – Aspects Of A Movie Genre*, p.107.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Dyer: *White* (London: Routledge, 1997) p.33.

<sup>75</sup> *The Return Of The Vanishing American*, p. 21.

<sup>76</sup> For example, Lee Clark Mitchell, Ella Shohat & Robert Stam and Jane Tompkins, all of whom have articulated a line of argument similar to that quoted here.

<sup>77</sup> *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, p.119.

'savagery', a role in which he could always feel secure in the knowledge that the native Indians were necessarily doomed to humiliation and defeat anyway.

Although they are by no means the only pre-occupations of the Western, the three thematic areas of landscape (including indigenous Indians), the portrayal of women and the role of the Western hero collectively represent the core issues that lie at the heart of the genre. Within the following three Chapters, each of these three areas will be examined in further detail by looking at novels from Jamaica and Trinidad that contain explicit and/or implicit links to Western motifs and comparing them with specific filmic portrayals of a similar nature. The way in which women writers have engaged with the Western film has been considered in a separate Chapter (Five), therefore my discussion throughout Chapters Seven to Nine will be solely confined to fictional works by male writers. The scope of consideration will, however, remain the same, i.e. any novel that was published by a writer from Jamaica or Trinidad, between the years 1950 to 1985, may be included.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WESTERN FILMS AND CARIBBEAN HEROES

In the previous Chapter consideration was given to some of the key components of characterisation that typify the central male role (or hero in cinematic terms) of the Western film. Analysis of the structure of fiction would also disclose the fact that the novel form offers numerous parallels to those employed in mainstream cinema. The pivotal nature and formulation of the role of a central – frequently male – character, in particular, provides an apposite example of the strong degree of linkage existing between the two media. It would, however, be highly inaccurate to suggest that either the centrality or the symbolic nature of the hero is a feature that could be considered in any way unique to Caribbean fiction. Nevertheless, I would argue that the *extent* to which references to film are made *within* that characterisation – in particular to Western heroic themes and iconography – clearly demonstrates the existence of a particularly close and intimate relationship between the cinema and many works of fiction from Jamaica and Trinidad.

During the period 1950 – 1985 there were one hundred and thirteen novels<sup>1</sup> published by male writers from those two islands. Of these, sixty-nine were by writers from Trinidad and the remaining forty-four novels were by Jamaicans. Although the Trinidadian writers were by far the most prolific overall, it is interesting to note that - in common with women writers as discussed in Chapter Five – the Jamaicans published many more novels in the start of that period. During the 1950s a

total of twenty-six novels were actually published, of which Jamaican writers accounted for as many as eighteen. By the end of the 1960s the pattern of publication was, however, beginning to change. Of the thirty-one novels that appeared during that ten year period, eighteen were by Trinidadians and just thirteen by Jamaicans. The disparity between the output of these two islands became even more significant in the 1970s as Jamaican works declined to just eight in total whilst novels by Trinidadians rose again to twenty-six. This trend continued into the first five years of the 1980s, with a total of twenty-two works being published up to and including 1985, of which just five were by Jamaicans.

With such a large body of work from writers of diverse backgrounds it is inevitable that both their choice of subject matter and their particular frames of reference should be equally disparate. Within the body of Jamaican writing, for example, around one in four<sup>2</sup> of all the novels published during that period were of an historical nature, usually concerned with the devastating effects of colonisation and/or slavery. It would be impossible to find any explicit cinematic references within these particular novels despite the fact that their respective formal structures generally utilise the focus of a central heroic character. Those novels that are included in the ensuing discussion should not, therefore, be considered as representative of the body of work as a whole because their temporal frameworks are necessarily confined within the twentieth century. The subsequent two Chapters that examine both the dichotomies between city and country life and the portrayal of women are, however,

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<sup>1</sup> See Introduction for a precise definition of the novels considered throughout this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Twelve novels or twenty-seven per cent of the total works published by Jamaicans. Amongst writers from Trinidad only four novels from the same period (approximately six per cent) were predominantly of an historical nature.

focused towards more *implicit* use of cinematic imagery. As a result they encompass a far wider range of novelistic material overall.

Before turning to consider some of the ways in which a Western heroic 'style' is translated into its fictional versions, it is worth reflecting briefly upon the extent to which general identification with the cinema is portrayed as an essential component of several male characters' lives within the novels under consideration. It is commonplace to find that an otherwise well-defined central character frequently lacks a strong sense of personal identity and displays a need to draw instead upon external sources – often of a filmic nature – with which to establish his personality.<sup>3</sup> The paradoxical nature of such behaviour - living within a series of fantasies, whilst knowing that none of them can ever really be fulfilled – is eloquently expressed by one such character himself in Lorris Elliott's 1982 novel *Coming For To Carry*. "...Omoh had to confront the tragic paradox within which he himself, like all his childhood friends who dreamed of being born again as millionaires, *fast-shooting cowboys* and such, had long been trapped... Their images of happiness were never garnered from the life they knew and thrived upon. For, well-conditioned by the glamour and the glitter of the world of cinema and books, they always shaped their fantasies in borrowed forms."<sup>4</sup> (My emphasis).

This very issue lies at the heart of Andrew Salkey's portrayal of Catullus Kelly in his 1969 novel *The Adventures Of Catullus Kelly*. Throughout the entire narrative Catullus relies upon a series of filmic personas to conceal his own identity as

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<sup>3</sup> Further discussion on the issue of identity can be found in Chapter Four that is devoted to the works of Alfred Hitchcock and V.S. Naipaul.

he finds that he is unable to be just 'himself'. The example that follows aptly demonstrates the severity of his identity crisis: "He [Catullus] had taken off the plantocratic mask and was searching for another, something suitable for the new role. He hit on Paul Newman. He weighed up the impact, imitated the physical 'feel' of the Newman personality and rejected it. He tried Belmondo and liked it."<sup>5</sup> A similar example can also be found in the above-mentioned novel *Coming For To Carry*. In this work the young Trinidadian student Omoh is shown to be struggling against all odds to find a role for himself in Canada. The behavioural traits that he displays as he continually searches for some sense of personal identity are similarly disturbing in their nature to those previously considered in connection with Catullus Kelly. "...Omoh could hardly resist the urge to go out and play the part he had so often seen performed by Gable, Boyer and such men."<sup>6</sup> The consequences for these novelistic characters eventually prove – as might have been expected - to be wholly catastrophic for both of them.

The inherent problems of movie mimicry or what Nettleford has generously described as a: "...strong attraction to things North American...what with the influence of the cinema and the mass media..."<sup>7</sup> are incisively interrogated by a number of other local writers. In the 'Trinidad' section of *The Middle Passage* that was published in 1962, V.S. Naipaul comments poignantly on the fact that: "...Trinidadians of all races and classes are remaking themselves in the image of the

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<sup>4</sup> Lorris Elliott: *Coming For To Carry*, (Toronto, Canada: Williams Wallace, 1982) p.92.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Salkey: *The Adventures Of Catullus Kelly* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1969) p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> *Coming For To Carry*, p.120.

<sup>7</sup> Rex M. Nettleford: *Cultural Action And Social Change: The Case For Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica, 1979) p.11.

Hollywood B-man.”<sup>8</sup> Such a critical point of view was, hardly surprisingly, not particularly well received by locals at the time. However, the Trinidadian writer Ralph de Boissiere had already challenged the wisdom of an over-reliance upon all things American some years earlier and, in particular, filmic imagery as this example from his 1956 novel *Rum And Coca-Cola* demonstrates. “Others, hoodwinked by Hollywood, imagined that under American occupation, highways, nightclubs, “modern life”, and, above all, big wages, would at once supersede the hated, circumscribed, poverty-racked order of things under the British.”<sup>9</sup>

An even more extreme example can be found in Shiva Naipaul’s novel *Fireflies* that, with its strong emphasis upon the corrupting influence of cinema, is considered in some degree of detail. Romesh,<sup>10</sup> the main protagonist of this novel who apparently adores the cinema, is presented throughout in terms that can only be described as the ultimate outcome of such cultural dependency.<sup>11</sup> Both of his parents fail to understand Romesh’s love of film and his constant visits to the cinema are cited – on a number of occasions – as the main cause of his poor performance at school. “ ‘But I never see you read that book I give you for Christmas. Oh no! All you want to do is go to the blasted cinema and come back home and behave like a star-boy’.”<sup>12</sup> As Romesh grows older, so his passion for the cinema is seen to increase, as his

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<sup>8</sup> *The Middle Passage*, p.65.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph de Boissiere: *Rum And Coca-Cola* (Melbourne, Australia: Australasian Book Society, 1956) p.62.

<sup>10</sup> Barratt has suggested that Naipaul modelled Romesh almost directly upon his own youthful attachment to the cinema, as the following quotation demonstrates. “There was also St. James’s Rialto Cinema where the young [Shiva] Naipaul could indulge in the escapism and fantasy of Hollywood movies. His attachment to this fantasy world is later mirrored in Romesh...who having become obsessed with the posturing, larger-than-life heroes on the Rialto screen creates his own artificial, cynical and contemptuous persona.” (Harold Barratt: ‘Shiva Naipaul’ in Bernth Lindfors & Reinhard Sander (eds.): *Dictionary Of Literary Biography, Volume 157, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Caribbean & Black African Writers* (London: Gale Research, 1996) p.219.

<sup>11</sup> As articulated in the Introduction to this thesis.

mother complains. “I never in my whole life see a boy who like going to the pictures so much... You wouldn't believe this, but one time I even catch him making face in the mirror just like one of them film-star’.”<sup>13</sup> Rather than looking for the root cause of his behavioural problems, Romesh's identification with the cinema and its heroes is pinpointed as both cause and effect and explicitly blamed for his eventual downfall. “...as he grew older his fervour seemed only to intensify and by the time Mrs Lutchman [his mother] realized what was happening, it was too late. *The cinema had taken her son away from her.*”<sup>14</sup> (My emphasis.)

The films that Romesh spends so much of his time watching are very much of the traditional Hollywood fare from that era, focusing upon a lone male character and his heroic deeds. “I see *Back to Bataan*<sup>15</sup> seven times in the last six months...and *Shane*<sup>16</sup> five times. Man, I could spend my whole life just going to see them two pictures.”<sup>17</sup> The irony between Romesh's identification with these classical Hollywood role models and his positioning in the novel as a self-alienated, demotivated character serves as a metaphor for the distaste with which all things American – particularly the cinema – are viewed in Shiva Naipaul's fictional world. With the cinema positioned as such a negative force in this novel, nothing good can be expected to happen to any character who is explicitly linked to its corrupting influences. As a consequence, the only things that Romesh appears to ‘learn’ from his

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<sup>12</sup> *Fireflies*, p.186.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.250.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Back To Bataan* (1945) starred John Wayne as a ‘cowboy in colonel's clothing’ who single-handedly keeps the Japanese at bay in the Philippines whilst waiting for the main US force to arrive.

<sup>16</sup> *Shane* is one of the ‘classic’ Westerns where Alan Ladd plays the lone stranger (a forerunner of Clint Eastwood's ‘man with no name’) who rides into the wilderness to aid a pioneering family who are battling against a gang of bandits.

<sup>17</sup> *Fireflies*, p.250.

frequent visits to the cinema are how to parody inappropriate behaviour and use it to humiliate his mother. “He lit a cigarette and dropped the match on the floor. Mrs Lutchman bent down to pick it up. Romesh watched her, his eyes narrowing into a Hollywood smirk.”<sup>18</sup>

Inevitably Romesh is made to undergo a traumatic experience that highlights the enormous distance between his fantasy persona – a “...conglomerate shadow of a hundred Hollywood heroes.”<sup>19</sup> – and the harsh reality of the world he has tried so hard to escape. Together with his cousin and sometime lover Renouka, Romesh embarks on a drunken binge of half-hearted destruction at his Uncle Govind’s home. Unfortunately for him, ‘reality’ fails to respond in the way that cinema had lead him to believe it would. Instead of being able to control the situation, Romesh is constantly thwarted by the theatrical behaviour of Govind, Mrs Khoja (Govind’s wife) and Renouka herself. “Even for Romesh the cinematic aspects of the situation were proving too much.”<sup>20</sup> His arrest, trial and imprisonment for the farcical event are all subsequently portrayed as functions of his inability to distinguish between the world of film and reality. Even as he is lead away from the court to begin a six month prison sentence, he appears to remain blissfully unaware of that fact: “His Hollywood gangster smirk never left his face.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite the very real problems that a dependency upon imported films such as that considered above can generate, the Hollywood Western nevertheless appears to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.299.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.252.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.313

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.316.

hold a singularly unique and cherished position within the Caribbean psyche, at least as portrayed by local novelists. In its most simplistic form, the Western occurs in novels as an intrinsic part of the cultural background to many characters' lives. In the 'One Out Of Many' section of V.S. Naipaul's *In A Free State*, the pervasive nature of cinematic iconography is subtly highlighted when Santosh – an Indian now living in the USA - innocently describes some Hare Krishna dancers in Western terms. "They were shaking little cymbals and chanting... It was a little bit like a Red Indian dance in a cowboy movie..."<sup>22</sup> In a 1988 article about West Indian identity, Sam Selvon described how the Western had played an incisive role in his own upbringing in Trinidad. "Whatever curiosity or cultural inclination I might have been developing was also due to American films. During recess at school we played cowboys and Indians, imitated American accents..."<sup>23</sup> A similar scenario to that described by Selvon can be found in V.S. Naipaul's novel *Guerrillas*. Meredith, a black Trinidadian, reminisces about his own childhood where a half-witted white boy had also been obsessed with Westerns. "He used to point at us and say, "Bam! Bam!" That was all he wanted to do, to play cowboys-and-Indians with you. You could make him very happy if you bammed back."<sup>24</sup> An almost identical scene is to be found played out by another small boy in Trench Town (Kingston) at the end of Thelwell's novel *The Harder They Come*. "'Bram, Bram, Bram!' He leapt from cover, guns blazing. The posse returned fire. "You dead!" the sheriff shouted. "Cho man, you dead!" "<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *In A Free State*, p.30.

<sup>23</sup> Sam Selvon: 'Finding West Indian Identity in London' in Susheila Nasta & Anna Rutherford (eds.): *Tiger's Triumph: Celebrating Sam Selvon* (New South Wales, Australia: Dangaroo Press, 1995) p.60.

<sup>24</sup> *Guerrillas*, p.138.

This 'obsession' with Western films that certain fictional characters display is by no means confined to the simplistic type of play-acting such as that described above. As previously considered in Chapter Six, the presence of a particular actor in a Western was as much a part of the genre as the formulaic narrative itself. It is not surprising to find, therefore, that several of these fictional characters display a particular fondness for Alan Ladd, who starred in many popular Westerns. In one such example, Salkey's Catullus Kelly chooses to imitate Alan Ladd as one of the many personas he adopts when confronted with a difficult situation. "He looked over his shoulder, smiled like Alan Ladd, opened the door fully and waited. He felt the bulk of *Skulls* [a white supremacist book about the inherent inferiority of blacks] in his posteen, hitched up his gunbelt..."<sup>26</sup> Earl Lovelace's novel *While Gods Are Falling* provides a further example when the semi-literate ghetto-boy Saga tries to use the lure of the same actor to entice his girlfriend back to the city. "A nice picture with Alan Lad (*sic*) is showin if you can come. I will be happy happy."<sup>27</sup> Hopalong Cassidy, another Western star whose child-like innocence offered numerous parallels to the role actually played by Ladd in *Shane*, is employed by another writer – de Boissiere - to offer an ironic comment on the ineffectiveness of the local police. "...the inspector stood with a drawn gun on the running board... "He playin' cowboy!" they said of the inspector. "Hop-along Cassidy!" (*sic*) they shouted derisively as the police car slowed to cross a drain."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Thelwell: *The Harder They Come* (London: The X Press, 1980) p. 391.

<sup>26</sup> *The Adventures Of Catullus Kelly*, p.182.

<sup>27</sup> Earl Lovelace: *While Gods Are Falling* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Drumbeat, 1984 [1965] ) p.76.

<sup>28</sup> Ralph de Boissiere: *Crown Jewel* (London: Picador, 1981 [1952] ), p.357.

Other fictional characters display a particular passion for Henry Fonda and the Westerns *Jesse James* and *The Return Of Frank James* in which he starred.<sup>29</sup> Both the nameless narrator of the ‘Tell Me Who To Kill’ section of *In A Free State* (pp. 67 and 90) and one of Anand’s classmates in the earlier V.S. Naipaul novel *A House For Mr Biswas*, comment enthusiastically upon the aesthetic beauty of Fonda’s cowboy gait. “‘How you mean, you don’t like Fonda. Anybody would think that you never see Fonda walk’.”<sup>30</sup> A strong sense of identification with the outlaw James brothers is also contained in John Stewart’s 1971 novel *Last Cool Days*, as the following example suggests. “You’re the real bad man. You worse than Jesse James. You’d show just how clean your heel is!”<sup>31</sup> Whilst admiring the ‘cowboy walk’ may be a harmless pastime to a number of these characters, when one begins to explicitly imitate it, that small shift in terms of characterisation carries a whole new danger in its level of mimicry. The cowboy gait that is employed by Lovelace’s Fisheye<sup>32</sup> in *The Dragon Can’t Dance* is no longer some harmless homage to a Western hero. His character has, instead, become entrapped in what Renu Juneja<sup>33</sup> has termed an ‘essentially derivative’ role. In Lovelace’s words: “He [Fisheye] walked, crawled to and from work, to and from the cinema, tall, slow, a bow-legged cowboy...just waiting for a man to snicker or say a rough word to him so he could cuff him down...”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter Six for further discussion on the impact that these two films made upon audiences in Trinidad.

<sup>30</sup> *A House For Mr. Biswas*, p.465.

<sup>31</sup> John Stewart: *Last Cool Days* (Ontario, Canada: Tsar Publications, 1996 [1971] ) p.132.

<sup>32</sup> According to Hebdige, Fish Eye Olivierre was a famous panman from Hellyard and may, therefore, have been part of the inspiration for Lovelace’s character. (*Cut ‘N’ Mix – Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*, p.38).

<sup>33</sup> Renu Juneja: *Caribbean Transactions – West Indian Culture In Literature* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1996) p.108.

<sup>34</sup> Earl Lovelace: *The Dragon Can’t Dance* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Caribbean Writers Series, 1993 [1979] ) p.65.

The above discussion is not intended to suggest that all nor, indeed, most male fictional characters have been wholly subsumed into some variant of the cowboy persona. As Everold Hosein so aptly commented: “A generation of West Indians have grown up on the tradition of Hollywood Westerns but West Indians remain West Indians and not duplicates of John Wayne.”<sup>35</sup> Instead, there appear to be gradations of identification that occur amongst different characters in a number of the novels from that period. Western imagery is essentially used as a token of cultural currency in many of these works – everybody can understand the reference and relate to its relevance in the particular circumstances in which it is utilised. Within the novels under scrutiny there are a number of examples of this less-extreme form of identification with the Western hero, as the following demonstrates.

The young Indian overseer Prekash in Sam Selvon’s novel *Those Who Eat The Cascadura* is one such character who occasionally mimics the behaviour that he has seen in Hollywood Westerns. “He spoke all this quickly, and shot the rum down with a jerk of his hand like a dusty cowboy in a new town.”<sup>36</sup> Prekash’s identification with the cowboy persona is, however, only a minor part of his characterisation and does not in any way suggest that he was lacking in his own sense of personal identity. Another Indian character Pariag, the lonely ‘coolie’ boy in Lovelace’s *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, also shows a particular fondness for Westerns, yet is also obviously able to distinguish between them and reality in a way that is wholly denied to the central character of Fisheye. “Some nights he [Pariag] would slip away from Dolly and go to

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<sup>35</sup> ‘The Problems of Imported Television Content in the Commonwealth Caribbean’, p.11.

<sup>36</sup> Sam Selvon: *Those Who Eat The Cascadura* (London: Davis-Poynter Ltd., 1972) p.43.

Royal Theatre and see cowboy movies, and in the day, riding the van, the wind blowing through his hair, he imagined himself a cowboy riding the range.”<sup>37</sup> Other works, however, demonstrate the more intense levels of identification that occur between male protagonists and their Western counterparts and often focus upon the inherent dangers they must ultimately face when the barriers between ‘reality’ and cinematic fiction finally crumble. It is, therefore, only in these more *extreme* examples of Western mimicry that the truly problematic nature of such behaviour really manifests itself.

The particularly close relationships between Lovelace’s work and the Hollywood Western are not wholly confined to his novel *The Dragon Can’t Dance*.<sup>38</sup> His earliest and most explicit references are to be found in his second novel *The Schoolmaster*. From the opening page of this earlier work there is a direct reference to the cinema – Western films in particular – that is clearly intended to make the reader aware of the connection between the written narrative and its cinematic counterpart. “...among the men there are those who would like to leave Kumaca for a few days and go down...past Valencia to the town of Zanilla with...the green painted cinema house where for a price you can go in and watch men on horses shoot guns off and make fine talk and kiss pretty girls...”.<sup>39</sup> The whole structure of the narrative parallels that of the classical Hollywood Western – as defined by Lovell,<sup>40</sup> amongst others – with its established formula of a virtuous hero (Pedro), innocent heroine

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<sup>37</sup> *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, p.94.

<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to note that both Carolyn Cooper in her introduction to that novel and Keith Q. Warner in his recently published *On Location* fail to acknowledge any filmic influences in Lovelace’s earlier works.

<sup>39</sup> Earl Lovelace: *The Schoolmaster* (Oxford: Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series, 1979 [1968] ) p.3.

<sup>40</sup> Alan Lovell: ‘The Western’ in Bill Nichols (ed.): *Movies And Methods, Volume I*, (Berkeley, California, USA: University of California Press, 1976) p.167.

(Christiana), wicked villain (Warwick) and an over-reliance on the revenge motif (Francis Assivero).

Whilst Warwick the schoolmaster is clearly anything but a hero in the cinematic (Western) sense, he is certainly the pivotal character in the novel and, as such, embodies much of the iconography usually associated with the main protagonist. Kennedy's film *Return Of The Seven* (1966) opens, for example, with the instantly recognisable tableau of a small boy gazing in wonder at a stranger riding into his village, whose presence will inevitably bring disruption and mayhem in many of the locals' lives. Warwick's own arrival in Kumaca is highly reminiscent of its Hollywood counterpart. "He [Humphy – Christiana's younger brother] was raising himself lazily from the step when out of the corners of his eyes, he saw the doves fly up. Looking down the yard to the path that led up to the house, he saw two men approaching, and for a moment remained motionless watching with wide-open eyes, because in all his life he had never seen such a man as the one who came riding on the donkey."<sup>41</sup> Warwick's final departure from the village, albeit with an unusual closing twist, bears an equally close resemblance to that employed in countless Westerns – he literally begins to ride off into the sunset. "The schoolmaster put the small bag on the ground, and he took hold of the horse, and vaulted on to its bare back...The sunshine was on the hills...The horse started to walk."<sup>42</sup> In keeping with the highly moralistic tone of the classical Western, evil must, however, ultimately be punished and Warwick is finally thrown to the ground and killed, together with his erstwhile symbol of power, the iconic white horse. "The shot smashed the silence. The white

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<sup>41</sup> *The Schoolmaster*, p.47

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 163-164.

horse seemed for a moment motionless in the air, then it pitched forward, fell, the schoolmaster going over its neck, with a swift, graceful pitch. The schoolmaster lay motionless.”<sup>43</sup>

The use of violence – usually a gunfight of some description - is commonplace in the resolution of most Hollywood Westerns and the closing pages of *The Schoolmaster* can again be found to parallel that of its movie counterparts. Assivero’s accusations and the reaction of the villagers – moving away and leaving him alone to face his opponent – provide images that reverberate with remembered scenes from numerous Western showdowns. “Francis Assivero had been holding his shot-gun with one hand... ‘Dardain’, he said... ‘I have five cartridges here in my pocket. I will now put one in this gun’ ... The people behind Dardain moved away quietly like a wind, and he was left standing alone.”<sup>44</sup> The violent actions of an individual, at least until the advent of the ‘Spaghetti’ Western in the 1960s, had traditionally been viewed as a regrettable yet somehow inevitable means by which justice could be delivered in an essentially lawless society. The death of a villain such as Warwick was therefore something to be applauded, rather than be appalled at, as Albert Maria Gomes celebrates in his 1978 novel *All Papa’s Children*. “At the cinema Bob had seen many a baddie drop suddenly to the bullet of the hero – and had clapped his hands, shouted approval and stamped his feet with intense delight. Good for them! Good that the bad should die and the good live on. For one thing, it was the law of the Wild West...”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.164.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.157.

<sup>45</sup> Albert Maria Gomes: *All Papa’s Children* (East Molesey, Surrey: Cairi Publishing House, 1978) p.35.

No discussion on Western violence could be complete without further consideration of Fisheye's portrayal in *The Dragon Can't Dance* and that of Ivan in both the novel and film of *The Harder They Come*. Although Carolyn Cooper<sup>46</sup> and Keith Q. Warner<sup>47</sup> have previously examined these works in some degree of detail, the powerful portrayal of both Fisheye and Ivan and their inability to "...maintain a sane critical distance from the text (i.e. film)..."<sup>48</sup> must still be given due consideration within this particular context. Cooper has suggested that their total immersion into the world of the cinema hero must be seen as 'pathological', yet although these portrayals are most definitely extreme, they are perhaps not so very far removed from behaviour displayed by some disaffected members of Caribbean urban youth in the late 1960s. Perry Henzell – director of the film *The Harder They Come* (1972) - describes in his preface to *The Power Game* the increasingly violent behaviour that Jamaican cinema-owners had actually found themselves forced to contend with. "...the owners of the Gaiety Cinema and then all the other theatre-owners in the slums put in concrete screens because gunmen in the audience more than once attempted to outdraw the likes of Clint Eastwood and Trinity."<sup>49</sup> More importantly, one only needs to look back to either Boysie Singh's exploits in Trinidad or the real Ivanhoe Martin's behaviour in Jamaica to see that both the fictional Ivan and Fisheye's characterisation had a lot of basis in fact.

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<sup>46</sup> Carolyn Cooper: *Noises In The Blood* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1994 [1993] ) pp. 97-98.

<sup>47</sup> *On Location*, pp. 17-20.

<sup>48</sup> *Noises In The Blood*, p.98.

<sup>49</sup> Perry Henzell: *The Power Game* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ten-A Publications, 1982) p.ii.

Boysie Singh (or 'The Rajah' as he was sometimes known) was a gangland leader and mass murderer from Port of Spain who was finally executed on the twentieth of August 1957, aged just forty-nine. Among his many crimes – for most of which he was never successfully prosecuted – were running gambling houses and prostitutes, smuggling illegal immigrants, piracy, beatings and numerous<sup>50</sup> murders. What is of particular relevance, however, is the extent to which the cinema played a pivotal role in his life. Only semi-literate, his first prison sentence actually came about as the result of 'popping' (entering without paying) into the London Theatre in Woodbrook to see a Tarzan film starring Elmo Lincoln in 1926. Singh was caught by the caretaker, beat him up in return and as a result was duly sentenced to twenty-one days of hard labour.

The powerful allure of Hollywood was eventually to have a far greater effect on Singh and one which, according to Bickerton, continued to influence other local youth for many years to come. In the early 1940s Singh went to see the just-released film *Stormy Weather*<sup>51</sup> (1943) starring Cab Calloway. The costumes from the film are said by Bickerton to have "...influenced his style of dressing; he blossomed out in the shoulder-pads, drape-cut jackets and voluminous trousers that set the style for a whole generation of saga-boys."<sup>52</sup> Lieber's 1981 definition of a saga-boy would tend to back up Bickerton's claims, at least in stylistic terms. "[A saga-boy is]... a well-dressed sport, a ghetto dandy. He has flair and tends towards exhibitionism; he's up-to-date in regard to styles and likes to surround himself with women. He is usually

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<sup>50</sup> No accurate number of victims has ever been established as many were disposed of at sea and their bodies never found or accounted for, but newspaper estimates typically range between twenty to thirty.

<sup>51</sup> An all-black musical romance that also featured Lena Horne and Fats Waller.

<sup>52</sup> Derek Bickerton: *The Murders Of Boysie Singh* (London: Arthur Baker Ltd., 1962) p.57.

dressed to kill and aware of his physical appearance.”<sup>53</sup> With his own swaggering demeanour and tendency to draw a gun at the slightest provocation, the step from saga-boy<sup>54</sup> Singh via the Hollywood Western to Fisheye in the Caribbean novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* is not so very large as to appear totally unbelievable. “[Fisheye] ... would be recognized on Carnival days... by his black hat, its silver band gleaming, his shirt unbuttoned down his chest, his long arms lifted above his head ... signalling his confidence and readiness for battle.”<sup>55</sup>

The degree of linkage between Fisheye and the cinema is, however, by no means confined to his early ‘saga-boy’ appearance. The later addition of knife holes into Fisheye’s treasured black hat highlights the early stages of transformation that his character undergoes as he moves ever closer to his Western filmic counterparts. “Sometimes...he would take off his hat and point to the holes and say: ‘You see where a fellar shoot me!’ In a way he was sorry that they hadn’t been real bullet holes, like in a western.”<sup>56</sup> By the time that Fisheye’s hijack of the police van occurs, his metamorphosis into a cowboy has been almost totally completed. “...his hat brim [was] pushed up from his eyes, his legs spread apart, slightly bow-legged, leaning back a little, with a pistol in his hand, a cowboy in a Western movie, braced against one of those storms of dust that always seem to sweep across the street, rolling hoops of brambles, just at the moment of the showdown between two nerveless rival

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<sup>53</sup> *Street Life: Afro American Culture In Urban Trinidad*, p.69.

<sup>54</sup> Lovelace provides another example of ‘saga boys’ and their particularly flashy style of dress in his novel *The Wine Of Astonishment*, as does Ian McDonald in *The Hummingbird Tree*. (Earl Lovelace: *The Wine Of Astonishment* (Oxford: Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series, 1986 [1982] ) p.22, Ian McDonald: *The Hummingbird Tree* (Oxford: Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series, 1992 [1969] ), pp. 27 & 74).

<sup>55</sup> *The Dragon Can't Dance*, p.70.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

gunmen.”<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately for Fisheye though, the one element that he lacks in this transformation is invincibility from the law that is generally enjoyed by his screen icons. As a result, both he and his fellow gunmen end up in jail, rather than becoming the local heroes that their aspirations might have lead them to expect.

Whilst the fictional Fisheye becomes almost wholly absorbed by the cowboy persona, the degree of identification between the Western and the original Ivanhoe or Rhygin’ Martin – on whom the subsequent film and novel are based - must be considered at least partly a fabrication of the local press. The twenty-nine year old Martin escaped from the Jamaican General Penitentiary on the first of September 1948. After hiding in the Carib Hotel, Hannah Town and killing Detective Constable Lewis who tried to re-arrest him there, he moved on to kill Lucinda Young as she opened a door to let him in and to shoot two other women who were in the house with her. The headline article which appeared in *The Daily Gleaner* the following day was already describing Martin as “...a sharp-shooting convict...”<sup>58</sup> and, interestingly, directed its focus upon a large picture of Martin whilst only providing much smaller ones of his victims. The following day, however *The Daily Gleaner* really launched into what can only be termed a histrionic style of prose by describing Martin as: “...a one-man army with an itch in his trigger finger, and with a ‘mission’ to perform.”<sup>59</sup> The same article carried a headline which read ‘Two-gun killer dares police’ and a sub-heading of ‘In Cowboy Style’ that went on to describe the earlier shootout with Martin ‘blazing from two guns’.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p.187.

<sup>58</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Thursday 2 September 1948, lead article, front page.

By the fifth of September and a third killing, a two-hundred pound reward was being offered by the police for information leading to his arrest. Martin continued to be headline news for most of that week and was still being referred to in cowboy terms as the ‘two-gun slayer’<sup>60</sup> whilst somehow managing to baffle the police and evade capture. As the weeks passed and he was still at large, the newspaper continued to devote small amounts of the front page to him, even though there was little new to report. It was not until Friday the eighth of October that Martin made the headlines once again with ‘Rhygin’ flees hide-out as swamps bog police’.<sup>61</sup> Two days later the police finally managed to track down Martin and kill him in a shootout at Lime Cay. Almost the whole front page of that day’s newspaper was devoted to Martin, including two photographs of him, one of which was described as being “...in two-gun style”.<sup>62</sup> Thus it would appear that most, if not all, of the analogies between Martin and the ‘cowboy’ or ‘two-gun’ style seems to have been generated by the media as a means of attracting readership. Ivan the cold-blooded killer had conveniently been transformed into a Western-style ‘hero’, battling against all odds to escape the clutches of the police ‘posse’, a narrative formula that would have been instantly recognisable to thousands of viewers of Westerns.

Henzell’s film version of *The Harder They Come*<sup>63</sup> picks up on the Western overtones of the Martin story and inflates them considerably by implying that the Hollywood movies, which Ivan and other disaffected youth viewed in cinemas such

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<sup>59</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Friday 3 September 1948, lead article, front page.

<sup>60</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Tuesday 7 September 1948, lead article, front page.

<sup>61</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Friday 8 October 1948, lead article, front page.

<sup>62</sup> *Daily Gleaner*, Sunday 10 October 1948, lead article, front page.

<sup>63</sup> Meeks has just recently published an article that directly compares the characterisation in this film with that contained in Lovelace’s novel *The Dragon Can’t Dance*. (Brian Meeks: ‘The Harder *Footnotes continue on the next page.*’)

as *The Rialto*, were dangerously deceptive. A 1976 review by Julianne Burton noted that the self-reflectiveness of the film – inserting clips from a Western and its audience to frame the action – specifically draws attention to the impact of that medium upon the local culture. Burton comments that: “Movies [in *The Harder They Come*] are not a harmless form of diversion and escape, but a powerful agent of socialization and mystification...The film makes it clear that those who preside over the chaos and apparent freedom of the cultural marketplace...are in close alliance with those who defend the existing power structure from any real threat.”<sup>64</sup> At the close of the film, Ivan’s final moments are inter-cut with flashbacks to that earlier film’s audience and the now portentous tones of Jose’s comment that ‘star-boy can’t dead (*sic*) till the last reel play’. Even if Ivan’s ‘heroism’ has turned out to be of a particularly hollow nature, he has nevertheless been transformed into the star of an epic of his own making and is duly applauded by his audience. “One of their boys has made it to the screen of their imagination... His death is not a simple execution but the apotheosis of a man of the people.”<sup>65</sup>

By the time that Thelwell’s ‘novelization’<sup>66</sup> of *The Harder They Come* was to appear in 1980, the differentiation between his Ivan and the Hollywood dream-turned-nightmare have almost become indistinguishable. From his very first sight of a cinema (*The Rialto*) in Kingston, Ivan is portrayed in this novel as being totally captivated by the whole cinematic experience, even before he enters and views a film.

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Dragon’ in Brian Meeks: *Narratives Of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, The Caribbean* (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2000).

<sup>64</sup> Julianne Burton: ‘Cultural Colonialism and the American Dream’ in *Jump Cut*, No. 6, (March/April 1975) p.6.

<sup>65</sup> Unidentified (anonymous) author: ‘Film Reviews – *The Harder They Come*’ in *Cinéaste*, Vol. 6., No. 2 (1974) p. 46.

“The theatre...[was] The tallest, most impressive structure Ivan had ever seen, it was not so much a building as a magical fantasy made real...A marketplace of dreams, it was designed to appear fabulous, more magical, more impossibly brilliant than the illusions it dispensed so cheaply.”<sup>67</sup> In Thelwell’s interpretation of events, Ivan and his fellow ‘sufferahs’ cannot help but act as indiscriminate sponges for anything and everything that Hollywood throws at them.<sup>68</sup> “...they constituted an audience so rapt and attentive, so impressionable and apparently uncritical that their identification was almost total...these weren’t pictures; the movie was a flowing reality, unfolding like time made visible before one’s eyes.”<sup>69</sup>

Within a short period of time, Ivan quickly moves from being a relatively indiscriminate viewer to one whose satisfaction can only be brought about by the particular formulaic charms of the Western. “Gangster movies didn’t appeal to him much, they seemed to lack the clean-cut heroism of the westerns.”<sup>70</sup> Despite retaining a fondness for the stylistic charms of certain other actors such as Humphrey Bogart, Ivan increasingly comes to think of himself exclusively in Western terms. “...in his innermost heart Rhygin was a cowboy. To miss a western, almost any western, brought sadness and deprivation to his spirit.”<sup>71</sup> His mimicry of the cowboy-style is not, however, solely confined to his internal musings as he also starts to develop a cowboy walk in a similar fashion to Lovelace’s Fisheye. “He [Ivan] was pacing along

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<sup>66</sup> See further details of this process in Michael Thelwell: ‘*The Harder They Come*: From Film to Novel’ in *Ex-Iles*, pp. 176-210.

<sup>67</sup> *The Harder They Come*, p.143.

<sup>68</sup> This concept is very much in line with MacDonald’s thinking about the dangers inherent in passively absorbing Hollywood ‘culture’ as outlined in the Introduction.

<sup>69</sup> *The Harder They Come*, pp.147-148.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p.195.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

the sidewalk like Wyatt Earp, with the slow, measured stride of a gunfighter..."<sup>72</sup> The dire consequences of Ivan's immersion into the world of fantasy also bear striking parallels to those eventually experienced by Fisheye in *The Dragon Can't Dance*.

As Ivan's identification with the Western hero grows, so his dependence upon the cinematic world increases to the extent where the inevitable outcome – as pre-figured earlier in the novel – starts to occur. After shooting his way out of a police ambush, Ivan finds himself unable to distinguish between the world of films and his own sordid reality. "What really happen? He had only fleeting impressions. More like a dream than anything else. Certainly less real than any movie he had ever seen. The wail of sirens in the distance added to the cinematic effect."<sup>73</sup> Only at the dramatic climax of the novel does Ivan faintly grasp the fact, in a brief moment of lucidity, that the world of films can never be anything more than an illusion. "He had to fight the laughter that rose up in him...Were they real – or another scene from a movie?...Show doan over a raas! Star-bwai can' dead after all..."<sup>74</sup>. The tragedy is, of course, that this inspiration arises too late to save him and the police marksmen immediately gun him down. Ironically, in the killing of Ivan law and order – or, at least a semblance of such – is once again seen to prevail over evil in typical Hollywood fashion. Thelwell does, however, insert one brief coda to the novel by suggesting that the mythical nature of Ivan's exploits does still live on in memories beyond his physical death. I am not wholly convinced that this interlude is sufficiently powerful for the whole novel to be interpreted as an inversion of the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p.197.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p.349.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p.390.

classical Hollywood formula, but it does at least raise further doubts in the mind of the reader about many of the filmic genre's conventions.

Because violence of one sort or another was such a fundamental element of the Western film, a much greater emphasis was usually placed upon the action – how it happened, when and to whom – than was necessarily given to dialogue. Many Western heroes were renowned for their reticence and that was understood to be a symbol of their commitment to the mission in hand; instead of wasting time talking about the task they simply got on with it. Many Western actors developed their own particular method of speech – John Wayne's drawl, for example – which imparted a heightened degree of importance to the few words they did utter. However, by the advent of the 'Spaghetti' Western in the 1960s, even the already limited dialogue of earlier films had been pared right down to a stylised, monosyllabic form. Actors such as Clint Eastwood and Lee Van Cleef both played characters of little or no words in a number of such films, relying instead upon their steely gaze (emphasised by shots of extreme facial close-ups) and their ability to draw a gun faster than any of their rivals.

Given the intensity of their identification with all things Western it is not surprising to find, therefore, that the two fictional characters who most closely mimic this highly stylised form of anti-language are again Fisheye in *The Dragon Can't Dance* and Ivan in *The Harder They Come*. In the latter novel, Ivan finds that his ability to copy the reticence of the Hollywood cowboy quickly earns him a greater degree of respect from his peers. "When he spoke it was a slow drawl through lips that scarcely moved, reluctantly separating just enough to allow the words to escape. And he used few words. The new persona worked well. The greetings became more

frequent, warmer...”<sup>75</sup>. Whilst Ivan may have enjoyed some temporary sense of elation from his mimicry, it ultimately leads him further away from his own sense of personal identity. Tragically, he moves ever further into an imaginary cowboy persona, with its inevitable and finally tragic consequences. “...he saw [himself] as a mysterious one: the lone, taciturn stranger riding into town, maintaining a certain distance and keeping his own counsel...seen but not known, until that day when some unsuspecting fool stepped over the invisible line.”<sup>76</sup>

In the case of Fisheye, the effect upon his personality when he adopts the clipped speech patterns of the Western hero offers a striking parallel to that loss of self so dramatically experienced by Ivan. On the morning in which he and his friends hijack the police van, Fisheye appears before them, strikingly dressed in black and only speaks in short, terse Western-style sentences. “ ‘Nobody ain’t moving on,’ [Fisheye said] and when the policeman turned to the voice, they would see him standing beside the jeep... ‘Who here have the guts to kill a police?’ Fisheye asked”<sup>77</sup> The irony is, of course, that Fisheye himself does not have the courage to pull the trigger, unlike the cowboy that he so manfully struggles to emulate. Inevitably his exploits end up in chaos and whilst he at least retains his life – unlike Ivan – his sense of personal identity has all but disappeared. The final recognition of this tragedy is eventually articulated by one of his fellow prisoners: “Even when we have power, when we have guns. Is like we ain’t have no self. I mean, we have a self but the self we have is for somebody else.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.196.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> *The Dragon Can't Dance*, pp.186-187.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p.202.

The laconic speech of both Ivan and Fisheye are directly linked to their identification with Western films, but there are other examples of fictional characters who also demonstrate a lack of verbalisation, even if it is not *explicitly* linked to their mimicry of Hollywood cowboys. Alexander 'Blackman' in Orlando Patterson's *An Absence Of Ruins* is portrayed as one such an extreme character whose life is dominated by deliberately imposed periods of silence. His entire role in the novel could, in fact, be read as similar in style to the anti-hero of the 'Spaghetti' Western as he rarely speaks, cares little about the feelings of others and demonstrates no sense of social responsibility. "His [Alexander's] refusal to communicate was quite deliberate...It was not that he would not say anything to her because he could not, but that he could not because he had chosen that he would not. It was his choice. And the choice was made simply and crudely for his own pleasure."<sup>79</sup> Whilst I would not wish to suggest that the linkages between this novel and the later Western films are anything more than tenuous, it is interesting to note that it was published in 1967 when the 'Spaghetti' Western was at its height of popularity. The notion of an amoral central character, single minded in his pursuit of self-gratification and lacking in verbalisation is common to both the novel and its cinematic counterpart, even if the former did not necessarily arise from any conscious form of mimicry.

In the Western film violence is by no means solely confined to that delivered by one man – the 'hero' - towards another (or several others). There are numerous instances of male violence towards women in the genre and several of these will be explored further in Chapter Nine which examines the novelistic portrayal of women

and its parallels to Western films. Physical violence is, in fact, something that is also inflicted *upon* the hero's own person in an almost ritualistic manner and not just meted out by him with only minimal risk of physical harm in return. The manner in which the hero carries himself throughout any such ordeal is, in fact, of paramount importance, as it serves to demonstrate to the audience the uniqueness of his ability to conquer pain and, by implication, to defeat 'evil' when eventually required to do so. There are countless examples in which the hero's physical sufferings have been used as just such a narrative device, but two films stand out as exemplars of the technique due to both the centrality and the particular brutality of the violence that is inflicted within them.

The earlier of the two films – *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961) – was directed by and starred Marlon Brando as 'Kid' Rio, a small-time bank-robber and habitual con man of unsuspecting women. Despite the apparent, almost familial, closeness of their earlier relationship, his older partner – Dad Longworth (Karl Malden) – betrays Rio and leaves him to face a posse alone after a particular robbery goes wrong. Five years later Rio returns from incarceration to track down Longworth in what appears to be the familiar betrayal and revenge format of so many Westerns. However, the centrepiece of the film revolves not, as might have been expected, around Rio killing Longworth, but is focused instead upon a sadistic whipping that Longworth inflicts upon Rio. In this scene the camera alternates in voyeuristic fashion between the inherent pleasure shown upon the face of Longworth and the agonies suffered by Rio as he slowly sinks to the ground and asks Longworth to end his humiliation by shooting and killing him. Instead of complying, Longworth takes his rifle and

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<sup>79</sup> Orlando Patterson: *An Absence Of Ruins* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1967) p.35.

savagely uses the butt to smash Rio's gun hand. Throughout the ordeal, Rio's control of his senses serves to demonstrate an inner strength and courage that marks him out, to the audience, as the one who will eventually prevail in the inevitable showdown between the two. Interestingly, although this does prove to be the case when Rio outshoots Longworth at the film's closure, another twist to the more traditional format is provided as Rio only wounds, but does not kill him, as might have been otherwise anticipated.

Sergio Leone's 1966 film *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly* also contains a pivotal scene of physical suffering in which the tenacious nature of the Clint Eastwood character - 'Blondie' - is established in stark comparison to that of his unscrupulous tormentor Tuco (Eli Wallach). In similar fashion to that recounted above, Tuco plans to avenge himself upon 'Blondie' for an earlier humiliation. Tuco's revenge is seemingly ensured when he captures 'Blondie' at gunpoint and forces him to walk across one hundred miles of blisteringly hot desert (or 'hell' as Tuco so graphically names it). Clint Eastwood's suffering is emphasised by the camera lingering over shots of him gasping with thirst, discarding his clothes, crawling on hands and knees and, most tellingly, upon the increasing burns and blisters that the sun inflicts upon his light (blond) complexion. By way of contrast, the dark-skinned Tuco remains sheltered from the worst of the sun under an incongruous parasol, drinks freely from his canteen of water and repeatedly laughs at the other's sufferings. Whilst Tuco keeps up a continuous monologue, Clint Eastwood's character remains predominantly silent, bearing his ordeal with dignity and continuing to stagger along until unable to move any further. Only the intervention of a run-away wagon diverts Tuco's attention from his victim, which

leads to Clint Eastwood re-asserting his 'heroic' superiority and reversing the tables upon Tuco throughout the remainder of the film.

The utilisation of physical suffering and the stylised fashion in which it is frequently dealt with are by no means exclusively confined to the world of the Hollywood Western. Within the fictional constructs of the Caribbean novel, similar narrative devices can also be found in which the unique nature of a central character's identity is demonstrated via his ability to both conquer pain and use that experience for personal regeneration at a later stage.<sup>80</sup> One of the early novels of John Hearne is particularly adept in both the way in which the ordeal of pain and suffering is used as a central motif in its narrative construction and the methods by which this is linked to its Hollywood counterpart. *The Autumn Equinox* concerns a young American, Jim, who comes to the fictional island of Cayuna to set up a press for Cuban revolutionaries. Although Jim claims some level of motivation for his actions – his mother turns out to have been Cuban, for example – it is not until he has endured a severe beating and pistol-whipping that he finally locates a true purpose for his life with a sound, ideological basis to his commitment. The men who come to smash the printing press – believing themselves true Cuban compatriots - can only express utter disdain for Jim and what they perceive as his play-acting at politics with filmic overtones. United in their disgust at his behaviour, they contemptuously dismiss Jim as a poor imitation of the Hollywood cowboy: "He is frightened. See for yourself. I

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<sup>80</sup> Although not specifically linked to the Hollywood Western, the portrayal of the early life of Joe Martin in Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* contains a similar example of the regeneration that can arise from suffering and overcoming extreme physical violence. (*A Brighter Sun*, especially pp. 25-26).

know this sort. Talk and fine ideals. They are not the kind we get in Santiago. This sort is of the Boy Scouts and the Wild West cinema.”<sup>81</sup>

After recovering from his severe beating, Jim subsequently recognises the fact that events leading up to his ordeal had contained an element of unreality in them, as if he had actually been immersed in watching a film. “‘It happened so suddenly’, Jim muttered slowly, his voice lost and deep inside himself. ‘It was like a dream, or falling asleep at the cinema and waking up in the middle of a big scene’.”<sup>82</sup> The important thing is, of course, that Jim has ‘awakened’ from his former life as a result of enduring and overcoming physical pain, in a manner so often enacted in the Hollywood Western. Now, instead of viewing life as if it: “...was like a film still...”<sup>83</sup>, his regeneration enables him to participate in full, whatever the outcome to his personal safety. As a result, he is able to make the decision to go and engage in hand-to-hand fighting with the revolutionaries in Cuba instead of sitting on the sidelines of the struggle as he had previously done.

As discussed in Chapter Six, the symbolic role of the Western hero inevitably altered as it evolved over a considerable period of time and many of these subtle changes in characterisation can be found in the novels under consideration. It is also possible to see that the central characters in many of these works have also shifted from a straightforward adoration or mimicry of cowboy mannerisms to a more complex engagement with issues of identity. Several of the novels considered have openly utilised some of the more traditional Hollywood conventions whilst others

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<sup>81</sup> John Hearne: *The Autumn Equinox* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1959) p.248.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* p.255.

have a more ambiguous relationship with their filmic sources. I would argue, however, that despite the diverse range of characterisation that has been under consideration, a high degree of correlation has been established between the two media in many aspects of the portrayal of central, male characters. The following Chapter will continue to examine the strength of these linkages by turning to consider the parallels between the narrative function of landscape in both the Caribbean novel and its Western counterparts.

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<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* p.65.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE NARRATIVE FUNCTION OF LANDSCAPE

The representation of landscape is one of the most important features of the Hollywood Western. The awesome presence of the vast desert – usually filmed in wide-angle, panoramic shots to emphasise its immense power and unforgiving nature – serves to both influence the plot and the type of characters that are capable of inhabiting it. The very nature of the land itself – wide open, wind-swept, barren plains or rugged, treeless mountainsides - can almost be read as another symbolic character within the genre rather than a major component of the general *mise-en-scène*, so important a role does it play in establishing the rhetoric of the Western. Literally hundreds of Western films utilise landscape in this manner - particularly within the opening sequence – to provide a symbolic framework that candidly celebrates man's ability to conquer or, at the very least, subvert the forces of nature. In Jane Tompkins' words: “..the land is everything to the hero; it is both the destination and the way. He courts it, struggles with it, defies it, conquers it, and lies down with it at night.”<sup>1</sup>

The films of John Ford, in particular, are justly renowned for their spectacular photography of Monument Valley, a setting he employed for as many as seven of his Westerns,<sup>2</sup> from *Stagecoach* made in the late 1930s through to *Cheyenne Autumn*, released in 1964. Ford not only returned to the same *general* location for each of these films, in many instances the exact same shots of mesas and buttes were used as

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<sup>1</sup> *West Of Everything – The Inner Life Of Westerns*, p.81.

back-drops to the differing narratives. For example, *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon*<sup>3</sup> uses 'at least five panoramic shots which refer back to the previous films', according to a recent article on Ford's repeated use of the same location.<sup>4</sup> The symbolic value of these awe-inspiring settings was thus vastly enhanced by repetition, reinforcing the inherent hostility of the landscape and inspiring a sense of wonder in the audience for a hero able to survive amidst such unforgiving surroundings. Peter Wollen's comment on the close interaction between the hero and the landscape in Ford's work is as succinct as any in pointing to the special relationship between them that the director compulsively explored: "The landscape of Ford's West is well-known: the gaunt rock outcrops of Monument Valley. Nature is hostile; to survive, man must be as tough as the cactus."<sup>5</sup>

The landscape within a Western was not, however, only there to reflect the particular nature of its hero. The pressing need to keep moving westwards was taken as a given fact by the genre. With a rapidly expanding eastern population, the vast 'empty' lands of the west were viewed as a highly valuable commodity that was merely waiting to be claimed by settlers. Coupled with an inherent sense of adventure or pioneering spirit amongst 'enterprising' males, this rampant expansionism apparently needed no further justification. Furthermore, the extinction of the indigenous Indians who inhabited those allegedly empty lands was typically shown

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<sup>2</sup> This figure excludes early Westerns made by Ford prior to the advent of sound. In total he directed fifty-six Westerns, the majority of which (thirty-eight) were made before 1926.

<sup>3</sup> According to Hughes, there are further connections between Ford and Monument Valley to be found in paintings of that location by the Western artist Frederic Remington. Several of these, in Hughes' opinion, appear to pre-echo exact scenes from a number of Ford's 'Valley' Westerns, including *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon*. (Robert Hughes: *American Visions – The Epic History Of Art In America* (London: The Harvill Press. London, 1997) p. 203.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Louis Leutrat & Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues: 'John Ford and Monument Valley' in *Back In the Saddle Again*, pp. 160-169.

(with a limited number of exceptions in mostly later films<sup>6</sup>) as an economic necessity in the ever-increasing move towards the Pacific Ocean. Numerous films such as *How The West Was Won* (1962) or *The Way West* (1967), for example, explore this myth of the pioneer and glorify the hardships faced on their respective journeys, including the ever-present threat of Indian attack. The Indian way of life was rarely considered by the genre as a viable alternative to that of the American settler. Notions of 'primitive' or 'savage' behaviour on the part of the native Indian were doomed to extinction in the face of 'civilisation' and 'progress', embodied in the figures of the heroic settler and his long-suffering compatriots. Parallels to colonialist activities in the Caribbean, rapidly culminating in the extinction of the local Caribs and Arawaks,<sup>7</sup> yet somehow sanctified by a strong belief in 'manifest destiny',<sup>8</sup> are all too easily brought to mind.<sup>9</sup>

Such representation and the values it inherently embodies were of paramount importance to the Western's ideological framework which was overtly concerned with issues of land ownership, expansionism and domestication or 'taming' of the so-called wilderness of the mythical western frontier. Thus whilst the harsh, apparent emptiness of the desert landscape was undoubtedly one of the Westerns most

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<sup>5</sup> 'John Ford' in *Theories Of Authorship*, p.104.

<sup>6</sup> A limited number of early Westerns were also sympathetic to the Indian, such as *The Redman's View* (1909) or *At Old Fort Dearborn* (1912), but mostly they were portrayed as what Buscombe has described as "...an anonymous horde and as dog-eating 'primitives'." (*The BFI Companion To The Western*, p.156).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Anthony's 1982 novel: *Bright Road To El Dorado* or H.G. de Lisser's 1958 work: *The Arawak Girl*, address just such issues and the devastating affect of colonial ambitions upon the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. (Michael Anthony: *Bright Road To El Dorado* (Walton on Thames, Surrey: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1982), H.G. de Lisser: *The Arawak Girl* (Kingston, Jamaica: Pioneer Press, 1958).

<sup>8</sup> A phrase first used to justify expansionism in an article by John L. O'Sullivan published in the July-August 1845 edition of *United States Magazine And Democratic Review*. In it, O'Sullivan suggested that Americans were the chosen people ('allotted by Providence') who would create a model society for their ever-increasing population in all the westward territories that they subsequently annexed.

recognisable visual features, its true significance could only be fully appreciated once it had been seen to be conquered, transformed and ‘civilised’ by bands of white, ‘heroic’ settlers. As Shohat and Stam so aptly comment: “A binary division pits sinister wilderness against beautiful garden, with the former “inevitably” giving way before the latter...”.<sup>10</sup> The contrasting image of a cultivated landscape - that is post-transformation by white settlers – was therefore inscribed into the genre’s ideology even if it did not necessarily manifest itself within the visual framework of a given Western film.

The setting up of binary oppositions such as those of wilderness versus Biblical ‘Garden of Eden’ have therefore played a fundamental role in the Western’s overall formulation and in establishing a sense of God-given righteousness to the pioneering spirit, irrespective of the means necessary to achieve its pre-determined ends. It is interesting to note that the justification embedded in notions of a pre-ordained fate or destiny had been widely employed in Western fiction even prior to the advent of the filmic version with which this thesis is primarily concerned. According to Henry Nash Smith, an image of the west as ‘the garden of the world’ was one of the most potent symbols in American society during the nineteenth century: “...a collective representation, a poetic idea...that defined the promise of American life.”<sup>11</sup> Smith observed that the (previously denied) existence of the western desert had eventually to be acknowledged from the 1820s onwards as increasing numbers of travellers visited the area and lived to report their findings. To

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<sup>9</sup> Other writers on Westerns such as Cawelti, for example, have noted similar linkages with novels about colonial ambitions in Africa that also focus upon the land/landscape. (*The Six Gun Mystique*, p.41).

<sup>10</sup> *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, p.116.

counteract these tales of aridity and encourage future settlers to move westwards, the potent 'garden' imagery was utilised with the overt suggestion that it was capable of extending into and transforming the desert or, in some more fanciful examples, even obliterating it altogether.<sup>12</sup> By man's endeavours alone it was suggested that increased rainfall and fertility would abound in areas where previously nothing had grown, fuelling a wider dream of an agrarian utopia in the west.

It is far too simplistic, of course, to imagine that the Western film was unaware of many of the inherent problems associated with that supposed transition from desert into agricultural paradise. Although many films simply celebrated the 'bravery' of those men who made the westwards journey, others acknowledged and examined at least some of the difficulties faced upon arrival in both working the land and co-existing with fellow settlers. The very nature of the land in many mid-western states and the low level of agricultural technology at that time made it initially unsuitable for most purposes apart from open range cattle farming. Thus the early cattle ranchers (before the American Civil War) had the run of the land to themselves once the local Indians had been suppressed. As more settlers arrived and staked their individual claims to plots of land, conflicts inevitably arose, particularly when herds of cattle were driven along the old trails that sometimes crossed newly settled land. The smaller landowners (homesteaders) tended to fence off the perimeters to their properties whilst the larger (open range) ranchers continued to allow their cattle and horses to roam freely, irrespective of the damage they often caused to others'

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Nash Smith: *Virgin Land – The American West As Symbol & Myth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: Harvard University Press, 1973 [1950] ) p.123.

property. This changing usage of the land and the essentially irreconcilable conflict between the two methods of agriculture was examined in a number of Westerns such as *Shane*<sup>13</sup> and *The Man From Laramie* (1955). In both of these films, the struggles of the homesteader were contrasted with the seemingly outmoded (and intimidating) methods of the larger ranch owner who refused to change his farming practises.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst the conflicts in both films were, at least, temporarily settled by violence on the part of the respective heroes (Alan Ladd and James Stewart), the longer-term effects of man's impact upon the landscape and its original inhabitants necessarily remained unresolved.

The above examples are by no means the only ways in which landscape played a key narrative function within Western films and I shall consider further aspects of its significance later in this Chapter. What is of relevance in this particular context is the relationship between this specific preoccupation of the genre (land ownership) with similar narrative scenarios that are to be found in a number of Caribbean novels. As has previously been discussed, the Western film generally paid scant regard to the plight of the native Indians and focused instead upon the 'heroic' behaviour of the American settlers and their alleged ability to transform the desert into a 'garden'. The justification for such rampant colonialism was seemingly contained within that very myth - the settlers were supposedly able to put the land to far better use than its indigenous population, hence their 'natural right' to ownership.

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<sup>12</sup> An early series of scientific surveys by F.V.Hayden (1867 onwards) were instrumental in expounding the myth of the garden and dispelling images of an arid, unworkable desert from the minds of prospective western landowners.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Seven for further references to this particular film and its popularity with a character in Shiva Naipaul's *Fireflies*.

Such spurious arguments have, of course, underpinned imperial and colonial<sup>15</sup> ambitions throughout the world and are by no means unique to the situation in America, although the extent to which the mythologising of such activities took place there is perhaps unparalleled elsewhere in the world.

The *opposite* perspective is to be found, however, in those Caribbean novels that deal with similar issues of land ownership and the impact of its changing usage.<sup>16</sup> By writing about the subject from the point of view of the victim, they both challenge the assumptions underpinning colonialism and re-inscribe themselves into the landscape of the Caribbean. As Homi Bhabha has so aptly commented in his seminal work on post-colonial cultures: "The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasises the quality of light, the question of social visibility..."<sup>17</sup>. The specific historical context of these Caribbean novels does not, of course, exactly parallel that enacted in the Western, as neither the characters they write about nor, by and large, their ancestors were indigenous to the islands in question, in fact far from it. Nevertheless, in grasping the importance of issues such as economic domination, viewed from the reverse perspective of the colonised, they challenge the fundamental right to represent themselves in a way that has rarely been afforded the American Indian. Furthermore, although a small number of the novels do not make *specific* references to the Hollywood Western, the thematic parallels

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<sup>14</sup> According to Buscombe, open range cattle running was over by the 1890s due to both the advent of the railways and the escalating conflicts between cowboys and farmers, who increasingly resisted the older trail drives through their recently settled land. (*The BFI Companion To The Western*, p.101).

<sup>15</sup> These terms are used as defined by Said to distinguish between the theoretical aspects of dominating a distant land (imperialism) and the actual settling of those lands (colonialism) (*Culture & Imperialism*, pp 8-9 in particular).

<sup>16</sup> Although outside of this specific context, those novels from 1950-1985 that deal explicitly with issues of slavery (a particular pre-occupation of Jamaican writers, see Chapter Seven) are also inherently involved in this critique of colonialism and land/power relationships.

between the two media over the representation of land/power relationships and the underlying effects of such conflict are nevertheless apparent.

It is hardly surprising that conflicts over land should be such an important narrative feature in a number of novels from the years in question. Memories of slavery and indentureship were inextricably bound up with issues of land – who owned it, who worked on it and who reaped the profits – and none of these factors had undergone any significant changes, in practical terms, throughout the nineteenth or even the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> In Fanon’s words: “For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.”<sup>19</sup> Andrew Salkey’s 1959 novel: *A Quality Of Violence*, for example, is directly concerned with just such issues. Set in the parish of St. Thomas at the turn of the century, it examines the relationships between land ownership, the power (and hypocrisy) associated with religion and the peasant’s helplessness in the face of natural disaster - a lasting drought that eventually forces them to abandon their cherished land. Salkey describes the ties between the peasants and the land as something almost holy in itself, echoing the concept of ‘sacred trust’ believed, with hindsight, to have existed between the American Indians and the lands that they formerly inhabited. “The land was the only thing that did tie up the master and we into one bundle. Because the master did want to work the land and make plenty profit out of it, the master had to bring we and put

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<sup>17</sup> *The Location Of Culture*, p.143.

<sup>18</sup> This is not the place for further detailed discussion on this issue, but it is arguable that little significant changes in overall land ownership have taken place even today. The only main difference is that large corporations have tended to replace some of the individuals who previously controlled vast tracts of both Jamaica and Trinidad, a factor that makes little difference to the work/power/distribution of profits relationship for much of the local populace.

<sup>19</sup> *The Wretched Of The Earth*, p.34.

we on the land, same so. And, I [Mother Johnson] say, that if we was the people that was close up to the land from long time, then now that we free, we must own the land and never let go, at all, at all."<sup>20</sup>

Mother Johnson's admonition to 'never let go' of land is a sentiment that is echoed, if not always followed, in Lovelace's 1968 work *The Schoolmaster*. The extent to which this novel emulates the Hollywood Western in terms of its overall narrative structure and characterisation of the schoolmaster himself have previously been considered in Chapter Seven, primarily concerned with the portrayal of the hero. In addition, there are further important linkages between this novel and its filmic counterpart as far as issues relating to land ownership are concerned and the ensuing discussion now considers these in some degree of detail.

Like so many Western films, this novel opens with a description - panoramic view in cinematic terms - of the landscape in which the action is to take place.<sup>21</sup> "Down on the flat and in the crotches of the land where the two rivers stagger through the blue stone so plentiful in Kumaca, the water is clear, and in places, ice cold. The soil is rich, deep and black."<sup>22</sup> The lushness of Lovelace's setting is, however, in direct contrast to the typically arid Western background to which his novel both refers and yet ultimately subverts with its acts of inversion of the classical paradigm. The novel also embodies the idea of reverence to the landscape - as propounded in many Western films - with its poetic descriptions of the region's natural beauty. "Sunlight

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Salkey: *A Quality Of Violence* (London: New Beacon Books, 1978 [1959] ) p. 113.

<sup>21</sup> A similar example can be found in the opening page of Selvon's novel *Turn Again Tiger*. "He looked down into the valley from a hill...A river coursed down on the west in a ribbon of sparkle...". Sam Selvon: *Turn Again Tiger* (Oxford: Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series: 1979 [1958] ) p.1.

blazes the hills; and scattered between the hills' valuable timber trees...the poui is dropping rich yellow flowers like a madman throwing away gold."<sup>23</sup> Kumaca is the 'Promised Land' yet around it lies the 'wilderness' of barely passable mountains and the sinister forest – or desert in the Western formulation – into which both Christiana and her mother eventually disappear and die.

There can be little doubt that land is of central importance in Lovelace's Kumaca, the village within which the narrative unfolds. The villagers' naiveté about issues of land and the power attached to its ownership parallels that of indigenous Indians in numerous Western films. Yet it is only Dardain, the shopkeeper, who really understands the true 'value' of land. He has made a career of swindling landowners out of their holdings in anticipation of selling the land when the road from Valencia is built.<sup>24</sup> "He had his way of dealing with delinquent accounts...The people of Kumaca who had accounts at his shop, all owned lands. If they could not pay in cash...well...there was always the matter of an agreement. He himself sold the stamps."<sup>25</sup> Fanon once again provides a telling example of similar behaviour in *The Wretched Of The Earth* that could well have provided additional inspiration for Lovelace's fictional rendition. "Then and then only did the peasants tell the tale of how the grocer gave them loans at exorbitant interest, and others recalled how he evicted them from their land and how from owners they became labourers."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *The Schoolmaster*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Obvious parallels exist between the situation portrayed by Lovelace and numerous Western films concerned with the encroachment of the railroads upon the settlers' lands in the western territories.

<sup>25</sup> *The Schoolmaster*, p.70.

<sup>26</sup> *The Wretched Of The Earth*, pp.153-154.

Within the novel, the character and behaviour of Paulaine Dandrade, father of the ill-fated Christiana, is directly associated with his own loss of land. The inquisitive Pedro enquires why Paulaine drinks so much and is told in reply that: “..he remembers how much he lost gambling on the cocks, and how we have hardly any land left...and because he knows the man he was...”<sup>27</sup>. Paulaine is forced to work on land belonging to another wealthy landowner (Consantine Patron) and is a broken man, unable to ever return to his former status and eventually incapable of even avenging his own daughter’s untimely death. By way of contrast, Warwick the schoolmaster who, ironically, is equally as land-less as Paulaine, is both characterised and behaves as if he is master of all he surveys. In a scene that is highly reminiscent of its filmic counterpart, Warwick is described observing the village from horseback like a wealthy rancher examining his lands. “...he was now sitting on his white horse, watching between the trees the day’s last sunshine in the red sky away over Maracas...He gazed down the precipice to the valley where bamboos were hushing now in the evening’s gentle wind...”<sup>28</sup> Warwick’s delusions of grandeur are, however, soon thwarted and, as previously considered, his death offers another linkage to the Western whilst again subverting its expected, happy ending. Furthermore, the very presence of the schoolmaster in Kumaca is finally understood for what it really was. Instead of turning a ‘desert’ into a ‘garden’, Warwick had only succeeded in the reverse – turning a ‘paradise’ in on itself – providing yet another example of the Western’s inversion that is so cleverly utilised by Lovelace throughout the novel.

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<sup>27</sup> *The Schoolmaster*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p.120.

The ownership of land – almost irrespective of the size of plot - was necessarily of paramount importance in the Caribbean for both historical reasons and the everyday, practical purpose of growing food with which to feed one's family. The pressing need for at least some redistribution of land in both Trinidad and Jamaica may have been eventually acknowledged by the colonial powers during the late 1930s but only scant attention was ever paid towards actually implementing any such schemes. In Jamaica a Land Settlement Act was put into place on the first of November 1940. The Lucky Hill Community Project commenced in that same year and accounted for eight hundred and seventy-three acres in the parish of St. Mary, whilst the Grove Farm Land Settlement which was taken over by the Government in 1947 had a further two hundred and twenty acres in St. Catherine.<sup>29</sup> When one considers that the 1943 Census showed a total of one million, seven hundred and ninety-three thousand, six hundred and sixty-eight acres of land as being in farms,<sup>30</sup> the minute proportion that these two schemes accounted for becomes immediately apparent. In addition, there were prohibitive restrictions for both applying for such land and maintaining it – one-twentieth of the purchase price to be paid as deposit, one acre or one-fifth of the land to be cultivated within one year and no sub-letting until the land was fully paid for. Coupled with the ever-present threat of eviction (re-possession and forfeit of all monies previously paid) for as little as six months' arrears of payments, it is hardly surprising that these schemes were viewed by the local inhabitants as little more than a token gesture towards any meaningful redistribution of land.

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<sup>29</sup> *Handbook Of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Government Printing Office, 1950) p.353.

<sup>30</sup> *Handbook Of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Government Printing Office, 1946) p.322

Earl Lovelace highlights both the ineffectiveness of such schemes and the torment that their very existence could cause amongst the poorer sectors of the Trinidadian community<sup>31</sup> in another of his novels: *The Wine Of Astonishment*. In this particular work, the main protagonist Bolo's whole dreams of finally settling down and becoming self-sufficient are permanently shattered when he fails to be even considered for one such plot of land. "...Bolo go by Buntin regular and Buntin sit down with him and together they make out a application for Bolo to lease a piece of land that the government say they was going to give out to people who want to do farming... Two months pass and Bolo ain't hear a word about his application, didn't even get one of those little piece of paper that the government send in a brown envelope to tell you that they receive your application and was giving it consideration."<sup>32</sup> As a result of this final blow to his declining self-esteem, Bolo turns increasingly towards a life of crime and dissipation and eventually dies in a shootout that once again echoes back to the closing scene of a Hollywood Western. "Then Bolo...move out from behind the sisters, his gun in his hands, and his face holding that calm weariness...A shot fire off and another shot and...Bolo pitch forward tumble down the steps and when he come to rest his head was lying at the foot of the steps and his body was sprawl over the ground..."<sup>33</sup>

The failure of governments to adequately implement land settlement schemes was by no means the only land problem that locals faced in the years prior to Independence. Ismith Khan's *The Jumbie Bird* succinctly pinpoints another dilemma

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<sup>31</sup> Several characters in Neville Dawes's novel *Interim* display a similar level of suspicion in relation to the effectiveness of Land Settlement schemes in Jamaica. (Neville Dawes: *Interim* (Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica, 1978) pp. 18-19)

<sup>32</sup> *The Wine Of Astonishment*, p.89.

that many descendants of indentured Indians had to deal with in Trinidad, where neither Hindu or Muslim marriages were recognised by the colonial authorities in Port of Spain until 1946. "...there were no legal records of their births housed in that building [The Red House]...they knew that the small plot of land their forefathers worked and toiled for was registered there...they knew that they would never be able to inherit that land, for in the musty parchments that the Red House kept, they did not exist...".<sup>34</sup> Thus, not only were they deprived of the lands that should have rightfully been their inheritance but their voting rights were also dependent upon the ownership of land or property. Without either, the Indian populace in Trinidad could neither register their complaints nor tackle the inherent injustices of such an immoral and discriminatory system. In many respects, the plight of these Indian descendants in pre-Independence Trinidad can be seen to bear a remarkable resemblance to that of the native Indians in the USA. Both groups were effectively tricked out of their lands by the imposition of an eminently unjust colonial system, against which neither was then capable of any really effective resistance.

It is not only in the contentious issues of land ownership that parallels can be found between the Caribbean novel and the Hollywood Western. The changing usage of land, as considered earlier in this Chapter, formed a key narrative component of many Western films. The structure of *Jesse James*, for example – a film that was immensely popular amongst Trinidadian audiences as previously considered in Chapter Six – focuses specifically upon the immoral dispossession of peasant farmers to make way for the forthcoming railroad. The conflict between the powerful railroad

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. pp 127-128.

magnates and the seemingly powerless landowners is only partially alleviated by the acts of extreme violence that Frank and Jesse James commit in revenge for the 'theft' of land that causes their mother's untimely death. Eventually, the might of the railroad and the forces of 'progress' that it represents ensure its ultimate success, despite the brothers' repeated attacks upon its trains. Jesse's death in the concluding scenes - shot in the back by one of his former gang members - marks the inevitable outcome of such conflicts. The message that it delivers to its audience is one that suggests violence can ultimately never prevent change.

Its counterpart is to be found in novels such as Selvon's *A Brighter Sun*<sup>35</sup> and de Boissiere's *Rum And Coca-Cola*. The latter work is of particular interest in this context as although the protagonists of change are actually American soldiers in the war years,<sup>36</sup> many of their actions are characterised as if they were really cowboys from a Western film. Furthermore, the dispossession of land lies at the very heart of the novel's narrative structure although it is viewed, in this instance, with a high degree of compassion from the (reverse) perspective of the oppressed rather than the dominant (filmic) point-of-view of the oppressor.

The narrative structure of *Rum And Coca-Cola*, as examined in Chapter Seven, focuses primarily upon the corruption of Trinidad by all things American, with

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<sup>34</sup> Ismith Khan: *The Jumbie Bird* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Caribbean Writers Series, 1994 [1961]) p.61.

<sup>35</sup> Strong parallels exist between *Jesse James* and this particular novel of Selvon's in respect to the tremendous impact that the American-built road makes upon the local peasant farmers, who are similarly dispossessed of their land as is the James family.

<sup>36</sup> Selvon's novel is placed within a similar context and time frame (i.e. Americans in Trinidad during the Second World War). However, although there are several filmic references in this work the author does not make a *specific* connection between the actions of the American army and those of the Hollywood cowboy.

a particular degree of emphasis being placed upon the imposition of American culture and 'values' through the medium of the cinema. A group of poor tenants are served notice to leave their land that, unknown to them, has been requisitioned by the American army. Many are unable to find alternative accommodation and determine to defy the law. Their fate – to continually be moved on with no regard for their wellbeing – parallels both that of their Hollywood counterparts and the herds of itinerant animals that often populate the Western landscape. "Some succeeded in finding accommodation in other districts...But others could not pay the exorbitant rents asked elsewhere, and many of them angrily, in desperation, determined to offer defiance to a law which in their view, had less regard for them than cattle."<sup>37</sup> Inevitably the Americans move in and raze their property, leaving the tenants to find alternative shelter anywhere they can. "All of them looked with mingled amazement and fear at the efficiency of the Americans and their machines... They were torn between admiration of the Americans, who appeared like super-men, and fear of what they would do next."<sup>38</sup> Like their screen equivalents, the poor and powerless are nevertheless doomed to give way eventually to the forces of 'progress' in the shape of the Americans and their proposals for a new road (more commonly, the railroad in Hollywood Westerns).

By utilising Western imagery to criticise and parody the behaviour of Americans, de Boissiere manages to make a series of political points that link his novel to the cinematic genre yet continually undermines the latter's ideological stance. For example, the rough, American labourer who is sent to bulldoze the shacks

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<sup>37</sup> *Rum And Coca-Cola*, p.66.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p.70.

of Belle-Symthe's former tenants is ironically dressed in elaborate Western footwear: "His back was so fleshy it was impossible to see a bone in it. His broad and red fleshy face also seemed boneless. Drawing up his pants he looked pointedly at his boots – cowpuncher's boots of red leather with narrow toes and small high heels."<sup>39</sup> It is hard to imagine a less heroic figure – in the cowboy sense – in either looks or actions and this is precisely the point that de Boissiere is making. Eventually, all the illusions that the locals harboured towards the American way of life – ironically instilled in them through the cinema - are inevitably doomed to disappointment. "The news that the Americans were coming [had] raised hopes in every breast. Workers and small business men declared that "now the Americans taking us over things going to improve"...The working class youth entertained the rosiest illusions about the chances awaiting young men under the benevolent rule of American millionaires."<sup>40</sup> Rather than a change for the better, conditions 'under the Americans' inevitably turn out to be equally as bad as that of the British. The hard lesson that the locals are forced to learn is that one colonial power had simply been usurped by another, both of whom were equally motivated by self-interest alone.

As important as the issue of land *ownership* is to both the Hollywood Western and certain Caribbean novels,<sup>41</sup> it is by no means the only connection that exists between the two media and their respective usage of landscapes. In many Western

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p.69.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p.62.

<sup>41</sup> Other works that emphasise the overwhelming importance of land ownership (in Jamaica) include William Ogilvie's 1953 novel *Cactus Village* and Clyde Knight's *We Shall Not Die* from 1983. Although its narrative is set outside of the Caribbean, V.S. Reid's *The Leopard* from 1958 is also intimately concerned with the struggles between coloniser and colonised for ownership of land (in Kenya). (William G. Ogilvie: *Cactus Village* (Kingston, Jamaica: Pioneer Press, 1953), Clyde Knight: *We Shall Not Die* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group, 1983), V.S. Reid: *The Leopard* (London: Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series, 1980 [1958])).

films the representation of town life versus the 'country' (desert) was repeatedly utilised to embody a series of binary oppositions that the genre equated with both the physical properties and the behavioural patterns of the inhabitants of these strikingly different environments. The austerity of the desert landscape – as previously considered – imparted an intrinsic sense of power to the man able to conquer its unforgiving harshness and, by implication, the very forces of nature. In appearance, style of dress, mannerisms and behaviour (equally as hard and unforgiving as the desert itself), the hero was characterised as being quite distinct from the town-dweller who must inevitably rely upon the superior talents of the former when violence threatened his supposedly-secure environment. By way of contrast, the male inhabitants of towns - often synonymous with the 'eastern' businessman, i.e. an outsider to the region – were usually inappropriately dressed (tweed suits, ties, bowler hats etc.) and lacking in the necessary skills to deal with the particular nature of a Western frontier environment.

A prime example of the iconography associated with the resourceful hero versus the inept townsman and their respective narrative functions is to be found in Ford's *Stagecoach*. Ringo Kid begins the film as an itinerant cowboy who has escaped from jail and is shunned by his fellow travellers whilst Gatewood, the wealthy town banker, is readily accepted as a natural 'leader' amongst the other passengers. The two men are explicitly characterised as the antithesis of each other and the desert/town opposition that they figuratively represent, with opposing ages, styles of clothing, speech and behavioural traits. Eventually, the well-dressed, loud-mouthed but ineffectual Gatewood is found out to be both a coward who panics under Indian attack and a thief who has stolen a fifty thousand dollar payroll from the bank

he previously worked in. By way of contrast, the reticent Ringo turns into the unsuspected hero of the film with his unparalleled handling of horses, guns and women and his intrinsic ability to out-think and outmanoeuvre the Apaches who attack the coach. The complete reversal of their social standing is ironically concluded when Gatewood is eventually arrested for his crimes whilst Ringo and Dallas (a former prostitute) embrace respectability with their forthcoming marriage and their plans to settle down on a ranch.

It is not just the exterior features of a town and its inhabitants that sets it apart from the desert landscape and the type of man (hero) that was capable of existing there. Within the Western town itself there were an abundance of ambiguities, many of which were portrayed as waiting to ensnare the unsuspecting visitor and, worse still, were capable of corrupting even the most strong-willed citizen who stayed within its confines long enough. The dichotomy between the aura of apparent safety that the town offers was sharply contrasted with the inherent dangers – alcohol, ‘loose’ women, religious constraints and social responsibilities – all of which a hero must reject if he was to avoid entrapments that could impair his reactions to potential danger. Films such as *High Noon* (1952) and *Death Of A Gunfighter* (1969), for example, both focused in detail upon the duplicitous nature of townsfolk who had been ‘softened’ by their urban lifestyles and whose morals were consequently debased beyond redemption. In both instances the hero must ultimately demonstrate his superior moral worth to the townsfolk by an act of extreme bravery and then try to escape the confines of that town before becoming tainted himself. The earlier film – *High Noon* - allowed Gary Cooper to overcome these hurdles and ride away with only a minor injury whilst the latter, in keeping with subtle shifts in the status of the hero

by the late 1960s, sees Richard Widmark killed in a hail of bullets. Neither film suggests, however, that their selfless actions left any lasting impression upon the urban environment that they both so forcibly rejected.

The dangers that were perceived to be inherent in a town or city environment are equally as important to the narrative structure of many Caribbean novels as they were to Hollywood Westerns such as those considered above. The contrast between urban dwelling and the (countryside/desert) landscapes of the respective media are, of course, necessarily disparate in their physicality, due to the widely differing locations that each must deal with. Descriptions of the landscape in Caribbean novels are, therefore, often couched in idealised, sentimental tones that emphasise the contrast between urban decay and the pastoral rather than utilising the stark, natural contrast between landscape and town that was typically employed in the Western. A comment by a character in Faustin Charles's novel *Signposts Of The Jumbie* serves to demonstrate this precise point: "Yes, down here hard, a person have to be strong to live in de city. But in de country, everybody does take life slow an easy."<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, despite their obvious differences in methodology, the parallels between the paradigmatic functions of town or city and landscape as spaces of corruption or redemption are strikingly similar within the two media.

Ian McDonald's evocation of both the lushness of the Trinidadian countryside and the innate dangers that are perceived to lurk in the city of Port of Spain is typical

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<sup>42</sup> Faustin Charles: *Signposts Of The Jumbie* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1981) p.130.

of the way in which landscape and city are often contrasted in a Caribbean novel.<sup>43</sup>

Alan, a young affluent white boy, is given to musing on the landscape of his childhood in a way that presents an idealised view of the countryside: “As I walked home the sky opposite the sun, now going down behind tree-coated mountains, was getting green-rose in colour. Milken gold was spreading further up the once blue helmet. And just above the mountains were hanging fat rubies and crowns of fire.”<sup>44</sup>

The stark contrast between this almost mythical environment from Alan’s point-of-view and the harsh realities of Port of Spain, as perceived by his Indian companion Kaiser, are as dramatic in their opposition to each other as the Western’s barren landscape was to the thriving town. “An’ what kin’ of place is a nasty concrete street fill up wit’ motor car an’ wash down wit’ beggar piss to raise up she chil’ren, eh? Not a place at all, man.”<sup>45</sup>

Kaiser’s graphic description of urban decay is by no means unique to novels based in pre-Independence Trinidad. In Perry Henzell’s 1982 novel: *The Power Game*, a similarly depressing parallel is drawn with its images of a (thinly disguised) downtown Kingston.<sup>46</sup> “...Mark wondered, as he did daily, at the extent to which the city had been allowed to deteriorate. The streets were filthy with garbage everywhere. Three of five traffic lights weren’t working properly... Everywhere one

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<sup>43</sup> Other examples would include Michael Anthony’s *The Year In San Fernando*, which also contrasts town and country living in this manner. The countryside in this novel is similarly invested with an almost mythical quality, enhanced by the ‘memories’ of an adolescent narrator. (Michael Anthony: *The Year In San Fernando* (Oxford: Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series, 1970 [1965] ).

<sup>44</sup> *The Humming-Bird Tree*, p.70.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p.62.

<sup>46</sup> Similar sentiments are expressed in Clyde Knight’s *We Shall Not Die*, which also describes the poverty and decay inherent in Kingston’s suburbs. “...narrow, dirty, garbage-littered pot holed streets lined on either side by all kind of small, dilapidated, run-down shacks typical of these wretched ghettos.” (*We Shall Not Die*, p.47).

looked there were young people hanging around with nowhere to go...”.<sup>47</sup> City life is almost universally acknowledged by Caribbean writers as being a complex environment that distorts, corrupts and often destroys all but the very strongest of its inhabitants in a manner that is highly reminiscent of the dangers associated with town dwelling in the Western film. As Bhabha has written: “It is there [in the city] that, in our time, the perplexity of the living is most acutely experienced.”<sup>48</sup> It takes a particular kind of character to withstand the perils of city/town life and many narratives in both media are testament to the frequency of failure.<sup>49</sup>

Some of the most strikingly brutal portrayals of urban living<sup>50</sup> are to be found in two of Roger Mais’s novels – *The Hills Were Joyful Together* and *Brother Man*. Whilst the latter novel does not employ cinematic effects to any great extent,<sup>51</sup> the manner in which it contrasts the redemptive effect of country life upon John Power with the defiling nature of his urban existence can be seen to offer parallels to the Western paradigm. Whilst Power’s experiences of the duplicitous nature of townsfolk is analogous to that portrayed in many Hollywood Westerns, it is in Mais’s earlier novel that the majority of explicit references to film are to be located. By utilising iconography from both the Western and gangster genres, Mais’s first novel from 1953 offers a scathing critique of the inherent dangers associated with the cinematic

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<sup>47</sup> *The Power Game*, p.49.

<sup>48</sup> *The Location Of Culture*, p.170.

<sup>49</sup> *The Harder They Come* – considered in detail in Chapter Seven – offers a prime example of the corrupting influence of city life upon a country boy in both its filmic and novel formats.

<sup>50</sup> *The Children Of Sisyphus* contains similarly graphic scenes of urban decay and violence but Patterson does not utilise filmic imagery within his narrative structure. (Orlando Patterson: *The Children Of Sisyphus* (Harlow, Essex: Longman Caribbean Writers Series, 1994 [1964])).

<sup>51</sup> The characterisation of Girlie is explicitly associated with cinematic imagery on two specific occasions (pp. 9 and 80) but otherwise the parallels between this novel and the cinema are of a more implicit nature. (Roger Mais: *Brother Man* (Oxford: Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series, 1974 [1954])).

imposition and absorption of a foreign culture, which pre-dates similar thinking by any of his contemporary novelists.<sup>52</sup>

The problem of being unable to distinguish between reality and the images presented in the cinema is highlighted early on by Surjue and Flitters in *The Hills Were Joyful Together*, long before they embark upon their ultimately fateful robbery venture. Even at this early stage in the narrative, Surjue is found wavering between fact and fiction whilst Flitters is initially portrayed as a character who knowingly questions his friend's lack of understanding. " 'It looked good in the movie, sure. So you want to go down to Goat Island some day an' take a header into the water among them hammerheads? No, sir! You wouldn't...Movies is movies, an' only a bloody fool wouldn't know that'."<sup>53</sup> Flitters's warnings are, however, sadly lost upon Surjue who increasingly lives out aspects of his life like a character from the films that he so desires to emulate. As the narrative progresses we learn that the robbery he and Flitters embarked upon has gone badly wrong and Surjue quickly finds himself abandoned by his erstwhile partner. Even this shock of betrayal fails to jolt Surjue back into reality and he finds himself reacting to the situation in a similar fashion to half-remembered scenes from the cinema. " 'Know any more good jokes, buddy' Surjue said out the side of his face, and suddenly he saw himself acting like a tough crook out of some third-rate gangster picture, and he laughed..."<sup>54</sup> The powerful influence of the cinema is not, however, solely confined to the effect that it ultimately plays upon the characterisation of Surjue. In a further ironic twist to the narrative,

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<sup>52</sup> *Rum And Coca-Cola*, published in 1956, is the closest temporal example that openly criticises the effects of American cinema upon a Caribbean population, as considered in Chapter Seven.

<sup>53</sup> Roger Mais: *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (Oxford: Heinemann Caribbean Writers Series, 1981 [1953]) p.95.

Flitters himself lives out the final days of his life sleeping rough on the pavement outside one of Kingston's main cinema houses. "Going past the Ward Theatre now ...on the sheltered pavement out front people slept...all he had to do was to pick himself out a spot between them. They would never think to look for him here...He pillowed his head on his hands, stretched out on the hard concrete, and went straight to sleep."<sup>55</sup>

Surjue's own capture and subsequent incarceration by the police causes the lines of distinction between his fictitious world and urban reality to crumble still further. The very real beatings that Surjue receives in prison and the images of 'redemptive' thrashings that so many Hollywood heroes undergo are similarly confused within his befuddled mind. "The cop with the rubber truncheon hit high up on the arm, and a sharp pain burst inside it and it went dead. He screamed, 'They do it better in the movies! Yah! You lousy bums!'"<sup>56</sup> By the time that Surjue eventually revolts against prison brutality, all of his actions and speech have merged into those of a Hollywood cowboy. "He wheeled and faced the advancing warders. 'Stick 'em up!' he said...Their hands shot up above their heads...'You too,' he said, wagging the gun at the two warders with the prisoners. 'Come over here. An' don't fool with me, I'll plug you just as soon as spittin'.'<sup>57</sup> His inevitable death in the closing pages of the novel provides a further linkage to the cinematic undertones that pervades so much of the novel's narrative structure. Described in almost slow-motion terms, Surjue finally succumbs to a bullet – like so many villains from the world of

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p.120.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p.224.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.135.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p.173.

Hollywood – just as he is on the verge of escaping to freedom. “He hung suspended another instant, and then he seemed just to let go all he had won so desperately...fell back with a thud to the ground below. He fell spread-eagled on his back, and lay still.”<sup>58</sup>

The similarities that exist between the thriller (gangster) genre and that of the Western have previously been pointed out by a number of film critics<sup>59</sup> and aspects of the former genre are considered in further detail in Chapter Five. Although Mais’s work pre-dates many of those published critiques, his cross-cutting<sup>60</sup> between the two filmic genres to depict the instability of Surjue’s mind ably demonstrates the parallel manner in which both explore the dangers most commonly associated with city life. Within both genres, crime and violence are almost universally perceived as an underlying threat to the stability of urban environments and a similar sentiment can be found throughout many of the Caribbean novels under consideration. Although the bulk of the discussion throughout this Chapter necessarily focused upon those novels that relate these problems to their Western counterparts, it is, in conclusion, also briefly worth considering a smaller number of works that concentrate more on their connections with the thriller genre.

The three novels published between 1969 and 1975 under the pseudonym of John Morris – a collaborative effort between John Hearne and Morris Cargill – are all

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p.288.

<sup>59</sup> Warshow’s seminal work in the 1950s was instrumental in linking the two genres by describing them both as being mainly concerned with narratives about ‘men with guns’ and it is hard to argue against that fairly simplistic definition even today. (*The Immediate Experience*, especially pp. 127-154).

closely linked by their use of the same core of characters throughout. This is a common feature that is also found in many Hollywood thrillers and in the novels of Jeanne Wilson as previously considered in Chapter Five. Each of the four main characters are described in some detail in the first novel: *Fever Grass*<sup>61</sup> but, in as many film sequels, it is assumed that the reader (audience) is already familiar with their individual behavioural traits when the subsequent works (*The Candywine Development*<sup>62</sup> and *The Checkerboard Caper*<sup>63</sup>) come to be read. The narrative structure of each novel contains many of the ‘classical’ thriller features: a number of mysterious events/murders that only the main characters can resolve, international travel to several contrasting cities where subversions of power are undermining national security and a series of gun battles that would be equally at home in a Hollywood Western. In each of the two later novels subsidiary characters are explicitly linked to Hollywood stars that were often associated with the thriller genre. In *The Checkerboard Caper*, for example, the behaviour of a young hit-man is described as emulating “...all the George Raft movies...”.<sup>64</sup> However, what is of particular interest in this specific context is the method by which references to the cinema – particularly in the first of the three works – are utilised to emphasise the similarities between the two media.

As with many thrillers, the narrative structure of *Fever Grass* necessarily involves a suspension of belief in the likelihood of its events ever occurring outside of

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<sup>60</sup> In addition to cutting between filmic genres, D’Costa has also pointed out that Chapter Seven of the novel actually “...moves like cinema, cutting from one scene to another, drawing together all the threads of chance and fate.” (*Roger Mais*, p.31).

<sup>61</sup> John Morris: *Fever Grass* (Jamaica: Collins & Sangster, 1969).

<sup>62</sup> John Morris: *The Candywine Development* (New York, USA: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1974 [1970]).

<sup>63</sup> John Morris: *The Checkerboard Caper* (Secaucus, New Jersey, USA: Citadel Press, 1975).

the world of fiction. This is particularly prevalent in the descriptions of lifestyle and behaviour relating to Peter Blackmore (a wealthy landowner) and Jassy Vane, his black girlfriend. Blackmore owns extensive tracts of land and property and drives a Ferrari yet is seemingly prepared to risk everything by joining a covert group of undercover intelligence agents, who operate under the ‘authority’ of the Commissioner of Jamaican Police. Jassy Vane is a similarly puzzling character who somehow manages to combine running her own successful advertising business with an equally demanding career in the Intelligence service. The authors, I would suggest, deliberately highlight the ‘larger-than-life’ qualities of these characters by emphasising their links to the world of film, as the following example suggests. “He [Peter] struck a match as he spoke and in the brief glare, his face seemed to etch itself on her [Jassy’s] mind with the immediacy and vividness of a still from a good film...”<sup>65</sup>. This brief passage not only signals its general connection with the cinema but also, in its evocation of half-light and sudden glare pinpoints a closer link with *film noir*,<sup>66</sup> that relied so heavily upon light and shade to impart an overwhelming sense of atmosphere or suspense to its particular audience.

Although the basic structure of this novel has explicit links to the thriller genre, other cinematic references are also to be found within the descriptions of dialogue and thought processes of the main characters. At an early stage in the novel, Peter Blackmore stumbles upon a newspaper report about the recent find of a young female murder victim that eventually leads to his involvement with the Intelligence

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<sup>64</sup> *The Checkerboard Capers*, p.153.

<sup>65</sup> *Fever Grass*, p.186.

<sup>66</sup> According to Rubin, *film noir* utilised “...a shadowy visual style and [a] bitter view of American society...[whilst] portraying a dark world riddled with corruption, deceit, neurosis, and victimization.” (*Footnotes continue on the next page.*)

Service. His attention had previously been engaged in reading about a union conflict that was unusually described in explicitly Western filmic terms: “[it was]...a rattling good yarn in which the workers circled like Indians about the stubbornly defended wagon train of managerial interests.”<sup>67</sup> Given the particular context, the use of Western symbolism is somewhat bizarre - unless it is also intended to draw the reader’s attention to the highly contrived nature of Blackmore’s mental characterisation. His reliance upon somewhat inappropriate imagery is highlighted again at a much later stage in the narrative. Faced with a particularly dangerous situation, Blackmore responds by musing about a half-remembered scene from the cinema that bears little connection to the events at hand. “The storage banks of pre-conscious memory suddenly and incongruously fed him a line from a film he had once seen, where the roué is persuading a shop girl to come away for an illicit weekend at a secluded spot...”<sup>68</sup> Once again, the reader is provided with explicit linkages between this character in the novel and a cinematic situation that somehow seems less than appropriate for this dénouement.

As I have intimated above, I would not wish to suggest that the authors of these three novels are wholly successful in their utilisation of references to the cinema, be it thrillers or any other genre. It is, however, pertinent to highlight their techniques in order to contrast it with that applied by other writers whose novels invoke the Western paradigm in a more sustained and appropriate manner. As the preceding discussion has demonstrated, the latter group are far more likely to operate

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This description could equally be applied to the fictional world of the novel under consideration. (*Thrillers*, pp. 90-91).

<sup>67</sup> *Fever Grass*, p.15.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p.223.

in a subversive manner, inverting key components of the filmic genre to highlight issues relating to land ownership than to simply parody elements of its formulaic nature. This may be partly explained by the contentious nature of the particular subject matter as the same is not necessarily true of many novels that engage with other specific thematic elements – the role of the hero or the portrayal of women - within the Hollywood Western. A more detailed discussion of the latter aspect is explored in the following Chapter.

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN FICTION AND FILM

The role of women within much of the fiction from Trinidad and Jamaica is rarely comparable to that of the central male character as previously defined in Chapters Six and Seven. Their narrative function is often of a minor, subsidiary nature and usually operates to highlight, by way of contrast, some important facet of the central male character's personality or actions. Although it would be inaccurate to say that women play a secondary role in *every* novel published during the time span under consideration, there are only a very limited number of works where they appear as central or leading characters in their own right.<sup>1</sup> In most of the novels from this particular period, women are essentially marginalised figures, in similar fashion to those typically found in the Western film. They usually play what amounts to a symbolic role in the narrative, which allows them to broadly represent feminine values without the need to fully explore them as characters in their own right.

The marginalisation of female characters is, of course, by no means an uncommon feature of fictional writing from many different parts of the world. What this Chapter aims to explore is, however, not so much the degree to which this occurs amongst novels by male Caribbean writers, but rather to examine the ways in which female (albeit subsidiary) characters are often defined through connections to the world of cinema. The nature of the relationships that exist between the representation

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<sup>1</sup> These are mostly novels of an historical nature. A more detailed consideration of their central positioning of women appears in a later section of this Chapter.

of women in the filmic and the literary media appears to fall into two distinctive categories.

As the discussion which follows will demonstrate, a series of linkages can be identified in which parallels seem to exist between the portrayal of women in the Western film and many of their fictional counterparts in Caribbean novels. That is not to suggest that the latter necessarily originated as the result of specific cinematic influence(s) but rather to highlight the common preoccupations<sup>2</sup> with which both media are concerned. It is possible that some of these examples may well have been influenced by the cinema. However, there are no explicit references in the novels from which they originate that link their female characters specifically to the Western genre and which could, therefore, be utilised to support such a conjecture. It is nevertheless possible to point to a number of similarities between the types of society that are portrayed in both the Western film and the Caribbean novel that might partly help to explain the similarities in positioning of female characters. In both instances – considered in greater detail below - the societal structure is overwhelmingly patriarchal, the threat of violence is ever present, women and their sexuality are seen as potentially threatening and rapid development and changes are taking place within a threatening hostile environment.

In addition to these common thematic links with the Western genre, a number of female characters are portrayed as identifying – often indiscriminately – with other cinematic icons and imagery. Although these explicit influences have not necessarily emanated from the Western itself, a number of similarities clearly exist between the

ways in which women's absorption of their stereotyped role parallels that of the indiscriminate male hero, as considered earlier in Chapter Seven. In common with characters such as Ivan from *The Harder They Come*, Romesh from *Fireflies* or Fisheye from *The Dragon Can't Dance*, these women are shown to be helpless 'sponges' that passively soak up the images which Hollywood throws at them, irrespective of their inappropriateness for their own particular lifestyles. These particularly worrying aspects of mimicry of the cinema are examined in greater detail throughout the latter part of this Chapter.

As previously considered in Chapter Six, the position of women within the Western film genre has traditionally been that of a supporting or secondary role, particularly when compared with the cowboy hero. Feminine values and opinions such as – anti-violence, the importance of family life, safety before honour – were the antithesis to many of the 'values' embodied in the hero and consequently were eventually shown up as being, at best, erroneous. Within these films, women traditionally had roles that called for little independent thought or speech other than when called upon to openly support their man.

In films such as *Shenandoah* (1965), for example, the female members of the household were predominantly silent in most of the important scenes. We never learn what they are thinking, other than the fact that they need to be loved and cared for by a 'good' man - in order to be 'safe and secure'. Pa explains to his prospective son-in-law, Sam, that women are essentially foolish creatures that men can never hope to really understand – 'You *never* know what they mean'. Ann – his daughter-in-law –

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<sup>2</sup> An exercise that parallels that undertaken in both Chapters Four and Eight.

plays what must be viewed as a typical female part in the film's narrative structure. Shortly after producing a son, both she and her husband James were murdered by scavengers during the ravages of the American Civil War. As a result, James achieved heroic status for gallantly giving his own life to try and save that of Ann and the baby, whilst Ann was simply forgotten and replaced by yet another silent female, an unidentified black girl who was seconded to nurse their orphaned baby son.

The sexual allure of women was something that the Western film was rarely able to come to terms with, as previously considered in Chapters Six and Seven. Most of the sexual liaisons that did take place were of a furtive and hurried nature, often with a prostitute whose anonymity enabled the hero to limit his vulnerability from the potential 'weakness' that a more permanent relationship might have afforded. Only on rare occasions were central characters in Western films portrayed as being in a stable, married relationship, such as Dan in *3:10 To Yuma* (1957). However, Dan was shown to be both morally and physically weak as a result of his overwhelming family commitments and it was only in the closing stages of the film that he finally achieved 'heroic' status by overcoming his subservience to Alice, his wife. At the other extreme, the women in films such as *The Wild Bunch* were explicitly portrayed as symbols of corruption and duplicity. In this extremely violent film they lied, cheated and regularly switched lovers and thought nothing of giving their body to the highest - or most aggressive - bidder as circumstances dictated. The 'heroes', in turn, regularly indulged in the sexual abuse of women's bodies, whores or heroines alike. The former group, such as the nameless and voiceless inmates of the brothels that the 'Wild Bunch' frequented, were furthermore displayed voyeuristically

to the (predominantly male) audience, as their clothes were savagely ripped off to camera before the men embarked on a drunken orgy of sexual excess.

Sudden death was a common feature in the Western film and its violent undertones reached into many other aspects of the genre. Whilst it would be true to say that most of the violence was conducted by and directed towards other men, there were still instances of (usually) lesser severity where women were the victims of male brutality. The brutal and graphic murder of Angel's ex-lover for her unfaithfulness in *The Wild Bunch* was just one such example. The earlier Western film-makers necessarily operated under a stringently applied censorship code that would have prevented them from explicitly showing a woman receiving little other than a 'well-meaning' slap on the face, should the plot demand it. Even in scenes of seemingly indiscriminate shooting, it would be extremely rare to find a female victim from amongst the innocent townsfolk caught in the crossfire. In contrast, women played what must be viewed as a symbolic role in these films that was of far greater importance than any development of them as individuated characters might otherwise have been.

Only in a very limited number of Westerns<sup>3</sup> have women been given the main lead and, even in those films, their femininity still usually remained subservient to the more dominant forces of patriarchy. That is not to suggest, however, that women functioned solely as minor, marginalised characters in the way that a native Indian or Mexican might have done within the same genre. Instead, female characters – or, at least an idealised notion of womanhood - played an integral role as part of the

traditional narrative structure. Within the highly-stylised value system of the Western, women were to be rescued, defended or revenged for some past or present slight to their character, in other words they provided a specific focus or justification for many of the hero's more violent actions. Most commonly, female characters were portrayed as the innocent victims of Indian or outlaw violence (including rape) such as that in Sturges's *The Last Train From Gun Hill* (1959). The act of violence or rape itself was rarely seen by the viewer and merely served to provide a motive for the hero's subsequent revenge, which usually culminated in extreme violence towards the perpetrator(s). It was not until the erosion of censorship in the 1960s that images of rape became, if not more common, then certainly much more explicit in Western films such as *Soldier Blue* or *Chato's Land* (1971).

Within the make believe world of many Caribbean novels the narrative function of women bears a remarkable resemblance to that described in connection with the Western film. In several of these novels, as in the films, women are essentially silenced, playing a secondary or minor role in the overall narrative structure. Often they are portrayed along the all too familiar lines of the virgin/whore dichotomy – with a particular degree of emphasis upon the latter role - whose thoughtless actions and/or sexuality are characterised as leading 'good' men astray. The act of rape itself is not a major narrative feature in the way in which it operates within the more recent Western film, but other acts of physical violence towards women are frequently portrayed in these novels. Furthermore, in a limited number of highly shocking examples, female characters both commit murder and are murdered in turn by their lovers in extreme acts of despair and revenge.

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<sup>3</sup> See further discussion and specific examples later in this Chapter.

The subsidiary role of female characters and their submission to the will of the male is certainly a key facet within several of the novels under consideration.<sup>4</sup> In Shiva Naipaul's novel *Fireflies* Baby Lutchman's role is very much one of a supporting or subsidiary character, who weaves in and out of the main narrative almost as a unifying thread but with little or no causality attached to her role. Events occur to her and around her – as in so many Western films – but she has no clear goal and passively accepts whatever life throws at her. By the end of the novel all of her aspirations have been destroyed and her only positive act - if it can be identified as such – is the fact that she finally acknowledges this. “With Sonya gone, Mrs Lutchman was given full charge of the shop. Twenty years before, she would have thrilled to the prospect that it opened to her. Regretfully, she understood that it had come twenty years to late. Mrs Lutchman...longed now for nothing.”<sup>5</sup>

It would be incorrect to suggest that the silent woman as portrayed in a film like *Shenandoah* is a major feature of Caribbean fiction, although one work where such an example does blatantly occur is in that of Michael Anthony's first novel *The Games Were Coming*. Whilst the narrative is centred on Leon and his close-knit family in the lead up to an important cycling race, his mother remains both nameless and speechless throughout most of the novel. Leon's father and younger brother Dolphus have been established as credible characters in the opening pages, but his mother is simply portrayed as an anonymous domestic who can easily be fooled by

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Cassie's willingness to suddenly abandon her career in politics to give Ben a child in de Boissiere's *Rum And Coca-Cola* or Minette's selfless devotion to John in Mais's *Brother Man*. This theme of domesticity/family life being used to 'tame' a previously independent woman is also common throughout the Western filmic genre as in works such as *Fort Apache* (1948) or *Shalako* (1968).

<sup>5</sup> *Fireflies*, p.416.

her youngest son. "The woman of the house was busy in the kitchen but every now and again she glanced round at him [Dolphus]. She knew his tricks. She knew one moment he would be there and the next he would be gone. It was very rarely she caught him in the act of going away."<sup>6</sup> Leon himself appears to treat his mother (still unidentified as such, but the reader must assume that this is indeed she) with a similar degree of detached contempt. "He [Leon] would have slipped out again to go to the steelband practice, but the old lady had threatened to lock him out. She was not too strict, really, and he felt sure if he had gone to watch Sun Vale<sup>7</sup> she wouldn't have done such a drastic thing, but he did not want to vex her too much."<sup>8</sup> It is only in the closing stages of the novel that we finally learn that this mysterious woman really is Leon's mother and also that she has a name, Melda. Significantly, this only occurs as she fades completely out from the narrative, hidden in a cloud of sexual innuendo and submissive behaviour towards her husband, in similar fashion to numerous Hollywood Westerns.

In several of these novels, female sensuality is also presented as something that men often fail to resist - in spite of themselves - on numerous occasions. As in many Westerns, sexual relationships are, by implication, something that should carry little or no suggestion of romance and even less the notion of any longer-term commitment. As Alex so aptly comments in *An Absence of Ruins*, the ideal for a man is apparently a relationship devoid of emotional ties. "Crazy as it may sound, I loved her [Elaine] because she was the only woman who ever offered me the possibility of

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Anthony: *The Games Were Coming* (London: André Deutsch, 1973 [1963] ) pp. 18-19.

<sup>7</sup> A local steel band.

<sup>8</sup> *The Games Were Coming*, p.40.

unattached involvement.”<sup>9</sup> The coupling between Adrian and Joyce in Sam Selvon’s *I Hear Thunder*, matches that ideal perfectly in its stark brutality which, significantly, links directly back to the world of cinema. “They came together straining and heaving, in a kind of heartless, cruel passion, unhurried as in a slow motion film.”<sup>10</sup> A stable relationship or, worse still, married life is often portrayed as something that should be feared and avoided by male characters at all costs. Selvon’s 1965 novel *The Housing Lark* presents just such a scenario with its equally devastating consequences for the male protagonist. Fitz is characterised as a fun-loving, womanising, hard-drinking man until he somehow manages to get himself entangled with Teena. From the moment that he gets married, his whole life changes for the worse and the other (male) characters frequently lament his ‘passing’ into a stable relationship. “‘He even stop going out: we can’t see him anywhere at all. Next thing you know, somebody spot Fitz in the park pushing pram’.”<sup>11</sup>

By way of contrast, in *The Games Were Coming* Leon attempts to exert a stronger level of control over himself in trying to avoid the sexual temptation that his girlfriend Sylvia apparently offers, for fear that it might divert his energies away from the task (cycling) at hand. “Keeping fit alone ruled out women. One outing with a woman could throw you back months. He had no time for women in that way.”<sup>12</sup> Despite his better intentions, Leon still lusts after Sylvia in the manner of a typical chaste Western hero who looks and wants, but rarely touches. “She was a wonderful girl to have stuck with him throughout this particular season...All he had done was to

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<sup>9</sup> *An Absence Of Ruins*, p.38.

<sup>10</sup> Sam Selvon: *I Hear Thunder* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1963) p.64.

<sup>11</sup> Sam Selvon: *The Housing Lark* (Washington D.C., USA: Three Continents Press, 1990 [1965] ) p.44.

<sup>12</sup> *The Games Were Coming*, p.56.

rouse her occasionally and then leave her. And yet she put up with it and was so simple and good. In this she was perhaps more like a faithful dog than like a woman. He felt ashamed. He would make it up to her after the games.”<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately for Leon, Sylvia has already embarked upon an affair with her (married) boss and, unknown to either male partner, is pregnant with his child. Thus Sylvia is ultimately shown to be a far weaker character than Leon – more like a whore than the virgin of his dreams - and her cunning plans to snare him into an early marriage are inevitably doomed to failure.

The duplicitous nature of women such as Sylvia is yet another feature that Caribbean fiction and the Western film appear to have in common. Marie in *Vera Cruz* (1954) is one such screen character who blatantly used her sexuality to lead the heroes astray whilst openly conducting multiple affairs with Henri, Joe and an anonymous sea captain all at the same time. Her one real aim was to dupe them all and eventually escape alone with a shipment of gold, even if the men must all die in the process. Inevitably her ruses were uncovered – evil women could not be seen to triumph during the 1950s - and she ends up truly alone without either the gold or any of her once attendant lovers.

Mohammed Sharlowe’s novella *Requiem For A Village* contains a similarly distrustful female, Angela, who deliberately uses her body to seduce multiple lovers in a manner highly reminiscent of that of Marie in *Vera Cruz*. “Angela was coldly calculating, biding her time for the right moment, and infinitely adept in the art of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. pp. 196-197.

simulation.”<sup>14</sup> Whilst it is really the corrupting influence of the main male character – Pastor Bob – whose actions eventually bring about the destruction of village life – Angela, like many of her filmic counterparts, bears much of the brunt of responsibility for apparently leading him astray with her blatantly carnal behaviour. “Angela jumped blithely from the chair, displaying her naked thighs... Angela sidled up again him... She swayed, pressed her nude self against the pastor.”<sup>15</sup>

A deeply ingrained mistrust of feminine sexuality is not uncommon within highly patriarchal societies such as those portrayed in both the novels and the films under consideration. In both media, issues of infidelity are rarely viewed as the prerogative of the female characters, irrespective of the level of promiscuity that is often displayed by their male counterparts. The extent to which a perceived laxity in women’s sexual morals can be found in many of the novels published between 1950 - 1985 is really quite pervasive and should be viewed, therefore, as one of their dominant narrative features. Several novels carry the implicit message that women are basically corrupt and deceitful in their sexual conduct, whilst others such as A.M. Clarke’s *Caribbean Coup*, go much further in their outright condemnation of female sexuality. The main protagonist in that novel, Tom Edwards, comments on a number of different occasions upon the inherent failings of women, according to his somewhat jaundiced view of sexual desire. “Funny how a woman would do anything to satisfy the cravings of sex, as long as she was assured that it would not be known.”<sup>16</sup> The irony is, of course, that Tom is a highly promiscuous and deceitful

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<sup>14</sup> Mohammed Sharlow: *Requiem For A Village/Apartheid Love* (Trinidad: Inprint Caribbean Ltd., 1982) p.49.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p.56.

<sup>16</sup> A.M. Clarke: *Caribbean Coup* (Trinidad & Tobago: The New Voices, 1979) p.21.

character himself although, not surprisingly, little or no condemnation of his behaviour can be found within the pages of the novel. A similar point of view is expressed by Hobart in *Of Heaven On Earth*: "It was extraordinary that these good girls had nothing better to do than offer themselves to a life of pleasure... indiscriminate thrills and debauchery of all sorts."<sup>17</sup> His particularly unpleasant view of women degenerates into an even less favourable tone as the novel proceeds. "In Chaconia, women were born to be laid. This was the pattern of life in which they were all reared and brought up; like vessels to take the tea, or the stew or man-seeds."<sup>18</sup> Thus the woman in the Caribbean novel is again seen as behaving in immoral and corrupt terms highly reminiscent of those portrayed in Hollywood Westerns such as *The Wild Bunch*, previously considered above.

The slippage from portraying loose, immoral female behaviour to that of characterising women as outright whores<sup>19</sup> is one to which both the Hollywood Western and several of these particular novels also have in common. In some instances, it is used in its novelistic format as the ultimate term of derision or dismissal of a woman rather than in the more literal sense. When Carlo in the novel *Where The Hummingbird Flies* learns that his girlfriend Mary is pregnant, he instantly accuses her of cheating on him (whoring), rather than face the daunting possibility of fatherhood. " 'You low, whoring bitch', he began... 'If you think you can make me responsible for your black nigger bastard, you are sadly mistaken, you worthless

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<sup>17</sup> Vital Angel: *Of Heaven On Earth* (Trinidad: Vita Art Publishing, 1966) p.42.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp. 59-60.

<sup>19</sup> Apparently there was a dramatic increase in the number of women who actually became prostitutes in Trinidad during the war years. This was undoubtedly linked to the 'influence' of the cash-rich American military who were based there at that time and several local writers acknowledge this factor. Earl Lovelace, for example, has his character Clem (Lord Trafalgar) in *The Wine Of Astonishment* (Footnotes continue on the next page.)

bitch, you!'.”<sup>20</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, Alex in *An Absence Of Ruins* gives a particularly distasteful description of a working prostitute, underlining the disdain with which he briefly considers her in purely animalistic terms. “...a whore, a beast with two legs, two arms, two breasts, a womb that opened out into tissues of voluptuousness. There for the taking. But what was she? Despite her nearness I felt then that I was incapable of knowing. What is more, I hardly cared.”<sup>21</sup>

The character of the female prostitute is rarely a major component of the narrative structure of these novels and I would not wish to suggest otherwise by drawing too much attention to it within this particular context. Nevertheless, the relatively unsympathetic portrayal that such women receive, particularly in relation to the delicate subject of venereal disease, does parallel that of their Hollywood counterparts in works such as *Death Of A Gunfighter*. In that particular film the local doctor routinely carries out an inspection of the town's whores, to ensure that the male patrons can safely continue to indulge in itinerant, casual sex, rather than addressing any inherent worries about female ill health nor the source of any such infection. Inevitably, whenever the subject of venereal disease is raised within these novels, the blame frequently falls upon the women in question who – like their cinematic counterparts - are almost always characterised as the transmitter but rarely the victims of such disease.<sup>22</sup>

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parody the desperateness of the situation in one of his first successful calypsos. “*The Yankees came - Oh, what a shame - If you see whores in Port of Spain*”. (*The Wine Of Astonishment*, p.29).

<sup>20</sup> Frank Hercules: *Where The Hummingbird Flies* (New York, USA: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1961) p.89.

<sup>21</sup> *An Absence Of Ruins*, p.24.

<sup>22</sup> One exception to this can actually be found in Orlando Patterson's 1972 novel *Die The Long Day*. In this instance it is Busha Pickersgill who is infected with syphilis and knowingly transmits it to the slave girls he forcibly takes as his mistresses. (Orlando Patterson: *Die The Long Day* (New York, USA: William Morrow & Co. Inc., 1972).

In *Song For Mumu*, the male protagonist Scully indignantly relates to Papa Peda how a relationship with a prostitute had temporarily left him impotent. "...he got that illness from a whore on Prudent Street ...a grey worm with a deep blood red head is crawling in her veins."<sup>23</sup> It simply never crosses his mind that he, instead, might actually have been the source of the infection, despite the fact that we later learn how Scully's life in the city had degenerated into one of numerous casual, sexual encounters. John Lincoln in *I Want A Black Doll*, offers a similarly unsympathetic view of prostitutes as he comments upon a group of New York whores in equally disparaging tones. "Along the septic length of Lenox Avenue were deep drunk curses spewing from wall-eyed syphilitics, and scabrous women peddling diseases in doorways. Sluts and strumpets."<sup>24</sup>

Within the fictional world of the Caribbean novel, violence towards women plays a rather more prominent role than that usually encountered in the Western filmic genre. Although the act of rape itself has not tended to provide a focal point within the narrative structure of many novels, its presence can be found in works such as *Those Who Eat The Cascadura*, *The Children Of Sisyphus*, *Brother Man* or *Where The Hummingbird Flies*. In each of these particular instances the rape scene itself is of secondary importance to the main narrative thrust and tends, therefore, to serve a rather different and less important function to that encountered in the Western film. Other acts of violence towards women are, however, much more widespread and many male characters are portrayed as being ambivalent towards it, if not actually

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<sup>23</sup> Lindsay Barratt: *Song For Mumu* (Washington D.C., USA: Howard University Press 1974 [1967] ) p.26.

condoning the violence there are limited signs that they might condemn or otherwise question its validity *per se*. As Otto the Chinese shopkeeper is advised in *Turn Again Tiger*, women allegedly need the occasional threat of violence if men are to keep them in their place.<sup>25</sup> “‘You letting that little girl [Berta] get out-of-hand, Otto. You have to show she you is a man, else she lend you hell’.”<sup>26</sup>

In the macho world that these men inhabit, hitting a woman is often the only response they can muster to circumstances that could otherwise threaten to overwhelm them. Jerry’s assault upon his wife Sonia in *Ruler In Hiroona* is a typical example of just such an outburst and even contains its own justification, limited though that may have been in Sonia’s eyes. “Suddenly, I hit her. Hard on the mouth. I just couldn’t sit there and look truth in the face. I had to hit it. To shut it up. To smother it. I wanted to hit Pittance [Jerry’s former political aide], but as he wasn’t there, I hit Sonia. ‘After all I’ve done for you’, I hissed. ‘You ungrateful bitch’.”<sup>27</sup> Carlo in *Where The Hummingbird Flies*, reacts in a similarly violent fashion to his girlfriend Mary’s pregnancy. Faced with the prospect of marriage to a girl of lower social status and, worse still, to his way of thinking, significantly darker than him in skin colour, Carlo can only react by lashing out both verbally and physically. “‘...if you’ brass-face enough to tell my father, I’ll kick your stinking black bastard out of your dirty guts! You blasted nigger whore! I have a mind to give you a damn

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<sup>24</sup> Frank Hercules: *I Want A Black Doll* (London: Collins, 1967) p.296.

<sup>25</sup> Another Selvon novel: *The Housing Lark*, contains a similar admonition about the use of violence towards women by the character of Fitz: “All women want is blows to keep them quiet.” (*The Housing Lark*, p.41).

<sup>26</sup> *Turn Again Tiger*, p.75.

<sup>27</sup> G.C.H. Thomas: *Ruler In Hiroona* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1989 [1972]) p.133.

slap'...The back of his hand struck her on the head with brutal force. Stunned, she fell backward."<sup>28</sup>

The ultimate act of violence towards women – murder – is only rarely portrayed in either the Western film or the Caribbean novel. When it does occur - as in Peckinpah's groundbreaking film *The Wild Bunch*, for example – its effect is therefore all that much more shocking. A similar case exists within a small number of the novels under consideration. Whilst only one novel – Roger Mais's *Brother Man* – contains an explicit example of a female character, Girlie, who eventually murders her unfaithful partner Papacita, there are four others<sup>29</sup> from within the specific time frame where the reverse is portrayed.

In Reid's 1958 work about East Africa: *The Leopard*, the violent death of Edith Gibson lies at the very heart of the narrative structure. The novel both articulates the irrational fear of miscegenation and contrasts Bwana Gibson's seemingly senseless act of violence with the justifiable homicide – 'making beautiful' - of white Kenyan settlers in the Mau Mau struggles for Independence. As the result of a single sexual encounter with the young Kikuyu hero Nebu, Edith gives birth to a half-caste child and is subsequently battered to death by her jealously insane husband. "...the bwana had become an animal, shrieking and battering in the flower face of the msabu as she lay spent and weak after the birth..."<sup>30</sup> The remainder of the novel -

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<sup>28</sup> *Where The Hummingbird Flies*, p.89.

<sup>29</sup> Apart from the novel cited in the text, Roger Mais's *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (p.265) and Orlando Patterson's *The Children Of Sisyphus* (pp. 180-181) similarly contain explicit examples of female characters who are brutally murdered. Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* also contains a brief reference to a savage murder by an Indian 'feller' of his German wife (p.133), even though neither are characters within the main narrative structure.

<sup>30</sup> *The Leopard*, p.17.

Nebu's retributive killing of Bwana Gibson, his son Toto's sadistic treachery, the encounter with the leopard and Nebu's own approaching death – all occur as a result of that earlier act of violence towards Edith. Although Edith is of little importance as a character in her own right, her symbolic role in the novel – as in many Hollywood Westerns - is thus found to be highly relevant. In common with many Western films, the main onus of the narrative may be wholly focused upon the eventual fate of the hero Nebu, but the way in which he behaves comes about as a direct result of the more feminine influences embodied in Edith's character.

The minor nature of the female role has inevitably been a leading feature in much of the above discussion on the parallels between film and fiction. It would be wrong to conclude this particular aspect of the discussion, however, without some brief mention of both those few Western films where women were given the central role and their fictional counterparts within the world of the novel. As far as films are concerned, one of the earliest Westerns to give a female – Joan Crawford – a leading role was that of *Johnny Guitar*. Works such as *Calamity Jane* also had a female lead (Doris Day), they still tended to privilege masculine values above all else. 'Calamity' Jane may have been a tomboy at the start of the film, but by its conclusion she had been transformed – through marriage - into the idealised image of womanhood that the film director (David Butler) so obviously revered. On the other hand Vienna, the leading lady in *Johnny Guitar*, was characterised as a totally feminine woman who remained in firm control of her life, yet stood for values that diametrically opposed those of the stereotypical Western male. Somehow, she managed to retain both her integrity and her femininity and ends the film, as Buscombe has commented, "...still

more than the equal to any man...".<sup>31</sup> Later examples of Westerns that also gave a more feminine perspective on the genre would include *The Ballad Of Josie* (1967) and *Hannie Caulder* (1971).

As far as novels are concerned, it tends to be those that were published in the 1950s that mainly focus upon women as their central, leading characters. Two of H. G. de Lissers's posthumous novels – *Psyche*<sup>32</sup> and *Morgan's Daughter*<sup>33</sup> – both contain a leading female character within an historical context whose efforts to outwit their male oppressors provide the main narrative impetus. A similar example exists in Du Quesnay's historical novel from 1960, *A Princess For Port Royal*,<sup>34</sup> which is centred around the tale of Mary Carleton's efforts to better herself after being transported to Jamaica from Newgate prison. Whilst all three of these novels have leading female characters, the worlds in which they operate remain necessarily dominated by men. It would be incorrect, therefore, to suggest that any of these particular heroines of the novel really embody an alternative value system to that of a dominant patriarchy.

There are other strong female characters to be found in these novels, such as Rita in Selvon's *A Brighter Sun*, who imparts a much more feminine perspective on issues that are otherwise dominated by a masculine point of view. Unlike many female characters, Rita is never afraid to speak her mind and forthrightly tells the 'hero' Tiger exactly what she thinks of his behaviour. " "Get out me blasted chair!"

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<sup>31</sup> *The BFI Companion To The Western*, p.243.

<sup>32</sup> H.G. de Lissers: *Psyche* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1985 [1952] ).

<sup>33</sup> H.G. de Lissers: *Morgan's Daughter* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1985 [1953] ).

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Le M. Du Quesnay: *A Princess For Port Royal* (Ilfracombe, Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1960).

Rita shouted. "Get out de house, yuh worthless bitch! Yuh have a nasty coolie mind!... Yuh is a damn fool...Haul yuh tail from here, don't stay here, go someway else".<sup>35</sup> The only novel by a man that really appears to break away and give a leading female character almost complete control over her own life is, however, to be found in Alvin Bennet's *God The Stonebreaker*.<sup>36</sup> The unlikely heroine – 'GB' – starts the novel as a poor grandmother, yet by the clever use of her wits,<sup>37</sup> her instinctive love of gambling and a wholly feminine way of dealing with others ends the story as a wealthy landowner. By way of contrast, all of the men that she encounters during her meteoric rise, end up in far worse circumstances than they started, mainly thanks to GB's inherently superior intelligence.

The above discussion has demonstrated many of the key thematic parallels that exist between the portrayal of women in both these novels and the Western. Most of these examples have therefore been of an implicit nature, but the remainder of this Chapter will now consider more *explicit* references to films and the cinema that are contained within several female characterisations. In many of the novels under consideration, an extremely high level of identification occurs between female characters and their filmic counterparts. As with central male figures, this is not wholly confined to their specific function within the narrative structure, but extends instead to a much broader positioning of them as characters whose lives are somehow inextricably defined by the imaginary world of the cinema.

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<sup>35</sup> *A Brighter Sun*, p.143.

<sup>36</sup> Alvin Bennett: *God The Stonebreaker* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1964).

<sup>37</sup> In many respects, GB represents an inversion of the mythical Anancy character, which is traditionally portrayed as being male.

For numerous female characters their appearance, actions and general mode of behaviour are characterised as being synonymous, yet somehow inferior, to that portrayed in films. Inevitably, the idealised nature of cinematic imagery can only provide women with a role model that is tantalisingly alluring, yet virtually impossible to emulate. Characters such as Eulalie in *The Wine Of Astonishment* try their best to mimic their Hollywood counterparts but ultimately end up looking more like whores than movie stars. "Eulalie is like the star girl on the movie screen, she belong and yet she different from the other girls. Her shoe heels look higher and her lipstick more red and her dress like it melt down to make one with her skin."<sup>38</sup> Thus, whilst women like the fictional Eulalie may try their best to copy what they have seen on the screen, they simply can never achieve that unobtainable goal of 'idealised' womanhood in a similar way that Fisheye in *The Dragon Can't Dance* could never become a true 'cowboy'.

The perceived contrast between men and women's reactions to what they see on the screen is cleverly parodied in a number of novels. Women's preference in films is portrayed in John Hearne's novel *The Faces Of Love* as being lightweight – a reflection of their own insubstantial characters - whilst men are much more interested in the tough, masculine world of the Western. "Oliver and I were taking Margaret and Sybil to a cowboy film later on. Neither of the girls liked Westerns very much, but they liked going up to Cotton Tree afterwards for ice-cream and beer. They only liked it when the film was a musical..."<sup>39</sup>. In Nathan Barrett's *Bars Of Adamant* Mrs Chetwick, a slightly unbalanced middle-class widow, is portrayed as another 'typical'

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<sup>38</sup> *The Wine Of Astonishment*, p.23.

woman who is totally entranced by Hollywood's interpretation of life. Once again, her particular love of musicals is offered as a metaphor for her own frivolous character. "When I lived on the Bay I used to go [to the cinema] every Saturday night. The singing and dancing – Jeanette McDonald and Nelson Eddy and Fred Astaire...that dancing fool – and oh, Carmen Miranda in *Floating (sic) Down To Rio*."<sup>40</sup> Yet, in that same conversation the old (male) blacksmith displays a level of perception about the falsity of such imagery that women such as Mrs Chetwick cannot – allegedly - even begin to understand. " 'You know, all them *flims (sic)* is made in this Hollywood where they fake everything to make it look real and it all comes out as shadows. I don't have time for such poppyshow'."<sup>41</sup>

The powerful effect of cinema extends way beyond the merely superficial appeal such as that described above. As Meela tells her daughter in *Song For Mumu*, the cinema offers a window into an idealised life that allows women to forget the drudgery of their own day-to-day existence. "...you can make new friends and night-time come you can go into a place they call a cinema place you see big pretty people on a white screen living pretty lives...you can forget you've ever known sadness or loss..."<sup>42</sup> The idealised notion of life that is promulgated by the world of cinema often causes characters to lose sight of the clear distinction that should exist between the imaginary world of romance and the mundane nature of everyday life. A 1986 essay by Rushdie succinctly points to the inherent problems that Hollywood imagery could cause amongst diasporic audiences such as those described in Caribbean fiction,

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<sup>39</sup> John Hearne: *The Faces Of Love* (London: World Distributors (Manchester) Ltd., 1959 [1957] ) p.122.

<sup>40</sup> Nathan Barrett: *Bars Of Adamant* (New York, USA: Fleet Publishing Corporation, 1966) p.21.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p.21.

<sup>42</sup> *Song For Mumu*, p.72.

people whose lives bore little or no resemblance to that portrayed in the glittering world of the cinema. "Hollywood always did see us as pathetic humans, didn't it, as lesser breeds in need of the profane demigods up there in VistaVision, Todd-AO or Cinemascope. Our place was a seat in the dark, from which we could look up to the stars and watch them shine. Banality made our lives unreal; *they* were the ones who were fully alive. So we munched our popcorn and grew confused about reality."<sup>43</sup>

In Sam Selvon's novel *Those Who Eat The Cascadura*, the young black servant girl, Eloisa, is characterised as one such fantasist who mistakenly believes that life can truly imitate film. As the observer of a passionate relationship between the Englishman Garry and the Indian girl Sarojini, Eloisa relies upon her stock of Hollywood memories to reassure herself that everything will turn out well for them. "In some dim corner of her memory Eloisa remembered a romantic film she had seen in her girlhood, and she likened Sarojini to that grand and awesome world where beautiful people acted out the pageant of life, living in a dream of colour and music, flowers and birds and wind in leafy trees."<sup>44</sup> In the 'reality' of the novel, however, Garry abandons the pregnant Sarojini without a second thought, despite her poverty and banishment from her family as a direct result of her relationship with him. Thus Eloisa's faith in the world of the movies is shown up, once again, for what it truly is, an idealised fantasy that bears no resemblance to the harsh realities of life in rural Trinidad.

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<sup>43</sup> Salman Rushdie: 'Debrett goes to Hollywood' in *Imaginary Homelands* p.326.

<sup>44</sup> *Those Who Eat The Cascadura*, p.37.

The very experience of visiting a cinema itself was necessarily bound up with issues of sexuality, as where the women were eventually seated on a date – be it pit, stalls or balcony<sup>45</sup> - helped to define the level of respect that the man in question was showing towards them. In de Boissiere's *Crown Jewel*, Cassie is particularly impressed when Popito (a Venezuelan) takes her (a black girl) into one of the more expensive seating areas. "They went to the Empire Theatre...she [Cassie] had thought they would sit in the pit with the workers but to her pride and joy they went through the front entrance among the well-dressed white and coloured folks and sat in the soft seats of the stalls."<sup>46</sup> The importance of seating areas is further highlighted in the previously mentioned novel: *Bars Of Adamant*. Mrs Chetwick tries to assert her social superiority over the old blacksmith by suggesting that he would know more than she possibly ever could about the cheaper cinema seats in Montego Bay. " 'What really amazes me is that people are able to find time to fill those places [in the cinema], night after night...I'm sure it's mostly rabble attend them. So tell me, where does the rabble get the fare? How much are the cheap seats nowadays?' ..."<sup>47</sup> The sarcastic tone that she adopts is doubly ironic, given that she has already been characterised as a highly frivolous, social climber. This particular outburst only serves therefore to reinforce the 'rational' male perspective on cinema that has already been propounded by the blacksmith earlier in that same conversation.

In the novel, many outings to the cinema are inextricably linked to sexuality on a more physical level, as couples frequently experience their first physical contact whilst seated within the auditorium's particular intimate darkness. Timmy, a young

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapters Two and Five for further discussion on the social stratification of cinema seating.

<sup>46</sup> *Crown Jewel*, p.123.

Indian boy in *Apartheid Love*, takes his girlfriend Pearl to the cinema because he longs to imitate the behaviour of other couples he has seen both on the screen and in the back row of seats. “Timmy bought the tickets, then he led Pearl up the stairs to the balcony section. They took two seats at the back. Timmy had often seen couples kissing there, and he wanted very much to kiss Pearl.”<sup>48</sup> It is not always the male, however, who is characterised as taking the lead or, as in the case of Jennifer in Selvon’s *An Island Is A World*, being disappointed when her partner fails to demonstrate any explicit sexual desire. “One evening in a cinema, they were sitting in the back seats [Jennifer and an unidentified boyfriend]. All he did was hold her hands...”.<sup>49</sup> [My emphasis]. The implication is surely that Jennifer had been expecting something rather more physical to pass between them and is disappointed that it did not occur, thus positioning her as a woman of somewhat dubious moral character.

With the cinema playing such a key role in the relationship between the sexes, it is hardly surprising to find that many men are inclined to liken their female counterparts to cinematic standards. In V.S. Naipaul’s early novel *The Suffrage Of Elvira*, the main protagonist Harbans is totally transfixed by the appearance of two American women whom he can only compare to the glamorous images of Hollywood. “They were both young and quite remarkably good-looking. Harbans had seen nothing like it outside the cinema.”<sup>50</sup> The Americans in question can only be rationalised in terms of the cinema as Harbans had no other possible source of

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<sup>47</sup> *Bars Of Adamant*, p.21.

<sup>48</sup> *Requiem For A Village/Apartheid Love*, p.19.

<sup>49</sup> Sam Selvon: *An Island Is A World* (London: Alan Wingate, 1955) p.32.

<sup>50</sup> *The Suffrage Of Elvira*, p.10.

reference for 'forward' white women such as these from within his limited experiences of life in Trinidad.<sup>51</sup>

The potential danger of slipping from thinking about specific (foreign) women in words such as those utilised by Harbans, to idealising all women in such a way is further highlighted in the novel *Of Heaven On Earth*. Hobart Crane, the lawyer, has lost all sense of rationalisation where women are concerned and demonstrates all too clearly the inherent danger of immersing oneself in the realms of cultural fantasy. Instead of seeing and enjoying local women for their own particular charms, he can only enthuse about the elusive aspects of idealised femininity. "When he [Hobart] spoke of pretty women, they were all cultivated, painted, and deep in silks and nylons as they appeared on Movie Screens...".<sup>52</sup> By conflating female characters with images half-remembered from the cinema, Caribbean women are effectively reduced in Hobart's mind to mere ciphers for some universal, European form of womanhood, a flattened image of wholly artificial construction. Inevitably, no woman he is ever likely to meet can ever conform nor satisfy the criteria by which he chooses to judge them.

If the men in these novels are prone to comparing women with cinematic standards of femininity, then it is hardly surprising to find that the female characters themselves emulate the stylised mannerisms of film actresses whenever possible. The young shop assistant in *A Brighter Sun*, for example, imagines how good it would be

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<sup>51</sup> A similar example occurs in Selvon's *I Hear Thunder*, where Mark's recently acquired English (white) wife is described in similarly filmic terms: "She [Joyce] have blond hair. She favour that film star – am, am, I forget, but you know the one I mean'." (*I Hear Thunder*, p.30).

<sup>52</sup> *Of Heaven On Earth*, p.10.

to win a sweepstake and throw in her job in explicitly filmic tones. “She wouldn’t be too dramatic, although she could afford to be...when he began to talk to her she would show such *beautiful* indifference, like Bette Davis.”<sup>53</sup> Not all such explicit mimicry is treated with a similar degree of sympathy, however. In Neville Dawes’s *The Last Enchantment*, the ageing Mrs Hanson who is carrying on a furtive affair with a younger, cynical doctor, is further degraded by her repeated comparisons to a second-rate actress. “‘Are you in love with me?’ she [Mrs Hanson] asked, trying to make her voice laugh lightly and succeeding only in sounding like a B-film actress.”<sup>54</sup> Johnnie Sobert, the main protagonist in Andrew Salkey’s *Escape To An Autumn Pavement*, is seen to share a similarly derogatory view of women and what he perceives as their pathetic attempts at filmic mimicry. “Why do the decent bitches all behave like B-film actresses...a sort of slap-happy busman’s holiday the whole way through?”<sup>55</sup> These degrading terms highlight the impossibility of the situation for a local woman. Men want them to be more like the screen images served up to the Caribbean from Hollywood, but even if they do try to emulate those impossible standards, they are almost universally derided for the poor quality of their imitation.

An even more extreme example of a woman whose characterisation is explicitly linked to her imitation of the cinema is to be found in that of Sushila in Shiva Naipaul’s *The Chip- Chip Gatherers*. From her earliest appearances in the novel, Sushila is portrayed as a woman of loose morals – possibly even a prostitute, although this is never explicitly stated - whose behaviour outrages even her closest relatives. “When Sita was old enough to walk, Sushila disappeared from the

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<sup>53</sup> *A Brighter Sun*, p.91.

<sup>54</sup> Neville Dawes: *The Last Enchantment* (London: First Four Square, 1966 [1960] ) p.75.

Settlement, abandoning her daughter to the mercies of Basdai...And, although she had no visible means of support, the invisible ones were clearly ample and she appeared to prosper."<sup>56</sup> Even the way that she dresses is seen as a parody of cinematic excesses, a further example of her inability to distinguish reality from the make-believe world of film: "Sushila was infatuated to the point of obsession with adornment...To adorn was not merely to improve and make more palatable. It was to make real. Everything, including herself, had to be embellished; heightened; and touched up. She used the heaviest, most scented powders and perfumes. Her lipsticks were brilliant and gaudy."<sup>57</sup>

It is not only her external appearance that matters to Sushila but also her surroundings, which she adapts in keeping with her distorted notion of 'the real'. "Sushila redecorated Rani's room according to her peculiar taste...[with]... glossy photographs of famous Hollywood stars. These she obtained from a 'friend' who managed a cinema."<sup>58</sup> Her interests in film star portraits are, like her hinted-at 'friendships', confined solely to the men. "Women, though, were excluded from her picture gallery."<sup>59</sup> Her failure to maintain a monogamous relationship is parodied in the fickle way with which she constantly changes those Hollywood stills in her room. "At any one time Sushila would have at least a dozen photographs pinned in a wavering line along the walls of her room. They were a good barometer of her inconstancy. By some mysterious process, the stars rose and fell in her estimation. Occasionally, the fallen might be reinstated (Errol Flynn had that distinction) but,

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<sup>55</sup> Andrew Salkey: *Escape To An Autumn Pavement* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1960) p.99.

<sup>56</sup> Shiva Naipaul: *The Chip-Chip Gatherers* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976 [1973] ) p.76.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* p.155.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p.154.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

usually, they disappeared without trace.”<sup>60</sup> It comes as little surprise, then, that Sushila herself eventually ‘disappears without trace’ when she is finally made to confront her fantasy world. Not only does she destroy and abandon all her adornments, but her final link with the world of make-believe is severed in her symbolic destruction of the pictures she had previously adored: “The glossy photographs of the Hollywood film stars had been torn from the wall and crumpled into balls.”<sup>61</sup>

Whilst Sushila’s characterisation is somewhat extreme in portraying her as the helpless victim of an excessive cultural dependency, her reliance upon the cinema is not so very far removed from the similar examples of Ivan, Romesh or Fisheye as considered earlier in this thesis. It is, perhaps, significant that Sushila’s identification is primarily with Hollywood films rather than Hindi works – as, indeed is Romesh’s in Shiva Naipaul’s earlier novel - which seems to imply a further distancing from their cultural roots in their respectively desperate searches for a true sense of identity. Sushila’s final outcome is not articulated within the novel, nevertheless it is not unreasonable to imagine that it might have been of a similarly tragic nature to those of the three men mentioned above.

As each of the examples cited demonstrate, a network of linkages can be traced between the portrayal of women in Caribbean novels and the Hollywood film. The latter section of this chapter concentrated upon the more explicit references to cinema that occur in relation to the characterisation of women, although implicit

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.244.

parallels also appear to exist between their portrayal in Western films and the Caribbean novel as defined in this thesis. These thematic links are particularly apparent within the extensive portrayal of women who demonstrate loose moral behaviour or work as outright prostitutes. They can also be identified amongst female characters who are the recipients of violence in a world that is both sexually and physically dominated by men and who – with a limited number of exceptions - are usually marginalised as characters in their own right. The only real convergence between the use of female characters within the two media appears to exist over the idealised role of women that plays a central function in many Western films. Its parallel is rarely to be traced within the Caribbean novels that were published during the years 1950 - 1985.

## CHAPTER TEN

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The body of this thesis has demonstrated that a network of linkages and relationships can be traced between the cinema and fictional writings from Jamaica and Trinidad, published between the years of 1950 - 1985. The widespread and recurrent nature of these references illustrates that cinema had a significant influence upon local writers – both male and female – that could be traced right throughout this period. The nature of the relationships between fiction and film was found to encompass a wide range of responses, from straightforward mimicry by characters to much more complex engagements that effectively inverted the classical paradigms promulgated by Hollywood films.

Within the opening Chapters, both the primacies of the cinema and its cultural impact in the Caribbean were considered in detail. The historical evidence contained therein clearly demonstrated the importance of film and, indeed, the whole cinematic experience in both Trinidad and Jamaica throughout that entire period. Chapter Two illustrated that the patterns of rapid growth in cinematic outlets and their subsequent decline in the 1970s were broadly similar in both islands. In Jamaica, Hollywood films were shown to have enjoyed an almost unchallenged position of dominance in terms of screenings during the years 1950 - 1985. In Trinidad, however, the importation of Indian (Hindi) films from the mid-1930s onwards disrupted the earlier monopoly enjoyed by Hollywood in that island and subsequently became a major viewing force in its own right. The impact of these films in Trinidad was considered

in detail throughout Chapter Three. This thesis has further illustrated that the Hollywood Western - and its later re-working into the Italian 'Spaghetti' Western - were amongst the most popular genre of films shown in both islands during that same time. Additional evidence of the Western's popularity was provided in later Chapters - Seven to Nine - which contained a detailed examination of the large number of novels that referred to some aspect of the Western filmic genre.

From the onset of this research, it had been anticipated that writers of Indian descent would have made extensive reference to aspects of Indian (Hindi) filmic iconography within their fictional writings. Had this been the case, it would have been possible to make a detailed comparison between their works with novels by other writers whose cinematic engagements were solely confined to the output from Hollywood. However, as the latter part of Chapter Three has illustrated, very few local writers *did* actually chose to engage with any easily identifiable aspect of the Indian medium. Of those few who did refer to Hindi films, their responses to its ideological constructs were largely indifferent to the nature of its particularly distinctive formulation. It was therefore neither practicable nor advisable to try and draw any real conclusions about the overall influence of Hindi cinema on writers of Indian descent from Trinidad; nor to carry out any meaningful comparison with others of European or African ancestry. The thesis restricts its observations to highlighting the limited number of examples where such allusions occurred and demonstrates the relatively low level of reference to the Hindi film overall when compared with its Hollywood counterparts.

The novels of V.S. Naipaul – excluding *The Enigma Of Arrival* and *A Way In The World* which were both published *after* 1985 – were examined together with the films of Alfred Hitchcock in Chapter Four. The 1971 work *In A Free State* was found to contain several explicit references to works by Hitchcock and both the novel and its references to the cinema were analysed in detail. Other novels by Naipaul were found to contain numerous and recurrent thematic concerns that parallel similar preoccupations expressed in a great many of Hitchcock's films. Chapter Four demonstrated how both men have focused upon a number of key themes throughout their respective careers. These included questions of identity, the problems arising from human relationships, personal and moral guilt, the fear of pursuit and many of the difficulties associated with the disempowered male figure.

The body of work produced by women writers during the years 1950 – 1985 was, perhaps surprisingly, found to contain no fewer references to film than those of their male counterparts. Many of the potential tensions caused by the assimilation of a hegemonic, external culture via the medium of film, were evident throughout these works by women writers. Numerous novels focused upon the inherent impracticalities of aspiring to such idealised notions of both femininity and masculinity as typically espoused in the 'classical' Hollywood film. Other works – *The Hurricane Wake* and *Crick Crack, Monkey* in particular – were found to have engaged explicitly and incisively with the Hollywood Western when dealing with the characterisation of the main, male protagonist. For a minority of female novelists, however, film appeared to have played only a limited, *implicit* role in shaping their work. In these instances it would be inaccurate to suggest the existence of any

stronger thematic links between the two media than those highlighted within the detailed discussion.

In the final section of this research, the focus was narrowed to an exclusive consideration of the Hollywood Western and those novels by male writers who appeared to have engaged with some specific feature of that genre. The historical development of the Western film was considered in some detail within Chapter Six and its importance as a significant component of Hollywood's output until the late 1960s was clearly established. The main thematic pre-occupations of the Western film were then examined, with particular emphasis upon the role of the cowboy hero, the narrative function of landscape and the symbolic portrayal of women.

Chapters Seven to Nine subsequently examined those novels that had similar preoccupations or explicit linkages to each of these three key areas. Chapter Seven showed that many novels were found to have utilised aspects of the cowboy hero iconography within their respective narrative structures. Some were of an extreme nature and stressed the inherent dangers in such imitative behaviour. Other male protagonists were characterised as parodying some aspect of the 'cowboy style', but with far less dramatic consequences. Chapter Eight examined the importance of land and landscape in many Caribbean novels and related its importance as a narrative feature to that of the Hollywood Western. Issues of land ownership, the changing usage of land and the dichotomy of town versus country were each examined in detail and numerous parallels were pinpointed between the two media. Chapter Nine considered the portrayal of women in Caribbean fiction and found that similar

parallels could be drawn between many aspects of their characterisation with those to be found in the Hollywood Western. The Chapter concluded by looking at other ways in which female characters were often satirised by writers for their excessive and seemingly indiscriminate levels of identification with aspects of filmic imagery. The concerns that were highlighted in these novels about the cultural implications that arose as a result of such mimicry parallel those found in similar characterisations by women writers throughout Chapter Five.

The main purpose of this research was, of course, to demonstrate that associations and relationships existed between the two media such as those outlined above. A further consideration was, however, to try and identify whether film material had been culturally transformed through its subversive re-working into fictional writing or whether its ideological constructs had simply been absorbed and parodied. Throughout the thesis, examples have been highlighted where certain writers appear to have engaged with cinematic representation in each of these different manners. In some instances, the precise nature and context of the references would suggest that writers have, indeed, actively engaged in acts of creative cultural subversion. Illustrations of their innovative use of imagery from the cinema are particularly prominent in novels such as *The Schoolmaster*, *Rum And Coca-Cola* and *In A Free State*. The cultural transformations that are represented in these works demonstrate both the similarities and 'differences' between the Caribbean and the cinematic characters they mimic, thus providing an effective and authentic counter-discourse to that contained within the Hollywood paradigm. In other examples, the level of identification that certain fictional characters displayed when copying their

cinematic counterparts had much more of an acquiescent than a subversive quality to it. Characters in novels by both male and female writers were shown as not only accepting the illusory world of film without question, but also trying to emulate it. Its most extreme cases – epitomised by the main protagonists in novels such as *The Dragon Can't Dance*, *The Harder They Come*, *The Chip-Chip Gatherers* and *Fireflies* – were considered in detail throughout Chapter Seven and Nine.

It was inevitable that a project of this nature had to confine its parameters, this thesis was therefore restricted to a period in which cinema was predominant as a source of entertainment in both islands. Its temporal framework was also designed to yield a sufficiently large, but not too unwieldy range of novelistic material that enabled a systematic search for film references to be undertaken on each of the one hundred and fifty-five novels published during the years in question. That is not to suggest that an expansion of the upper or lower publication dates that were set herein would not have generated a body of writing that also displayed a level of interaction with the cinema. It is certainly possible to find explicit references to film in earlier novels such as H.G. de Lisser's *Jane's Career* from 1914 or Claude McKay's *Banana Bottom* that was published in 1933. More recent works such as *Between Two Seasons* (1994) by the Trinidadian painter I. J. Boodhoo or *Salt* (1996) by Earl Lovelace also make extensive use of the filmic medium within their respective narrative structures.

In geographical terms, an even stronger case could be made for increasing this range of material at a future date to include other regions of the Caribbean. Chapters Two and Three showed how the role of the cinema had dramatically declined in both

Trinidad and Jamaica by the late 1970s. In other parts of the Caribbean its level of relative importance continued for a longer period of time. In Guyana, for example, the first *local* television transmissions did not take place until January 1988, unlike Jamaica and Trinidad where local television stations had started in the early 1960s. The strength of the influence of cinema can be found in several novels by Guyanese writers that were published during the latter part of the twentieth century. These include works such as Rooplall Monar's *Janjhat* (1989), David Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991) and Fred D'Aguiar's *Dear Future* (1996). Furthermore, all three of these particular novels have engaged with aspects of Hindi films that would provide a further point of comparison with writers from Trinidad who, by and large, mostly neglected to utilise such imagery. Such an expansion of scope would, of course, have to be undertaken as a post-doctoral exercise. Nevertheless, it is worth concluding that whilst this project has greatly improved our knowledge of the cultural impact of film in the Caribbean, it has also pointed the way towards further research within the field of Caribbean studies that could be usefully conducted in the future.

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