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**“Home”: Emigration, Identity and Modern
Caribbean Literature**

by

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of Philosophy in English and Comparative Literary Studies

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This thesis is dedicated to Claris and Herbert McIntosh.

Declarations

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree at the University of Warwick or any other educational institution. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at the University of Warwick or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged. This thesis may be photocopied.

Abstract

Caribbean writing is an emigrant tradition. The first waves of native-born authors from the region all spent significant portions of their lives abroad and, almost without exception, built their fame upon the desires of metropolitan audiences for knowledge of their colonies. Accordingly, the famous names of Lamming, Naipaul, Selvon, Césaire and Glissant are all stamped with a slightly less famous departure date. While many critics have noted these facts, there has been little sustained analysis of how the unique social positions and preoccupations of emigrants have affected the works of these five writers or their peers. This thesis is an attempt to address this issue. Its argument is that Caribbean emigrant authors spoke from unique social and conceptual loci. Through detailed, comparative readings of these five authors' first major works, alongside considerations of their self-assessments, critical opinion on their oeuvres, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary field and Antonio Gramsci's theory of the organic intellectual, the argument advanced is that although these authors actively positioned themselves, and were positioned by their readers, in such a way that their emigrant status has had its importance elided, that status is present and potent in their post-emigration works. While the concerns of these writers all altered over the course of their careers, their early experiences of emigration shaped some of their most widely read texts and resulted in a harmony between them that transcends the authors' differing islands of origin and their later thematic and political preoccupations.

Introduction: Arrivals, Departures and Writers

The history of the Caribbean is marked by movement. From the region's first entry into written record with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492, through its absorption into European empires in the centuries that followed, to its eventual, almost total, decolonisation after the Second World War, the Caribbean Basin has seen over five hundred years of near-constant population flux, the bulk of which has been the direct result of large-scale migrations. The first recorded, and most catalytic, of these migratory movements was the one prompted by Columbus's landfall. On the explorer's arrival, the islands of the Caribbean were inhabited by roughly 200,000 members of native tribes.¹ Less than one century later the region was fully controlled by its first immigrants: Western Europeans. The almost total liquidation of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, and their effective substitution by an imported population, was a grim forecast of the heedlessness with which colonial powers would treat the area for the majority of its written history. These acts optimised a willingness to shuffle the land's inhabitants to meet European needs and created a legacy that would complicate all future arrivals and prompt many future departures.

Arrival: Early Caribbean Migration

From his very first writings, Columbus showcases the mindset of the colonisers who would follow him. In his journals, the explorer depicts the Caribbean islands and their residents solely as potentially exploitable commodities, writing, among other things, that the natives

¹ Helmut Blume, *The Caribbean Islands*, trans. by Johannes Maczewski and Ann Norton (London: Longman, 1974), p. 55. Blume identifies these tribes as native Ciboney, Arawaks, Tainos and Caribs but Irving Rouse's more recent study, *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), which draws upon archaeological evidence, identifies them as Guanahatabey, Tainos and Island Caribs (6). The tribes have a history of misidentification, which most likely stems from early Europeans' inconsistent use of group names. See Rouse, p. 146.

‘ought to make good slaves for they are of quick intelligence since I notice that they are quick to repeat what is said to them’.² In addition, the sailor darkly boasted that he could conquer all the people in the region with a mere fifty men, providing further evidence that from the first European contact with this previously unknown space focus was placed solely upon its potential exploitation.³ As mentioned, the region’s first notable inward migration brought its first demographic shift: the destruction of all regional tribes, leaving only small pockets of indigenous people left alive in what was to become Haiti and the Guianas.⁴ As with other conquerors during the exploration age, Columbus and his countrymen treated the islands they discovered as unclaimed territories, empty spaces awaiting an occupier’s stamp; they denied the native inhabitants existence, identity and ownership, and constructed the Caribbean as a blank slate upon which a new European identity could be engraved.⁵ This attitude was enshrined in the early Spanish *encomienda* and *repartimiento* systems which granted the first settlers not only land on the newly discovered islands, but control of all people in residence, effectively sanctioning the ensuing genocide.⁶

Columbus-style thought coupled with cruel law culminated in acts that Bartolomé de las Casas described as ‘tear[ing] the natives to shreds, murder[ing] them and inflict[ing] upon them untold misery, suffering and distress’ that led to the quick destruction of indigenous communities and created the need for a new labouring class.⁷ This need was satisfied by inward migrations in the form of two waves of replacement labour: first white

² Christopher Columbus, *Journal of the First Voyage (Diario del primer viaje) 1492*, ed. and trans. by B. W. Ife. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1990), p. 31.

³ Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 35.

⁴ J. Michael Dash, ‘Introduction’, in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Hispanic and Francophone Regions*, ed. by A. James Arnold and others, 3 vols (Philadelphia: John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 1994 -2001), I (1994), pp. 309-14 (p. 309).

⁵ B. W. Ife, ‘Introduction’, in Christopher Columbus, *Journal of the First Voyage (Diario del primer viaje) 1492*, ed. and trans. by B. W. Ife. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1990), pp. v-xxv (pp. xxiv-xxv).

⁶ See Blume, p. 64; and J. H. Parry and P. M. Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies* (London: Macmillan, 1956), p. 9.

⁷ Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. and trans. by Nigel Griffin, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 69. My translation.

indentured servants and then African slaves. Unlike the slave population of North America, Caribbean slaves were not 'stable' or 'self-reproducing'; they were constantly churned, widespread disease, malnutrition and excessive work necessitating continual replenishment of those in bondage and creating a constant inflow of new migrants from the African continent.⁸

Northwestern European challenges to Spain's regional supremacy ran concurrently with the inflow of the indentured and the enslaved. Through the use of privateers and 'guerrilla'-esque forays into the Lesser Antilles, other kingdoms created a presence in the area.⁹ Battles between these colonial powers resulted in further reconfigurations as islands changed hands and swapped flags, and all residents were exposed to the additional linguistic and cultural influences that accompanied ongoing arrivals and departures. In- and out-migration continued through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the next major population shift coming after the abolition of slavery in the British territories with the transport of Indian and Chinese labourers into the region to replace manumitted slaves. On the English-owned islands, from 1838 to 1917, hundreds of thousands of indentured Indians were brought over from colonial holdings in Calcutta and Madras and, despite fixed-term contracts that included the promise of transport back home, they were often stranded in the area and forced to establish themselves permanently.¹⁰ The French made a similar move post-emancipation, and had additional migrants arriving from the British Caribbean to meet

⁸ Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 167.

⁹ Harold Mitchell, *Europe in the Caribbean: The Policies of Great Britain, France and the Netherlands towards their West Indian Territories in the Twentieth Century* (London: W. & R. Chambers, 1963), p. 1.

¹⁰ See Shelby T. McCloy, *The Negro in the French West Indies* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), p. 160 for France's import of Asian labourers and Bonham C. Richardson, *The Caribbean in the Wider World, 1492-1992: A Regional Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 74 for the migrants from the British Caribbean.

new labour needs.¹¹ They too were on fixed-termed contracts and, like the Asian indentured, few ever returned home.¹²

Along with new human arrivals, the region was subject to the arrivals of new plants and animals, its landscape altering along with its population. From 1650 to 1665, a massive endeavour dubbed ‘The Great Clearing’ by Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh had settlers reducing acres of indigenous forests and jungles to clear fields for imported vegetation.¹³ The massive alteration of the terrain to support sugar cane, the region’s prime cash crop, created what Bonham Richardson has called a ‘sharp ecological discontinuity with the past’—a botanical discontinuity which was matched by the transformation of the islands’ animal life as Europeans shipped over wild and domesticated species, which have since ‘driven out or modified’ native fauna.¹⁴

The wilful and wanton destabilisation of both the ecosystem and the people on these islands epitomises their intended function for European empires. The Caribbean colonies were never meant to be stable homes; their prime purpose was to create wealth. These colonies served to uphold one arm of the ‘triangular’ trade between Europe, West Africa and Atlantic America – accepting slaves from Africa and shipping produce to Europe.¹⁵ Within this matrix the workers and overseers on the islands were themselves merely commodities with a functional value; they were reshuffled whenever necessary and never allowed or expected to establish the communal bonds needed for the creation of united societies. As noted by Sidney Mintz, the Caribbean colonies were not

erected upon massive indigenous bases in areas of declining great literate civilizations, as was true in India and Indonesia; they were not mere points of trade, like Macao or Shanghai, where ancestral cultural hinterlands could remain

¹¹ Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier: Départements et Territoires D'outre-Mer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 98.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean 1624-1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 268.

¹⁴ Richardson, p. 30; and Parry and Sherlock, p. v.

¹⁵ Parry and Sherlock, p. 38.

surprisingly unaffected in spite of the exercise of considerable European power; they were not “tribal” mosaics, within which European colonizers carried on their exploitation accompanied by some curious vision of the “civilizing” function, as in the Congo, or New Guinea; nor were they areas of intense European settlement, where new forms of European culture provided an accultural “anchor” for other newcomers, as in the United States or Australia. They were, in fact, the oldest “industrial” colonies of the West outside Europe [...] and fitted to European needs with peculiar intensity and pervasiveness.¹⁶

The islands were unique, ‘industrial’ in the sense that, like factories, they were constructed, terrain and workers configured and reconfigured with the sole purpose of maximising production and easing distribution. These islands were populated by agglomerations of worker-exiles transplanted to new environments, whose only function, for Europe, was to sustain plantations far removed from home countries which few, if any, would ever see again.

It is impossible to overstate the fact that, in the colonial phase, the people of the Caribbean were not one ‘people’ in any real sense at any level of society.¹⁷ Because of the functional aim of these islands, and their regular population changes, whatever mass identity the archipelago possessed in its earliest years ended with the arrival of Columbus. In the post-indigenous phase, the political instability of the region and the methods used by the imperial powers to actively discourage the new arrivals’ attempts to cohere, including the deliberate mixture of slaves to discourage feelings of solidarity, exacerbated rifts in the community.¹⁸ Further, as in other colonised areas of the world, the new ‘native’ populations of the Caribbean were denied any collective voice until very late in the colonial period –

¹⁶ Sidney Mintz, ‘The Caribbean as a Socio-Cultural Area’ in *Peoples and Cultures of the Caribbean: An Anthropological Reader*, ed. by Michael M. Horowitz (New York: The Natural History Press for the American Museum of Natural History, 1971), pp. 17-46 (p. 36).

¹⁷ See Lewis, *Main Currents*, p. 6. It is also important to note that even the residents of European descent were divided, namely by religion, language and culture and did not wholly identify with their countrymen in the metropole. See Parry and Sherlock, p. vi; and Richardson, p. 26.

¹⁸ See Richardson, p. 65 on colonisers’ tactics to discourage unity among slaves.

what were known as the ‘Tropics’, ‘Antilles’, and ‘West Indies’ were created and understood through the words of outsiders, from Columbus to Leslie, Long to Dubuisson, Aphra Behn to de las Casas to Lévi-Strauss.¹⁹ These individuals were ‘outsider-insiders’: Europeans who had resided in or visited the Caribbean and represented it and its people to a Europe that exported these representations back to the islands.²⁰ A handful of spokespeople defined and described the Caribbean for non-resident consumers, in a sense crystallising a vision of the islands based on their own fixations, be they the slave-trade, the noble savage or the elusive mulatto woman.²¹ These writers’ voices replaced the voices of the labouring majority; their concerns, simply by virtue of having an audience, became the concerns that defined the region. In the post-emancipation era, these European ideas about the identity of the people and the importance of the area were imposed on the masses through indoctrinating and belittling school curricula. What communal sense the inhabitants possessed was, initially, either imported or extended no further than groups of caste or colour.²² As a whole consisting of transplanted African, European and Asian parts, there was little besides context that united all and stood in opposition to imperial power.

¹⁹ The names given to the region betray Europeans’ desires to conform this territory to their own ideas and ideals. ‘Antilles’ is likely derived from the name of the mythical island ‘Antilla’, or Atlantis that was said to lie between Europe and Asia. Perhaps representing the past claims on the region, it still has a multitude of names and there is a marked inconsistency in the usage of the terms ‘Caribbean’, ‘West Indies’ and ‘Antilles’ – the most popular. All terms are, at times, used interchangeably to describe the entire archipelago, but, at times, used distinctly, particularly so that the term ‘Caribbean’ refers to all islands, the term ‘West Indies’ refers to the English-speaking islands and the term ‘Antilles’ refers to the French- and Dutch-speaking islands. Throughout this thesis, for clarity, I have used only the term ‘Caribbean’, modifying it when being specific. For a brief engagement with the various names used for the region and their associations for different scholars and individuals, see Norman Girvan, ‘Reinterpreting the Caribbean’, in *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, ed. by Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2001), pp. 3-23 (pp. 3-8).

²⁰ See Sheller, *Consuming*, p. 170, where she speaks of those ‘outsider-insiders’ who fill a similar role in the contemporary Caribbean. The entirety of Sheller’s text deals with the ways in which the Caribbean has been represented by European ‘outsiders’ through its history.

²¹ The fixation with the ‘mulatto woman’ is discussed in Régis Antoine, ‘The Caribbean in Metropolitan French Writing’, in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Hispanic and Francophone Regions*, ed. by A. James Arnold and others, pp. 349-62 (pp. 351-54) as well as in Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 229 -35.

²² Caribbean societies were often stratified by colour. See Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 161, for a discussion of this in French regions. On the English-speaking islands there was a complex ‘hierarchy of shades’, laid out

Modern Migration

The widespread lack of firm collective identities would change, but would not change rapidly. As we will see, the years after the emancipation of African slaves, across the islands, were largely years of consolidated European control, economic turmoil and inter-group conflict. It was not until the early-to-mid-twentieth century, World War-era, that representatives of the colonised islands of the Caribbean began to articulate a collective, non-European, identity themselves. The most sustained and concerted of these efforts took place after World War Two, when a slow wave of decolonisation swept through the archipelago. In this period, many Caribbean islands were granted or promised independent status and those that were not changed their relationship with their colonial 'owners'. Martinique and Guadeloupe switched from French colonies to French Departments; the largest British territories were given sovereignty; and Cuba broke free from effective American rule. Despite this increased sovereignty, the islands still suffered. In *Caribbean Discourse (Discours antillais)*, the Martiniquan author and critic Edouard Glissant describes the history of the Caribbean as one of 'the repertoire of responses of an individual-within-a-country to an Other-Elsewhere'.²³ This is an accurate and succinct summary of the difficulties encountered during the colonial period and one which applies equally well to the postcolonial era. Despite the trauma of life during imperialism, the insidiousness of imperial rule, and the pervasiveness of the power of 'Others-Elsewhere' was, paradoxically, felt only after the fragmentation of European dominance.

This new trauma took two forms. The first was the severe economic and social deprivation that was a direct result of the 'permissive' exploitation mentioned by Sidney Mintz. Independence and departmentalisation were no smooth movements to a more

in depth by Winston James in 'Migration, Racism and Identity Formation: The Caribbean Experience in Britain' in *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain*, ed. by Winston James and Clive Harris (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 231-87, (pp. 233-37).

²³ *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989) p. 70.

prosperous future; all islands suffered problems that were direct results of their earlier mismanagement, from Martinique and Guadeloupe's economic dependence on the metropole, to population size generally exceeding local resources Caribbean-wide, to low-paid job opportunities, widespread indigence, poor inter-island communication, and the preponderance of undiversified plantations which forced the importation of basic necessities.²⁴ The latter fact was perhaps the root cause of all the others, and ultimately the most damaging. Colonial monocultural farming practices forced reliance on outsiders: because the islands generally produced one main crop, sugar, and their fortunes were tied to demand for it. This deprived the producers of much market influence, and, as with other monocultures, they had prices dictated simply because they had no choice, they had to sell to make any revenue.²⁵ Although the tourist industry expanded in the postcolonial period, and is a major source of capital to this day, it too is wholly dependent on the interests and desires of outsiders. These challenges combine with frequent environmental disruptions and rampant US political and military interference to create an area with an economic fate still determined from the outside by hegemonic 'Others'.

The second new trauma can be described easily as an 'identity crisis'. Once colonisers stopped exercising full control the 'shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosive forces' which formed the current Caribbean were felt, the damage of long-denied self-representation worsened by the empty space where a shared past or unified cultural practice or dominant religious belief existed in other post-colonies. The inhabitants of the Caribbean, particularly the descendants of African slaves, and the growing number of mulattos, whose particular social position was unique to this environment, all experienced

²⁴ See Aldrich and Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier*, p. 24; Gordon Lewis, 'The Challenge of Independence in the British Caribbean', in *Caribbean Freedom: Society and Economy from Emancipation to the Present*, ed. by Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (London: James Currey Publishers, 1993), pp. 511-18 (p. 511); Blume, p. 6; and Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. by James Maraniss (London: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 73.

²⁵ See Parry and Sherlock, p. 224 for an explanation of this phenomenon in Cuba.

what Derek Walcott has dubbed collective ‘amnesia’.²⁶ They were unable to reclaim a unifying past because the area’s history began with Columbus and progressed as a series of uncoordinated arrivals and departures.²⁷ In addition, they were still subject to school curricula and self-concepts created ‘Outside’. J. H. Parry and P. M. Sherlock summarised this in 1956 shortly before the decolonisation of the English-speaking islands was to begin. They wrote: ‘West Indian history appears disjointed and unreal to West Indians today. It is a story told from someone else’s point of view. The political history of the islands has been written in terms of the struggle of Europeans (or North Americans) for possession or control’.²⁸ This situation was perhaps even more acute for the French-speaking islands of the Caribbean that, as *Départements d’outre-mer* (DOMs), remained under complete and direct French control, not only subject to a French-created history curriculum but government administrators shipped from France, mass media beamed from France, and news reports focused on metropolitan events from ‘the most remote provinces’ of the French hexagon ‘at the expense of news about events in neighbouring West Indian islands’.²⁹

For newly independent nations, a sense of pride generated by national identity could have only enhanced their efforts to create a new unity; for the French Departments, a stable, separate identity could have created pride in their contribution to an eclectic, transregional French nation, but, as noted, collective identities were, at this time, and at best, ambiguous. Despite this, and while overbearing economic dominance continued to persist in new forms, the total discursive dominance of outsiders mentioned above notably slackened between and after both World Wars. Though, as Parry’s comments indicate, external portrayals did not vanish altogether, the identity of the region began to be contested and articulated by more and more of the region’s inhabitants. With increased freedom and desired and actual self-

²⁶ Derek Walcott, ‘The Muse of History’, in *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean*, ed. by Orde Coombs (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1974), pp. 1-27 (p. 4).

²⁷ Parry and Sherlock, p. 32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. vii-viii.

²⁹ Beverley Ormerod, *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1985), p.3.

governance came the need to address the issue of self-definition – a challenge answered by Caribbean authors and intellectuals. Within the space of a decade after the start of World War II, the Caribbean experienced a ‘boom’ of thinkers who widely disseminated their own perceptions of their homelands in essays and novels, poems and performances, often revising, complicating or challenging those accounts previously written and those accounts still being produced in Europe. This emergence was sudden and, though it was neither unprecedented nor impossible to anticipate, it had a great effect on external understanding of the Caribbean.³⁰

The emergence of these new voices was foreshadowed by the developments in Caribbean writing long before World War II and exemplifies a phenomenon described by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* through which a newly-formed social group always ‘creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields’.³¹ To Gramsci, these ‘organic intellectuals’ work to define the group both to its members and to outsiders. Though the social group in the Caribbean was definitively in existence before the world wars, it was effectively silenced and spoken-for, and only truly emerged onto the world scene on its own terms in the forties and fifties. Because of the ‘identity crisis’ previously described, and the pre-war discursive dominance of Europe, emergent, organic author-intellectuals served a pressing and essential function: they presented the Caribbean to itself and to others through the Caribbean’s own eyes. Their

³⁰ The spike in Caribbean work was forecast by the emergence of a number of small publications promoting creative writing in the anglophone Caribbean during the thirties and forties. These include the Barbados’s *Bim*, Trinidad’s *Beacon*, Jamaica’s *Focus*, and British Guiana’s *Kyk-over-al*. For a summary of these journals’ developments, see Reinhard W. Sander’s chapter, ‘The Thirties and Forties’ in Bruce King ed., *West Indian Literature*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 38-50. In the francophone Caribbean there was a similar growth in writing a decade earlier, although publication was metropolitan-based. See Sam Haigh’s opening chapter in *An Introduction to Caribbean Francophone Writing: Guadeloupe and Martinique*, ed. by Sam Haigh (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 1-16, for an account of early authors, and Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 99, for early periodicals.

³¹ Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, eds. and trans, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 2005), p. 5.

emergence was presaged over 100 years earlier in the region's first post-colony, Haiti. After the successful slave revolt that culminated in 1804 independence, a group of organic Haitian intellectuals emerged whose roles adumbrated the roles played by World War-era intellectuals and drafted the relationship these later advocates would have with their islands.

Caribbean Intellectuals: The Case of Haiti

The violence of the Haitian Revolution and its implicit challenge to regional European powers resulted in Haiti's status as a 'pariah' state after its independence.³² In an effort to redress this loss in regard its intellectuals entered into a hotly contested battle with Europeans to present the country and its people to the world in a positive light.³³ Colonisers had a vested interest in Haiti's subordination because, unlike other contemporaneous revolutions, such as that in the United States, the subjugated peoples who had organised and led the country's revolt were black and elsewhere still in chains.³⁴ European empires were apprehensive about the potential influence of a black republic on the rest of the colonised territories in the area and early Haitian writing expressed its authors' own vested interests in overcoming overwhelmingly negative representations in order to legitimate the republic to the world. Authors wrote about the nation's birth 'almost obsessively and with mystical fervor' in order to create a national narrative, exalt derided revolutionary heroes and solidify a sense of uniqueness over the rest of the Caribbean.³⁵ In most work, Haitian elites presented the island as a 'symbol of redemption for the whole African race', and though the population

³² Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy* (London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), p. 12.

³³ See Philip James Kaisary's *The Literary Impact of the Haitian Revolution* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2008) for a history of representations of the revolution.

³⁴ David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan Education, 1996), p. 4.

³⁵ Léon-François Hoffman, 'Haitian Sensibility' in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Hispanic and Francophone Regions*, ed. by A. James Arnold and others, pp. 365-78 (p. 366).

was stratified along colour lines, authors were ‘practically unanimous in portraying Haiti as a symbol of African regeneration and of racial equality.’³⁶

Although they possessed the noble goals of exalting their people in the eyes of others, and creating a communal sense through their work, the organic intellectuals who composed the stories of the nation were almost wholly detached from the Haitians they portrayed. The elite who produced literature were a small, privileged group who wrote primarily for each other.³⁷ Because of an extraordinarily low literacy rate, the main consumers of the French-language literature produced by these authors were not the newly-liberated Haitian slaves but this select group of elite themselves, and Europeans.³⁸ The battle for representation was one being waged primarily on foreign shores to win foreign hearts – something epitomised by the fact one author, Baron de Vastey, had his works distributed by the foreign minister.³⁹

For all their positive statements about the Haitian people, Haitian authors were apprehensive about peasants’ actual practices and concerned with, among other things, how to represent the islands’ customs to the rest of the world in a way that would not shock.⁴⁰ These intellectuals wanted the ‘superstitions’ of the majority, including the voodoo religion, eliminated and were ambivalent about Africa.⁴¹ Ultimately, while these authors longed to redeem their race and countrymen, their European educations and intended European audiences affected their representations. David Nicholls sums this simply by stating the Haitian elite, including authors, ‘wished to demonstrate the capacity of members of the black

³⁶ Nicholls, pp. 1, 5.

³⁷ Ulrich Fleischmann, ‘The Formation and Evolution of a Literary Discourse: One, Two, or Three Literatures?’ in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Hispanic and Francophone Regions*, ed. by A. James Arnold and others, pp. 317- 38 (p. 323-24).

³⁸ The Haitian literacy rate is notoriously low as is the percentage of the population who are fluent in French. See Hoffman p. 374.

³⁹ Nicholls, p. 43.

⁴⁰ Hoffmann, p. 373.

⁴¹ Nicholls, pp. 11-12.

race to achieve progress and to build a civilised community, according to *European* standards, which they accepted as being of universal application [my emphasis]’.⁴²

Caribbean Intellectuals in the World War Era

As in post-independence Haiti, throughout the Caribbean there was a sharp disjunction between the literary class and the non-literate. Writing about Trinidad, with words that apply to the entirety of the anglophone Caribbean, Bridget Brereton has noted that middle-class status in the decolonising era was determined by an individual holding a non-manual labour job, and having ‘command of European, or British, culture, especially the ability to speak and write correct English,’ according to Brereton, these two criteria were more crucial than either material prosperity or lightness of skin colour’ and because of this ‘a fairly prosperous but uneducated smallholder would not belong to the middle class; and an elementary schoolteacher on a miserable salary would’.⁴³ In the French Caribbean, the majority and the middle class were divided along similar lines, the ‘elite’ ‘differentiated from the masses by its cultural achievement’.⁴⁴ It is to these separated, educated, middle classes that World War-era Caribbean intellectuals belonged, and throughout the region, as in other former colonies, class status was closely correlated with education and cultural allegiance rather than income.⁴⁵ Reinforcing this point, Frantz Fanon wrote, in reference to the desire for residents of the French Caribbean to master the French language, in characteristically provocative

⁴² Ibid., p. 2.

⁴³ Bridget Brereton, ‘The Development of an Identity: The Black Middle Class of Trinidad in the Later Nineteenth Century’, in *Caribbean Freedom: Society and Economy from Emancipation to the Present*, p. 274.

⁴⁴ J. Michael Dash, ‘Introduction’, in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Hispanic and Francophone Regions*, ed. by A. James Arnold and others, p. 311.

⁴⁵ See Alistair Hennessy, ‘Intellectuals: The General and the Particular’ in *Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century Caribbean, Volume I, Spectre of a New Class: The Commonwealth Caribbean*, ed. by Alistair Hennessy (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1-20 (p. 7), where the author argues that high illiteracy rates in the developing world create situations where anyone with qualifications is a potential member of the elite. This claim is corroborated by much comment on the Caribbean region, including Robert Aldrich and John Connell’s statement that *francisation* (‘Frenchification’) through schooling was the central means of social promotion in the French Caribbean after emancipation. See Aldrich and Connell, *France’s Overseas Frontier*, p. 171.

terms, that the ‘colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards’, according to Fanon, ‘the middle class in the Antilles never speak Creole [the language of the masses] except to their servants. In school the children of Martinique are taught to scorn the dialect’.⁴⁶ Though Fanon’s analysis is a pointed attack on the leavings of colonialism, it still links closely with the idea that the educated were indoctrinated with different perspectives and formed a privileged in-group. As noted by Bruce King in his introduction to *West Indian Literature*, and alluded to above, merely gaining an education could create a social chasm between a child and his parents, and instruction beyond primary level of a non-middle class child was likely to ‘cause or require’ ‘estrangement from family and village life’.⁴⁷ Early, educated, organic Caribbean intellectuals were passionate advocates of the Caribbean people but these writers were, as their Haitian predecessors had been, fighting a discursive battle on behalf of those who lived very separate lives, lives which, in many cases, the intellectuals did not fully endorse. Like the Haitian authors before them, these authors ‘were caught between the culture of the masses, which they knew partially but shunned, and the culture of the colonizer, which they longed to acquire’.⁴⁸

This fact is also covered by Gramsci, who claimed that one cannot be both a ‘peasant’ and an ‘intellectual’ simultaneously. In his estimation, the two groups are mutually exclusive, fulfil different social functions, and membership in the ‘intellectual’ caste denies ‘peasant’ identity. This does not mean that an intellectual cannot come from the peasantry, merely, much as Bruce King’s description above suggests, that the ‘peasant’ role, with its

⁴⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), pp. 18, 20.

⁴⁷ Bruce King, ‘Introduction’, in *West Indian Literature*, ed. by Bruce King, pp. 1-8 (p. 2).

⁴⁸ Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (London: Ohio University Press, 1980), p. 67. Cudjoe differentiates, in this commentary, between ‘intellectuals’ who are stuck between the colonisers and the masses in an impotent, seemingly stagnated state, and authors who, although from the intellectual class, are able to know their people and represent their desires. Why authors are ‘in touch with the aspiration of the masses’ in a way that others are not is, to me, insufficiently justified (Ibid.). It is a common claim in Caribbean criticism and one which I will go on to complicate.

attendant status associations, is annulled when one ascends to the intellectual class.⁴⁹ In the case of the Caribbean, Gramsci's claim is perfectly apt. The writers who would go on to represent the region to the world, and wrest discursive dominance from European hands, were in some cases of the peasantry, but in all cases were no longer peasants.

In addition, there was a further significant difference between the authors of the boom period and their people, one linked to the persistent theme in the long history of the region. The most notable writers of this era – the famous names of Césaire, Glissant, James, Lamming, Naipaul and Selvon to name very few – who published articles, novels, journals, poems, letters and speeches that ostensibly wrested the identity of the Caribbean from 'Others-Elsewhere' were often themselves established 'Elsewhere'. Despite successes, focus on the people, and the bold nature of what can be seen as near-simultaneous, transnational desire for legitimacy and recognition, with marked few exceptions, these writers composed their major works as emigrants abroad. As these writers were long-time island inhabitants, they were not 'Others' as such, but, in addition to a class-based disjunction on par with those of the Haitian intellectuals, they were subject to a real physical break between themselves and the people they portrayed. They were not wholly disconnected from the Caribbean, of course; they left along with many others who fled the overpopulation and economic dependency mentioned above to seek jobs or education elsewhere, but they are marked by the fact that they overwhelmingly presented the rural regions of their countries and peasants' concerns in their texts, despite separation from the contemporary realities of rural life by physical location and class status. Despite authors' clear aims to elevate Caribbean labourers, their representations were largely complicated by their distance and, as a result, the concerns of the metropolitan emigrant, rather than those of the island resident, are visible everywhere in their texts.

⁴⁹ Hoare and Nowell-Smith, p. 6.

Caribbean Emigrant Authors and Caribbean Critics

The fact that many of the first wave of Caribbean authors were or still are emigrants, and that as emigrants unique preoccupations can be read in their work, is a fact that has not gone wholly unrecognised by their readers. Unfortunately, it is information often afforded little importance; information which is frequently glossed over and rarely explored. Kenneth Ramchand, one of the earliest English language Caribbean critics, and an early emigrant to England himself, wrote of anglophone authors that

the nostalgia of the emigré, and the professional writer's awareness of the preconceptions and the ignorance of his foreign readers affect mood, content, and expression to *some extent* but the novelists writing in London seldom depart from a concern with the shape and possible directions of their society, its central issues and causes, its patterns of group life, and the quality of life possible for individuals in it [my emphasis].⁵⁰

Speaking of the 1950s anglophone boom in her chapter in *West Indian Literature*, Sandra Pouchet Paquet notes but then dismisses the emigration from the Caribbean in this period; she states, in line with Ramchand, that 'despite the voluntary exile of most writers published at this time, they were characteristically concerned with the structure and values of Caribbean society'.⁵¹ Similarly, in his recent assessment of the work of George Lamming, Bill Schwarz has written that 'we might savour the paradox of [the] "whole Caribbean reality" [Lamming's words] coming to life in an anonymous suburban street of Chiswick, in West London. But how else could this have occurred, given the exigencies of the colonial situation?'.⁵² Most critics of anglophone writing have identified themes in texts that are closely linked to the experience of emigration but, on the whole, they have failed to

⁵⁰ Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 13.

⁵¹ Sandra Pouchet Paquet, 'The Fifties', in *West Indian Literature*, ed. by Bruce King, pp. 51-62 (p. 52).

⁵² Schwarz, Bill, 'Locating Lamming', in *The Locations of George Lamming*, ed. by Bill Schwarz (Oxford: Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1-25 (p. 10).

elaborate the link between these themes and the status of the anglophone authors. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, in line with general critical practice, has written that 'the West Indian novel in English is in part preoccupied with a general quest for roots. Beneath most West Indian fictional characters there lurks a sense of exile. Alienation, individual and communal, is the one unifying theme in the West Indian novel.'⁵³ By and large critics of the French Caribbean have been more attentive to the significance of the fact that the writing is, essentially, an emigrant tradition, but they too have not detailed how that fact would result in a unique perception that resonates through multiple texts.⁵⁴ The trans-regional themes of 'exile' and a 'quest for roots' are so intimately tied to ideas about the Caribbean as an agglomeration of displaced people, that they are almost exclusively addressed as applying to the entirety of islands' populations, rather than given any specified focus on their relevance to emigrant-intellectuals.

Not all Caribbean critics have glossed the gap between emigrant authors and their islands and people. Alison Donnell has mentioned, in reference to studies of Caribbean women's writing, that far too many contemporary studies take an uncritical stance toward migrant status and view it as 'an almost all-encompassing frame within which differences in terms of social relations almost evaporate'.⁵⁵ Though he would go on to leave the Caribbean himself, while resident in the region, Derek Walcott noted that the persistence of the kind of themes Ngugi recognised highlighted an essential disjunction between the preoccupations of

⁵³ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 40.

⁵⁴ Until recently, all major authors from the French Caribbean were based in Paris for a least a portion of their career, and all major works have been and continue to be printed in the French capital – because of this obvious and direct metropolitan influence, any lack of consideration of it by critics would be neglectful. Still, considerations of this issue tend to be brief. Characteristic acknowledgements include Eleni Coundouriotis's questioning of René Maran's reputation as the inventor of the French African novel despite being a Martiniquan resident of France in *Claiming History: Colonialism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 5; Roger Toumson's claim that residence in Paris was essential to Aimé Césaire's rebirth as a poet in Toumson and Simonne Henry-Valmore, *Aimé Césaire: le nègre inconsolé* (Paris: Syros, Vent des îles, 1993), p. 39; and J. Michael. Dash's acknowledgment of the fact that Edouard Glissant was 'isolated from the Caribbean while writing [his first] novel in Paris' in *Edouard Glissant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 68.

⁵⁵ Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 91.

Caribbean author/intellectuals and the preoccupations of the Caribbean's residents. Writing of the same fixation with roots and exile quoted above, Walcott has claimed that 'by all arguments they [the common people] should have felt displaced, seeing this ocean as another Canaan, but that image was the hallucination of professional romantics, writer and politician'.⁵⁶ Although Walcott's comment is not specifically directed at emigrant authors it is a meaningful admission of the significance of the gap between writer and subject in Caribbean letters, one that harmonises with Louis James's claim that, 'to a large extent, West Indian writing has grown out of the pain of "leaving", out of a sense of deprivation. Its sharpness of focus has often been produced by the fact that it is a literature of belonging, seen across a void of oceans'.⁵⁷ Similarly, though she is not speaking directly of emigration, Celia Britton notes in her essay, 'Eating their Words', that the French Caribbean author is appreciated primarily for his ability to be a ventriloquist and showcase that 's/he is in unmediated contact with the authentic living "voices" ' of their people.⁵⁸

Despite recognition of ventriloquism, romanticism and distance, to date no critic has taken the gap in preoccupation between the people and the 'professional romantics' that Walcott has noted, bridged it with James's ideas of the 'pain of 'leaving' ' and arrived at Ngugi's themes. No critic has explored how the transcendence of these themes, across regions, could be direct products of authors' analogous social positions *combined* with their physical locations or considered how World War-era emigration and the gaps between authors and their people can be read in the many symbols of 'alienation' and 'exile' in these authors' texts. No critic has thoroughly engaged with the role these authors played in

⁵⁶ Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says: An Overture', in *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), pp. 3-40 (p. 16). Sarah Brouillette has noted that Walcott has engaged with the separation between the Caribbean author and his Caribbean subjects throughout his career, stating, 'Walcott's conflicted hesitation about his relationship to his material is in many ways his material', in *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 43.

⁵⁷ Louis James, 'For the Time Being: Epilogue or Prologue?', in *The Islands in Between: Essays on West Indian Literature*, ed. by Louis James (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 154-57 (p. 155).

⁵⁸ Celia Britton, 'Eating their Words: The Consumption of French Caribbean Literature' *ASCALF Yearbook: The Annual Publication of the Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French*, 1 (1996), 15-23 (p. 19).

describing and defining the Caribbean in the post-war era or considered how their texts were constrained by their intended audiences and accepted and promoted only insofar as they conformed to their audience's expectations. And no critic has shown how these constraints challenge the prevailing notion that these authors spoke primarily with the voice of their people or shown that, in contrast with Ramchand's claim that texts were influenced by emigration to 'some extent', that the texts birthed after flight were influenced by emigration to a *great extent*.

In actuality most critics have done the opposite; the authors of this time have most frequently been read as if their work transparently reflected the preoccupations and challenges of their kinsmen back 'home'. The main thrust of most considerations of the early Caribbean canon is that these texts serve as evidence of a decisive break with discursive domination, as evidence of the people, finally, speaking solely for themselves. This is easily seen in the comment that 'between 1950 and 1965, over 100 novels were written by West Indian authors. In these novels the calling into question of the colonial situation and the celebration of the nationalist movement are taken even further. In them we can see the growing power and presence of the Caribbean masses'⁵⁹ and also in the claim that the 'question of identity [...] asked by nearly all Caribbean writers' is a product of 'wounds practically every Caribbean person feels in himself'.⁶⁰ In each of these statements we encounter a contradiction of Derek Walcott's statement above; to these critics the voices of the authors are of identical pitch as those of the 'masses', but when context and concerns are taken into account, and texts closely read, it is clear that this cannot be the case.

Exploration of how modern out-migration affected these authors gives insight into the relationship between the emigrant and his home country, the post-colony and the

⁵⁹ Paget Henry, 'Decolonization and Cultural Underdevelopment in the Commonwealth Caribbean', in *The Newer Caribbean: Decolonization, Democracy and Development*, ed. by Paget Henry and Carl Stone (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1983), pp. 95-120 (p. 109)

⁶⁰ Roger Toumson, 'The Question of Identity in Caribbean Literature', *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, 5 (1986), 131-43 (p. 133).

metropolis, the established and the emergent. Though these authors had not been forcefully transplanted to new regions, as their ancestors had been, they were transplants, intentionally re-established in the former sites of colonial rule, occupying similar roles as early colonist 'insider-outsiders'. They challenged some prejudices but also worked as informants; they attempted to fashion new identities but their texts were composed for metropolitan readers. As with the early colonial authors, these emigrants' voices overrode the voices of the majority; their concerns, simply by virtue of having an enormous audience, became the concerns that defined, and still define, critical considerations of the region. But what have been read as representative voices of the Caribbean are in fact the unique voices of a distinct minority: an organic intellectual, exiled elite, whose representations say as much, if not more, about their particular subject-positions as they do about the islands they have left.

Caribbean Emigrant Authors Constrained

To understand the direct impact of emigration on these authors, it is necessary to consider the constraints they faced as new arrivals from far-flung colonies who sought to publish texts about their relatively unknown regions. For this it is useful to adduce the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about the inherent competition and struggle for power within the publishing world to facilitate understanding of the authors' situations. Bourdieu has posited the existence of a wide 'field of cultural production' within which all artists compete for recognition, acceptance and success.⁶¹ Within this field there are those who are 'dominant', or who have achieved prosperity in accordance with the field's criteria and those who are 'dominated', or have gained enough acceptance to participate in the field but have little influence or recognition. The wide field of cultural production is divided into sub-fields

⁶¹ Bourdieu's theory is elaborated in *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. by Matthew Adamson, rev. edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. by Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), and *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

which correspond to each of the arts and, accordingly, it contains a ‘literary field’. This field is a constantly shifting hierarchy driven by conflict and, according to Bourdieu, ‘one of the major issues at stake in the struggles that occur [...] is the definition of the limits of the field, that is, of legitimate participation in the struggles’.⁶² This competition for clout can easily be observed in contemporary critical debates about the legitimacy of the works of fiction by popular authors like Dan Brown and Stephen King – it is a competition through and by which ‘literature’ and ‘art’ are defined. Literary conflict is driven by the desire to establish, maintain and increase status and often involves authors advocating ‘literature’ that is similar to their own, which implicitly affords their writing additional value. The literary field is, in all respects, hierarchical. Bourdieu says the field is both stratified and

involves power – the power to publish or to refuse publication [...] it involves capital – the capital of the established author which can be partly transferred into the account of a young and still unknown author by a highly positive review or a preface; one can observe here, as in other fields, power relations, strategies, interests, etc.⁶³

These power relations are felt most acutely by new authors, the most recent entrants onto the field of battle. Those who seek to become writers usually have no ‘symbolic capital’ and rely on agents, publishing houses and avuncular established talents to invest in their success.⁶⁴

Expanding upon this theory, Pascale Casanova has broadened the concept to consider the levels of symbolic capital attached to various global regions. Her thesis, presented in *The World Republic of Letters*, is that not all literary sites are equal; those established and emerging authors granted the highest literary capital are those authors from sites with more numerous canonical texts and that possess ‘a more or less extensive professional “milieu”’, ‘a restricted and cultivated public [...] an interested aristocracy or enlightened bourgeoisie [...] salons, a specialized press [...] sought-after publishers with

⁶² Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, p. 143.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 141.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

distinguished lists who compete with one another [...] respected judges of talent', and 'celebrated writers wholly devoted to the task of writing'.⁶⁵ To Casanova, a French or American or British author immediately enters the literary field with more power than an author from a less-endowed region: their books will be more widely read and published; academics will take a quicker interest; their ephemera will have an audience; they will have the opportunity to travel to promote their work; and they will be immediately put into contact with established authors who can invest in their talents.

The base concepts of both Casanova and Bourdieu are difficult to dismiss. That the literary world thrives on rivalries and that certain authors, largely, but not exclusively, from economically dominant parts of the world, receive more opportunities and respect is irrefutable. When their concepts are applied to the post-war, decolonising Caribbean context, and the situations of emigrant authors analysed with an eye to these theories, it is easy to see the singular position that early authors occupied. The Caribbean islands did not possess an abundance of any of the things Casanova claims make an area prosperous in the literary field; in fact, they had almost none of them – a few semi-regular journals and groups of aspiring writers serving as the limited 'professional milieu'. Because of this lack, upon arrival, the positions within the various sub-fields of European literature – the French and English in particular – open to these individuals were limited. As newly emergent, organic intellectuals from areas with little literary capital, these authors were constrained to certain spaces within their fields; it was at first impossible for them to have the same options as metropolitan writers.

These limitations seem to have expressed themselves primarily in the content of these authors' works. As we shall see from examples of contemporaneous reviews and criticism, what European readers thirsted for, which is alluded to in Celia Britton's comments about author's requirement to speak with the 'authentic living "voices" of their

⁶⁵ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M. B. DeBevoise (London: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 15.

people', were stories about Caribbean life on the ground. Speaking of the emergence of new European literatures in the nineteenth century, Casanova says that authors were able to establish a degree of autonomy from more established literatures by becoming 'political avatars of the notion of the "people"', or by presenting themselves as official representatives of the groups of which they were members.⁶⁶ By taking this option, authors assumed one of the few roles open to them as possessors of restricted literary capital: the role of 'authentic' author/intellectual.⁶⁷ This position was the one in which authors were likely to gain the greatest recognition; it was a space in the field that had the potential to generate the most substantial literary capital; it was a position-taking that lent these writers legitimacy and created an entry-level sub-section within the global literary field predicated on their relationship to their people. This strategy/constraint is the exact one adopted by Caribbean emigrant authors, a connection noted by Casanova herself in her discussion of post-war postcolonial writing.⁶⁸ For these Caribbean authors, access to the field of literature in their adopted countries – particularly in the inter- and post-war period before 'black' or 'Commonwealth' or 'postcolonial' writing had established their own semi-autonomous spaces within global letters – depended on their ability to play the role of 'spokespeople' for the masses. The legitimacy of these first-generation emigrant writers, and their chances of recognition and publication absolutely depended upon the extent to which they could be seen to represent the concerns of their people and could be viewed as 'one of' the many from the Caribbean – or truly organic products of an emergent group. But, crucially, for their utterances to be favoured over those of their contemporaries still residing in the Caribbean, these authors also had to show that their words were *more valuable* than those of their countrymen. The role they had to adopt was that of 'one of the people/close to the people'

⁶⁶ Casanova, p. 80.

⁶⁷ Interestingly, A. Sivanandan explains the nature of this forced position in detail in his essay 'The Liberation of the Black Intellectual', despite his overall argument asserting that a true 'black', self-actualised, intellectual speaks not only with the voice of his people but with that of all the world's oppressed. See *A Different Hunger* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), pp. 82-98, particularly p. 85.

⁶⁸ Casanova, p. 80.

yet somehow still ‘above the people/better than the people’, and for that reason their space, at first, was dependent on proving both their similarity *and* their difference – ultimately their right to represent. If the people could speak for themselves, if the intellectuals on the islands were afforded similar status, these exiles’ words would have no value. This claim may, at first, seem to be overstating a case, but, as will be seen, it is an assertion supported by the authors’ own words.

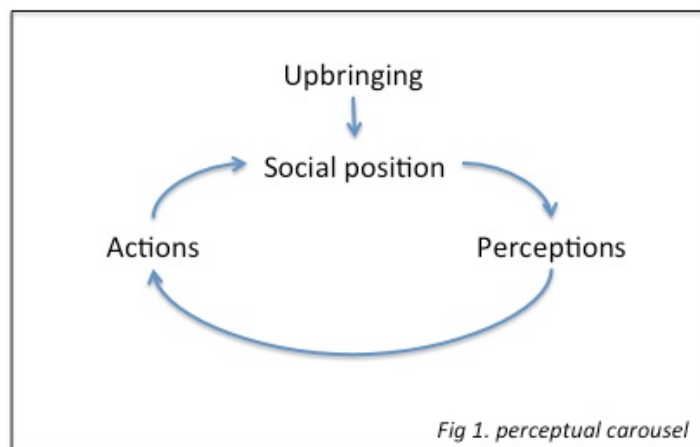
This constraint – the need to show allegiance and understanding of a group to which the authors could not claim full membership – leads to the second constraint these authors faced, one which undermines the overt advocacy of their work. In Bourdieu’s theory, actors in the literary field have their positions determined by what he calls their ‘habitus’. Bourdieu defines this as ‘embodied history’ that is ‘internalised’ and shared to an extent by members of a social class; habitus is a ‘structuring structure’, the sum total of all of an individual’s experiences ‘embodied’, or evident in their thoughts and actions.⁶⁹ It is the prism of background through which the external world is filtered and which determines both the way the world appears and individuals’ responses to it. In other words, ‘habitus’ is the mental structure, produced by our upbringing, that regulates our engagement with the world at every level, from our movements to our thoughts.

While the term ‘habitus’ is unique in this usage to Bourdieu, the idea of a ‘structuring’ mental structure that shapes our perceptions as well as our representations of the world, which is itself determined by our origins, is not new. Many theorists in the materialist tradition have posited a relationship between background, perception and, necessarily, representation. Most notably, Louis Althusser stated that ideologies, or shared perceptual structures produced by individual and collective histories, ‘always express *class positions*’; Raymond Williams described historical groups as being united by ‘structures of feeling’, shared perceptions which are evident ‘in the most delicate and least tangible parts

⁶⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 53, 60.

of our activity', such as art; and the sociologist Lucien Goldmann argued that certain social groups present a structured replication of their philosophies in their creative output.⁷⁰ While some of these concepts have been criticised for their static or overly determinative depiction of human thought and feeling,⁷¹ the idea that our origins affect what we think and what we do – 'what we do' including our representations of our self and others – is widespread throughout the fields of literary theory, psychology and sociology.

The shared elements of these concepts create a model of thought and action that is something like the carousel depicted below: our origins shape our place in the world, which in turn reflects itself in our perceptions, which influence our actions, which have an impact on our place in the world, and so on.



By extension, any perception is partly selected by our desires and partly pre-selected by our history. It follows that, because of this, individuals have a fixed number of options, both conceptual and otherwise, available to them at any given time. These options will be based on their background, class, and the multiple factors that create their current situation, and the effect these have had, or are having, on their outlook on the world. Drawing all of that

⁷⁰ See, respectively, Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology*, [n. trans.] (London: Verso, 1984), p. 33; Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 48; Lucien Goldmann, *Cultural Creation in Modern Society*, trans. by Bart Grahl (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), pp. 76-77.

⁷¹ Goldmann and Althusser's theories in particular have been subject to many critiques, not least that of Frederic Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 38, 44. Where he notes Althusser's privileging of philosophy in his model and criticises Goldmann's 'simplistic and mechanical' theory.

together, we arrive at the second, powerful constraint placed on emigrant authors: the constraint of their own perception. This constraint was a product of biography and location – all the factors that led to each individual becoming an author situated abroad. Although the circumstances surrounding migration varied from person to person, there were many similarities, particularly between authors from the same region. These similarities both prefaced and followed on from their emigration and brought these organic intellectuals to an analogous perceptual space that served as a constraint on their representations. For ease and consistency I will refer to this ‘space’ as their ‘conceptual locus’, a figurative site in time and mind from which these authors saw their world.

To get a clear sense of the nature of this conceptual locus, and its effects on literary production, it is important to detail the likely impact of the experience of emigration on these authors’ ways of seeing. As ex-colonial emigrants, these authors were a dominated, comparatively disempowered fraction of European society. The experience of emigration is not easy for anyone and, just as the first inhabitants of the Caribbean experienced ‘shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosive forces’ that resulted in their current composition, so too were modern self-exiled emigrants subject to a similar form of destabilisation. For this group, movement was from a place where their function in society was not questioned, to a place where their position and legitimacy was nascent and challenged. Much space has been dedicated above to asserting that the Caribbean as a whole suffered from instability and frequent change due to the displacement of its people from the earliest European contact, but it is essential to understand that the lack of collective island identities at this time would have made the experience of emigrating to partially closed European cities even more difficult, specifically because, upon appearance, emigrants are usually expected to furnish a narrative. Common questions like, ‘Where were you born?’ and ‘What is it like there?’ require individuals to present a story of origins that either challenges or creates conceptions of their ethnic groups or home countries. In a sense, a new emigrant must fashion an identity not solely for him or herself but for his or her people as

well, often in the face of already existing and/or incorrect ideas. Landing in post-war Europe, all Caribbean emigrants faced a variety of challenges, one of the largest being a glaring lack of understanding of islands' specificity or cultural compositions. This forced defence and explanation accompanied and incited what Sudha Rai has described as emigrants' common need 'to question assess, criticize, judge and ultimately decide how [they] will live life — a process of *redefinition* of the individual in relation to a known world [...] a process of discarding'.⁷² As in our carousel model, actions affect perceptions; in this case, the action of emigration into an unstable social position leads to Rai's perceptual 'discarding'. Immigration is, necessarily, a sharp alteration of social standing and a decisive addition to history. It is important to stress that, while these writers were born, grew up and were educated in the Caribbean, and that '[t]o immigrate means to immigrate together with one's history [...] traditions, ways of living, feeling, acting and thinking, with one's language, one's religion and all the other social, political and mental structures of one's society', 'immigration itself [is] an integral part of that history' – an action that necessarily sends our carousel spinning and leads to new conceptions.⁷³ It is worth noting that this re-conceptualisation process is as much active as reactive; it is both a natural mental reflex for transplanted peoples and a product of the responses of the residents of their new locale. For Caribbean emigrants, the lack of established collective identity and the need to create a narrative would require reconsideration of their self-conceptions and their relationships with their islands.

For middle-class *writers* these reconsiderations were necessarily public and influential. As alluded to in the discussion of Pascale Casanova's theory, the nature of decolonisation created a space in the 'field' of literature for colonial exiles – a space generated by rising metropolitan interest in the Caribbean and other formerly colonised

⁷² Sudha Rai, *Homeless by Choice: Naipaul, Jhabvala, Rushdie, and India* (Jaipur: Printwell, 1992), p. 4.

⁷³ Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, trans. by David Macey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 3.

zones during the era after World War Two. A hungry audience created opportunities to publish literature that would reveal 'truths' about the Caribbean and made a way for authors to break into literature and gain recognition and real success. Within their texts authors necessarily had to address questions of Caribbean identity; and could not but provide answers that betrayed their own, changing conceptions of self and society and their own positions in society regardless of their ostensible focus. It should be clear that Caribbean authors sat somewhere between Europe and the Caribbean – they were not in full possession of peasant traditions they abandoned through their education nor did they truly know European metropolitan ritual despite their schooling. They were dominant members (middle-class) of a dominated (Caribbean-emigrant) group in Europe and dominated members (artists) of a dominant group (middle-class) in the Caribbean. In Europe, within the field of literature, they were, as new emigrant entrants, in a dominated position, essentially on the lowest rung of a dominated group (producers of culture) within the dominant group (producers of capital). In essence, they shifted positions from site to site, but remained always on the margins of any two groups. Bourdieu has noted that 'the cultural producers [including authors], who occupy the economically dominated and symbolically dominant position within the field of cultural production, tend to feel solidarity with the occupants of the economically and culturally dominated positions within the field of class position'.⁷⁴ Put simply, artists, by virtue of their subordinated position in the dominant group, feel a kinship for those below them because they understand being in a subordinate position. If we expand this to the Caribbean authors we encounter a group with sympathy for the dominated – as they are dominated by Europeans, established artists and producers of capital – and the dominant – as they are dominant in the group of emigrants in Europe.

All of this would have combined to create a unique conceptual locus, one that is betrayed in all writing from this group in this era. These authors had a kinship with the people they emigrated with, but as members of the Caribbean's middle-class they had an

⁷⁴ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 44.

ambivalent relationship with their working class compatriots; as authors in Europe their utterances were afforded more importance than the masses at 'home' but as colonials their utterances were of interest only so long as they could be read as representative of those at 'home'. In practice, this resulted in work that betrays a range of sympathies, as well as prejudices; work that is marked by recurrent confusion and striking ambivalence about identity; work that houses frequent, likely unintended, exaltations of the detached, separated intellectual over the peasant masses. Emigration was both constraining for these authors and liberating. Many from the anglophone Caribbean fled because production costs and low literacy rates meant they simply could not survive by writing if they remained in their region, what small literary success they could build at home could never match the fame and respect possible in the metropolis.⁷⁵ Francophone authors, on the other hand, largely left to pursue their education abroad, the lack of higher education institutions in the Antilles making moves to the metropole necessary for the ambitious. Flight was a voyage to areas where emigrants' opportunities for expression were both expanded and limited, their identities both questioned and accepted; they were thrust into inherently complicated positions.

Though it is easy to show that these authors' social positions were complicated, it is more difficult to evidence, and perhaps also to accept, that these distinct positions had a palpable or unique effect on their texts. This difficulty only increases when the fact that many other postcolonial intellectuals have quite clearly played similar roles as translators for and interlocutors with the dominant class. It is quite a common function, observed by many, and neatly summarised by Edward Said and Frantz Fanon. Speaking of representations of the East and West, Edward Said commented that 'within each civilizational camp [...] there are official representatives of that culture or civilization who make themselves into its mouthpiece, who assign themselves the role of articulating "our" (or for that matter "their") essence. This always necessitates a fair amount of compression, reduction, and exaggeration

⁷⁵ See Ramchand, pp. 12-13; Hennessey, 'Intellectuals', p. 8.

[on their part]’.⁷⁶ In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon famously detailed what he saw as ‘native intellectuals’ progression through three distinct phases: 1) cultural assimilation/mimicry of the dominant class, 2) a return to roots in their writing, complicated by the fact that the intellectual ‘is not a part of his people’ and can only reproduce ‘past happenings of the bygone days of his childhood’ and, 3) dedication to the people’s enlightenment where the intellectual ‘turns himself into an awakener of the people’ and produces ‘a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature’.⁷⁷ Taken with Gramsci’s theory, Said and Fanon’s comments shadow much of what was argued above, that is, that organic intellectuals act as spokespeople for those they are somewhat separated from, and that their utterances do not represent ‘reality’ but their interpretation of it. It would be hard to argue that the work of postcolonial author/intellectuals from regions outside of the Caribbean do not conform to Fanon’s phases of development or to Said’s ‘compression, reduction, and exaggeration’ of reality; but it would be equally hard to argue that context and social position do not affect the types of ‘compression, reduction, and exaggeration’ that can be unearthed in writing and that the intellectual’s position – ‘not a part of his people’ – is not even more complicated if he speaks for his people despite vast gaps in location and acculturation.

Texts and Contexts

Outside of theories of literary fields, or conceptual loci, many cultural critics have noted that location and historical moment have a great bearing on the composition of texts. Writing about portrayals of history, Benita Parry has stated:

⁷⁶ Edward W. Said, ‘The Clash of Definitions’, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2001) pp. 569-90 (p. 577).

⁷⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp. 178-79.

It is obvious that reminiscence is never a transparent rendering of the past but an experience after the fact and one which is necessarily permeated by desire and accented with judgement, and can be the occasion for confession, self-justification, concealment or catharsis [...] because both memory and historical texts are partial chronicles of the past [...] we need to distinguish who is doing the recollecting, and in what interest.⁷⁸

As with chronicles of history, so too with creative writing: no rendering is 'transparent'; all representations are 'distillations, or simplifications, or a set of choices made by an author that are far less messy and mixed up than the reality'.⁷⁹ All writing is influenced by the opinions of the author; the moment in history he inhabits; his response to his circumstances; and, with much published writing, the commercial concerns of his agents and editors. In the contemplation of the world they are to portray, all writers make additions and subtractions based on these things. In this self-editing, 'confession, self-justification, concealment [and] catharsis' find their way into literature, 'distil[ling]' reality, and revealing much about the who, what, where, why and when of a text's composition. In short, the social and conceptual positions of all authors are evident everywhere in their texts.

For Caribbean emigrants we find explicit descriptions of the disjunction between intellectuals and others, as well as many language and general concessions made for a foreign audience, along with other complications. In simply writing speech or third-person narrative, Caribbean authors evidence connections to the dominated or the dominant. Language is inextricably linked to group identity, and language in the Caribbean is inextricably linked to class.⁸⁰ On the anglophone islands Standard English is 'associated with the higher echelons of Caribbean society and is native only to a very small elite [...]

⁷⁸ Benita Parry, 'Reconciliation and Remembrance', in *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 179-93 (p. 180).

⁷⁹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 80.

⁸⁰ On the importance of language to group identity, see George De Vos, 'Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation', in *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict, Accommodation* ed. by Lola Romanucci-Ross and George DeVos, 3rd edn (London: AltaMira Press, 1995), pp. 15-47 (p. 23).

command of SE is an index of educational achievement and social status'.⁸¹ On the Francophone islands, proper use of French has been and still is seen as a necessity for social promotion.⁸² Authors are challenged by how and to what extent they use Creole or patois, what dialect expresses about their protagonists and their islands, and ultimately what their own voice, be it in omniscient narration or in essay writing, or verse, represents about themselves and their origins – their responses to these challenges are inextricably linked to their positions.

In addition to language concessions, all of these authors make other concessions and adaptations for their audiences that often simultaneously showcase their split identification and multiply marginal positions. In order to have any success, these texts had to be written in such a way that a foreign audience could read, understand and appreciate them, which often included simplifying dialect, adding exposition and using a metropolitan frame of reference. The latter two methods were evident in the introduction to the Trinidadian V. S. Naipaul's first published novel, *The Mystic Masseur*:

All characters, organizations, and incidents in this novel are fictitious. This is a necessary assurance because, although its politicians have taken to calling it a country, Trinidad is a small island, no bigger than Lancashire, with a population somewhat smaller than Nottingham's. In this novel the geography of the island is distorted. Dates are, unavoidably, mentioned; but no actual holder of any office is portrayed. The strike mentioned in Chapter Twelve has no basis in actual fact.⁸³

⁸¹ Donald Winford, 'Sociolinguistic Approaches to Language Use in the Anglophone Caribbean', in *Language and the Social Construction of Identity in Creole Situations*, ed. by Marcyliena Morgan (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, 1994), pp. 43-62 (p. 44).

⁸² See Gertrud Aub-Buscher, 'Linguistic Paradoxes: French and Creole in the West Indian DOM at the Turn of the Century', in *The Francophone Caribbean Today: Literature, Language, Culture*, ed. by Gertrud Aub-Buscher and Beverley Ormerod Noakes (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2003), pp. 1-15; Richard D. E. Burton, 'Between the Particular and the Universal: Dilemmas of the Martiniquan Intellectual', in *Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century Caribbean, Volume II, Unity in Variety: The Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean*, ed. by Alistair Hennessy (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 186-210 (p. 195).

⁸³ V. S. Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur and Miguel Street* (London: Picador, 2002), p. i.

Clearly if this novel was written to be consumed by a Trinidadians, it would be unnecessary to compare the size and population of Trinidad to anywhere in Britain, or to assert that ‘the strike mentioned in Chapter Twelve has no basis in actual fact’. Further, Naipaul shows where his loyalty lies and manipulates the unfamiliarity of his audience with the locale to ridicule Trinidad, in this case its aspirations to self-determination, by jeering the ‘politicians [who] have taken to calling it a country’. Though the novel is filled with more than simple derision, this brief introduction sets the author against the people and is written in such a way that it promises metropolitan readers, in 1957, much amusement in this tale of an island, no larger than Lancashire, populated by fewer people than Nottingham, whose inhabitants believed that it could possibly be considered a country, and so on.

Audience always affects texts. In the case of the emigrant, who writes for a public that is ignorant of the place they portray, this allows them untold freedom to shape responses while simultaneously shackling them, forcing them to make allowances and alter their work to increase its accessibility or face accusations of obscurity. Lamenting this fact, contemplating the importance of his readership, and succinctly laying out an aspect of the complicated position of the Caribbean emigrant writer, Naipaul claimed that ‘the Americans do not want me because I am too British. The public here do not want me because I am too foreign [...but] I live in England and depend on an English audience’.⁸⁴ Every text is composed by a specific person in specific place, at a specific time, for a specific group of people, all of these factors influence content, all are evident within content, and all of these factors make the work of Caribbean emigrants, like Naipaul, located at the margins of multiple groups, unique. Tropes of alienation, the masses’ stasis versus the dynamism of intellectuals and the need and struggle to refashion a self despite the instability of history, ride alongside and underneath storylines that attempt to establish a connection with

⁸⁴ V. S. Naipaul, ‘London’, in *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 9-17 (p. 9).

abandoned regions through the use of dialect, local signifiers, anecdote, autobiography and explicit calls to the people to take arms against their oppressors throughout this literature.

Departure

Alistair Hennessey has written that, in the anglophone Caribbean, ‘the diaspora is now a fact of life and any consideration of West Indian intellectuals needs to examine the interplay and interaction between homeland and diaspora’.⁸⁵ Despite this call to action, no sustained work has been done to date to explore the effects of emigration on the writers of the Caribbean. Although a return to the centre is one of colonialism’s legacies, and emigration is central to the Caribbean’s history, there has been little more than passing comment and brief essays on emigration and Caribbean literature, either from postcolonial critics or from those critics focused primarily on Caribbean letters. Emerging from a distinct and misunderstood space, which lacked its own recognised history, and subject to the full brunt of the colonial project, yet structurally dominant and educated to revere the metropolis, Caribbean emigrant authors are prime examples of individuals stuck between abandoned and adopted cultures, and their choices to align with one or the other, and their betrayals of their confused location, evidence the demands to create a new ‘self’ placed on all emigrants. These issues are represented beneath the surface of their texts, and this thesis will attempt a few tentative scratches at excavation.

For this study, focus has been limited to the first works of those authors who shaped the perception of Caribbean writing, the putative World War-era first wave who landed in the time period before mass media and widely disseminated exploitation of their region in travel brochures; those authors who came to Europe when the continent was in an unsettled position between and after two World Wars, who found a place in European letters based on

⁸⁵ Hennessey, ‘Intellectuals’, p. 9.

their ability to fulfil a desire for knowledge of the colonies and directly influenced perceptions of their countrymen. Because positions within a field of literature are based upon conflict and external material conditions, a field is never static. As Bourdieu states, ‘a position-taking changes, even when the position remains identical, whenever there is a change in the universe of options that are simultaneously offered for producers and consumers to choose from’.⁸⁶ Change in the relationship between the colonies and their former owners necessitated changes in the positions and roles open to authors. Though an organic-intellectual emigrant locus is evident in the texts of second-wave writers, who began writing, or were first recognised, in the 1960s, and in later texts of the first wave, it is one that has been altered by changed relationships between Caribbean emigrants, metropolitan residents, and intellectuals from both groups.⁸⁷ Though other studies on later writers who immigrated to other, non-European locales, should be undertaken, this study, as a first engagement, seeks to show a method of approach and present evidence for the preeminent names of the first wave that can then be adapted, adopted, challenged and expanded upon for alternative considerations.

In order to establish context and its effects on this first wave, the remainder of this thesis is divided into two large sections, each focused on the two major language traditions of Caribbean emigrant letters: English and French. In part one we begin with a consideration of three of the first Caribbean authors from the anglophone regions to begin publishing abroad: George Lamming, V. S. Naipaul and Samuel Selvon. This chapter surveys the decolonising era in the English-speaking Caribbean and the various factors that prompted the flight of the writing-class. As we shall see, George Lamming, a self-proclaimed Caribbean peasant, challenges his own self-identity through the structures and tropes of his first work published abroad, *In the Castle of my Skin*; the oft-derided V. S. Naipaul’s contempt for his

⁸⁶ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 30.

⁸⁷ It is worth noting that Raymond Williams, when describing his concept of ‘structures of feeling’ notes the natural shifts and ‘continuities’ in different generations’ responses to their environment and hence their imaginative output. See Williams, p. 49.

colonial origins is undermined by identification with some, but not all, of the people in his earliest completed work, *Miguel Street*; and Samuel Selvon's 'Tiger', intended to represent an aspiring Trinidadian peasant, is an obvious construct who maps the juncture between the exiled intellectual and the island resident in *A Brighter Sun*.

In part two we explore the francophone context and differentiate the relationship of the French islands with mainland France from that of the English-speaking islands with the United Kingdom. This section charts the causes of migration to the metropolis for French authors and focuses on the work of Aimé Césaire and Edouard Glissant. In it I present the argument that Aimé Césaire's 1939 first draft of his famous *Notebook of a Return to Native Land* (*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*) clearly figures the emigrant as the source of liberating energy for the islands' masses; while Edouard Glissant's *The Ripening* (*La Lézarde*), although closely aligned with ideas of the people's need to break free from French rule, actually presents the people as incapable of motivating or representing themselves without the assistance of intellectuals, specifically emigrants.

The final chapter connects the work of all the authors considered by drawing links between islands, individuals, circumstances and thematic and technical fixations. It also engages with those authors neglected by this study – the Caribbean emigrants of the second, and later, generations.

Part I: Emigration and the Anglophone Caribbean

Chapter 1:

Of the People, Above the People: Anglophone Caribbean Intellectuals

Even a brief consideration of the list of Caribbean authors who published fiction and gained an audience and acceptance abroad in the period surrounding both World Wars, easily reveals that the majority were emigrants from the British-owned, English-speaking regions of the archipelago. Britain controlled the largest number of Caribbean territories since the 1814 treaties of Paris and London added Tobago, St Lucia and what would become British Guiana to the empire's regional holdings.¹ Naturally, a greater number of colonies meant a greater number of English-speakers in the region, a greater number of potential emigrants, and a greater number of potential emigrant-intellectuals. These potentials were primarily fulfilled after World War II. Wartime losses prompted the Crown to actively solicit labourers from their depressed yet populous Caribbean colonies to bolster the British workforce. This solicitation was coupled with a loosening of strictures on immigration through the 1948 Nationality Act, which enticed vast numbers of people from the anglophone Caribbean, from all levels of society, with the offer of UK citizenship. Lured by increased opportunities and unrestricted residency rights, many left their home-islands for an at first accepting, then quickly hostile, mother country. Along with the general masses of immigrants came many aspiring writers who sought publication and higher earnings abroad. Of those who travelled to Britain in search of literary fame, only some would go on to publish; of those published, only a fraction of those would gain and retain any real success. Despite the culling of aspirants in each stage of the publication-to-recognition process, from 1950 to 1964, over eighty novels by anglophone Caribbean authors appeared in London – far, far more than

¹ H.V. Wiseman, *A Short History of the British West Indies* (London: University of London Press, 1950), p. 54.

those published in the Caribbean itself.² From these eighty-five publications, only about a dozen recognised and respected talents emerged and only a handful of those have received sustained attention to the present day.

Anglophone Caribbean authors essentially came to Britain in two waves, each corresponding to a phase of general immigration. The first wave consisted of individuals who arrived with the scores of their countrymen in the wake of the aforementioned Nationality Act. These writers gained recognition and respect as individuals and as a collective during the early-to-mid-1950s and their ranks include V. S. Naipaul, Edgar Mittelholzer, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Roger Mais and John Hearne. The second wave consisted of those who arrived in a final surge of West Indian immigration from the mid-to-late-1950s to the mid-1960s when a series of legislation, beginning with the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, placed severe restrictions on colonial immigration. This second wave gained fame in the 1960s and includes Orlando Patterson, Michael Anthony and Wilson Harris. Where the first group is notable for bringing writing from their region and – to a large extent – the Caribbean itself into the metropolitan frame, the second group is notable for innovating the way tales about the Caribbean could be told. The early-fifties arrivals are unique in the fact that they spoke, initially, as pioneering representatives of the residents of the West Indies. Their books were read as the ‘truth’ of the West Indian situation, and they capitalised on the hunger of the metropolitan reading public to know more about the new immigrants from far-flung colonies. The second wave, increasingly entering into an established immigrant group, for which positive feelings had curdled, did not have the benefit of metropolitan ignorance and contributed to a growing canon of Caribbean fiction. Though much of the work of the second wave is as important, if not, in some cases, more important than the work of their predecessors, their writing can easily be seen as a series of responses to and recalibrations of the work that had preceded it, all

² For a list of all the novels published in this span, see Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 53.

affected by the changed relationship of the West Indian emigrant to the British resident. Owing to this, the work of the first wave is more fruitful for an inquiry into how emigrant Caribbean intellectuals fulfilled Gramsci's organic, representative function as described in the introduction.

While many writers fulfil the chronological and situational requirements to be placed within this first wave of emigrant authors, only the Trinidadians V. S. Naipaul and Samuel Selvon, and the Barbadian George Lamming can be said to have completely occupied the role of 'spokesmen', because of their prestige, through and beyond the time of their writing. Though the specific positioning of these authors within a field of literature has altered as historical situations and the composition and expectations of their readers have changed, they are still frequently read as the mouthpieces of Caribbean consciousness and concerns. This is likely because the work of Lamming, Naipaul and Selvon has been often approached through the authors' own claims about themselves. As a result the complex, complicated relationship they had with their subjects, because of their own status as emigrant-intellectuals, is often elided and their market- and conceptually-constrained assessments of their relationships privileged in analyses of their work. But when their work is read against the history of anglophone Caribbean development up to the era of mass emigration to Europe, when their work is read as a product of the unique conceptual locus of the Caribbean emigrant-intellectual in post-war Britain, an ambivalence spawned by their situation is easily revealed.

The Early Anglophone Caribbean

The history of the anglophone Caribbean up to the late-1950s can be read as a series of three movements: the movement inward of the non-indigenous populations, the movement upward of the formerly dominated to positions of near-dominance, and the movement outward of masses of emigrants. Though British powers intended this region to form a crop of settler

colonies on a par with those later created in the United States, Australia and Canada, the idea was quickly abandoned. Rampant, fatal disease and the dominant sugarcane industry's requirement for large estates greeted the first arrivals from Britain and quickly discouraged immigrants who could not afford vast tracts of land, or endure local ailments, from establishing themselves in the new colonies.³ Due to the dominance of plantations and the undesirability of the region for long-term settlement, the English-speaking colonies, like their French and Dutch counterparts, became tropical factories for the production and distribution of goods.⁴

Indeed, any sense of creating societies connected by communal bonds seems to have been absent altogether from the minds of British powers. African slaves were brought in to work, or to be funnelled to other locations within the Empire; landlords owned the ground but were absent, often Europe-based, their lands cultivated by hired overseers; communal bonds of any kind were either actively discouraged or seemingly not thought of at all. The islands existed to produce goods and were essentially 'staffed' and 'managed' as a assembly line might be: when vacancies appeared, they were filled; when things broke down, they were hastily fixed: any feeling of community was unnecessary to their desired function, production. Even inter-island exchange and contact did not take place; as noted by H. V. Wiseman, the purpose of the colonies, initially, was to trade with England, solely, and they were therefore linked only to the metropole and not to each other at all.⁵

This glaring failure to actively bind the whole British-Caribbean community is clear in the societies' structures and in the policies they implemented to respond to social change. All islands had an upper-class of white property holders, a lower-class of black servants and

³ Wiseman, pp. 88-89.

⁴ We will consider the differences between the anglophone and francophone Caribbean in the next section. For more information on the Dutch colonies of the region, see Gert Oostindie, *Paradise Overseas: The Dutch Caribbean, Colonialism and its Transatlantic Legacies* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2005) for a recent study which includes contemporary effects of historic colonial practices. For a comprehensive history of the colonial era, see Cornelius Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and the Guianas: 1680-1791* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985) and *Ibid., The Dutch in the Caribbean and in Surinam: 1791/5 – 1942* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990).

⁵ Wiseman, p. 117.

a middle class of coloured gentry that operated as almost wholly distinct, only somewhat-intersecting units. Many white residents of the islands resisted being identified as ‘West Indians’, their imagined bonds, identities and frames of reference being, to them, European, despite negative opinions of them in Britain.⁶ Between disempowered slaves and their white owners were the mixed-race, ‘coloured’ offspring of, usually brief, interracial unions. Sometimes manumitted, sometimes granted preferential treatment as slaves, the coloured class lived at the intersection between the powerful and the disempowered. Where the ‘white elite’ were in firm hold of ‘commercial, political and educational opportunities’, free members of the coloured class had access to some, but not all of these things.⁷ Winston James recalls Edward Long’s term ‘the pride of amended blood’ to describe this phenomenon. This pride was one that placed free coloureds in an improved position on a spectrum of racial purity and one that self-justified increased rights, including the right to own slaves.⁸ This early social separation created a legacy that can be seen through the anglophone region’s history – from pre- to post-emancipation and even to the present day. Despite the division between whites, coloureds and blacks initially corresponding to a divide between rural-based labour and urban-based professionals and owners – division continued even after the movement of the black masses from plantations into cities after emancipation. In fact, the end of slavery did little to create unity; in many regions all that occurred was further social fragmentation due to the import of more groups to be slotted into the white-coloured-black hierarchy.

Nonetheless, emancipation was the first major social change in British Caribbean history, its mismanagement creating social upheavals whose repercussions would affect the area for well over a century. Abolition was a grand disruption to the islands’ existing

⁶ Rhonda Cobham, ‘The Background’, in *West Indian Literature*, ed. by Bruce King, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 11-26 (p. 12); Wiseman, p. 90.

⁷ Cobham, p. 16.

⁸ Winston James, ‘Migration, Racism and Identity Formation: The Caribbean Experience in Britain’, in *Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain*, ed. by Winston James and Clive Harris (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 231-87 (p. 236)

structure, one that was not at all welcomed by the colonial ruling-class. The desire to free African slaves was primarily a metropolitan-driven programme that created conflict between white island residents and those in Britain who forced through the legislation.⁹ Because of the serious threat to profits that paid plantation labour represented, colonials argued with the Crown that some compromise had to be reached to protect their investments. Eventually it was agreed that slavery would be phased out slowly, through an ‘apprenticeship’ system that would keep slaves labouring on plantations for six years. By some accounts, apprenticeship ‘was even worse than slavery, in that slave-owners sought to maximise the output from their slaves whom they were going to lose shortly’; the system inspired owners to even greater disregard for those Africans with whom they felt no bonds.¹⁰ Apprenticeship was doomed to failure; in the end it lasted only four years, from 1834 to 1838. Once the experiment was definitively abandoned, many slaves defected from plantations, refusing the small wages offered by owners, their awareness of the real worth of their labour linked to knowledge of their old purchase prices.¹¹ Manumission was a painful economic blow to the islands, its impact illustrated by a sharp decline in the output of sugar on most islands from 1838-39.¹² This massive social upheaval elicited a hasty response that prompted further social fragmentation. Rather than raising wages, or otherwise enticing back the lost labourers, experiments with alternative cheap labour sources were undertaken. Waves of Chinese and Portuguese were brought into the English islands in the region but neither of these two groups proved an effective replacement workforce. The Portuguese were not used to cultivating cane and did so poorly; the Chinese were recruited from the merchant class and

⁹ Wiseman, p. 114.

¹⁰ David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo, ‘Introduction’, in *Across the Dark Waters: Ethnicity and Indian Identity in the Caribbean*, ed. by David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 1-11 (p. 1)

¹¹ Malcolm Cross, ‘East Indian - Creole Relations in Trinidad and Guiana in the Late Nineteenth Century’, in *Across the Dark Waters*, ed. By David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo, pp. 14-38 (p. 16).

¹² Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1949) 1 (1949), pp. 193-203.

many drifted back to that profession to become Caribbean shop owners.¹³ Again lands were left to be tended at increased expense, and again, rather than suffering from lowered profits, landowners acted to import more people. Due to rumours about the ‘tractable nature of Indian labourers’ and their success as imports to the island of Mauritius, Indians were shipped into the region as indentured servants from 1838.¹⁴ As of 1917, when indenture ended, 551,000 Indians had been transplanted, the vast majority placed in British Guiana and Trinidad.¹⁵

The Second Movement: Upward

As of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the existent social schisms between the black, white and coloured were only supplemented by further schisms between the new immigrant groups and those already resident – all relations worsened by poor living conditions and a widespread lack of education. Blacks and Indians competed for agricultural jobs from the arrival of the first indentured labourers and planters encouraged negative feelings between the two groups.¹⁶ The standard of living for labourers was low, ‘mortality rates were high [...and] relatively mild ailments, like measles and whooping cough’ had a disproportionately damaging effect on the people.¹⁷ In addition, an 1891 census showed that, 268 years after the establishment of Britain’s first Caribbean colony, half of the population of the British Caribbean over the age of five could not read or write.¹⁸ In response to all of this, the colonial administration would go on to create scholarships to fund post-primary education. Though not all would be eligible for these bursaries, their recipients, distinguished by academic excellence, went on to form a burgeoning black and Indian

¹³ Dabydeen and Samaroo, p. 2.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 3.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁶ Cross, p. 19

¹⁷ Wiseman, p. 94.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

middle-class in the early twentieth century.¹⁹ Paradoxically, due to their education, this middle group would, rather than create bridges between conflicting social fractions, form a new social fraction themselves by breaking away from the masses and falling into a similar in-between space as that occupied by the coloured middle-class. This new position was as much product of their education as a replication of the long-established social structures that separated the city from the country, the rural from the urban, the literate from the illiterate.

Throughout the Anglophone Caribbean, this emergent educated class was ‘generally speaking, excluded from the white elite [...] They were not a part of the ruling class, but their literacy and their intellectual skills, which they valued highly, clearly marked them off from the black and East Indian masses.’²⁰ The winners of scholarships, the first literate and educated members of the underclass, lived at the borders of the dominant and the dominated, with one foot gilded by education placed firmly in the dominant class and a foot bruised by social origin in the historically subordinate class. Their social status was that of the lowest rung of the upper echelon of society, and progression upwards was barred. Despite the educated group’s in-between placement, ascension into it was much desired. Bruce King has written that, on the anglophone islands, ‘there were few opportunities in such areas as business, technology and science’, and ‘mastery of the English language and European culture’, through education and its grant of access to some of the professions were necessary ‘means towards advancement’ in society.²¹ Rhonda Cobham has echoed this, stating that for black children, the ‘best option had always been to win an ‘exhibition’ or government scholarship to one of the few good secondary schools, and from there to move into a white-collar job in the civil service or the teaching profession.’²²

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 94-95.

²⁰ Bridget Brereton, ‘The Development of an Identity: The Black Middle Class of Trinidad in the Later Nineteenth Century’, in *Caribbean Freedom: Society and Economy from Emancipation to the Present*, ed. by Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (London: James Currey Publishers, 1993), pp. 274-83 (p. 274). Although Brereton refers only to Trinidad here, based on other evidence, which we will consider, it seems these comments are applicable to the entire region.

²¹ Bruce King, ‘Introduction’, in *West Indian Literature*, ed. by Bruce King, pp. 1-9 (pp.1-2).

²² Cobham, p. 16.

Education in the early-twentieth century West Indies – as it still does there and elsewhere in the world – initiated a type of internal emigration – from the working class to the educated class and the professions. Without a scholarship this apotheosis was impossible; attending post-primary school without financial assistance was a privilege reserved for the upper classes.²³ For this reason, scores of children undertook the gruelling ritual of preparation for exhibition examinations, a process Reinhard Sander has described as surmounting ‘a formidable collection of hurdles, financial and otherwise, [that] ensured that only the fittest survived’.²⁴ This Darwinian competition ensured that ‘those who made it to secondary school under these conditions were usually more gifted than the average child from a privileged background whose parents could afford to pay fees’.²⁵ The children from the underclass who won places in good schools sat alongside the children of the upper-class whose places were assured. They were aware of their greater intelligence compared to many of their classmates, as well as their greater intelligence in comparison to their other ‘class-mates’: their fellows in the underclass who failed or simply did not take the exams. A likely product of their early recognition of their comparative intellectual strength was that graduates of this regime, those who received their secondary education, often viewed both the entrenched white elite and the entrenched rural and urban poor with a degree of disdain – as a result they became separated from both groups. As noted by Rhonda Cobham, winning a scholarship and becoming educated often resulted in ‘a truncation of family ties. The child who made good was usually thrust into a social circle his parents could not enter or excluded from the society of his less fortunate peers’.²⁶ As a whole in the anglophone Caribbean, ‘within the educated middle class, where the values of the European colonizers had been

²³ Brereton, p. 276.

²⁴ Reinhard W. Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening: West Indian Literature of the Nineteen-Thirties* (London: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 19.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Cobham, p. 17.

most emulated, cultural suppression and assimilation had combined to alienate the individual from the rest of his community'.²⁷

This exclusion and alienation resulted in mixed emotions toward the labouring class, mixed emotions which entered the public sphere with the growth of literary circles and the beginnings of indigenous, locally-focused publications in the Caribbean. As would be expected, some of the 'internal emigrants', those educated to secondary level and granted access to middle-class professions, aspired to be authors, and, of these, a few went on to write and publish. Jamaica was the first 'center of literary activity' in the British Caribbean, possessing a number of active writers in the early twentieth century,²⁸ but it was arguably overshadowed by the literary production of Trinidad in the 1930s. Though the two largest West Indian islands traded the mantle of literary 'centre', little reviews emerged in almost every colony during the first half of the last century: *Forum* and *Bim* in Barbados; *The Quarterly Magazine*, *Trinidad*, *The Beacon*, *Youth*, *Picong* and *Callaloo* in Trinidad; *St. George's Literary League Magazine* in Grenada; *The Outlook* in British Honduras; *Kyk-over-al* in British Guiana, and *Focus*, *Planter's Punch*, and *Caribbean Quarterly* in Jamaica. Of these, *The Beacon* provides clear and consistent evidence of the type of mental bind characteristic of the organic West Indian intellectuals of this time.

The Beacon was published in three bursts, from 1929 to 1930, from 1931 to 1933 and then just once in 1939. The men associated with the production of the periodical, and often published within it, were four influential author-intellectuals, 'The Beacon Group': Alfred H. Mendes, Albert Gomes, C. L. R. James and Ralph de Boissière. The stories in *The Beacon* were, by and large, locally focused and 'cover all aspects of Trinidad life, though a significant proportion [...] were concerned exclusively with the lifestyle and culture of the lower classes'; the *Beacon* itself 'deeply engrossed in the exploration of what constitutes a

²⁷ Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening*, p. 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Trinidadian or West Indian identity'.²⁹ *The Beacon* was a manifestly political tract and, among its aims, it sought to recognise the disparate groups that made up its contemporary Trinidad, binding the splintered social fractions through its writing into more of a social whole. In a sense, the magazine served as a site where all the diverse groups of Trinidad could be united, and even included an 'India Section' to carry news of importance to the still often excluded and mistrusted Indian indentured labourers and their descendents. Though content and focus of *The Beacon* evidence a desire for unity, its authors' many class-based prejudices were clear in their writing and disrupted their efforts. A particularly glaring example of prejudices undermining expressed intent is Alfred Gomes' challenge to the leading party's desire for universal suffrage as a mistake because the average member of the working class was as intelligent as an 'ape'.³⁰ *The Beacon* crisply illustrates the peculiar split thinking of the organic intellectuals of this region. Gomes disdained working class 'apes' yet, the magazine's editors expressly called for authentic regional writing that 'utilize[d] West Indian settings, speech, characters, situations and conflicts'.³¹ *The Beacon* rejected submissions that did not meet this criterion, and published a vast number of stories set in the 'barrack-yard' or poor urban dwellings. Because this desire for authenticity from its contributors sat alongside a lack of knowledge of the working class, the magazine tended to portray what Reinhard Sander has called a 'romanticized' version of life in the slums which epitomised the editors' 'cultural alienation from their local environment'.³² Like all authors, these organic intellectuals were in the dominated fraction of the dominant middle class, and from this position felt sympathy – Bourdieu's 'homology of position' – for those below them – a sympathy only intensified by their own origins in the dominated group and the kinship of skin – but it was undermined by their absorption of colonisers' values.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 9, 31.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

³¹ Reinhard W. Sander, 'The Thirties and Forties', in *West Indian Literature*, ed. by Bruce King, pp. 38-50 (p. 41).

³² Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening*, pp. 36, 44.

From the Beacon Group came one of the region's most influential emigrant intellectuals, C. L. R. James, who went on to replicate and deepen this split thinking in his long sojourn in England and the United States. James was not the first emigrant author from the anglophone Caribbean; the Jamaican Claude McKay has been called the 'first major' writer to go abroad and begin a literary career,³³ and he himself was quickly followed by Jean Rhys and Eric Walrond. Though these three early authors can be considered the chronological 'first wave' of twentieth-century anglophone writers abroad, their work was effectively subsumed within other literary traditions,³⁴ and did not play a leading role in shaping the field of modern Caribbean literature. C. L. R. James though was a constant champion of his region and its people and replicated and heralded the conceptual locus of the later generation of Caribbean writers. Like those who would follow him after the Second World War, James 'was personally isolated from the West Indian scene'— despite speaking regularly about it and on its behalf.³⁵ It is important to note that James and his successors lived in a time period when physical distances were effectively greater than they are today; a lack of email, fibre optic cable, and frequent flying meant relocation to a foreign country – more so than relocation to the professional world on the islands – meant a serious rupture in contact. Like his successors, James willingly chose this break. A move to the metropole was a move to a wider audience and greater opportunities to publish; and, in the six years he stayed in Britain before uprooting for the United States, James published five books and co-wrote and performed in the play *Toussaint L'Ouverture* – all things he would have been unlikely to achieve in his contemporary Caribbean.³⁶

³³ Anthony Boxill, 'The Beginnings to 1929', in *West Indian Literature*, ed. by Bruce King, pp. 27-37 (p. 35).

³⁴ King, Bruce, 'Introduction', pp. 1-9 (p. 3).

³⁵ Gordon Lewis, 'The Challenge of Independence in the British Caribbean', in *Caribbean Freedom*, ed. by Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd, pp. 511-18 (p. 515).

³⁶ James was in Britain from 1932-1938. While there he published, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, *Minty Alley*, *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, and *A History of Negro Revolt*. See Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966 - 1972: A Literary and Cultural History* (London: New Beacon Books, 1992), p. 3, for information on his play *Toussaint L'Ouverture*.

James's role as a spokesman, primarily for colonised blacks, but also, specifically, for those in the Caribbean, was more complicated than the 'homology of position' evident in *The Beacon*. James spoke for the people but was not really *of* the people in any way; in fact, in terms of respect, renown and revenue – all products of his location – James was essentially *above* the mass of Caribbean people for whom he was taken as representative. His critics have acknowledged this, the titles of work about him highlighting the disjunction between his allegiances and his utterances. Kent Worcester's essay title 'A Victorian with the Rebel Seed' portrays the conflict between the author's 'Third World' championing, Marxist leanings, and his patrician interests and Reinhard Sander's chapter dedicated to James in *Trinidad Awakening* refers to the man as 'The Ambivalent Intellectual', while its contents describe his in-between position.³⁷ Worcester shows that James's reputation was primarily built and burnished outside of the Caribbean, and that the author possessed a 'West Indian identity [which] was overdetermined by the influence of an Anglophilic education and by the inspiration of the American Century'.³⁸ James was both a critic and an advocate of empire. He believed in the nurturing value of the mother country, and spoke of a clear spectrum of civilisation, claiming once that independence for St. Lucia and Barbados was 'either immorality or sadism'.³⁹ He was preoccupied with the relationship between 'the educated black man and the uneducated black masses' and his statements veer from sympathy for one group to sympathy for the other.⁴⁰ His part-memoir *Beyond a Boundary* is rife with tension between admiration for the creations of the British Empire and a nostalgic affection for the Caribbean people and his split allegiance is only even more apparent in his

³⁷ See Kent Worcester, 'A Victorian with the Rebel Seed: C. L. R. James and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement', in *Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century Caribbean*, ed. by Alistair Hennessy (London: Macmillan, 1992) 1 (1992), pp. 115-130; and Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening*, p. 91.

³⁸ Worcester, pp. 116, 121.

³⁹ C. L. R. James, 'The Birth of a Nation', in *Contemporary Caribbean: A Sociological Reader*, ed. by Susan Craig (Maracas: College Press, 1981), pp. 3-36 (p. 6).

⁴⁰ Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening*, p. 92.

first and only novel, *Minty Alley*.⁴¹ James's position as a conflicted emigrant spokesman would be replicated and deepened by the many authors who would go on to follow his example after World War II and emigrate from the anglophone Caribbean.

The Third Movement: Outward

The middle years of the twentieth century were particularly turbulent in the whole Caribbean region and inspired mass flight. Hurricanes and drought weakened the sugar industry and caused widespread unemployment. In the 1930s, Depression-fuelled anxiety boiled over into widespread 'militant working-class protest' that caused 'major social upheavals' in a succession of West Indian colonies.⁴² In 1935 there were marches in Trinidad and Jamaica protesting unemployment, strikes in British Guiana, and unrest in St. Vincent because of a rise in customs duties. These were followed by oilfield strikes in Trinidad, riots in Barbados and Jamaica and further strikes in (then) British Guiana and St. Lucia. At the end of 1937 the British appointed a Royal Commission to look into what was going wrong and shortly after that the Empire was drawn into the Second World War.⁴³

In many ways the war was a boon for the islands, due to its provision of a much-needed release-valve for rising unemployment and other social pressures. World War II generated revenue for the West Indies, from which both local administrations and individuals benefited. Naval and air force bases were leased from Britain by America all over the region, including on the islands of Trinidad, Jamaica and on the mainland colony of British Guiana, providing capital from tax and customs duties,⁴⁴ and also creating jobs for

⁴¹ C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 2005); *Minty Alley* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1936). The examples in *Beyond a Boundary* are numerous, but a few specifics are James's claims that watching cricket in the West Indies meant leaving behind 'sordid' everyday life (88); and that during his life 'intellectually I lived abroad, chiefly in England' (86). The final example showcases a pride in his British education that is elsewhere shown in his claim that he was able to quote Burke from a young age (7). James presents an allegiance to the people and to the Empire, all while showcasing his position as decidedly 'above' the masses.

⁴² Richard Hart, 'The Labour Rebellions of the 1930s', in *Caribbean Freedom*, ed. by Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepard, pp. 370-75 (p 370).

⁴³ For details of this unrest, see Cobham, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁴ Wiseman, p. 129.

islanders. In addition to producing funds, and on-island employment, the war created job opportunities through military service. At the start of WWII only those of 'pure European descent' could serve, but this policy was eventually abolished and all subjects were allowed to enrol in the armed forces.⁴⁵ By serving in Europe, soldiers' horizons were widened and, though black servicemen stationed in Britain experienced prejudice, 'wartime conditions prompted greater expressions of goodwill and friendship and also forced the authorities to discourage blatant expressions of racism'.⁴⁶ The experience of wartime residency enabled servicemen to become familiar with England, and the world beyond their homes, and many exercised the option to remain in the country after the war.⁴⁷

Unskilled jobs were plentiful in Britain and the 1948 Nationality Act granted UK citizenship to 'every fourth person on the planet', all the residents of the British Empire.⁴⁸ This enticed both army personnel and numerous island residents to remain, return, or journey to Britain and resulted in a formidable surge of West Indian migrants determined to switch hemispheres and seek their fortunes abroad. The most notable authors from the English-speaking Caribbean were to arrive in England with the World War emigration waves. These writers were compelled by the same social pressures and desires for new opportunities as their compatriots and by the hope, however dim, of literary success in London. It was a hope fuelled by many factors, including the successes of their predecessors, like C. L. R. James. Among other motivators, writers at this time were particularly inspired by the influential wartime radio programme *Caribbean Voices*, which granted many the first opportunity to be paid for their work.

Caribbean Voices must be mentioned in any historical gloss, however brief, of the origins of anglophone Caribbean emigrant writing. The radio show played a huge role in

⁴⁵ Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration: Immigration, 'Race' and 'Race' Relations in Post-War Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 23.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 26, 27.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Patrick French, *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V. S. Naipaul* (Oxford: Picador, 2008), p. 67.

promoting the work of anglophone authors, and helped to spark the hope of a receptive audience and a liveable income abroad. *Caribbean Voices* began quite modestly: during the war, the Jamaican poet Una Marson aired a programme for the BBC, *Calling the West Indies*, which was intended to be a means for Caribbean servicemen in London to stay in touch with their friends and family back home.⁴⁹ The show became immensely popular and was soon transformed by Marson, in line with her interests and contacts, into *Caribbean Voices*, a weekly cultural feature that, by the time Marson returned to Jamaica in 1946, had become a major showcase for writing in English within the Caribbean.⁵⁰ In the year of Marson's departure, the show found a new editor, the Irishman Henry Swanzy. Under Swanzy's stewardship, the show had a 'catalytic effect' and provided a crop of island-based authors with the means to be paid for their work and access to a 'virtual community' of similar talents and to a wider, England-based, audience.⁵¹ Like the editors of *The Beacon*, Swanzy favoured stories that were 'unsentimental', 'local rather than derivative' those stories that depicted the assumed truth of the Caribbean experience.⁵²

The desires of the publishing industry and the public in Britain would cause emigrant authors and emigrant labourers to have a symbiotic relationship. A direct, causal link between increased migration to the 'mother country' and increased interest in Caribbean fiction from residents of the 'mother country' is clear and has been noted by many. Bruce King has suggested that this is related to a general concern with decolonisation. Though this interest was mainly focused on Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, it seems to have kindled in British readers an attendant interest in the Caribbean.⁵³ Rhonda Cobham has claimed that the arrival of large numbers of immigrants created curiosity and an audience for the writing of their authors.⁵⁴ This is echoed by Anne Walmsley who has written that 'book publishing was

⁴⁹ Walmsley, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ French, p. 85.

⁵² Ibid., p. 86.

⁵³ See King, 'Introduction', p. 3, for a description of initial metropolitan interest in African fiction.

⁵⁴ Cobham, p. 19.

experiencing something of a post-war boom; small young publishing houses were eager to bring work by fresh, vigorous, new voices from far corners of the Commonwealth, especially those who used English with the fluency, individuality and verve of West Indians'.⁵⁵ Diana Athill, supplements this commentary with the claim that 'it was easier to get reviews for a writer seen by the British as black than it was for a young white writer, and reviews influenced readers a good deal more then than they do now'.⁵⁶ Though Athill does not state it explicitly, the subtext of her comment seems to be that the ease of attracting reviewers who were concerned with the Commonwealth, who greatly influenced the public, made unpublished writers from the Caribbean more attractive to publishers than their unpublished British counterparts. These authors would draw in reviewers who would entice readers and generate sales. If all of this is put together it becomes clear that these writers had an appeal that was a direct result of immigration and decolonisation – an appeal that was, as we will see with Lamming, Naipaul and Selvon, inextricably tied to their representations of the putative 'reality' of Caribbean life.

Reception and Identity

The movements within the anglophone Caribbean – the inward movement that created a mixed, non-indigenous population and the upward movement of a minority of these people into the middle-classes – were responsible for these authors' singular identities and opinions; they were the primordial social conditions from which authors emerged, which influenced their upbringings, their social positions, their perceptions and their actions. Ultimately though, it was the act of emigration and the move from the Caribbean to the metropole that created the greatest mismatch between the positions they claimed and those they occupied and the manifestation of this mismatch in the clash of allegiances found in their work. All of

⁵⁵ Walmsley, p. 11.

⁵⁶ French, p. 180.

this was a constrained response, what I would argue was a *necessary* response to their reception in Britain and the demands of the regional publishing industry. For these writers, things were not as simple as leaving by ship and landing in literary celebrity. Despite the freedom to pursue their dreams of publication, and a real chance at widespread recognition, these emigrant-intellectuals were subject to the same social pressures as their other emigrating kinsmen, social pressures which would do much to shape their identities in their new location.

Although post-war Britain was the centre of a global colonial empire, and a small minority of non-white people had been present in the country for many years, a significant number of British residents did not welcome the empire's extra-island subjects openly, especially once it became clear that immigration was less a wave than a rising tide.⁵⁷ While Sheila Allen has noted that racism in Britain has not, in the twentieth century, been on par with the entrenched racism found in places like the United States with longstanding discriminatory policies,⁵⁸ the ignorance that breeds racist sentiment and almost inevitably leads to conflict was very much present in post-war Britain. A 1951 survey revealed that half of the British population had never even seen a non-white person; in addition, at this time, most schoolchildren were learning from books that portrayed Commonwealth residents in line with 'derogatory stereotypes'.⁵⁹ Because of dual lack of contact and information, public reaction to Commonwealth immigrants worsened at a rapid rate. The sociologist Zig Layton-Henry summarises this phenomenon neatly. He has written that emigrants 'are often perceived as foreign intruders, illegitimate competitors for scarce resources such as jobs, accommodation, health and welfare benefits', adding that 'large-scale immigration, in

⁵⁷ These black people, Indians, and Arabs, primarily worked in the sea trade and resided in the dockland areas of Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool, London and the Northeast. See Sheila Allen, *New Minorities, Old Conflicts: Asian and West Indian Migrants in Britain* (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 33-34.

⁵⁸ Allen, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid. pp. 14-15.

particular if it occurs over a short period, often results in resentment, hostility and violence, especially in those places that become the focus for immigrant settlement'.⁶⁰

In Britain the response to Caribbean immigrants followed Layton-Henry's formula exactly: first there was resentment, then hostility, then, by 1958, there was large-scale violence. The second stage came in the form of overt discrimination. Among other things until the 1968 Race Relations Act banned racist advertising, 'No Coloured' and 'Europeans Only' signs were commonly used to ward off black tenants.⁶¹ Widespread resentment is clear in a 1954 *Times* article that presents itself as a simple overview of post-war immigration but claims that 'the immigrants have been mostly skilled and semi-skilled workmen—tailors, masons, mechanics, carpenters—though not always trained to the standards of skill expected in Britain.'⁶² Another *Times* article, published later that same year, picks up on this theme of colonial inferiority and claims that though immigrants 'are not workshy, two immigrants have the productivity of about one good English workman [...] They are said not to like working in high temperatures, rather surprisingly, and some managers think the explanation is to be found in their inferior physique.'⁶³ Four years later, race-fuelled riots in London and the north of England broke out and the narrative had effectively progressed to Layton-Henry's final stage: violence.

If the established British citizens felt somewhat unsettled by the arrival of people from the Caribbean, the new arrivals themselves were often worse affected. British ignorance meant a lack of distinction between island-residents, who were primarily classified as 'Jamaicans' and a general lack of recognition of the social complexity of the Caribbean.⁶⁴ Class had no effect on discrimination in England, as it did in the West Indies: in Britain black professionals were as often refused jobs on the grounds of race as non-

⁶⁰ Layton-Henry, p. 5.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 47-48.

⁶² Michael Banton, 'Britain's Negro Minority I: The Attraction of an Imperial "El Dorado"', *Times*, 31 May 1954, p. 7.

⁶³ 'The West Indian Settlers II: Anxiety About the Future of Inflow Lasts', *Times*, 9 November 1954, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Allen, p. 86.

professionals,⁶⁵ their options often as limited as those to whom they were superior at home. Under this regime, emigrants' own means of distinction were lost within the wider groupings of the host country. As one immigrant interviewee in Douglas Hinds' *Journey to an Illusion* states, in the Caribbean 'black was something you associate with poverty [...] I had an aunt who used to work for some white people in New Amsterdam [...] my aunty would never work for a black man even if he was made of gold'.⁶⁶ In Britain, these opinions had to be abandoned as a more insidious and less finely differentiated skin-colour prejudice was rampant. In Britain, one was either white or not; there was no space in-between. In this context, black middle-class professionals were first and foremost *black*, their education and standing meaningful only if and when engaged in their occupation; otherwise they were of the masses. Writing of this phenomenon, Sheila Allen states that 'within the space of a few hours, or even minutes, an individual, having changed neither his occupation nor his color, only his situation, may be accorded prestige and respect and then refused food or drink or be unable to hire a taxi.'⁶⁷ Although educated Caribbean immigrants were 'culturally least distinct' from the British, compared to other immigrants from elsewhere in the Empire, they were forcefully excluded from the British middle-class.⁶⁸

In their pioneering sociological study of migration to Britain from its former colonies, *Inside Babylon*, Winston James and Clive Harris have remarked that this experience of identity-rupture forced a number of reconfigurations in self-concept. As portrayed by James and Harris, these reconfigurations were logical reactions to immigrants' reception, the country's prevailing notion of a black/white racial dichotomy forcing Caribbean emigrants, at home stratified by islands, education, status and hue, into a collective identity.⁶⁹ Thus, the idea of a 'West Indian people' was effectively crystallised by

⁶⁵ Layton-Henry, p. 48.

⁶⁶ Donald Hinds, *Journey to an Illusion: The West Indian in Britain* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture, 2001), p. 11.

⁶⁷ Allen, p. 16.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 168.

⁶⁹ James, 'Migration, Racism', p. 240.

those who had left the British-owned islands. All evidence points to the fact that this process of re-thinking identity was not a pleasant or an easy experience; it was a painful transculturation, and, as a result of their experiences in Britain, many immigrants expressed a desire to return to the Caribbean – a desire undermined and complicated by the relative material prosperity they had in the new, openly racist society.⁷⁰ What complicated matters even further was the fact many of those who gave up on England and returned to the Caribbean found things on their islands irrevocably changed, worsening their feelings of alienation, and forcing them into a identity-void, one ex-emigrant referring to himself as a ‘foreigner in my own country’.⁷¹

All who emigrated were forced to re-adjust their identities and rethink their relationships with their former homes. But, paradoxically, it would be those emigrants in the midst of this re-thinking process who would have the most influence on metropolitan opinions of island realities. Further, those who would dominate the articulation and publicity of island life ‘back home’ would be those who were already the most detached from their people by education and aspiration, and even cut off from members of their own middle class by choice of occupation. West Indian identity would be defined for the world by those afforded the most praise, respect and privilege in the colonial centre; by those who were educated to question the validity of their own culture; by those who needed the mother country most to continue their careers and maintain their livelihoods: the author-emigrants of the first wave.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 244-45.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 246.

Chapter 2:

Emigration, Lamming, Naipaul, Selvon

As Caribbean immigrant authors in Britain, Lamming, Naipaul and Selvon had limitations imposed upon them by the British literary field. As we will see, all these authors' first readers consigned them to a particular space within the world of British letters. Rather than having their work read in comparison to a wide range of writing from the past and present, the writing of Lamming, Naipaul and Selvon was, on its first appearance, evaluated based on its alignment with other colonial writing and, crucially, afforded value based on the assumed 'truth' of its depiction of its subjects. When this fact is combined with all the identity reconfigurations – primarily the creation of a wider 'West Indian' identity – in emigrants considered in the previous chapter, we see how these authors were doubly constrained, by the market and their own altered perceptions, to represent themselves both as directly aligned with the Caribbean masses and as truth-tellers – spokesmen gifted with a knowledge that eluded others. This positioning jarred with their actual social position in relation to the people of the Caribbean. Their public proclamations reveal their efforts to assert an analogous status with others from their islands, but their first major works, those novels they wrote and published abroad, display a slippage between what they professed to be and what they were, despite critical readings to the contrary.

Positions Given

Contemporarily, George Lamming is the most critically feted of the three luminaries of the first wave. His work has long been recognised as special, his poetic prose style along with the wide scope and ambition of his texts immediately set his technical skill apart from his peers from as far back as the reviews of his first novel, *In the Castle of my Skin*. British critics greeted Lamming's first work with admiration and actively distinguished it from other

novels within the sub-field of colonial/Caribbean writing while its marketing as ‘the first prose work of a remarkable new writer—a vivid and poignant story of life in his native Barbados’ presented the novel as a means to gain insight into the Caribbean.¹ An early reviewer claimed that ‘like Mr. Edgar Mittelholzer, of British Guiana, and Mr. Samuel Selvon, of Trinidad, Mr. Lamming is a pioneer, creating a literature that is West Indian in its content and yet within the tradition of English literature’.² The novel was celebrated as ‘distinct from the class to which, superficially, it might seem to belong—that stream of books, autobiographical or otherwise, which steadily flows from South Africa, the Colonies, and from any place where the problems of colour and of political freedom have brought conflicts for which no real solution is in sight’.³ Both the advertising and commentary quite actively place Lamming’s book within its special sub-set of a wider field. His novel is ‘pioneer[ing]’ and ‘West Indian’, distinct from other colonial writing but still ‘within the tradition of English literature’ – or a valid participant in Britain’s literary field. Further, the work is quite actively stacked in a hierarchy that includes Mittelholzer and Selvon, an ostensibly innocent comment but one which, again, separates the work from the wider mass of writing. In addition, Lamming’s first critics lavished kudos primarily because of an assumed ability to represent Caribbean life as it was believed to be lived. Arthur Calder-Marshall in a *Times Literary Supplement* review claimed that

Uncertainty is a major characteristic of life in the Caribbean; nothing quite certainly *is*. Truth is the grain of sand within the pearl of conjecture. The laws of cause and effect are held in abeyance. That sense of fittingness and of inevitability which is the western heritage from the ancient Greeks is absent from the West Indies. The signpost pointing to Tragedy leads as often as not to High Farce. Mr. Lamming has caught this peculiar Caribbean tendency more subtly than Mr. Edgar Mittelholzer.⁴

¹ *In the Castle of my Skin* advertisement, *Times*, 14 January 1953, p. 8.

² Arthur Calder-Marshall, ‘Youth in Barbados’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 March 1953, p. 206.

³ David Paul, ‘Surface and Depths’, *Observer*, 15 March 1953, p. 9.

⁴ Calder-Marshall, p. 206.

Here the book critic reinforces a hierarchy – with Lamming’s work superior to Mittelholzer’s – while praising the ‘truth’ of the author’s renderings, based on their conformity to a variety of unusual ideas about the essence of Caribbean life. This is seen again in an *Observer* review that salutes Lamming’s ability to mention the problems of race in his novel without transforming them into ‘into a guiding, and necessarily falsifying light’.⁵ Lamming continues, in this review, to be a teller of ‘truths’.

Naipaul, an author now far better decorated and better known than George Lamming, although a recipient of chequered critical opinion, received similar treatment in his early career. His first-published novel, *The Mystic Masseur* was ‘well-worth reading for its own sake, and the characters in it, as emotional and excitable as children, while in Trinidad to-day, may be in the Tottenham Court Road to-morrow’.⁶ His second novel *Miguel Street* offered ‘charming sketches of West Indian life’.⁷ Of *Masseur* we are told that ‘Mr. Naipaul, himself an Indian, writes of life in the raw, as seen in Trinidad’ and that the idle main character, Ganesh Ramsurnair, ‘to judge by Mr. Naipaul’s description of life in Trinidad [...] is not alone [in his laziness] among his countrymen’.⁸ Of *Miguel Street*, we are also told ‘to the inhabitants of Port of Spain [,] Miguel Street, or its equivalent, is probably a street like many another’.⁹ Like Lamming’s, Naipaul’s novels were assessed on their conformity to an assumed reality. His fictional characters were potential real-life immigrants, he presented ‘raw’ life, his settings were seen as so real they were said to be analogous to real streets.

Early reviews and assessments of Selvon’s work are in character very similar but of a somewhat different pitch due to his chronological situation. Samuel Selvon was the first Caribbean writer of the first wave in Britain, and, as such, his work essentially heralded that of his contemporaries. Selvon’s first novel, *A Brighter Sun*, was the vanguard effort of the

⁵ Paul, p.9.

⁶ ‘New Fiction’, *Times*, 23 May 1957, p. 15.

⁷ ‘Fiction in 1959’, *Times*, 24 December 1959, p. 9.

⁸ David Tylden-Wright, *Times Literary Supplement*, ‘Out of Joint’, 31 May 1957 p. 333.

⁹ David Tylden-Wright, *Times Literary Supplement*, ‘Street Scene’, 24 April 1959, p. 237.

later publishing boom, and in many ways, he created the space into which Naipaul and Lamming were later slotted. As such, his reviewers more frequently note his innovation, while also praising his 'truth': 'a rarity, and a welcome one, Mr. Samuel Selvon is a Trinidadian of Indian parents writing in *A Brighter Sun* of poverty, fun, poetry, early marriages, and extempore rejoicings of his island. He has a direct eye on his scene, and the dialect-dialogues seems to run in natural and dramatic rhythms.'¹⁰ 'One-third of the inhabitants of Trinidad are of Indian extraction, and Mr. Samuel Selvon, in a first novel of quite remarkable quality, has written about their life during the war. Himself an Indian, much of his story is presumably based on first hand knowledge'.¹¹ This reviewer, because of Selvon's pioneering nature, has no other colonial authors to compare him to, so resorts to categorising *A Brighter Sun* in relation to a British novel, Ronald Firbank's *Prancing Nigger*, all the while making Selvon's subordination clear. He claims that Selvon's dialect dialogue is excellent, on par with that used in *Prancing Nigger*, 'an indication, too, of how masterly Firbank's art was, for Mr. Selvon here creates naturalistically, but with equal comic and authentic effect, what Firbank achieved largely by an act of imagination'.¹² Again, in the reviews above, truth is stressed, Selvon's Indian origin used more than once to reinforce the accuracy of his representations.

This fixation on the 'truth' of all of these authors' creations has continued long past the 1950s when the above reviews were written. Although the vectors that these 'truths' are said to issue along have altered with the changed optics of our times, Lamming, Selvon and Naipaul are still positioned within a subset of letters, and celebrated for their insights into the 'reality' of West Indian life. Lamming has been said to showcase 'how the West Indian sees himself: excluded from all that the colonizer takes for granted, yet bound to him by abstract

¹⁰ Lionel Hale, 'New Novels,' *Observer*, 3 February 1952, p. 7.

¹¹ Alan Ross, 'Struggle for Existence', *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 February 1952, p. 121.

¹² *Ibid.*

ties'.¹³ In his fiction, Naipaul shows 'the weakness of the West Indian male, his inability and unwillingness to be responsible for a family and a woman' along with the 'misfit [sic] between liberal notions of representation and decolonization and the realities of society in a late colonial or newly independent state'.¹⁴ And Selvon has been said to enter the 'world' of Indo-Trinidadian peasants 'imaginatively, sympathetically, and authentically'.¹⁵ Though the comments on Lamming and Naipaul both have an overt political charge, all three quotations evidence the ongoing influence of conceptions of these writers as being spokesmen; and while it would be foolish to claim that their books are wholly detached from the realities of their contemporary West Indies, it is entirely accurate that conformity to 'reality' has had an overdetermining and overshadowing influence on readings of all three – blotting their actual social positions and their influence on the 'realities' they have chosen to portray.

Positions Taken

This is as much a result of the placement of these authors within the literary field by their first reviewers, as it is a result of their own active attempts to advance their prestige and esteem within the confines of the space they had been granted. It is important to remember that, as presented by Pierre Bourdieu, the literary field – like the social field – is governed by conflict. Not all authors can be successful and it is in any individual author's interests to promote their work and themselves as unique, praise those who write in a similar mode, and denigrate those who write differently in order to accumulate the 'literary' and actual capital that comes with having their work considered special.¹⁶ As far as this form of conflict is concerned, the writers of the first wave in Britain were no different from other writers in

¹³ Margaret Paul Joseph, *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction* (London: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 10.

¹⁴ Bruce King, *V. S. Naipaul* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 24, 28.

¹⁵ Roydon Salick, *The Novels of Sam Selvon: A Critical Study* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 2.

¹⁶ See Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. by Matthew Adamson, rev. edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 141.

other contexts. While they were mostly all known to each other, and established a mini-community around *Caribbean Voices*,¹⁷ they still competed for publishing houses, readers and interest, and acted accordingly. All attempted to establish a hierarchy of fiction with their own at the top – their options for self-representation always constricted by the base requirements of their participation in the literary field: that they showed the ‘truth’ of life for West Indians. As with Henry Swanzy and the editors of *The Beacon*, and as shown above, their audience craved apparent ‘authenticity’ which meant, however they presented themselves, that all of the authors had to fight to highlight their work’s connection to actual reality.

While all of the authors did this, George Lamming was the only one of the three to attempt categorisation in any text longer than single essay-length. Throughout his book, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), Lamming advocates a hierarchy of Caribbean authors, positioning his work, and work similar to his, at the top. His means of categorisation – his overall method for re-structuring the field in his favour – is to classify authors based on their ability to write fiction focused on the rural Caribbean community, as he does. Though the title of the essay collection seems to promise a detailed consideration of the fraught position of the emigrant in the metropolis, the book itself does not do this definitively. Instead it acknowledges then elides Lamming’s emigrant status and announces a direct link between his work and the thoughts and feelings of his abandoned, peasant countrymen, a connection which he claims significant writers from his peer group have denied. In the book, Lamming famously attacks the work of V. S. Naipaul, by criticising what he sees as Naipaul’s inability to ‘move [his fiction] beyond a castrated satire’.¹⁸ He claims, ‘when such a writer is a colonial, ashamed of his cultural background and striving like mad to prove himself through promotion to the peaks of a ‘superior’ culture [...] then satire, like the charge of philistinism,

¹⁷ Patrick French, *The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V. S. Naipaul* (Oxford: Picador, 2008), p. 144.

¹⁸ George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: Michael Joseph, 1960), p. 225. Further references are cited in parenthesis in the text.

is for me nothing more than a refuge' (225). This assessment is more than a one-off snipe or charge of Uncle-Tom-ism; it is but one expression of a wider philosophy presented throughout the text to separate celebratory depictions of the Caribbean from critical, or non-peasant-centred representations, a philosophy that affords the latter greater status. Lamming figures himself and his fellow authors as true 'representatives', in both senses of the word, of the rural poor they portray in their fiction; going so far as to say, in *Pleasures*, that all 'West Indians' have a 'peasant sensibility' (225) and that all West Indian novels have peasant 'substance', 'motives' and 'directions' (38). Lamming disparages negative or ambivalent analyses in order to support his claims of the importance of 'peasant' ideas and 'peasant' sense to Caribbean writing. All those he sees as betraying their responsibility to their rural kinsmen are granted no reprieve, and in line with this, he notably questions the work of John Hearne not for its emasculation of its subjects, like Naipaul, or even its lack of literary merit, but for Hearne's presumed 'dread of being identified with the land at peasant level' due to his composition of novels about the Caribbean middle-class (46). At no stage does Lamming praise himself, but his evaluation of his own work is implicit. By attacking authors who shirk peasant identity, Lamming, whose work to date had dealt solely with peasants and the underclass, necessarily elevates himself. Of all his named contemporaries, the writer to whom Lamming gives the most praise is the man he describes as 'the greatest, and therefore the most important folk poet the British Caribbean has yet produced' (224), Samuel Selvon, due to his honest depiction of rural people.

By 1960, the Caribbean space of the British field contained authors of the first- and burgeoning second wave. Lamming's assertions in *The Pleasures of Exile* can be read as an effort to re-claim territory, re-assert importance and defend his space against new challengers. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, on the whole this seems to be neither a calculated nor opportunistic exercise. In *Pleasures* Lamming is merely undertaking criticism, which, like all criticism, betrays his prejudices – prejudices born of his upbringing and social position and their effects on his perceptions, and it is just one of a series of moves

made by anglophone Caribbean authors at this time to re-order and structure their subordinate area within British letters.¹⁹ This focus on the necessity of peasant identity emerged at a time when the emigrants' perspective was being challenged. In this vein, Edward Brathwaite questioned the ability of the long-absent writer to explore and map 'the physical, social, moral and emotional territory that is ours [in the Caribbean]'.²⁰ Lamming's asserted peasant identity is a defence against the attacks of newer entrants to the field, like Brathwaite, and is also a reassertion of significance that addressed V. S. Naipaul's article 'The Regional Barrier', published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, where Naipaul challenged his peers, like Lamming, who used 'Race', sex and American or British lead characters in their work, things Naipaul portrays as a wily way to win readers.²¹

The position that Naipaul fought for within the field – his own re-ordering of his space to assert his singularity – was that of perspicacious outsider who was not truly 'of' the people at all. This was a placement that was in direct opposition to the one asserted by George Lamming, but, crucially, one that did not deny Naipaul's insight, which in fact was a means through which he could assert the clarity of his vision. In 'The Regional Barrier' he makes the claim that Lamming takes particular issue with, stating, 'superficially, because of the multitude of races, Trinidad may seem complex, but to anyone who knows it, it is a simple colonial philistine society'.²² Here Naipaul reveals his insight by contrasting his knowledge of Trinidad with the false impressions of a mere visitor overwhelmed by apparent complexity. Later on in the article, like Lamming in *Pleasures*, he foregrounds his exiled status, and speaks of his need to remain in England if he is to publish anything, but again, like Lamming, and in line with the requirements of his space within the field, he

¹⁹ See Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (London: Routledge, 2006) pp. 16-32 for detail of some of the conflict that took place in the anglophone literary world from the late 1950s to the 1970s, including competition between home-based and emigrant authors.

²⁰ Edward Brathwaite, 'The New West Indian Novelists', *Bim* 32 (1961), 271-280 (p. 278); Sandra Pouchet Paquet, 'The Fifties', in *West Indian Literature*, ed. by Bruce King, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 51-62 (p. 52).

²¹ *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 August 1958, p. xxxvii. Ironically, Naipaul would go on to use all of these things in his 1975 novel *Guerrillas* (London: André Deutsch).

²² *Ibid.*

asserts his understanding of the place he has left, not only mentioning his ability to see beyond its ostensible complexity, but also making a series of blanket statements about Trinidad. Like Lamming, Naipaul actively worked to create hierarchies in his favour; but his jobs as the part-time editor and presenter of *Caribbean Voices* from 1954-1956 and then as a reviewer for the *New Statesman* from 1957-1961, granted him far more opportunities to praise or denigrate the work of his notable contemporaries – always, of course, putting himself and his work in a dominant position. Naipaul sought a space where his authenticity would not be questioned and his uniqueness would be an accepted fact; at every opportunity he differentiated himself from his fellow West Indian authors – a strategy he would expand with his first travelogue, *The Middle Passage*.²³ In this book Naipaul clearly differentiates himself not just from West Indian writers, but from West Indians as a whole, sowing the seeds for the detached persona that he would adopt in his considerations of other postcolonial sites in later books. Where Lamming was happy to align himself with Samuel Selvon, Naipaul was, and is, happy to align himself with no other author besides himself – but, in line with the shape of the field, has never once cast any doubt on his ability to relay the West Indian experience from ‘inside’.

Of the three authors Samuel Selvon produced the least non-fiction, his position-taking evident primarily through interviews. Like the others, Selvon casts little doubt on his ability to represent the people from whom he is disconnected. His position is almost exactly aligned with that put forward by George Lamming. He presents himself, in interview, and in the few, brief non-fiction essays he wrote during his career, as something like a ‘folk poet’: one who writes the truth instinctively, without artifice. In interview, Selvon characterised himself as what ‘one would perhaps call a primitive writer, as you talk about a primitive painter, someone who does something out of some natural instinct’, and confessed that when writing, ‘I paid very little respect to the rules, purely because I’m ignorant of them’, quite in

²³ *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Colonial Societies* (London: André Deutsch, 1962)

contrast to Lamming and Naipaul.²⁴ Even when taking overt pride in his work, as he does in the very short essay 'A Note on Dialect', he dismisses any deep knowledge of his chosen art form. In the essay he states

I was the first Caribbean writer to explore and employ dialect in a full-length novel [...] I was boldfaced enough to write a complete chapter in a stream-of-consciousness style (I think that is what it is called) without punctuation and seemingly disconnected, a style difficult enough for the average reader with 'straight' English.²⁵

Here he essentially boasts of his innovation in style but differentiates himself from others by his supposed lack of knowledge of the name of the stream-of-consciousness technique (although he uses it correctly). This sort of self-description would be one he repeated and repeated. He described writing *A Brighter Sun* as a simple process, marked by ignorance: 'A naive Caribbean writer, I had just sat down and written about an aspect of Trinidad life as I remembered it, with no revisions, with no hesitation, without any knowledge of what a novel was'.²⁶ Though this narrative jars with his description of himself as an avid reader elsewhere,²⁷ Selvon's repeated unwillingness to ascribe ambition to himself or his work marked a clear space for him within the literary field – the gifted natural talent, the transparent, straightforward representative of the people. Selvon's claim to the truth comes out in the interviews where he describes himself as someone whose goal it was to enlighten the ignorant. He claimed he began writing abroad because 'people didn't know what part of the world I came from and that was something that I felt ought to be corrected'.²⁸ In another

²⁴ Reed Dasenbrock and Feroza Jussawalla, 'Sam Selvon: Interview with Reed Dasenbrock and Feroza Jussawalla', in *Tiger's Triumph: Celebrating Sam Selvon*, ed. by Susheila Nasta and Anna Rutherford (London: Dangaroo Press, 1995), pp. 114-25 (p. 118).

²⁵ Sam Selvon, 'A Note on Dialect (1971)', in *Tiger's Triumph*, ed. by Susheila Nasta and Anna Rutherford, pp. 74-75 (p. 74).

²⁶ Sam Selvon, 'Finding West Indian Identity in London', in *Displaced Persons*, ed. by Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford (Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1988), pp. 122-25 (p. 123).

²⁷ Dasenbrock, p. 118.

²⁸ John Theime and Alexandra Dutti, "'Old Talk": Two Interviews with Sam Selvon', in *Something Rich and Strange: Selected Essays on Sam Selvon*, ed. by Martin Zehnder (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2003), pp. 117-33 (p. 118).

interview he claimed that 'I believe that the West Indian novelist had, among his major responsibilities, that of making his country and his people known accurately to the rest of the world'.²⁹ He was, even in his own eyes, a spokesman, one with true knowledge that the British public required. In addition, Selvon always presents himself, throughout his 28-year absence from Trinidad, as wholly 'Caribbean' or 'Trinidadian', expressing a reluctance to identify himself as an 'exile': 'I don't like the word exile, I feel that when someone tells you that you are exiled that means you are banished from your land. I just feel that I am living abroad, you know; I am living abroad as a writer.'³⁰ Although Naipaul has advocated his disconnection from the Caribbean throughout his career and Lamming asserted his 'exile' but undermined it by declaring England a 'dubious refuge' in *The Pleasures of Exile*,³¹ it is Samuel Selvon, who would never return to the Caribbean after his 1950 flight, who claimed he was merely 'living abroad.' This self-identification reinforces two things. The first is the lack of space created within British society for the Caribbean emigrant to feel comfortable and at home. The second is the fact that that Selvon, like Naipaul and Lamming, seemed to have a different view of himself than that evident from actual fact. Taken together, these things hint at the unique conceptual locus of the anglophone Caribbean emigrant-author, who feels himself as connected and committed to his people despite many gaps between himself and his subjects.

Positions Taken (Again)

By and large, all of these position-takings have gone unexplored. Though there is a clear disjunction between these authors' self-representations and their realities, little has been done to thoroughly investigate this trend or to reveal the links between their self-positionings

²⁹ Michel Fabre, 'Sam Selvon: Interviews and Conversations', in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1988), pp. 64-76 (p. 67).

³⁰ Theime and Dutti, p. 125.

³¹ Lamming, *Pleasures*, p. 22.

and their creative works. Lamming could not claim to speak for peasants when, even within the Caribbean, there is a gap between the rural working class and the educated, literate elite. Naipaul's many claims to be uniquely detached are everywhere undermined in his actual fiction, and historically inaccurate – he was, among other things, a member of the thriving *Caribbean Voices* social set, all of whom were artists who chose to leave their homes to find an audience abroad. And Selvon's comments on self-identity are eminently problematic, as is the clash between his education and the literary style of his books and his asserted artless, instinctive skill. All of these authors were emigrants who were detached from their subjects by class and distance yet forced into close alignment with them because of social pressure and the demands of the market. Their assertions of intimate knowledge born of a shared identity and intimate knowledge born of a dispassionate detachment do not stand up to inquiry – their real in-between position slips out in their fiction. This is clear in all of their early works, before significant shifts in the field created a wider pan-colonial space of identification. Unfortunately, while conflicts between these authors' utterances and actuality have been noted by their critics, little attention has been paid to emigration's influence on their visions.

Lamming's connection to the peasantry has been questioned but left, largely, unresolved. While many critics readily acknowledge the gulf dividing Lamming's social and physical positions and his self-positioning, rather than challenging his claims or exploring their effect in his work, they have, by and large, noted a problem – a gap between what it argued and what is actual – and addressed it superficially. Supriya Nair's approach to this in her book *Caliban's Curse: George Lamming and the Revisioning of History* is indicative of the standard critical treatment. Nair, to her great credit, repeatedly interjects that it is important for any of Lamming's critics to take into account his emigrant status and its lack of alignment with that of his peasant subjects. She asserts that 'while Lamming might see himself as a soldier in the ranks of the peasants, he nevertheless operates from a very

different location in culture.’³² She questions: ‘What has the West Indian writer brought to peasant culture?’ (21). She colours Lamming’s attempt to restore the history of the rural working-class because it ‘does not emerge smoothly, given the weight of colonial middle-class authority in both history and literature’ (81). ‘We cannot forget,’ she writes, ‘that while Lamming and [C.L.R.] James would like to see themselves as representatives of the lower classes, many of the intellectuals who were speaking for those “down below” had moved, by virtue of their education to another class position’ (92). Further, she states that ‘we cannot ignore the difference in class position of those who actually claimed to speak and those they claimed to speak for’ (93).

This approach is excellent, and would serve as a standard for an engagement with Lamming and his contemporaries’ status as emigrants if the explanations offered to overcome and illuminate the inherent problems with Lamming’s self-perception were less cursory. As it stands Nair is adept at reminding her audience of the issues, but less adept at unpicking them. She states the author himself ‘is not blind to the tensions of articulating a coherent national identity, as all his novels show, since his refusal to construct a unified narrator comes from the impossibility of creating a unified national subject that can claim to speak for diverse groups’ (6), and leaves that as sufficient evidence that his statements need only to be noted and then set aside. Similarly she says ‘to recognize Lamming’s own position within the institutional sites of a largely middle-class domain is not, however to reject entirely his metaphorical mantle of the *houngan*’ (22).³³ Similarly, in *Caribbean Autobiography*, Sandra Pouchet Paquet notes that ‘any pan-Caribbean paradigm is immediately qualified by the thematics of diaspora, by the tensions between cosmopolitan experiences and rooted ones’,³⁴ but does not allow that fact to complicate her later reading of

³² Supriya Nair, *Caliban’s Curse: George Lamming and the Revisioning of History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 6. Further references are cited in parenthesis in the text.

³³ A *houngan* is a priest-‘mediator’ in voodoo ritual (21). In Nair’s usage it serves as a synonym for ‘representative’.

³⁴ Sandra Pouchet Paquet, *Caribbean Autobiography: Cultural Identity and Self-Representation* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p. 6.

Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*. All of this amounts to a tacit, if not sometimes explicit, acceptance of Lamming's self-positioning as representing the truth of the peasant class; the author's fought-for space in the British literary field has, essentially, gone unchallenged and under-explored for decades, despite its obvious misalignment with his social-position.

Paradoxically, the same thing has happened to V. S. Naipaul, Lamming's rival. The paradox stems from the fact that Naipaul is the only one of the three authors to have his self-situation as a unique, uninfluenced, eternal exile mentioned at length, repeatedly, in critiques of his work yet he has never had his emigrant status as a post-war emigrant from the English-speaking Caribbean properly explored. Arguing that Naipaul's claims for uniqueness should be questioned, Landeg White, wrote:

Whatever loyalties Naipaul rejects, however much he denies being a spokesman for his region, he is still a writer from the West Indies writing largely about the West Indies for an audience abroad. He cannot avoid being regarded to some extent as *the interpreter* of one region to another, and his political and social attitudes cannot be dismissed as irrelevant [...] Even if we forgive the author for not being more charitable, we are still entitled to ask what makes him so different, what has released him from the absurdities in which his characters are trapped [my emphasis].³⁵

Here the critic seeks to assert that Naipaul *is* connected to the West Indies, despite his claims, and *is* a *spokesman*, whatever his professed detachment – the latter assertion an almost unnecessary act, since Naipaul himself has never presented his writing as anything less than the truth.

Many critics have, like White, taken issue with Naipaul's asserted, singular stance, but most have only served to reinforce it through their critiques. Examples of this are manifold, but some of the best come from Rob Nixon's book *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin*. Nixon's text is unique in the fact that it is designed as a sustained challenge to Naipaul's professed externality, but despite a concerted effort to unpick

³⁵ Landeg White, *V. S. Naipaul: A Critical Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 14.

Naipaul's claims, Nixon essentially challenges *how* Naipaul is external and singular, rather than *that* he is external and singular. Nixon's direct target is Naipaul's professed insight, but his inadvertent reinforcement of the author's self-positioning reveals the power and influence of Naipaul's asserted stance. Nixon uses the opening chapters of his book to both highlight and evidence how Naipaul has been read 'as a mandarin possessing a penetrating, analytic understanding of Third World societies' by Western critics.³⁶ He deftly draws in the history of the middle classes of the anglophone Caribbean to showcase how Naipaul, 'was schooled to perceive the immediate world of Trinidad as paradoxically remote and insubstantial, as exiled to the margins of an English-centred reality' (11). And, highlighting the kind of sentiment expressed by Bruce King, Nixon shows that 'because he derives from the so-called Third World, Naipaul can be invoked, with the help of bold generalizations, as someone with a personal knowledge of "those kinds" of places and peoples, a knowledge that only an insider could hope to command' in order to buttress racist ideas about the developing world (18).

This is all hard to protest, and, as should be clear, it aligns almost exactly with my assessment of Naipaul and his peers. Where Nixon insufficiently treats his subject is in his failure to read into ways in which Naipaul's material position within the British publishing environment, and the experience of emigration, may have forced or influenced his claims. Further, Nixon fails to see how Naipaul's contemporaries made similar moves, and presents the writer at times as something like an insidious manipulator. While Nixon does this in order to smudge the image of Naipaul's singularity, he in fact re-instates a degree of singularity by failing to note how Naipaul's feelings of being 'outside' of both Caribbean and British society were, in fact, common, as seen with the respondent in *Inside Babylon* who felt a 'stranger' wherever he went. Nixon presents Naipaul's self-positioning as cynical and wilful. He claims that the author's 'admirers—encouraged in this attitude by Naipaul's

³⁶ Rob Nixon, *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 4. Further references are cited in parenthesis in the text.

own reading of his life—portray him as laboring under a burden of insurmountable estrangement’ (17). The use of ‘burden’ here is important to the critic’s argument; he believes that a central focus of Naipaul’s writing is its portrayal of the author as afflicted by his status. To Nixon this affliction is illusory. He goes on to state that ‘among writers in English, no one has gone to Naipaul’s lengths to cultivate such an emphatic link between the literary theme of exile and his personal history, nor has anyone so consistently played off that connection in the body of his or her work’ (19). As in his use of ‘burden’ above, it is in the individual words and phrases that Nixon’s feelings are evident. The critic’s claim that Naipaul has gone to ‘lengths’ to ‘cultivate’ his exilic status, coupled with the statement that the writer has ‘played off’ a connection between his status and his work, affords Naipaul an almost sinister intent to manipulate. Nixon does not believe Naipaul is justified in using terms like ‘exile’ and ‘refugee’ to describe himself because ‘the exile longs for a change of government or an easing of restrictions; his or her existence is oriented towards that moment when a return to the homeland will be possible once more’ and ‘refugees tend to be powerless, anonymous, voiceless people who, as the etymology suggests, are in flight’ (22, 23). Nixon avers that because Naipaul does not fit the defined criteria, he can neither claim to be a refugee or an exile, and as and when he does it its mere ‘rhetorical posturing’ (24). Because of his only passing analysis of the post-war Caribbean emigrant scene – an analysis that merely mentions that Naipaul’s place as an emigrant was shared by others (19-21) – Nixon sees only ‘rhetorical posturing’ in Naipaul’s claims. With a wider lens he could have noted the fact that George Lamming, also, frequently, described himself as an ‘exile’ and inserted the word into the title of his essay collection. Though Nixon’s true aim is a detailed critique of Naipaul’s travel fiction, a critical elision is still executed – and the author is presented as one whose positioning took place in a vacuum, who detached from the mass of his peers to make claims that no others would make. It is an assessment very much like Naipaul’s assessment of himself.

Samuel Selvon has received a slightly different treatment than the other two authors, but it is treatment which still gives little heed to the clash of his literary and social positions. In one sense, Samuel Selvon's situation is the obverse of V. S. Naipaul's: where Naipaul's claims are frequently scrutinised, Selvon's self-identification is rarely considered in his readings. Nevertheless, as a whole, his critical readings have exactly paralleled Naipaul's and Lamming's. Overall, readings of Selvon's work have long conformed to Lamming's comments in *The Pleasures of Exile*. In a passage preceding the 'folk poet' christening, Lamming claims that 'writers like Selvon and Vic Reid [...] are essentially peasant [...] The peasant tongue has its own rhythms which are Selvon's and Reid's rhythms; and no artifice of technique, no sophisticated gimmicks [...] can achieve the specific taste and sound of Selvon's prose'.³⁷ This brief overview of Selvon's work and style – with its focus on written speech, rhythm, and the lack of 'sophisticated gimmicks' or complex technique – matched Selvon's comments quoted above and set the tone for later criticism. Bruce F. MacDonald neatly summarises this type of critical response to Selvon by stating that when he is read 'Selvon is often referred to by critics as merely a reference point in the debate over the use of English in the West Indies—he is the innovator; he represents the "peasant consciousness" and the "anti-colonial" use of language'.³⁸ Put simply, Selvon was, and still too-often is, read through Lamming's initial orientation of his work and his own claims of its restorative, truth-telling aims and objectives.

Repositioning

To read these authors as transparently representing the people of their islands, as Selvon and Lamming often are; or to read them as isolated, uniquely challenged or heedlessly mendacious figures, as Naipaul too frequently is, is to read with one eye closed to an

³⁷ Lamming, *Pleasures*, p. 45.

³⁸ Bruce F. MacDonald, 'Language and Consciousness in Samuel Selvon's *A Brighter Sun*', in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. by Susheila Nasta, pp. 173-86, (p. 173).

important part of their historical context: their membership in a mass of British Caribbean people and British Caribbean intellectuals, who moved into an increasingly hostile Britain. Emigration had a massive effect on these authors' texts and heavily colours their representations. The problems with simply accepting the efforts of metropolitan intellectuals to grant subjected groups of 'subalterns' agency through their work was raised two decades ago by Gayatri Spivak and remains salient in this situation; Spivak's contestation of the Western intellectual's claim that he can speak for those who were denied any voice of their own, without qualification, is one that can be again made here.³⁹ Though Spivak seemed to mean 'white Western intellectual' in her formulation, if the category is justifiably expanded beyond colour to class and location we can question how the claims these authors make are complicated by their situation at the intersection of many groups: immigrants and residents; intellectuals and peasants; the middle class and the working class.

In her book on Rushdie, Jhabvala and Naipaul, Sudha Rai presents a cogent, and succinct summary of the complications of an intellectual emigrant's representations of, and relation to his/her former home:

Literate, educated, aware of the implications of his statements and choices, the expatriate writer tries to convey the truth of both parties embroiled in the war of colonialism and neo-colonialism — the European and the Indian/West Indian. He makes a conscious attempt to bring dignity to the New World, by righting himself through recall, confession, struggle and the making of new artistic standards. What is painful is that in order to carry out this task, he must separate himself from his people — a people, the majority of whom do not or cannot read what he writes,

³⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313.

since he writes in a foreign language, and a people who cannot take the risk of publishing what he writes, because they do not understand.⁴⁰

Rai claims that the expatriate has a set ‘sensitivity’ that includes an ability to negotiate an ‘insider-outsider position’ but is marked by dissatisfaction with both cultures, and a desire for equilibrium that is constantly frustrated. In her opinion, these issues express themselves in fiction as, among other things, fragmented characters who never find satisfying solutions to their problems.⁴¹ While these assertions are presented with reference to the specific authors she critiques, and the East Indian context, Rai’s theory fits Lamming, Naipaul and Selvon – and their positions in the post-war British context as West Indian transplants – precisely. Of particular relevance are her claims that the expatriate writer ‘grapples with problems of self [...] country [...] and language [...] to build up the structure of [his] *own distinct sensibility* [my emphasis]’.⁴² Because of their origins, Lamming, Naipaul and Selvon identified with both Britain and the West Indies, the rural and the urban, workers and thinkers, and created contorted, ambivalent first works, which, while seeming to assert one or more ‘truths’ about the West Indian region and its people clearly show conflicting, contradictory ‘truths’ that highlight a ‘distinct sensibility’, a unique conceptual locus born of their actual, rather than asserted place in the world.

Above the People in the Castle of my Skin

George Lamming’s first novel, *In the Castle of my Skin* offers particularly fertile ground for an inquiry into how the actual situation of an emigrant author can be betrayed within an asserted, alternate positioning.⁴³ The text quite clearly attempts to present a rich and

⁴⁰ Sudha Rai, *Homeless by Choice: Naipaul, Jhabvala, Rushdie and India* (Jaipur: Printwell, 1992), p. 6. Though it is an interesting study of the effects of emigration on writing, Rai’s book positions Naipaul primarily as an Indian/Hindu and does not adequately explore the author’s Caribbean context.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 6, 7.

⁴² Ibid., p. 7.

⁴³ All references to the novel are taken from George Lamming, *In the Castle of my Skin* (London: Longman, 2004), and are cited in parenthesis in the text.

neglected peasant history and highlight peasants' desire for revolutionary autonomy – one that aligns exactly with Lamming's putative role as the restorer of peasant lives – but its efforts are undermined by its own form and by its depiction of events. The novel, on close inspection, reveals itself to be an exaltation of the enlightened, absent individual emigrant above the impotent peasant collective. This reading is wholly counter-intuitive. *In the Castle of my Skin* is an ostensibly political book, one concerned with the celebration of the rural community it is centred upon and the growth and development of the main character it follows. It is the base upon which Lamming's esteem was erected, and the one upon which it stands, but the book's politics are torn, its identifications with the 'people' incomplete.

The novel tells two stories simultaneously: that of its protagonist, G. and that of the Barbadian community in which he lives, Creighton's Village. In simple, numerical terms, the inhabitants of Creighton's Village receive the bulk of the narrative's focus; the lives of the peasant community, their routines, habits, quarrels, and concerns are considered on far more pages than G's thoughts and experiences. In addition, the depiction of Creighton's Village bears the hallmarks of a book determined to illuminate neglected lives and reveal the nature of an oppressive colonial system. The denizens of Creighton's Village are a subjected people, torn by the kind of distorted self-perception that is described in theories of the effects of colonialism. They have been so hurt by years of subjugation by white overlords that they 'accepted instinctively that others, meaning the white, were superior' (19). They are victims of a feudal system where the white owner of their land, Mr. Creighton, has granted a handful of villagers the rank of 'overseer'. By awarding these assignments, Creighton has widened rifts in the community and, in the overseers' interactions with their fellows, created conflicts and worsened a deep-seated and self-directed hatred within the populace, the overseers referring to their fellow inhabitants as 'low-down nigger people' (18) evidencing something akin to W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness which causes the oppressed to

always see themselves through their oppressor's eyes.⁴⁴ Potential sources of these feelings of inferiority are scattered throughout the book, from the way the town is laid out, with the landlord's home physically situated on a hill far above the villagers' shacks – a clear symbol of a psychological dominance that is expressed in the villagers' attitudes to him and other whites (20-21); to the way village boys are forced to fight each other for loose change by white tourists to the island (107-08). The story of a German anthropologist coming to study the people is interrupted for its teller to comment that the woman had come to take

some kind of notes 'bout the way they [some members of the village] live, but nobody believe that, 'cause nobody don't take notes 'bout human beings. You may take notes 'bout pigeons an' rabbits an' that kind of creature, but we never hear in all we born days 'bout people comin' to take notes 'bout other people who wus like themselves. (126)

Though some of the episodes preceding this one clearly display that not even the inhabitants of the town believe that white people were 'like themselves', this is written with dramatic irony as its intent and seems to have the text's British audience in mind. Although the speaker of this story is unaware, a connection is immediately made for the reader: the white anthropologist is taking notes about the Barbadian people specifically *because* she doesn't think these people are like her, and further, the author seems to be suggesting that these anthropologists view the people as equivalent to their view of 'pigeons an' rabbits an' that kind of creature': the anthropologists see them as animals. Because of all of this, the most common type of reading of this novel is one which explores its representation of colonialism's leavings, and which figures it as a work of active resistance to, and open critique of, colonialism's legacy. These readings are often productive; the grounds of the text on first contact seem more willing to bear a postcolonial challenge to colonialist rule than any other insight; but beneath the top-level of the narrative lies something altogether different.

⁴⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), p. 2.

One of the things that marks *In the Castle of my Skin* as an ambitious and unique first novel is its singular style. As is characteristic of all Lamming's fiction, the novel eschews standard story structure for something more heterodox, and, at times, jarring. The tale of G. and his village is told in a range of formats and voices, and it flips quickly from first-person recollection to omniscient survey to dramatic dialogue to first-person reportage to stream of consciousness narrative and back again within single chapters, sometimes on single pages. There is no stability to the text; each chapter surprises with its approach and there are few clues as to how a chapter or episode will unfold. Any search for a straightforward progression of events building to a climax whose complications are somehow resolved will either be fruitless or regularly frustrated.

Despite this play of storytelling methods, in the main, the book relies on two narrative techniques: first-person and omniscient narration. The novel's first-person narrative is told from G.'s perspective. His consciousness is located at some point in the future looking back, first at his childhood life in Barbados, then at the series of events that led to his young-adult departure from the island. The omniscient sections, on the other hand, take a broader view; they scan the happenings in the village as a whole, surveying in a way that seems utterly detached from any individual eye. This has been read as a demarcation between two distinct foci: the developments in the town (as described by the omniscient narrator) and the development of the boy, G. (as described by the first-person narrator). Sandra Pouchet Paquet has defined the omniscient sections of the book, which again occupy its bulk, as being concerned with 'the broader social, historical and cultural contexts' of the story, as opposed to the 'self-referential' first-person sections.⁴⁵ This comment is backed by Lamming's own claim that 'we are rarely [in the novel] concerned with the exploration of an individual consciousness'.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Paquet, *Caribbean Autobiography*, p. 114.

⁴⁶ George Lamming, 'In the Castle of my Skin: Thirty Years After', in *Conversations, George Lamming: Essays, Addresses and Interviews 1953-1990*, ed. by Richard Drayton and Andaiye (London: Karia Press, 1992), pp. 46-56 (p. 47).

To an extent this is the case, the sections from the detached perspective are certainly occupied with the broader social context of the story, and appear to be detached from any individual. But there is evidence in the text that a reading that cleaves the two main narrative modes into completely separate and distinct methods of representation, with set remits and preoccupations, is a reading that ignores telling overlaps between the two perspectives. As will be shown, these crossings blur the line between the story's 'I' and its counterpoint, the seemingly objective, omniscient narrator. Further, these crossings not only show how much the 'omniscient' narrator's insight is possessed by the first-person narrator, but also link to a concept that snakes through the text: that rather than being a celebratory story of the power of the collective, *In the Castle of my Skin* is in fact a novel that privileges the individual over the masses and exalts the intelligence and ability of the physically detached and intellectually divorced subject: the educated emigrant. The book attempts to clear a space for the noble peasantry to enter history, but instead privileges the individual, the intellectual, over all others, answering Landeg White's question ('What makes him so different, what has released him from the absurdities in which his characters are trapped?') with a stark contrast between the potency of the emigrant and the impotency of the masses.

Much of the foundation for this interpretation is laid in the book's opening two chapters. The novel begins with G. The first scene described is the young G. staring out of the window of his small home on his ninth birthday, mourning the ruin of his day by the 'rain, rain, rain' that pours down from the sky (1). The perspective of this initial scene is first-person and its tense is past, and both facts combine to produce a narrative style that suggests an adult G.'s recollection of childhood life. As the first chapter unfolds, G. is stuck at his window 'where the spray had given the sill a little wet life', staring out, his mind roaming through the history of Creighton's Village and the reaction of its people to the flood (1). As G. reminisces, he states that 'no one seemed to notice how the noon had passed to evening, the evening to night; nor worry that the weather had played me false' (1). This is

both an ironic enactment of a child's anxiety about being ignored and a statement of the theme that will run throughout the book: the distance between the individual, G., and the society of which he is a part. It also, despite its ironic bent, sets G. up, within the first page, as a more perspicacious observer than his fellow citizens, someone who notices things that they miss, and who is possessed of an insight into their thoughts that they themselves do not have. This view is not based on this ironic/childish statement alone, soon after the narrator relates:

our lives—meaning our fears and their corresponding ideals—seemed to escape down an imaginary drain that was our future. Our capacity for feeling had grown as large as the flood, but prayers of a simple village seemed as precariously adequate as the houses hoisted on water. *Of course, it was difficult to see what was happening outside* [my emphasis]. (2)

From his half-ironic statement that the villagers are unaware of the movement of the fading day, and the disappointment it signalled in him, G. goes on to make grand pronouncements of 'our' future and its loss. The narrator, positioned in an undetermined point in the future – beyond the emigration to Trinidad with which the novel closes – offers a totalising vision of his people: he questions the efficacy of their prayers, assuming that prayers were being made – then suddenly retracts, almost as if conscious that the sweep of his statements belies his childhood vantage point, doubling back to say 'it was difficult to see what was happening outside'.

Something interesting has occurred here which repeats itself throughout the text. We encounter a conflict between what the child in the centre of the story could possibly know, and what the assumed adult narrator interprets as the significance of the events. It is repeated again almost immediately when the narrative perspective disconnects from G.'s sensual experience to set bounds on the village of 'small, heaped houses', name its streets and describe its features (2-3). This move to survey once again posits the capaciousness of the narrator's knowledge and the range of his vision. The overview ends with the narrator's

attempt to recollect his father, questioning his own memory that ‘sank with its cargo of episodes like a crew preferring to scuttle the consequences of survival’ (3). In just a few pages he has signalled several disjunctions: one between himself and those in the town who are unaware of the passing day and unaware of him; one between his claims to knowledge and his physical position at the time he describes; and a final one between his absent childhood memory and implied, potent adult memory that contains not only the events of the day but also insight into others’ actions during the heavy rain.

In many ways this can be taken as a characteristic opening of a classic bildungsroman: the audience is introduced to a young child lacking in knowledge (here: memory) who will, it seems by story’s end, have changed into an adult with burgeoning wisdom – an adult similar to the one who recollects. In the general style of this genre, the young protagonist seems to crave both greater independence and general understanding, stating, ‘for memory I had substituted inquiry’ and having, from the loneliness of being the only child of a single parent, ‘grown the consolation of freedom’ (4). As with other examples of the bildungsroman, the recollecting narrator knows more than his youthful representative on the page and interjects comments and insights that could only be the product of a life lived on beyond the events in the text. So far this is unremarkable, and this familiar style continues through most of the second chapter until a sudden stylistic shift.

The second chapter portrays another event in the narrator’s childhood: while G. is being bathed by his mother, his young neighbour, Bob, watches the naked spectacle from over the fence, leans too far forward, accidentally breaks the fence and is threatened with a beating by his own mother. It is in the second half of this chapter that the narrative mode is altered by what seems to be a complete switch to an omniscient perspective wholly severed from G – both the younger G. depicted and the conceptual adult G.-as-narrator. In fear of his punishment, Bob runs into G.’s house and is followed in by G. While Bob plots his eventual escape from his mother’s wrath (by hiding in a burlap sack), the narrator goes to the half-door of the house and spies on the two mothers and their friend, Miss Foster, speaking

outside (14). From this point, and for the next ninety pages, the narrator is no longer directly engaged in the action described. After Bob crawls out of the house, the narrator's gaze lingers on the three women outside, and the description becomes increasingly abstract and detached from the events of the scene.

The abstraction begins in a single line paragraph that simply names the three women: 'Miss Foster. My mother. Bob's mother' (16). The narrative then disconnects and, in a sense, zooms out of the events at hand, explicitly figuring the three women as representatives of a much larger pattern of events and activities on the island, in the present and throughout its history: 'It seemed they were three pieces in a pattern which remained constant. The flow of its history was undisturbed by any difference in the pieces, nor was its evenness affected by any likeness' (16). While this may appear to be an alien interjection, one that jars with the first-person perspective so far present in the second chapter, we are still very much positioned behind the future G.'s eyes, still in thrall to the single speaking 'I'. The narrator is so divorced from the action that he is a mere spectator, but he is still present, the tone and vocabulary utilised have not changed, while the story continues along the trail adumbrated by this description, the focus of the narrative moving progressively farther away from the three women into the village, then even farther: 'Outside at the street corner where villagers poked wreckage from the blocked canal, it had absorbed another three, four, fourteen [...] Outside where the road crossed there were more: thirteen, thirty' (16-17). The expansion of the narrator's gaze continues unabated, just as when in the first chapter G. mapped the concerns of the villagers as he stared out of his window but saw things well beyond the range of his sight, so the narration, illuminating the 'pattern' of which the women and the two groups of villagers are all a part, goes beyond the what the young G. could reasonably observe at that moment and enters into what could only be the realms of adult insight into the routines and habits of the village. Though the people of the village are unaware of the significance of this pattern, their place within it, or how their actions affect it, all of these things are meaningful and visible to the narrator: 'The three

were shuffling episodes and exchanging the confidences which informed their life with meaning. The meaning was not clear to them. It was not their concern, and it would never be' (17). All of this is still very much in the first-person, explicitly in the mind of the recollecting self, and ends with five words: 'Three. Thirteen. Thirty. Three hundred' (17). The adult G. sees a pattern, and his perspective, widening and widening is in no significant way different from that of an omniscient narrator: he sees and understands all to the extent that he can plot overlaps in action that transcend time and space. The idea that he, the individual, detached by temporal and physical location from the people he describes is able to understand the people, nonetheless, to a depth they cannot is one that is repeated and gains ultimate significance later in the story. It is an idea to which we will return.

After the four sentence fragments there is a gap in the text, signalling a change of location or perspective, and the focus shifts to 'an estate' (17). We have now lost the 'I' to omniscience. But, despite the lack of a grounded subject, the style of narration is identical. Much of what G. gave us immediately before the break in the text could be considered similarly 'omniscient' – well beyond the purview of any individual; and the writing style has not changed, in fact it goes so far as to repeat the 'Three. Thirteen. Thirty.' conceit. This 'new' section uses the same language; and seems to follow the same aim as the section preceding: the presentation of evidence that the villagers slot into a pattern of which they are unaware. This is critical. The story slides from the women in the narrator's immediate vicinity to the island as a whole, now seemingly unencumbered by G.'s direct experience, but replicating the pattern of life as he defines it, the 'Three. Thirteen. Thirty' phrase used to showcase the series of apparently overlapping microcosms, appearing again and again (23, 25) and then again, once more, when the narration 'returns' to a first-person perspective marked by 'my' (25). But this switch can only be dubbed a return in the sense that the scene is the one at the start and an 'I' has been added again. The omniscient narrator, and the adult-G. narrator have spoken with the same words and pursued the same ideas, in fact, the entire thrust of the omniscient narrative is a justification of G.'s comment on the wider collective

of villagers of which his mother and her two friends are but a representative element. It explores the way their lives are similar and, importantly, how these similarities are readily evident to G. who sees a pattern that no one else notices and, he states explicitly, never will. The narrative, when once again marked by a speaking subject, returns to being fixed on the women and their conversation, which ends in silence where 'they seemed to wonder what would happen tomorrow' (26). In the next chapter, again ostensibly omniscient – or at least without an 'I' – we are told, it seems, what happened the next day; the 'omniscient' section again answering a question posed by G.'s mind, as detached from his immediate vicinity as his rumination during the rain, but no less centred on events relevant to his life.

The two initial chapters bear a powerful message about the individual's insight compared to that of his people, one that will be repeated, and question the distinction between G. and the omniscient voice. This trope of the superior, perspicacious narrator is as old as C. L. R. James's *Minty Alley*.⁴⁷ In it, the central character, another young man, this one a young-adult named Haynes, observes and comments on the lives of those around him in a manner very similar to G.'s. Haynes, in James's novel, is explicitly not 'of' the people but an educated man of the middle-class who cannot afford the upkeep of the home left to him by his mother and decides to let the property and rent a room in Number 2 Minty Alley, a barrack-yard occupied by a motley of picaresque characters. Haynes' superiority to, and separation from, the other tenants of the Alley is shown immediately. Despite his condescension to them, all the other residents adore Haynes and he becomes a source of advice and a friend to all, and a lover to one, before departing. Two things are notable about the novel. The first is the respect afforded to the intellectual Haynes by all the residents of the alley: although he is younger than almost all of them, everyone asks him for advice and solicits his friendship; he knows them only briefly and yet they absorb him into their group. Despite all that, a gap is always present. Even the character closest to Haynes, his young lover Maisie, refers to him by his surname and title, 'Mr. Haynes', highlighting both his

⁴⁷ *Minty Alley* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1936).

exalted social position and his dominance of the situation.⁴⁸ The second notable element is the perspective. The novel is told in a third-person limited point-of-view; all the reader knows is what Haynes knows, and much of what Haynes knows is gleaned from spying on the barrack-yard residents through a hole in his wall, much as the young G. observes the people in his village. Reinhard Sander has argued that ‘Haynes’ role as eavesdropper [...] is an exact parallel of the position of the middle-class writer of barrack-yard stories. The lives of the barrack yarders provide him with excitement and sexual titillation of a kind unknown in his usual environment’ and at the end of the book, ‘Haynes is allowed to drift out of his involvement with the yard’ in a ‘casual way’, which signals his lack of real involvement in the other characters’ lives.⁴⁹ Haynes is an intermediary for the reader – the filter for all knowledge about those around him, those who are, socially, below him. He participates in these lives but only superficially: he easily detaches himself when he has had enough, is adored without effort, insightful without exertion and clearly superior.

Though G.’s vision and insight are even broader than those of Haynes – his position over and above those he observes is the same; and just as Haynes ‘parallel[s] [...] the position of the middle-class writer of barrack-yard stories’ in relation to the barrack-yard resident, so G.’s relation to the other members of Creighton’s Village parallels the positions of island residents in relation to those authors who would depict them from England. G. sees and understands what is present before him and its relevance to the larger scheme with an insight beyond any nine-year-old’s, and goes into a level of detail on detached events beyond that which even an adult directly observing or remembering could summon. He sees all: the totality of village and island life and how those lives fit into something much larger than their owners’ comprehension. The ‘Three. Thirteen. Thirty’ pattern eludes all who are a part of it; only the separated narrator, a member of the community because of his position

⁴⁸ Reinhard Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening: West Indian Literature of the Nineteen Thirties* (London: Greenwood Press, 1988), p 101.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 100.

within it, but physically and psychologically separated from direct participation, is aware of it.

This chasm between the individual and the multitude, and the privileging of the individual's insight and ability to act *over* that of the multitude continues through the book, along with bleedings of omniscience into 'limited' perspective, bleedings that hint that the speaking subject's perspective is far from limited. About a third of the way through the novel, the narrator is beaten by his mother for hanging out at the corner. He is *inside* his house but is still aware that Bob 'heard the screeing, and came down to our house listening', that he 'came and heard' G.'s mother's words and then, that 'Bob had head enough and he was back at the corner plugging his toe in the earth', before the lashing concluded (105). This could be taken as the narrator filling in gaps in a story he heard recounted from all sides later on, but a similar omniscient hiccup occurs in chapter seven. The narration at the opening of the chapter is indistinguishable from omniscience until, unexpectedly an 'I' appears, an 'I' that possesses a helicopter vision that allows him to see into the minds of participants in a religious ceremony knowing that 'they liked to see how others got saved, and sometimes they heard their testimonies which were embarrassingly intimate. Their candour was a sign of their purge' (153). Had there been any sign that the narrator had attended a ceremony of this type before, or again, or had there been any allusion to G.'s ability to learn from these people later on, this could be dismissed as the wisdom of experience, but as it stands it strikes as an unwarranted insight. The blurring of lines between the two perspectives happens again, and then again in the story. Each time, we are shown that G.'s almost panoptic vision is in no significant way short of the omniscient narrator's. Perhaps his position as a recollecting subject provides him with this hindsight, but as shown, if the narration is taken to be a recollection, the things he recalls are beyond the bounds of memory, as none would have been directly experienced. Rather than taking them to be textual anomalies, it is best to see them in the wider scope of the text, especially since they

support an idea that is championed toward its end. This panoptic insight is linked to a later prophecy of the power and knowledge of certain people over that of the collective.

Despite its clearly recuperative aims, in *In the Castle of my Skin* the ‘Three. Thirteen. Thirty.’ collective group of villagers is, by and large, presented as ignorant, impotent and static. The villagers are consistently lumped together, seemingly to evidence the pattern of which they are a part, and few of the many characters in the book are even granted proper names, referred to simply as ‘the boy’, ‘the woman’, ‘the man’. Lamming, as noted, explains this away with his comment that ‘we are rarely [in the novel] concerned with the exploration of an individual consciousness’. And while this is true, the extreme contrast between the vicissitudes, articulateness and introspection of individual consciousness, when we are concerned with it, and the acts and statements of the unnamed collective, privileges the individual with an intelligence and agency the collective simply are not given. The third chapter excellently presents a contrast between the all-seeing G. and the children who are his peers. The chapter is set in a school, and portrays the performance of groups of schoolboys for a white colonial inspector. It showcases a collective lack of knowledge, the centre of education failing to convey any information to its pupils. For their performance the ‘lower first’ class ‘recited the lesson they had been learning for the last three months. Their teacher gave them the signal and they intoned together.’

a	b	ab	catch a crab
g	o	go	let it go
a	b	ab	catch a crab
go	o	go	let it go. (32)

Other, more advanced classes, recite similar three-month lessons. These episodes are delivered with no overt irony and the reader is led to believe that what the boys present is truly the extent of what they have learned after months of instruction. Further, later on in the same chapter, a group of boys begin discussing slavery, one of them having heard an older member of the village community mentioning it, but none of the boys believing that it was

possible for slavery to have taken place. The boys' misconception is supported by a teacher who 'had simply said, not here, someplace else' when asked if there were ever slaves on Barbados (50). This chapter could be read as a critique of colonial under- or mis-education, but the school staff members are all Barbadians, only the inspector is an outsider. If this critique is directed at anybody it seems to be the ignorant staff, not the white men for whom they have the children perform. If this is a critique of colonialism, it draws all in for opprobrium, and fails to paint anything but a grim picture of the collective intelligence at its earliest stage.

But there are even harsher criticisms that follow. As a whole, throughout the book, the people are presented as impotent and lacking dynamism. Later in the same school chapter, children conspire to attack the head teacher for revenge but decide not to do it (39). Next the head teacher discovers his wife has been cheating on him with one of his employees but is unable to approach the offender, because 'he felt a strange impotence of action' (56). This is sustained over a number of pages, the head teacher acknowledging to himself that 'the villagers had no power. They were weak in everything except their trust (59).' Though he attempts to mentally remove himself from the mass of villagers by imagining himself as the 'unattainable ideal' (59) the head teacher's thoughts appear in the midst of his inability to act, lumping him back in with the peasantry of which he is a product. The extent of the people's impotence is clarified further in a riot scene in the centre of the book. After an extended strike period in the city, riots break out and the rioters spread toward Creighton's Village. The villagers are scared but find it 'difficult to act since everything depended on the fighting in the city which no one had seen' (182). Eventually the rioters arrive. They are angry and desperate for revenge, stalking through the streets seeking to kill the landlord, Creighton. The group approach him as he staggers toward his home, but ultimately they cannot act. 'They argued among themselves whether they should *fire* [stones at the landlord...] They argued as they advanced quiet and cautious like boys baiting crabs (199).' Earlier on in the novel a scene featuring an unsuccessful attempt by a

boy to 'catch a crab' results in near-death (142-144). Here a clear connection is drawn between that earlier evidence of impotence, the rioters, and the uninspiring achievement of the 'lower first' at their crab-catching recital. Unsurprisingly, the rioters fail; they cannot agree amongst themselves how and when they should attack and the opportune moment passes; they lose their quarry and the next chapter begins, 'the years had changed nothing. The riots were not repeated. The landlord had remained' (201). The villagers live repetitive lives; though their existence is full of humorous episodes, much storytelling and religious ceremony, the masses have no power to change anything, especially the things that need to be altered for them to survive. The need for change is explained by one perspicacious character, a shoemaker, who says, 'if times goes on changin' changin', an' we here don't make a change one way or the next, 'tis simply a matter that times will go along 'bout it business an' leave we all here still waitin' (94). This is exactly what occurs. The characters are unable to adapt and are ruined by outside forces beyond their control.

Even those characters who re-appear in the story are uncomplicated or powerless or stuck. One particularly glaring example of the fixity of everyone is the narrator's mother who, in our second encounter with her, tries to beat the nine-year-old G. for misbehaving (11), tries to beat him again, when she reappears, and he is in his early-teens, for hanging out on the corner (105) and tries to beat him again, at the end of the novel, when he is seventeen years old, for not listening to her when she speaks (258). She appears four times and acts exactly the same in the final three, with G. Even reflecting upon the predictability of her actions (257). With the exception of the main character and one other, she receives the most time on the page and does not alter at all over the eight years that the novel covers. The second representatives of the lack of positive change are two characters, Ma and Pa, the eldest residents of Creighton's village. The early chapters in which Ma and Pa feature function like a Greek chorus. The two voices provide a wider historical context for the other events taking place, make a break in the action, and are even written out as dramatic dialogue that, in the first instance, ends with verse (82). The two characters are directly

linked by their description to labour and the land: Pa has veins like roots (223); Ma has 'leather bound arms' (72), connecting her to rural labour, and likening her to a repository of knowledge, like an antique book. Ma and Pa are the centres, if not the souls of the village. As such, they receive the most luscious description in the novel, being two of the very few characters whose features are even described (72), which showcases their significance. This is a significance that is also expressed in their names; although they are called 'Ma' and 'Pa' by other characters, and each other, they are referred to as 'Old Man' and 'Old Woman' in their dialogue, pointing to an archetypal position, their names and nicknames placing them in the role of progenitors, the oldest villagers and the mother and father of all. Not only are they given a great deal of symbolic weight as, simultaneously, the repositories of the village's knowledge and its oracles, they are the physical embodiments – almost avatars – of the village itself. The major occurrences that happen to Ma and Pa directly reflect occurrences in the whole community. They are described as 'quite healthy and [...] quite happy except when there was some calamity like the flood' (72), showing an almost mystical connection between their health and the village's that is played out when Ma dies immediately before a series of catastrophes occur that leave Pa, and his fellow residents, dispossessed. These two characters, though blessed with a loving, almost sentimental rendering, are not separate from the pattern, in fact, they are the centre of it: their well-being is directly linked to the community's, the only changes they experience making their existence more difficult, just as the only changes that occur in the village are unwanted.

By the end of the book all is in ruin. The village has been bought and sold off by the ex-teacher-turned-entrepreneur, Mr. Slime, and the majority of the inhabitants have to abandon it. The villagers' collective ignorance and inability to act have stopped them from halting the progress of events that ended their happiness. Worse, it is hinted that this is due to a rampant distrust that frustrates positive movements for change. Few people trust each other in the novel. Fathers do not trust their sons (37); the head teacher doesn't trust his staff (61); boys don't trust their mothers (37); all people are the 'enemy' (22), except the one

person who betrays the entire town, Mr. Slime (87) – the bearer of one of the most ominous and immediately untrustworthy surnames in literary history! The villagers' lack of ability to create change is linked to a lack of desire for change in the first place, in all except the shoemaker mentioned above. They 'were peaceful. They asked for nothing but a tolerable existence, more bread, better shelter, and peace of mind to worship their God' (93). They are a docile people who have no sense of what their lives could be, who only wish to worship *their* (not 'our') God – and because of this they are destroyed.

This is no presumption: the villagers are ruined because of their ignorance and inability to act. This fact is made glaring by the only two dynamic characters in the novel: G. and his friend Trumper. Trumper is a member of G.'s childhood friendship group who pursues a dream to emigrate to America. He returns to the island very late in the novel and he has become a very different person, all of his changes receiving unequivocally positive descriptions. Before his actual reappearance, a chrysalis is forecast in letters Trumper sends to the narrator before his return to Barbados that signal his improvement abroad. The letters are 'written in a way I [G.] hadn't thought him capable of and which in fact I didn't quite understand. He had been away three years and the new place had done something to him [...] He had learnt a new word, and the word seemed like some other world which I had never heard of. Trumper had changed' (219). This signals a movement from ignorance to intelligence that is only reinforced when Trumper appears in person. His voice is 'deeper' he is 'big, confident and self-satisfied' and looks 'happy and prosperous' (273). His flight to America has improved him physically and mentally.

In the descriptions preceding Trumper's arrival, we realise that the narrator too is about to emigrate. The encounter with Trumper forecasts all the positive changes G. can expect in himself, in fact, even before undergoing the metamorphosis that awaits him outside of the island, and outside of the pattern of which he was never wholly a part, the narrator has already begun to change. This is an indicator of his potential; he has already started the process of detachment from his home that will allow him to transcend the mass of villagers

and break away from their fate. His mother, who attempts to beat him, as she does in most of their encounters in the novel, cannot because he is 'taller and stronger' and 'the spectacle of her approaching [...] was almost ridiculous' (258). The narrator's growth has been catalysed by his abortive education at his high school. He can now write well, like Trumper, as evidenced in the diary we are introduced to at the opening of the final chapter, while the mass of villagers are illiterate. Increased knowledge through education has made G. feel as if he has been living 'on the circumference of two worlds [...] as though my roots had been snapped from the centre of what I knew best, while I remained impotent to wrest what my fortunes had forced me into' (212). The narrator has, due to his learning, moved from his external position in relation to *one* world, that of the village, to an external position in relation to *two* worlds, those of the village and his new school – an interstitial position that links perfectly to that of the West Indian emigrant author – between the masses and the middle class. He still figures himself as impotent and driven by events, but an alteration of self has begun to occur that will enable him to act, to flee.

In fact, emigration seems to provide the only means of breaking free from the pattern that drives all history in the village and on the island. It is portrayed as a wholly positive act. Trumper, despite leaving, remains connected to the land (278), and advocates flight as 'a good change' (279) and a means to access knowledge even greater than that disbursed in the high school. He says, 'the things you got to learn in this life you never see and will never see in the books you read at that High School. 'Tis p'raps what the 'ol people call experience' (280). If school education has given the narrator knowledge and willingness to act that is missing from his countrymen but keeps him 'impotent to wrest what my fortunes had forced me into', then the true knowledge of experience that allows action must be located in one place only: abroad. As the two characters continue this conversation, they stroll through the town stripped bare making it clear what fate awaits those who remain behind (281-285). To underline this, Trumper makes a poignant statement at the end of the walk: 'There be people who always get hurt [...] 'cause they got all sorts o' ideas 'bout this

life except the right ones. An' it ain't their fault. There's a part o' those people which can't sort o' cope with what you call life [...] I know you be one o' those people' (284-285). This statement, coming at the end of a wander through destruction, leads to the conclusion that not only is G. 'one of those people' but the villagers who have been grievously 'hurt' by Mr. Slime are these people also. Their ruin is a result of their lack of understanding of the ways of the world, their faith in their landlord and belief in an inalienable connection to the land and to their homes, but they cannot be blamed.

Although the villagers are clearly presented to be complicit in their ruin, the text openly and explicitly asserts that the knowledge, ability and skills the village people would have needed to halt their destruction simply were not available in their own environment; the kind of self-consciousness, and empowering race-consciousness that they required could only be accessed abroad. Trumper, of course, possesses both types of consciousness, and by virtue of them he is able to propose a solution to the dispossession that none of the villagers had considered. 'You think they dare move all these houses? [...] If every one of you refuse to pay a cent on that land, and if all o' you decide to sleep in the street or let the Government find room for you in the prison house, you think they dare go through with this business of selling the land?' (278). Whether or not Trumper's plan of resistance would have worked is immaterial; it is a plan that harnesses the collective, and one beyond the reckoning of the narrator or any of those left on the island because of their lack of a collective identity. Emigration has given Trumper access to a new idea of the masses that has brought him closer to his people and granted him determination. He says later, echoing Samuel Selvon, that by leaving he has learned more about his 'people' and 'race' and that, 'none o' you here on this islan' know what it mean to fin' race' (287). None on the island have this knowledge, but Trumper promises the narrator that, because of his flight, he will 'become a Negro like me an' and all the rest in the States' (289). This is another, unequivocal, positive; the wisdom found outside, that of race-consciousness, that of collective identity and will-to-action, is the crux of true knowledge and will give the narrator even greater power to act and

know his world; it will ensure he is no longer one of those people, like his countrymen, 'who always get hurt'. G. sees it as his 'duty to discover' what Trumper claims lays outside the island and he 'envied that assurance' that Trumper possesses which enables him to 'walk in the sun or stand on the highest hill and proclaim himself the blackest evidence of the white man's denial of conscience' (291). This all, paradoxically, suggests that one cannot really become a part of the community until one leaves it.

It is almost possible to see Trumper's newfound power and perspicacity as a product of flight to America, rather than a product of flight alone. As the character himself notes, he did not find his racial identity until he landed in the United States, he underlines this fact by thanking the country for granting him new insight (287). In America, Trumper says, black people 'suffer in a way we don't know here. We can't understand it here and we never will. But their sufferin' teach them what we here won't ever know. The Race, our people (288).' Trumper draws a clear line between American blacks, suffering from a more oppressive form of racism, and Barbadian blacks and the colonial oppression they suffer. This American suffering produces the knowledge of race, a knowledge the Barbadians will never have. But it would be a misreading to regard this wisdom as one bound to the American experience. Trumper himself contradicts this interpretation by promising G. that similar insight will be accessible to him too, *immediately* upon departure: 'you can't understand it here. Not here. But *the day you leave* and perhaps if you go further than Trinidad you'll learn [my emphasis] (288).' While an example Trumper gives of a friend in America proves that knowledge abroad is not automatic (285), he figures it as automatic for G. G.'s early statement when observing the women outside of his door that, 'the three were shuffling episodes and exchanging the confidences which informed their life with meaning. The meaning was not clear to them. It was not their concern, and it would never be' (17), echoes Trumper's descriptions of island ignorance and flags G.'s own metamorphosis away from his island. We are led to believe, when looking back, that after leaving G. does gain the wisdom that Trumper possesses – the wisdom that is inaccessible to those in Barbados, that

makes them fail to understand the importance of their actions, but allows G. to see the relevance of all they do, and, at times, know their actions even when he himself could not have possibly seen them, due to their conformity to a pattern.

Both implicitly and explicitly the statement has been made and made again that the separated emigrant has access to understanding and power that the resident member of the collective does not possess. The novel as a whole works to support its earliest premise that the people are a part of something that drives them, that they do not understand, that they cannot break away from, and that this lack of insight is characteristic of their society. Though the narrator has a type of knowledge, that allows him to say, 'I understood the village, the High School, my mother, the first assistant [...] I understood my island' (288), the knowledge is incomplete and can only be made whole elsewhere.

In the final chapter G. has, like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus before him, shifted from a mere subordinate in a larger community to a separated subject capable of describing the world as he sees it in his diary, in his own words. This points us again to the novel as bildungsroman, but also binds the book quite closely to Joyce's *Portrait*, which also posits exile as a necessity for true self-knowledge. Sandra Pouchet Paquet has said that in *In the Castle of my Skin*, G. is inextricably linked to his community: 'in a sense he is the village; the history of his dislocation echoes the dislocation of the village. He is a collective character.'⁵⁰ I believe that the second clause of the first sentence is true, his dislocation echoes the peasants' dislocation, but he is no collective, that distinction is reserved for Ma and Pa. G.'s fortunes are the inverse of everyone but Trumper's: as he grows his village shrinks, literally, houses physically uprooted as he finds the race-conscious foundation for the castle of his skin. The individual identity survives the death of the collective and is promised to be solidified by flight. The final sentence of the book marks a becoming and a letting go. G. states 'the earth where I walked was a marvel of blackness and I knew in a sense more deep than simple departure I had said farewell, farewell to the land' (295).

⁵⁰ Sandra Pouchet Paquet, *The Novels of George Lamming* (London: Heinemann, 1982), p. 14.

Trumper has altered/enhanced the narrator's sight; he can now see the 'earth' the people, the land, for the 'marvel of blackness' that it actually is, but he only sees it by virtue of his farewell.

Lamming positioned *In the Castle of my Skin* as an anti-colonial critique, and himself as an anti-colonial advocate of peasant's abilities, and by and large it has been read in exactly this way. Despite this, the story, while draped in anti-colonial trappings, and decisively advocating a transnational, empowering, black identity, locates the true power of anti-colonial resistance in an extra-colonial location, and harbours a discreet challenge to the power of the peasantry. Lamming's attempt to give voice to the people 'down below' actively denies them the ability to act, or even understand themselves, without the assistance of someone or someplace detached and possessed of a self-awareness to which they have no access. This is a hidden perspective that has long gone unnoticed, and one that aligns Lamming's novel very closely with the apparently 'castrated satire' presented in V. S. Naipaul's first-written novel, *Miguel Street*.

Everywhere Un-cum-foughtable: Split Identification in *Miguel Street*

Naipaul's first-written novel, *Miguel Street* has been many times criticised for its fixation on the decay and impotence of a colonial community, despite the fact that its mode of representation closely resembles that of Lamming in *In the Castle of my Skin*. When *Miguel Street* is read against Lamming's novel, Naipaul and Lamming's overlapping concerns, and responses to their people and emigration are easily shown, the evidence clearly overthrowing any notion of Naipaul's singular vision or vitriol. *Miguel Street*, like *In the Castle of my Skin*, is the story of a self-contained social group told through the recollections of one of its former members, a small boy who goes on to grow up and move away. Like Lamming's novel, the book follows the evolution and collapse of a small island community: the

residents of a road in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, a ramshackle collection of rogues, mistresses and their children who occupy the eponymous Miguel Street. Like *In the Castle of my Skin*, *Miguel Street* exalts the individual emigrant over the island resident, while showcasing sympathy for the plight of the people – the novel is neither pure celebration nor harsh denigration; it is a fundamentally ambivalent work that issued from and evidences an interstitial position.

Along with those of C. L. R. James and George Lamming, V. S. Naipaul's, unnamed, first-person narrator is an intermediary between the community depicted and the reader. As with G., the site of the narration is beyond the end of the narrative; the story is told by an adult character reflecting on the chaotic days of his childhood on Miguel Street. From the outset he is the audience's interlocutor and engages with the reader through direct address. As early as the third paragraph of the book he wonders 'I don't know if you remember the year the film *Casablanca* was made'.⁵¹ The narrator is our Trinidadian tour guide, a translator, his relationship with the reader paralleled in his work as a sign maker in the early chapters; the act of translating the occupations of some neighbourhood into simple notices is aligned with the narrator's bringing forward and restructuring of the narratives of the people of the street for easy reading. As the audience's sign-maker he simplifies lives, figuratively signing his name, or his perspective, on his representations, as he does on the second sign he creates (9).

Not only is the narrator positioned as an intermediary between the people and the reader, he is positioned in like manner to the emigrant author's actual social situation, as a part of the people, but also above the people, connected to the outside consumers of the tale but also distanced from them. He speaks with the authority of one with an intimate link to all the workings of the island. The narrator frequently makes blanket statements such as 'There is no stupid pride among Trinidad craftsmen. No one is a specialist' (54), which show his

⁵¹ V. S. Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur and Miguel Street* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 1. All further references are cited in parenthesis in the text.

overarching understanding of the people of the entire island, not just the residents of Miguel Street. Yet, though he is of the island, poor enough to not be in the ‘class’ of people to wear pyjamas to bed (68), he is still very much superior to the people whose lives he recalls. After a long chapter on the plight of Elias, a young man from Miguel Street who aspires to pass the Cambridge School Certificate Test but repeatedly fails, the narrator tells of how he passed the test with ease: ‘A few years later I sat the Cambridge Senior School Certificate Examination myself, and Mr Cambridge gave me a second grade’ (32). After finding a job with equal ease the narrator is shouted at by Elias, who, another character claims is ‘just sad and jealous’ (Ibid.). The residents of Miguel Street see Elias as a boy with clear potential and the narrator easily bests him. Like G., the soon-to-be-emigrant narrator is thoroughly differentiated from the people he portrays. He is literate where many in the narrative are not. His recollecting, concise narrative tone marks him, from the outset, as different from both those he represents and his younger self, who speak in Creole.⁵² His alignment seems to be with that of the reader, the actual British audience of *Miguel Street*, and frequent translations and use of Lamming-like dramatic irony highlight this connection. Throughout the text the narrator informs the reader of meanings. When a character is asked about the welfare of another and his response is ‘she dey’ this is quickly refigured into Standard English: ‘[the] meaning [of this was] that she was alright’ (21). Later another character oddly translates himself, saying the word *labasse* means ‘dump’ (96). This is, of course, not unusual for a book that features characters who use a non-standard vocabulary, but it underlines how this narrative, as well as others that use this technique, is one that is filtered for a foreign audience and features a narrator who is affected by the needs of his perceived readers.

Frequent irony also creates a connection between the narrator and the reader. As noted by Glyne Griffith ‘the ironic nature of much of Naipaul’s [earliest] writing creates a type of camaraderie between author and reader as it establishes an “us” and “them”

⁵² William Walsh notes the same effect in Naipaul’s *Mystic Masseur*. See *V. S. Naipaul* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973), p. 5.

dichotomy between reader and characters'.⁵³ This is everywhere the case in *Miguel Street* as it is the case in the tale of the anthropologist in *In the Castle of my Skin*. The audience is very much catered for in this novel. One character claims in an argument with another about what to do when he goes to court that he is 'talking as if Trinidad is England. You ever hear that people tell the truth in Trinidad and get away? In Trinidad the more you innocent, the more they throw you in jail and the more bribe you got to hand out' (164-165). This statement immediately draws in the metropolitan reader; it forces him to consider his own experience and contrasts it with Trinidad for either a comically wry or tragic effect. We see something similar again, later, in an episode where the narrator's mother attempts to speak a more refined English while comforting a female guest having trouble with her husband. She stumbles humorously

bringing out all her fancy words and fancy pronunciations, pronouncing comfortable as cum-foughtable, and making war rhyme with bar, and promising that everything was deffy-nightly going to be all right [...] My mother said, 'The onliest thing with this boy father was that it was the other way round. Whenever I uses to go to the room where he was he uses to jump out of bed and run away bawling – run away screaming. (106-107)

Here the audience is invited to find amusement in the woman's best English, which still falls shy of any Standard. She invents 'onliest', 'uses', and shows her confusion of what is and is not 'correct' English by second-guessing her use of 'bawling' when the word is used accurately. Though anglophone Caribbean code-switching to variants of Standard English is an actual phenomenon, and this could be read as an attempt at verisimilitude, the immediate contrast with the tone of the narration simply highlights the 'us'-ness of the narrator's position – and, for the metropolitan reader, brings us, through our knowledge of Standard, closer to him and into a distanced, evaluative position in relation to 'them'. The

⁵³ Glyne Griffith, 'V. S. Naipaul: The Satire of Nihilism', in *The Comic Vision in West Indian Literature*, ed. by Roydon Salick (Marabella: Printex, [1993]), pp. 126-34. (p. 129).

sign-maker, of course, is not exactly aligned with the English reader. As mentioned, his poverty and knowledge of the locale set him apart. Nonetheless he is decisively not a full member of the masses whose language, and whose ignorance, he no longer shares. He is the figure of the actual emigrant, with a foot in each camp, distanced by miles and memory.

The distance between the narrator and the people is only widened by the many portrayals of failure in the novel. On Miguel Street no one who actively seeks success achieves it except the narrator. The arc of the story is his progression from a childhood acceptance of the street and its people to an adult rebellion against it and flight. In its direction, outcome, and narrative style, the story is essentially the same as the story of G. The narrator's experience is told mainly in snippets and fragments interpolated into the stories of the many residents of the street who aim at success and miss it.

The narrator's life is a secondary focus of the narrative and the main concern of each chapter is another, different, character's failures – the failures ranging from the deeply tragic to the merely comic. It is a chronicle of the rise and fall (or often, simply fall) of the many residents of Miguel Street. Bogart tries to flee the street but is forced back. Popo never finishes the things he builds and gets arrested for theft. George, an inveterate wife-beater, dies. Man-Man pretends to be the next messiah but, after begging to be stoned and feeling the pain of the first missile, gives it up. Big Foot wants to be a champion boxer but is beaten up and is afraid of dogs. Morgan goes insane. Laura, always pregnant, has a daughter who falls pregnant and commits suicide. Etc. These individuals' tales are fragmented, as their lives are fragmented, and told in overlapping short sketches, short sentences, short paragraphs, the narrator always there to explain and offer titbits of his own thoughts and experiences but rarely a major player.

The satirical aspect of *Miguel Street* and the distancing of the narrator from those represented throughout have been mentioned by critics, as have the story's fixation on frustrated desires and mistakes. As stated by M. Keith Booker the novel is notable for the

series of characters who ‘fail dismally’ in their attempts to fulfil their dreams.⁵⁴ In the classic mode of anglophone Caribbean criticism, some critics, like Bruce King, connect the ‘realities’ in the novel to the realities of actual colonial societies. King claims the book, along with Naipaul’s other early work, has themes such as ‘the way impoverished, hopeless lives and the chaotic mixing of cultures result in fantasy, brutality, violence and corruption’.⁵⁵ ‘These fixations are not merely artistic because the books ‘are also social history’.⁵⁶ In *Miguel Street*,’ King states, ‘nothing is made, no business succeeds, no art work is finished, no love or marriage lasts’.⁵⁷ While this may be a slight overstatement of the case, it is essentially correct; the novel’s only notable success is its narrator. Selwyn R. Cudjoe, a West Indian critic known for his hard critiques of Naipaul, reinforces this, but figures it as a distortion of reality. While Cudjoe is largely aligned with King and Booker, and notes that the ‘major theme’ of the novel is ‘that one cannot achieve anything in Trinidad because of the futility and the sterility of the society’, he claims that the boredom of the novel’s cast ‘makes all of the characters absurd reflections of the social totality’.⁵⁸ The argument here hinges on the axis of *Miguel Street*’s supposed truth and untruth. Where King, Naipaul’s supporter, sees a representation of reality, Cudjoe sees absurdity. Both note the obsession with futility that forms the novel’s core but neither links the farcical cycles of effort and frustration in the book to the author’s status as a recollecting emigrant.

While the theme of failure has been noted, along with a disconnection between the narrator, author, and subjects of the book, no critic has connected this obsession with the author’s position, or with the fact that criticisms of the street, and by extension Trinidad, are not unequivocally asserted in the book. There is an inherent questioning in *Miguel Street* of

⁵⁴ M. Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga, *The Caribbean Novel in English: An Introduction* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001), p. 148.

⁵⁵ King, *V. S. Naipaul*, p. 17.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁸ Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 31.

whether or not a life of aspiration is more desirable than the laid-back lives of the members of the street, which has gone unremarked. Miguel Street, for all the *picaros* who live on it, is a thriving, functioning community, and trouble enters only when characters reach for more than they are capable of attaining. Bogart, the 'most bored man' (1) the narrator has ever met, falls into ruin after a botched attempt to relocate to British Guiana and set up a brothel. Bolo the barber's attempts to win a local newspaper competition result in frustration, assault, and then a series of failures (including a failure to acknowledge victory in the local lottery). Edward, once a laid-back schemer, aspires to be like the American soldiers occupying Trinidad, decides to take a wife and is ruined. This pattern of aspiration then failure is replicated throughout the book; only those who are content, or become content with their lot, like the unemployed Uncle Bhacku who falls into the role of pundit; Popo the carpenter, who returns to honest labour after selling stolen goods; and the trash collector Eddoes, who is blessed with a beautiful daughter, are rewarded.

The negative value of aspiration is especially clear in the example of the character Hat. Hat plays a role in *Miguel Street* that is very similar to that of Ma and Pa in Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*. Hat's experiences are a synecdoche of those of the community, and in many ways he represents its heart and possesses the knowledge of its accumulated experience. Hat is second only to the narrator in his number of appearances in the book, and he is a font of wisdom throughout. The epitome of idleness, Hat reads newspapers, hangs out on the streets and does not much else. But despite his lack of aspiration, the narrator says 'I never knew a man who enjoyed life as much as Hat did' despite the fact that 'he did practically the same things every day' (163). Though the narrator makes it clear that not all characters, like the 'bored' Bogart, enjoy idleness, this aspiration-less stasis seems the best way to live. Hat excels at it, and it brings him happiness; those who accept their conditions or fall into an acceptance, like Hat, are able to attain equilibrium. This is made even more glaring when Hat makes the same mistake as the others and tries to change his lot by trying to find a woman. Hat's pursuit leads to his collapse and, like Lamming's Ma and Pa, his ruin

is explicitly connected to the collapse of the social group: 'It broke up the Miguel Street Club, and Hat himself was never the same afterwards' (167). Hat marries the woman he finds, beats her and is jailed, when he returns he and the street have changed – his idle life and happiness lost in the pursuit of his ambition.

Before Hat's collapse the street functions, though its population is transient and its denizens have no clear futures; it is almost a self-contained world within a world, which follows its own rules. Bruce King has remarked upon the essential vitality of the street, and its demarcation as an autonomous space – separated from the metropolitan world – beholden to only its own laws, noting that 'in *Miguel Street* there is a tolerance, even an appreciation, of eccentric self-display'.⁵⁹ Where in the metropole the kinds of 'self-display' shown in the book would be regarded as aberrant, on the street they are tolerated if not, at times, celebrated. Miguel Street has its own norms and though outsiders don't understand them, they work. At the opening of the eighth chapter, this is straightforwardly laid out: 'A stranger could drive through Miguel Street and just say "Slum!" because he could see no more. But we, who lived there, saw our street as a world (61).' And this world, despite appearances to outsiders, functioned. There is much compassion for other residents, seen when the narrator is lost upon arrival on the street and he is looked after (73). There is a great degree of overt sympathy for most of the characters in the novel – the narrator and the people he portrays more closely and explicitly tied to each other than those in Lamming's novel. Throughout the book the narrator 'feels sorry' for the plight of the people he observes, that phrase repeated five times throughout and backed by tears shed for characters who fail or are mistreated. Based on the representation of the characters and the obvious clash between their morality – Hat at one point saying it is 'a good thing for a man to beat his woman' – and the moral codes of the intended audience, this compassion could be read as the compassion of condescension, a pity for ignorance or stupidity. It could be read this way – but the frequency of its appearance, and the fact that it is withheld from certain

⁵⁹ V. S. Naipaul, p. 19.

characters, and lavished on the formerly happy, carefree and knowledgeable man, Hat, shows that it is not wholly cynical.

Many critics, even those who are highly disparaging of Naipaul's writing have acknowledged the sympathy inherent in the text. Gordon Rohlehr, who is far from a Naipaul apologist, states in his essay 'The Ironic Approach', that 'because of Naipaul's sympathy, *Miguel Street* comes across to the reader not merely as a jungle, but as a place where people in the face of insuperable frustration still preserve an intimacy and humour which is almost a new type of maturity'.⁶⁰ Though this sympathy is accompanied by an 'unconscious acceptance of a typical European view of Third World inferiority', Rohlehr notes it as a clear challenge to Lamming's assessment of the work's supposedly 'castrated satire'.⁶¹ Stefano Harney agrees, claiming the early book 'mixes humour and even hope with disappointment and claustrophobia' in a way Naipaul's later work does not.⁶² These two comments showcase the paradoxes within the novel: Miguel Street is a world of ignorance, violence, and little aspiration, but its residents are, on the whole, likeable, their lives liveable and full of amusement. While many residents crave more, if they aspire to break free from the repetition of street life, they are ruined, if they accept their absurdity and essential stasis, they can thrive, but only to the limits attainable in their dilapidated surroundings.

This is a tangle, and perhaps the manifestation of some philosophy that poor islanders ought to stay in their place. But perhaps not. Early in the novel, the character Popo, a carpenter, warns the narrator that 'when you grow old as me [...] you find that you don't care for the things you thought you woulda like if you coulda afford them' (11). Later, after the ruin of the firework-maker, Morgan, the narrator recalls one of Hat's maxims that echoes Popo's sentiment: 'as Hat said, when a man gets something he wants badly, he doesn't like

⁶⁰ Gordon Rohlehr, 'The Ironic Approach: The Novels of V. S. Naipaul', in *The Islands in Between: Essays on West Indian Literature*, ed. by Louis James (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 121-39, p. 126.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 121.

⁶² Stefano Harney, *Nationalism and Identity: Culture and the Imagination in a Caribbean Diaspora* (London: Zed Books, 1996), p. 140.

it' (71). Both quotations link to the theme of failure in the book and both state, clearly, that the pursuit and attainment of a goal do not result in self-fulfilment. It is an odd theme for a novel, particularly a novel that ends with its narrator setting off for a new life 'walk[ing] briskly towards the aeroplane [that will take me abroad], not looking back, looking only at my shadow before me, a dancing dwarf on the tarmac' (179). Where Lamming locates success firmly outside of his island and makes it only attainable for the educated emigrant, Naipaul questions whether or not success is possible anywhere – whether the emigrant thinker is, despite natural ability, really any more able to succeed than the people he represents. The fact that the novel includes many examples of individuals attempting to emigrate from the street and the island but being sucked back or destroyed because of their flight, reduces any optimism about the exit shown at the end of the book. In *Miguel Street* the colonial microcosm is fractured, broken and limited, but it is understandable, and at times enjoyable – it is the outside world and excessive ambition – the kind of ambition that catalyses a desire to find a better life abroad – that guarantee ruin. The narrator has an almost Haynes- and G.-like ease in departing Miguel Street but his departure is weighed down by the knowledge that all previous attempts to escape have only brought trouble, by the fact that 'when a man gets something he wants badly, he doesn't like it.' A fact we see repeated again and again.

In a consideration of Naipaul's early work, Selwyn Cudjoe claims that 'a sense of being lost and alone, a sense of isolation and exile, a recognition that his society was decaying and that it committed injustices against its members' can be found throughout Naipaul's writing, resulting in 'the subtheme of home (what or where is home?) and displacement (trying to find a center) [which] arose with enormous force, resistance, and urgency' in his early works.⁶³ This is an excellent dissection of Naipaul's first written novel, *Miguel Street*. Unfortunately, overlooking the post-war emigrant author context, Cudjoe does little to explore how 'isolation and exile' the 'subtheme[s] of home' and 'displacement'

⁶³ Cudjoe, *V. S. Naipaul*, p. 29.

are closely tied to Naipaul's social position and instead ties them to Naipaul's 'Hindu sensibility' and 'the clash between Eastern and Western perceptions of the world'.⁶⁴ It is clear that the position of the rural East Indian in Trinidad is important to Naipaul's writing; it would be hard to dispute Helen Hayward's claim that being 'a member of a culturally displaced minority community' in a colony is important to Naipaul's various fixations, but it would be equally hard to deny Hayward's following claim that 'the nature of colonial education, which encouraged an identification with the values of English civilization' likely 'increased [Naipaul's] sense of distance from the culture that surrounded him'.⁶⁵ This was a distance only exacerbated by the author's 1950 flight for post-war Britain, and one complicated by the clear sympathy, and alignment, if only partial alignment, with the people that is evident in *Miguel Street*.

In his second non-fiction book, *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul's moving description of arrival in England corresponds to Lamming's assessment of the country as 'dubious refuge'. He writes, 'I came to London. It had become the centre of my world and I had worked hard to come to it. And I was lost. London was not the centre of my world. I had been misled; but there was nowhere else to go [...] in the big city I was confined to a smaller world than I had ever known. I became my flat, my desk, my name.'⁶⁶ When the final scene of *Miguel Street* and the theme of failed aspiration are placed alongside Naipaul's position as an author whose experience of emigration is an experience of feeling 'misled', it manifests new sense. Though we know that the narrator of *Miguel Street* is in a position above the people he spends the novel among, and that the street is a place where ignorance and idleness are bliss, his departure is not joyful because he is not moving toward definite success; he is merely moving away from the comfort of a world he understands. As he waits for the plane he is 'frightened', the foreigners waiting there 'looked too rich, too

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 6, 12.

⁶⁵ Helen Hayward, *The Enigma of V. S. Naipaul: Sources and Contexts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 2.

⁶⁶ V. S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (London: André Deutsch, 1964), p. 45.

comfortable' and he wants to 'put off the moment' of being with them, so decides to return home when the flight is delayed (178). When he returns to the street, he is shocked to see that 'although I had been away, destined to be gone for good, everything was going on just as before, with nothing to indicate my absence' (178-179). This is almost certainly yet another representation of colonial stasis, but it is also a sign that the narrator, the emigrant, has little importance to his home. He is inessential. Where Hat's arrest and three-year jail sentence alter the feeling of the street, the narrator's departure barely makes an impact. He has little importance in either world: he is not needed in the street, nor is he needed in the future location represented by the departures lounge. Like all the other characters of the book he seems destined to be disappointed by the attainment of his goal, a fact foreshadowed by his already-alienation. Here we see clearly the complicated position of the emigrant-author portrayed exactly. We receive, not only a representation of the dominant-at-home and dominated-abroad (in the departures lounge) position, we also see the uncomfortable straddling of two groups, and the emigrant-intellectual's, at least partial, disconnection from both.

Hayward notes in Naipaul's' work, 'an unresolved and important ambivalence in his attitude towards the history of empire [...] He moves between the stance of insider and that of outsider with regard to the societies he portrays, and blends, in an unsettling manner, sympathy with irony, cruelty with compassion, in the treatment of certain characters.'⁶⁷ This is the sort of privileging of position that Nixon takes issue with in *Postcolonial Mandarin* but, as we have seen with Lamming, this insider-outsider stance was not unique to V. S. Naipaul, nor was the 'blend of sympathy with irony, cruelty with compassion'. This is a succinct description of not just Naipaul, or Naipaul's sign-maker in *Miguel Street*, but the representational techniques produced by the emigrant-authors' conceptual loci. All feel/felt the need to flee, a conflicted superiority over those they left behind, and an attraction-repulsion to the place left and the place where they arrived. All played the role of both

⁶⁷ Hayward, p. 4.

insiders and outsiders. And all harboured mixed feelings about the people they portrayed. Like Lamming, Naipaul's own position is dramatised by that of his character, and, like Lamming, it undermines the position he insisted upon – he is by no means wholly an insider or an outsider: he is somewhere in-between.

‘Wat to Is Must Is’: The Impossibility of Escape in *A Brighter Sun*

A similar position is dramatised in the work of Samuel Selvon. Although Selvon largely claimed to speak on behalf of the island of Trinidad, as a resident, simply ‘living abroad as a writer’, his first novel, *A Brighter Sun*, like the other two novels considered, complicates this connection. Like Naipaul and Lamming, Selvon's text showcases a partial allegiance to the colonist's world combined with a deep sympathy for the characters who suffer the effects of colonisation, while placing the individual with the will to migrate above those who remain in place. But Selvon's first depiction of the island he would never resettle in is marked with a more complex identification than either Lamming or Naipaul's work, and an even more pessimistic attitude toward flight. This has gone, so far, wholly unremarked. In accordance with the critic Bruce MacDonald, I believe that reading Selvon's earliest writing as ‘a dramatization of the tensions of land and language’, as most critics have, means ‘we will miss the wider vision which unifies and gives life to the more obvious conflicts. Selvon is more conscious of the craft of his fiction than Lamming's romantic rhetoric [and perhaps his own self-effacing comments] would allow’.⁶⁸ There is a too-often unseen sense of melancholy in Selvon's work, especially *A Brighter Sun*, which goes against his reputation for rollicking good humour. It is in the melancholic episodes in this book – where his main character becomes introspective, or when the world shifts against him – that we can discover the ‘wider vision’ about the possibility of self-improvement, and the concept of home that is more than Naipaul's ambivalence about leaving the masses for a role with the masters and

⁶⁸ MacDonald, p. 176.

Lamming's scepticism about the potential of the people. *A Brighter Sun* showcases a vision that is at once more moving and more enlightening about the felt-necessity and complications of emigration from the Caribbean than those of Selvon's peers; even if it is less hopeful.

A Brighter Sun tells the story of Tiger, a young Indo-Caribbean teenager thrust into adulthood by an early marriage and forced to come to terms with the demands and responsibilities of his nascent maturity. Similar to Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* and Naipaul's *Miguel Street*, *A Brighter Sun*'s protagonist is a young man who develops an identity that is separate and distinct from that of his community; but unlike those later novels, Selvon's work coheres much more closely to the style of a classic bildungsroman. Tiger is never far from centre-stage in this narrative, and desire for greater independence and manhood are clearly mapped out as a painful psychological struggle for self-definition. Tiger's mind moves constantly and each of his scenes contains questions and reconsiderations; the flitting of his thoughts being only a few of many 'moves' in the text: from the country to the city, from adolescence to adulthood, from ignorance to experience. The themes of relocation and restlessness have fundamental importance to the narrative. Tiger and his young bride Urmilla are in constant motion. From their first move to the mixed, 'cosmopolitan' village of Barataria into their marital mud hut, to their final move into the brick house Tiger constructs, the central characters are perpetually shifting – in place and in status, occupation and aspiration – most upheavals prompted by Tiger's desire for a better life – the brighter sun of the title.

Though he is its most important player, the story is not Tiger's alone. In a manner that recalls or, in chronological context, foreshadows *In the Castle of my Skin* and *Miguel Street*, events in Tiger's life are juxtaposed with the events in his wider community and provide insight into the composition of his village and his island. Unlike Lamming's book, which switches quickly from the central character to the community for long stretches, or Naipaul's book, which simply peppers other's stories with sprinkles of the narrator's life, *A*

Brighter Sun alternates between Tiger and Trinidad through the smooth inverted-triangle structure of most of its chapters. Following on from the first, many chapters begin with the latest happenings in Trinidad and slowly zoom in on Tiger's neighbourhood, then on Tiger himself. Roydon Salick has dubbed this the author's 'newsreel technique' which 'allows Selvon to create, as it were, a pointillistic, yet seemingly full historical and social context for Tiger's narrative'.⁶⁹ Along with providing a sociohistorical context for Tiger's private life these sections situate Trinidad as a thriving world that functions quite effectively, and independently of Europe and the Americas. Setting up the newsreel technique for the rest of the novel, the first chapter begins, 'On New Year's Day, 1939, while Trinidadians who had money or hopes of winning money were attending the races in the Queen's Park Savannah, Port of Spain, a number of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe landed on the island' and it goes on to describe the way this arrival affected Trinidad, increasing the 'rental of residences and business places' and resulting, after a German training ship arrived near the colony, in 'adjacent territorial waters [being] proclaimed a prohibited area'.⁷⁰ While this may seem to be a simple account of the involvement of Trinidad in world affairs, the arrival of German Jews is set against other events of 1939. Immediately after this we are told,

A man went about the streets balancing a bottle of rum on his head. An East Indian, reputedly mad, walked to the wharf and dipped a key in the sea and went away muttering to himself. A big burly Negro called Mussolini, one-legged and arrogant, chased a small boy who was teasing him and fell down [...] In September much rain fell. (3)

A sensible question would be: Why is the meaningful event of the Jews' arrival and the effective entrance of Trinidad into the war set against these seeming trivialities? The answer is simply that these events, the mad East Indian's unlocking of the sea, Mussolini's

⁶⁹ Roydon Salick, 'Introduction', in Samuel Selvon, *A Brighter Sun* (Harlow: Longman, 1985), pp. i-xv (p. xiv).

⁷⁰ Samuel Selvon, *A Brighter Sun* (Harlow: Longman, 1985), p. 3. All further references are cited in parenthesis in the text.

collapse, and extra autumn rain, are seen as equally, if not more, important on the island. A fact backed up by the statement later that ‘in Chaguanas, a sugar-cane district halfway down the western coast of the island, the biggest thing to happen, bigger even than the war, was Tiger’s wedding’ (4). What would be trivial to outsiders – just another wedding, or a madman traipsing into the sea – is in fact important and memorable to the people on the island and contributes to their collective history. The island is a different, insular world, much like Naipaul’s *Miguel Street*; though it is affected by what occurs beyond its coastlines, its own events are the focus of its people. This notion is reinforced later in the novel. In the second ‘newsreel’ in the second chapter we are alerted to the fact that American servicemen arrived on the island in 1941 and are told that in the same year ‘a man named Afoo Dayday was caught urinating behind a tree in a park and was jailed’ (17). Chapter Five reinforces the people’s priorities, and focus, when ‘a man named Soylo who lived in the Northern Range, up in the Aripo hills in the central part of the island, didn’t know there was a war on until a day in August 1942. And when he heard he shrugged his shoulders and said, “O-ho! Dat is why we seeing so much trouble to get saltfish in de shop now!”’(63). The text grants small events on the island as much weight as those events that are shaking the world, because these events have more bearing on the lives of the island’s people. To echo the title of Selvon’s later work, in *A Brighter Sun* ‘an island is a world’.

The novel creates a vivid image of Trinidad, not only as place where people have peculiar concerns, but as place strained by its own unique social tensions. Tiger’s first voyage, from Chaguanas to Barataria, is a trip from a mostly Indian community to a community marked by its mixing and eclecticism. Selvon uses the relocation, and the attendant necessity for Tiger to interact with black ‘Creole’ Trinidadians, as an opportunity to comment on his former island’s racial composition and racial politics to a much greater extent than Naipaul. This is a central part of the story, and important to Tiger’s perceptual ‘move’ from his parents’ way of thinking to his own. We learn quickly that Indians and black people traditionally live apart: Indians work the fields while ‘Negroes were never

farmers, and most of them did odd jobs in the village or the city' (10). This division of labour results in a divided polity and self-segregation neatly encapsulated in Tiger's father's admonition to his son that, 'you must look for Indian friend, like you and you wife. Indian must keep together (47).' The two races, though living side-by-side, keep to themselves.

Tiger, importantly, resists this. Like his descendents in *Miguel Street* and *In the Castle of my Skin*, he seeks to leave behind the lifestyle and prejudices of the people surrounding him and, like many central characters before and since, the young man is specially equipped to do this. Like Lamming and Naipaul's characters, Tiger is marked by differences, from differences in speech to differences in desires. Tiger's 'language is closer to standard English than all the Trinidadian characters in the novel, with only a few concessions to the "creole" dialect to give it the flavour of being Trinidadian', which sets him out as unique.⁷¹ His desires quickly outstrip those of his peers; his early intention to become a man by smoking, drinking, swearing and bullying Urmilla (11-12) is replaced by a deeper desire to know, to find out 'about things in general, about people, about how I does feel funny sometimes'; Tiger's cares shift to essential, 'existential questions': 'What I doing here now? Why I living? What all of we doing here? Why some people black and some white? How far is it from here to that cloud up there? What it have behind the sky? Why some people rich and some poor? But what is they fighting a war for?' (100-101).⁷² These questions are beyond the scope of an Afo Dayday or a Soylo, and beyond the scope of Tiger's closest companions. Again though, like his descendants, the nature of these questions binds Tiger to his people, rather than the metropolitan reader, even as they distance him from them. While Tiger's speech brings him closer to us, as does, perhaps, his desire for knowledge, his evident ignorance of why the war is happening or what is 'behind

⁷¹ On Tiger's speech, see MacDonald, p. 178.

⁷² See Grace Eche Okereke 'Samuel Selvon's Evolution from *A Brighter Sun* to *Turn Again Tiger*: An Expansion of Vision and a Development of Form', in *Tiger's Triumph*, ed. by Susheila Nasta and Anna Rutherford, pp. 35-53 (p. 38) on Tiger's questioning.

the sky' mark him, like the other characters we have considered, as straddling a line between 'them' and 'us'.

This in-between position is reinforced by Tiger's relationship with the wider cast. Though no explicit contrasts between Tiger and other characters are drawn, as they are in Lamming and Naipaul's novels, they are fairly evident. Each character in the text has some relation to what Tiger is or aspires to be and is decisively not like Tiger.⁷³ One of Tiger's many moves is from subsistence to economic solvency, the Chinese shopkeeper, Tall Boy, representing the degree of economic success that is attainable in Tiger's context. Like Tiger, Tall Boy is from a minority community in Trinidad, and like Tiger he is creolised, a brief gloss in the text explaining that when a Chinese person is granted a name other than 'Chin' on the island, the implication is that they have gained acceptance by the wider community (50-51).⁷⁴ Tall Boy owns a small shop and is successful enough to buy out his indolent competitor, Otto. He is a success; he is well-liked; he has a healthy family and numerous children. Tall Boy is a model of Baratarian achievement, but a model without ambition. When he thinks of his children, '...he didn't have immediate plans for the future; the main thing was to have money for them when they grew up to open their own business...they could wait. But he had to pay the carpenter, and flour and rice were running low' (62). The ellipses indicate that thoughts of his offspring were deferred and the second sentence shows his children's futures are subordinate to his day-to-day concerns. Unlike Tiger, Tall Boy is content in his present place; he has no ambition. This state is echoed by Tiger's closest friend, the black Creole, Joe. Joe shows the contentment of the anti-intellectual. He has some success, a house with the 'amenities' of 'running water', a 'septic tank' and an 'electric stove' (30), but he aspires to nothing else. He is content; the philosophical words he tells Tiger in a time of stress are simple: 'Wat to is must is' (38). When Tiger is surprised that

⁷³ I owe this part of my argument to Grace Okereke who presents an unelaborated version of what follows in her essay, above, p. 38.

⁷⁴ It is worth noting that we have again here, as in the newsreel sections, evidence of a totalising vision that offers the reader a sweeping view of an unknown space.

Joe cannot write, Joe responds, 'dey have plenty of people who can't write [...] and dey living happy' (42). Unlike Tiger, Joe does not find a quest for knowledge necessary.

Tiger's wife, Urmilla, is also distinguished from other characters by her lack of a phonetic Creole, and while she easily attracts the reader's sympathy, her movement from country life to city life is far less fraught than Tiger's. Urmilla longs for womanhood as her husband longs for manhood, but her thoughts are not haunted in the same way as his by existential questions. Urmilla, though afraid of her husband and her new life at the start of the novel, gains security in her womanhood, and herself, once she has given birth, the old fear replaced with a fearful excitement about her new role: 'shades of responsibility moved in her mind. From the time the baby had come, a new power swept through her, like wind [...] when she felt the baby at her side, she had thought, I is woman now, and the thought had made her fearful and joyful at the same time' (48). This flood of fearful joy comes but one paragraph before more of Tiger's mental convolutions – these in particular marking him as separate from his father. He wonders, 'Why I should only look for Indian friend? [...] Ain't a man is a man, don't mind if he skin not white, or if he hair curl?' his thoughts, 'how burned cane thrash went spinning in the wind helplessly' (48). Urmilla has found her identity, while Tiger still struggles, and will continue to struggle, to define not just manhood, but the meaning of 'man'.

The most important contrast character of Tiger is Sookdeo, an old Indian farmer who serves as a symbol of abject failure and a doomed rural way of life. Sookdeo is a drunk who lives on 'rum and memories', whose 'hands were cracked and gnarled with labour' (65). He is man who has worked the land for many years, his long life making him a repository of lost knowledge. Sookdeo sailed to Trinidad from India as an indentured labourer and 'lived in San Juan when the land was planted with cane, and not as it was today, with houses and streets. He remembered when the whole of Barataria was cultivating cane, spreading down to the swamp' (65). His long life of toiling on the land has given him a 'careless love' for the earth, one he shares with Tiger (77), and he spends his non-drunken

hours cultivating and selling his crops and offering the use of his old donkey and cart to other villagers. Though Sookdeo is a symbol of the dead-end of working only to satisfy immediate needs, he is a sympathetic character and becomes Tiger's mentor. Inexplicably, despite his background and utter lack of motivation for anything other than drink, Sookdeo can read, and he takes Tiger under his wing to pass the skill to him. The old man has talent with crops and is intelligent enough to read but he is not dynamic; his life is static and stagnant and he suffers for this near the end of the book. Sookdeo is the personification of labour fettered to the land and his life and ruin are a warning to Tiger. Though he never alters his activities, Sookdeo realises the fate that awaits him and he bids Tiger not to follow his example:

Boy, Ah frighten too bad. It have a time wen it ain't have no rum for me to drink, and I start to tink. Ah tink, "Sookdeo, is wat yuh do wid yuh life at all? Is wat going to happen to yuh? Who go bury you wen yuh dead? [...] Yuh want to come man like me? Go in de city, don't stay dis side. Get ah work wid wite people in office. If you stay here, wat? Digging hole in ground, Rainy season come. Tomatoes come. Sell, buy rum. Go back in garden again. Sun burning yuh! Every day same ting dis side. Ah frighten, boy. (116)

Sookdeo begs Tiger to leave the fields and start anew; he wants him to escape what he sees as a repetitive, monotonous life – a dead end.

If all of these contrast characters are taken together they create the range of possibilities open to Tiger. If he remains in Barataria, merely cultivating, his fate will be as uncertain as Sookdeo's; if he remains and aspires to more he can potentially ascend to Tall Boy's heights, but seemingly there is not much else he can attain. Tiger's restlessness makes Joe's contentment unreachable and his identity harder to fix than Urmilla's. Taken together, these characters highlight Tiger's difference, from everyone, and make his overarching desire to transcend his background understandable. When Tiger hears about England from Sookdeo 'he was conscious only of the great distance which separated him from all that was

happening' (75). It is a distance he seeks to narrow, or overleap, but his adamant pursuit of this goal complicates and nearly ruins his life.

It is here that we discover the connection of the novel to the theme of emigration. Though Tiger remains firmly planted on Trinidadian soil throughout the narrative, his entire struggle is a struggle to move away, both physically and mentally, from his origins. He seeks to emigrate from the life his father has led, and his fellow Baratarians lead, and, though he does not do it, he even contemplates leaving Trinidad altogether. Tiger's desires mime the desires of the country-to-country emigrant, though his emigration is simply from countryside to city-outskirts, and from a lack of knowledge to a greater understanding. The implicit question posed by *A Brighter Sun* is a simple one, with great relevance to Selvon's displaced generation: Is it possible, or even desirable to transcend your origins and find success by leaving your home? Or, as Joe says, is what happens in life beyond your control? Lamming's answer in *In the Castle of my Skin* is 'yes': it is both possible *and* desirable; Naipaul's answer in *Miguel Street* is that it is desirable but perhaps impossible. Looking at the evidence in *A Brighter Sun*, Selvon's answer to both parts of the question is a diffident 'no'.

Education is Tiger's primary means to become more than what he was destined to be, but as MacDonald avers, 'it is as much a puzzle as a solution, and it finally offers no easy, complete answers'.⁷⁵ Two types of knowledge are prevalent, and in conflict, in the novel. Both are contrasted in an innocuous scene in the middle of the text. Tiger questions Sookdeo's success with his harvests, and asks 'how it is you crops always coming good and you don't do work in the garden, man' (76). Sookdeo claims he 'can't explain' but it is linked to his love of his vegetables: 'yuh must love de tomatoes and lettuce and pigeon peas, and dey grow if yuh love them' (76). Tiger says that he too loves his crops, and works hard on them, and wonders if Sookdeo has been following the instructions of the government's

⁷⁵ Macdonald, p. 181.

‘agriculture man’ who ‘does come round sometimes, and give we advice’ (77). Sookdeo’s response creates an image of the distinct types of knowledge:

Yuh mean dat fellow who come dis side? He smart. He know what he talkam bout, he have plenty book knowledge. One time, yuh know, he come and ask me how Ah does plant, and why Ah don’t take more care wid de garden. Dat time Ah was planting pigeon peas. He look at de young trees and he tell me dat unless Ah do wat he say, Ah wouldn’t get enough peas to feed a fowl. But you tink Ah worried wid him? Nar, man. Two, three month after he come back [...] pigeon peas laden on de trees, boy, until de branches touching the ground. (77)

Sookdeo respects the ‘book knowledge’ of the agriculture emissary (‘He smart’), but ultimately it pales in comparison to Sookdeo’s natural talent born of his love of his crops. Tiger is stunned by this: ‘You won’t say you know more than government people! (78).’ Sookdeo’s answer is straightforward: ‘Haveam some ting yuh learn only by experience (78).’ With this statement, a line is drawn between the knowledge gleaned by doing – shown to be successful in Sookdeo’s case, and the knowledge drawn from reading – which allows someone to be ‘smart’, but does not seem to pay experience’s dividends. For most of the novel, Tiger’s quest is to attain ‘book knowledge’, the kind of knowing that is disconnected from his background and the land. This is an almost wholly fruitless pursuit. Grace Eche Okereke has said that ‘Selvon portrays the education and knowledge Tiger has acquired as destructive of happiness’.⁷⁶ She is essentially correct, but perhaps fails to distinguish between the knowledge absorbed from books and that gained by doing; book knowledge, and the inflated self-importance it creates, almost destroys Tiger’s life, while experiential knowledge is less black-and-white.

Shortly after this scene, there is a clever double entendre. Contemplating what Sookdeo has told him, Tiger reflects that ‘what he didn’t know hurt him more than what he

⁷⁶ Okereke, p. 39.

knew' (80). The apparent meaning is that he needs to acquire knowledge to overcome the 'hurt' of ignorance; but in actual fact, all the knowledge that he acquires ends up causing the 'hurt': what he didn't know, at that instant, would go on 'to hurt him more than what he knew.' Immediately after learning how to read and write, and gaining a desire to record this history of Baratara before it is changed by the construction of the Churchill-Roosevelt highway, Tiger becomes heedless of his family. He tells Urmilla, 'I will write down everything what happen. How we had garden, and how the Americans come, and how we had to leave, and how they build the road—' (126). Urmilla's concerns, the product of her more stable identity as a woman and mother, are fixed on the immediate, the family; she responds instantly:

“Don't talk so loud, Tiger, you go wake up the baby.”

“To hell with the baby! I talking bout the future, and how we will build a house to live in.”

“You don't care for the child again. Ever since you learning to read and to write, you having big ideas, you going to town, you like you don't care to stay home again, like you don't care about anything.” (126)

Tiger's search for knowledge, his desire to move beyond his roots by spending more time in the city and by reading and writing, has caused him to neglect and damage his family. The characteristically passive Urmilla challenges his new behaviour, but Tiger is unmoved; his thoughts shift to failing in his pursuit. He thought, 'What if things went somehow wrong, if he got to be an old man like Sookdeo, with a wife and a girl child, and an awful fear inside, the fear of having nothing in front or behind?' (126). Sookdeo, the doomed drunkard, returns as a symbol of all Tiger wishes to avoid; Urmilla's chastisement is forgotten, and the search for book knowledge continues.

After this episode, Tiger continues to detach himself further from his family. In a comic scene, he showcases his knowledge of the dictionary, light-heartedly dismissing Urmilla's definition of a fish as something 'that does live in the sea, and in river and pond

too,' with the verbatim, dictionary meaning. 'I know I would catch you!', Tiger says, 'It say is a animal living in water, is a vertebrate, cold-blooded animal having gills throughout life and limbs, if any, modified into fins. You see!' (159). This amusing scene comes just after Tiger 'ripe with knowledge' questions whether Urmilla is cheating on him (142) and precedes the most tragic episode in the text where, in pursuit of a promotion Tiger invites his American bosses home for an authentic meal that goes perfectly to plan, pleases the Americans but causes Tiger to become enraged at Urmilla, leading to the stillbirth of a long-coveted son.

Thought, for Tiger, is an almost unnatural burden. We are told in the middle of the novel that 'sometimes a heart-slowng homesickness overcame him, and he wanted to run back to his life as a boy in the canefields, with no thoughts to worry him' (81). This harking back to childhood could be read as a straight-portrayal of the endemic nostalgia of young adulthood, but this sentence contains items of especial relevance to Tiger and his desire to escape his origins. It suggests that not only childhood, but life in the fields is soothing. Tiger's natural work, in the arable land he loves, even as a child, is worry-free; his pursuit of knowledge, beyond his calling, talent and background is what causes distress. There is an elemental connection between Tiger and the land and when this is severed, by abortive attempts at social climbing, or desperation for the insight that comes from reading and writing, Tiger is hurt. We see this throughout the novel. In an extended internal monologue, before Tiger's education begins, he dreams of a better life, thinking:

Even little Henry could read and write a little. Every time he thought of that Tiger winced as if he had been slapped in the face [...] he was no old man, to resign himself to a poor life, killing out his body in the fields [...] Man, I will go and live in Port of Spain; this village too small, you can't learn anything except how to plant crop. (82)

Tiger's thoughts of aspiration link directly to a desire to escape, to make a further flight from the near-city to the city itself, but his belief that he will find succour beyond the fields is immediately undermined:

So the tune went on in his brain [...] when he raised his head he could see the hills of the Northern Range and feel himself a part of it all. And he found satisfaction in the growth of the seeds he planted [...] And when the seeds burst and the shoots peeped at the sun, he felt that at least he could make things grow, even if he did not have any knowledge. (82)

Characteristically, Tiger denies the fact that the knowledge gleaned from experience is true knowledge. But it is his native knowledge. This scene shows Tiger's undeniable attachment to the land. He is a 'part of it all', more than just a man in the landscape that feels the world is a wide place and he an aspect of it; he is connected – the sentence 'And he found satisfaction...' following on from the 'a part of it all' showing the attachment is more than a romantic feeling of oneness, but a symbiosis with the land. This technique is repeated later when Tiger, after a horrible experience in the city he longed to live in, muses in the park, aspiring again, then 'look[ing] at the sea again, feeling its deep movement', then shifting his vision to the setting sun and 'watch[ing] it with deep feeling, not giving of himself so much as drawing from it what he could' (101). Symbiosis here is clear: the sun soothes Tiger.

After Tiger's marriage, at the start of the novel, his uncle Ramlal gives him life advice: 'You gettam house which side Barataria, gettam land, cow [...] Haveam plenty boy chile—girl chile no good, only bring trouble on yuh head. You live dat side, plantam garden, live good' (7). For all of his struggles, by the end of the book, Tiger has attained nothing more than what his uncle advises him, but he has been successful within the terms laid out by his family, and context, and also found a measure of internal harmony. At the end Tiger has been swayed by Joe's philosophy, and says himself that 'what had to happen, had to happen' (190). In conversation with Joe he elaborates that a man 'should be glad for what he have, he shouldn't want too much thing [...] He shouldn't want to do big things right away,

he should take time, he should wait for chances and opportunities. He should be grateful for what he have, don't mind it small (194).' It is a statement very close to the mistrust of aspiration voiced by Hat and Popo in *Miguel Street*.

Grace Okereke says that Selvon, at the book's conclusion, 'is saying that the Caribbean man in the New World can never find satisfaction and fulfilment in escape. Rather, he must reconcile himself to his place in society, and root himself in the land making the best he can out of it'.⁷⁷ This very much seems to be the case, but Tiger's decision seems, at every moment, constrained. Tiger's fate is the land, it is true, but he still remains restless. His final extended reflection shows his continued dissatisfaction with his surroundings, and his continued difference from his peers: 'It seemed no one knew that a battle had been won, that peace had been declared. They still went to work in the fields, the sun still shone, Tall Boy's shop was still there, they said the same things, over and over, day after day' (214). The 'battle' Tiger speaks of is ostensibly WWII, but the word could very well refer to his internal struggle. Though peace, in a sense, has been declared, it is marked by 'day after day' monotony and Tiger remains dissatisfied. His final line in the novel, 'Now it is a good time to plant corn', is 'muttered', and evidences exhaustion, rather than jubilation (215). Further, we see here, as we have seen in Lamming and Naipaul, yet another repetition of the idea of island stasis as the days are said merely to repeat themselves. Tiger has not achieved his dreams; he has simply become resigned to the fact that book knowledge does not work for him and that any attempt to move beyond the field – to be dissatisfied with what the text reveals to be his essential connection to the land, will be ruinous.

A Brighter Sun tells the Naipaulian story of a failed attempt to escape a somewhat confining, restrictive home. Though its deployment of humour does not stray into satire, it poses the same questions about escape that *Miguel Street* poses. In line with this, as Bruce MacDonald has argued, it is difficult to see it as the celebration of life in the peasantry that

⁷⁷ Okereke, p. 40.

Lamming takes it for.⁷⁸ Although Kenneth Ramchand has claimed that the novel presents a ‘faith in one’s real roots in a particular place’,⁷⁹ Tiger’s dissatisfaction with his life, to the last, shows little ‘faith’. In many ways the main character seems bound, even fettered, to the land of his origin; his roots are not wholly enriching, though the land soothes him it holds him back and the conclusion of the narrative promises mere repetition. Gordon Rohlehr has said that ‘Selvon seems to view history and change as things which one must accept’, and I would add the clause that the acceptance here is against the character’s wishes.⁸⁰ We get a sense here of an essentialism, the kind that the contrast between book knowledge and experience highlights: because of what he is, fundamentally, Tiger cannot become what he wishes. His emigration has only reinforced the fact that he cannot fully transcend his background even though he wishes to do so.

The novel reads against the grain of Lamming’s first novel. Here the movement from one place to a perceived better place is not wholly positive – and return is impossible. New knowledge makes life harder; a new context creates unexpected challenges; attainment of dreams is only ever partial and ultimately unsatisfying. Though Tiger is set out as special from those around him, this is not enough to make his movements – in status, occupation and aspiration – his emigration, a success. And, because of all of this, his various ‘moves’ are implicitly questioned. In Tiger’s search for ‘a brighter sun’, he finds, that there is no ‘brighter’ sun, that the same light shines on the literate and illiterate, that a new place is not a new world and that, wherever you are, ‘What to is must is’. This is not a joyful revelation and it goes a step beyond Naipaul to cast doubt on whether or not the Caribbean intellectual resident, with origins in the peasantry, has any chance of separation due to his own essential nature.

⁷⁸ MacDonald, p. 182.

⁷⁹ Kenneth Ramchand, *An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature* (Sunbury-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1976), p. 72.

⁸⁰ Gordon Rohlehr, ‘The Folk in Caribbean Literature’, in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. by Susheila Nasta, pp. 29-43 (p. 39).

Conclusion

Pierre Bourdieu's describes his concept of 'habitus' as the 'product of the incorporation of objective necessity' which 'provides strategies which, even if they are not produced by consciously aiming at explicitly formulated goals [...] turn out to be objectively adjusted to the situation'.⁸¹ The 'constraint of social conditions' governs habitus and though subjective interpretation of and reaction to social conditions affect it, those interpretations and reactions are delimited by social context.⁸² In our adaptation of 'habitus' – which brackets Bourdieu's focus on its 'embodied' aspect to highlight the effects of origins and context on perception to place actors in a particular conceptual locus – we, necessarily, encounter a similar conflict between external and unconscious constraints battling with and shaping conscious desire.⁸³ As mentioned, it is unlikely that any of our authors set out to write anything other than the straightforward, unambiguous and un-ambivalent representations that they claimed to be creating. Lamming's wish was to elevate the peasantry; Naipaul's wish was to give insight into his 'philistine' society; and Selvon aimed to show his metropolitan readers the realities of Trinidad. None of them mentioned as a goal the desire to represent emigration or emigrants, and certainly none of them actively recognised the similarity of their portrayals of ambitious, mobile, outsiders in relation to their people. Nonetheless, as shown, all of these aspects are evident in their work. Productions always owe something to the space occupied by their producers. The reality in texts is a reality refracted through an author's experience and sensibility – and it often reveals itself to be the product of a slightly or markedly different sensibility than the one an author claims for himself. This is as true of these three first-wave West Indian authors as it is of any authors, in any context, including, as we shall see, their French Caribbean counterparts.

⁸¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, p. 11.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸³ For an introduction to Bourdieu's thoughts on how 'habitus' affects the physical acts of individuals and is thus 'embodied', see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 53, 60.

Part II: Emigration and the Francophone Caribbean

Chapter 3:

Crossing the Border: Francophone Caribbean Intellectuals

The authors from the anglophone Caribbean are far more numerous than their francophone counterparts, those from the French-speaking territories of Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana, as a cohort, have had a far wider-reaching influence than their peers from the English-speaking islands. Where the likes of V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming and Samuel Selvon have had a substantial impact on thought and writing from and about the Caribbean, the major names from the francophone tradition, particularly Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant and Maryse Condé, have had direct influence on Franco-Caribbean politics; postcolonial, post-modern and feminist theory; literary criticism; and historical comment upon and modern conceptions of their area of the world. When more recent writers like Patrick Chamoiseau are highlighted within the list of literary figures from the Caribbean Départements d’Outre Mer (DOMs) of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana, the widespread acclaim for authors from this region, which contributes only a fraction to the total population of the Caribbean, is even more apparent.¹

There are many factors that contribute to this disproportionate impact – including the ongoing vogue for French thought – but almost all link to the fact that, like writing from the anglophone islands, francophone Caribbean literature is essentially an emigrant tradition. As with the anglophone authors we have already considered, in almost all instances residence in Europe served as a gateway for French Caribbean writers into a field of global literature. Residence in the metropole was the primary means through which they were able

¹ I use the terms ‘French- or Franco-Caribbean’ as a shorthand throughout this and subsequent chapters. It is somewhat rough-and-ready as, in my usage, it usually excludes Haiti, which was, of course, controlled by France until its successful slave revolt.

to establish themselves as intellectual representatives for their countrymen and therefore gain the clout to have their work read, studied and disseminated. Time in Paris in particular gave authors access to influential literary and artistic circles that simply did not exist on their islands of origin. As mentioned earlier, Pascale Casanova presents a compelling case in *The World Republic of Letters* that writing produced in certain regions of the world is more likely to gain an audience than that produced elsewhere. Of all the privileged places that Casanova considers, none is ranked higher for historical influence than Paris, the ‘capital of modernity’.² Residence in France, and direct connection to the French literary tradition, gave emigrant authors access to intellectual patrons, a global audience, and the ability to establish French Caribbean writing as a unique subfield within the space of French letters.

While flight to the metropole was an essential factor in the establishment of this literature, the movement of authors from the French colonies to the French hexagon occurred under very different circumstances from that of residents of anglophone islands to Britain. Due to the fact the Caribbean DOMs have been under almost continuous French control since the seventeenth century, and have yet to gain sovereignty, authors who left their homes for Paris may be considered ‘emigrants’, or *departees*, but cannot really be considered ‘immigrants’ in even the widest sense of the word.³ While anglophone authors were in a similar position immediately before and after the Second World War, their islands were steadily separating from the metropole in the decades that followed and many remained in Britain to become traditional immigrants after their islands had gained independence. For French Caribbean authors, the situation is markedly different: as the years following the close of the Second World War passed, their home territories became ever more connected to, and ever more dependent upon, France, and shifted from island colonies to their current

² Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M. B. DeBevoise (London: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 88.

³ It is worth noting, as Alistair Hennessy does, that Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana have been ‘under continuous European rule for longer than any other part of the non-European world.’ See ‘Series Preface’, in *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana Today*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. iii.

DOM status. Because of this, modern French Caribbean authors have never been anything other than French citizens and the nature of their emigration – brief, extended or successive stints in the metropole of varying lengths, dubbed ‘circulating’ by Alain Anselin – is common to their countrymen.⁴

There is one other, crucial difference between the French and English-speaking Caribbean: the timing of these authors’ arrivals. While the first major anglophone writers went to Britain with waves and waves of their countrymen, the vanguard francophone writers arrived before spikes in movement from the French Caribbean to France. Unlike Britain, which actively solicited island subjects immediately after the war to fill vacancies in manufacturing and medicine, France did not entice people from its Caribbean colonies until the 1960s.⁵ As with the anglophone context, a spike in emigration corresponded with a spike in writing about the colonies, but those authors whose first publications came in the ’60s and ’70s inserted their works into an already established body of French Caribbean literature, one whose earliest writers began their work in the 1920s and ’30s. This has created a very different generational division than that of authors in Britain.

There has been no single critical approach to bracketing off this body of work into artistic eras or generations. Nonetheless there are some broad similarities in divisions made. It is widely recognised that writing in the ’60s and ’70s had a different tone and content than that published earlier. ‘Until the 1960s, written forms of creole were very rare, and there was a more or less absolute divide between literary language which remained close to standard

⁴ Alain Anselin, *L’émigration antillaise en France: la troisième île* (Paris: Karthala, 1990), p. 197.

⁵ The most detailed study of this phenomenon is in French, Alain Anselin’s *L’émigration antillaise*, above. For more history, along with attitudes to emigration among the young in the French Caribbean see also Pierre-Leval Sainte-Rose, *Le Jeune antillais face à la migration: analyse du couple attrait/répulsion dans le phénomène migratoire* (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1983). A comprehensive English-language study is Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France’s Overseas Frontier: Départements et Territoires D’outre-Mer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially, pp. 109-115. Briefer, more schematic coverage can be found in Alain Anselin’s article ‘West Indians in France’, in *French and West Indian*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno, pp. 112-18.

literary French, and spoken creole or creolised French'.⁶ In addition, 'significant' talents from Guadeloupe appeared in this decade.⁷ Authors in the 1970s produced literature that was, in Sam Haigh's terms 'more pessimistic than earlier writing'.⁸ In the 1970s important female authors appeared, including Jacqueline Manicom, Simone Schwartz-Bart and the aforementioned Maryse Condé.⁹ As we will consider in detail in the next chapter, French Caribbean writing has come in waves that often directly connect to three theoretical movements, 'three principle ways of thinking of Difference [...] pre-modern (Négritude), the modern (Antillanité)' and the 'post-modern (Créolité)'.¹⁰ These movements connect to decades: Négritude gained popularity in the 1930s and faded in the 1960s; from the '60s through to the '80s versions of the theory of Antillanité, focused on Caribbean specificity, grew in influence; and lastly, from the 1980s to our contemporary era, Créolité became the theory of the moment. The generation in which we are interested is the first, those writers who were influenced by Négritude, who arrived before the 1960s emigrants, and who would shape the conception of French Caribbean writing and islands.¹¹

Like the anglophone authors we have just considered, the writers of the French Caribbean first wave entered a country that was effectively ignorant of their area of the world. This put writers into privileged, yet delimited positions: they were unrestricted by structured and established expectations about 'native' writing from the Caribbean but their

⁶ Celia Britton, 'Eating Their Words: The Consumption of French Caribbean Literature', *ASCALF Yearbook: The Annual Publication of the Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French*, 1 (1996), 15-23 (p. 18).

⁷ Belinda Jack, *Francophone Literatures: An Introductory Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 121.

⁸ Sam Haigh, 'Introduction', in *An Introduction to Caribbean Francophone Writing: Guadeloupe and Martinique*, ed. by Sam Haigh (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 1-16 (p. 11).

⁹ Haigh, 'Introduction', p. 11

¹⁰ Richard D. E. Burton, 'The Idea of Difference in Contemporary French West Indian Thought: Négritude, Antillanité, Créolité', in *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana Today*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 137-66 (p. 158).

¹¹ In a similar manner to the inconsistent use of the terms 'Antilles', 'Caribbean' and 'West Indies', there is a marked inconsistency in the spelling and capitalisation of the names of the French Caribbean theoretical movements. In this essay I will use 'Négritude', 'Antillanité' (sometimes rendered 'Caribbeanness' in translation and English-language criticism) and Créolité. My sources vary widely in their capitalisation, use of diacritics and terminology.

writing could garner attention only to the extent that it represented certain ‘truths’ about, in this context, the colonial or black world. As with the anglophone authors, the act of emigration combined with upbringing and environment to result in marked gaps between writers and those they chose to represent – gaps widened by reception, and which reveal themselves in their texts.

Unlike the anglophone context, the physical and psychological distance that status and immigration created between authors and their subjects, the importance of residence in the metropole to their lives and work, and the centrality of a foreign audience to their successes are regularly acknowledged facts within French Caribbean criticism. Owing something to revaluations of the relationship between ‘postcolonial’ intellectuals and their people, and the authors’ own statements about themselves, some engagement with the externality of these writers is almost obligatory in contemporary readings. The common critical acknowledgement is similar to one presented by Paul Clay Sorum in his description of colonial authors in France who ‘were likely to discover [...] that the society whose culture they had imbibed was less open to them than they had expected [...] They found themselves estranged from both worlds and torn within themselves’.¹² Clearly, this mirrors the argument presented in the last chapter. Nonetheless, on the whole, mention of emigration as an influential factor in this literature takes the shape of passing comments on intellectuals’ disconnection from their people, their thrall to French thought and their function as spokesmen. These factors are rarely, if ever, read into their work in any systematic way, nor are they any detailed considerations of the formation of their literary sub-field. Critics have yet to explore how psychological and physical gaps combined with the constraints placed on writers by the French literati to both spin and influence the content of the work they produced, work which betrays a double resentment that has yet to be addressed – a resentment aimed at the French *and* at the Caribbean people – work that reveals authors’

¹² Paul Clay Sorum, *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 212-13.

uneasy situation between two poles of identity, even within its most strident declarations of belonging. These are the issues we will go on to explore.

As with the anglophone authors, focus will be restricted to the most influential members of the first wave in order to consider the manifestation of early responses to emigration in major post-emigration texts. In pursuit of this goal, I will only refer to authors who came from Martinique and Guadeloupe, the two islands which produced the bulk of the French Caribbean's authors.¹³ Just as in the other context, it is important to understand the history of the region we are considering in order to properly situate its authors within their space in time and thus gain an understanding of the circumstances surrounding their upbringing, experience of emigration and the demands placed upon them by their contemporary literary field. As discussed, these social factors would have influenced these authors' conceptual loci and through this, their ways of representing what they perceived.

For the purpose of sharper focus, we will concentrate on just two of the most influential writers from the period before increased French Caribbean immigration, Aimé Césaire and Edouard Glissant. The two are, without question, the most well-regarded and influential writers in the French Caribbean literary tradition and the work of both has done much to shape critical and global perceptions of their people. Although Césaire was not the first French Caribbean author to publish work about his region in the World War-era, his work went on to overshadow that of his predecessors. Decades of scrutiny have made Césaire one of the few Caribbean writers to have his status as an emigrant considered in depth. Unfortunately, due to confusion about the publication and content of his first work, the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to Native Land*), these

¹³ Guiana's comparatively small population and slow development are likely contributing factors to the notably smaller number of authors the territory has so far produced. For more information on Guiana's comparatively small, early population, see W. Adolphe Roberts, *The French in the West Indies* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1971), pp. 148-49. See Bridget Jones and Elie Stephenson, 'Society, Culture and Politics in French Guiana', in *French and West Indian*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno, pp. 56-74 for an overview of the colony's development. It is also worth pointing out that Guiana is more affected by immigration than emigration making it very different from most other areas in the Caribbean. See Aldrich and Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier*, p. 112.

considerations have imposed a reading of Césaire's immigrant status onto a version of the text written after he returned to residence in the Caribbean.¹⁴ This mis-reading combined with Césaire's stature compels his inclusion in this study. Glissant is in almost the opposite position. He has yet to have his status as an early emigrant to France considered in any depth. In addition, most readings of his work take for granted a consistency in his vision, artistic production and social position. Glissant is something of a liminal figure. His first works appeared at the end of the first wave of French Caribbean writing and his later works solidified the theoretical movement associated with the second wave. Owing to this, Glissant's links to earlier immigrants are often overlooked. What follows will seek to address the flaws in considerations of these authors' works. It will situate the works within the unique history of the French Caribbean islands and the unique circumstances surrounding the creation, and flight, of the islands' organic intellectual group.

Arrival: The Social Formation of the French Caribbean

Although Caribbean territories are sometimes lumped together in contemporary theories; and despite marked, substantial parallels in the history of all areas in the region, there are many important differences in the development of the French and English Caribbean. As a result, the events that led to the creation of a social fraction of author-intellectuals, those who would eventually migrate to the metropole, are distinct. These events, coupled with the distinctive character of the French modern-era migration, led to unique relationships between emigrant authors, their home islands, and the imperial city in which they would spend significant portions of their lives.

The first important difference is the relative size of France's Caribbean colonies. Unlike England, which would go on to control the greatest number of islands in the region,

¹⁴ The title of this work is often translated as '*Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*', despite the lack of the possessive '*mon*' in the original French. I have chosen to render it in a way that is closer to the source language and which is important to my reading of the text in the next chapter.

the scale of the French Caribbean empire was always somewhat small, despite its high material value. France established its Caribbean empire, composed of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Saint Domingue (the western half of the island of Hispaniola) and Guiana in the first part of the seventeenth century.¹⁵ At the beginning of France's New World venture, Canada was its most valued colony, but the empire's island holdings in the Caribbean very quickly exceeded Canada 'in geopolitical importance'.¹⁶ This was due in large part to their economic value. Despite diminutive size, the French territories, particularly Saint Domingue, were notoriously profitable: in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they 'produced 40 per cent of the world's sugar and half its coffee' and were, decisively, 'the richest colonies in the world'.¹⁷

The second important difference is France's approach to the whole colonial enterprise. The French were not as rapacious as the Spanish, nor did they see their islands' native inhabitants solely as potential sources of labour. Because of this, at first, 'the Christian mission became the official strategy by means of which French officials and the company leadership legitimated colonialism and pursued a policy of "friendship" with the natives'.¹⁸ On the island of Martinique, this more humane approach to the indigenous population resulted in the establishment of a physical boundary between the colonisers and the Caribbean people. But this border did not last. It would go on to collapse when it no longer served the colonisers' needs, resulting in, as elsewhere, the slaughter of the indigenous.¹⁹ The demarcation then erasure of this physical border foreshadowed the nature of France's management of its Caribbean empire. The country's policies shifted quickly and symbolic and legislative borders were erected and torn down repeatedly. Unlike the British

¹⁵ Shelby T. McCloy, *The Negro in the French West Indies* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), p. 1.

¹⁶ Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 4.

¹⁷ Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 14.

¹⁸ Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, p. 46.

¹⁹ Aldrich and Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier*, p. 96.

islands, where rigid boundaries between Europeans and others slowly eroded over many centuries, in the French territories, boundaries of all kinds were constantly erected and knocked down, moved and removed. Opportunities for individuals to ascend the social hierarchy were granted and taken away so regularly that it resulted in a history of unstable social positions for all residents except those few privileged white Frenchmen (*békés*), at the very peak of the societal pyramid, who remained largely untouched by endless change.

As with elsewhere in the Caribbean, the bulk of the early francophone population fell into one of two categories: either white European or black African slave. In the early history there was a degree of movement between these groups. Firstly, black slaves could have freedom granted to them by their owners and become ‘free-people of colour’ with obvious social advantages over their kinsmen in bondage. Secondly, as mentioned by Beverley Ormerod, ‘for both white and black members of an estate community, factors such as the nature of a person’s employment or his country of origin would modify the role played by colour in the assignment of social status’.²⁰ Thirdly, widespread instances of interracial sex were a means for the groups to interact, overlap and combine. It is well known that miscegenation, often through sexual violence, was prevalent in all slave societies. Nevertheless, in the French Caribbean, miscegenation seems to have taken a variety of forms. In these territories white settlers commonly took black mistresses and these liaisons were sometimes supplemented by interracial marriages.²¹ Mixed marriage was not considered aberrant; in fact it was actively championed by the Compagnie des isles de l’Amerique, which brought people to the area.²² Had the colonies been sites where ethnic differentiation was a strict and all-encompassing philosophy, these inter-marriages could and would not have been encouraged, nor would freedom have been an option for people of colour. The commonplace occurrence of miscegenation led to the production of a large

²⁰ Beverley Ormerod, *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1985), p. 58.

²¹ See McCloy, p. 32; Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 161.

²² Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, p. 201.

‘*métis*’, ‘mulatto’ or mixed-race population. As on the anglophone islands, and elsewhere in the French colonial world, because mulattoes, by virtue of having French fathers, were more likely to have access to property and rights than the enslaved, they organically developed into the central stratum of a three-tiered society.²³

Shifting Boundaries

In obverse manner to the physical boundary between islanders and colonisers, which was scrubbed away when colonial policy changed, the conceptual boundaries between the residents of the French Caribbean islands were solidified when metropolitan philosophies altered. Specifically, all islanders became the targets of ‘juridically enforced racial segregation’.²⁴ When the import of slaves began, the regulation of slavery was the domain of the slaves’ owners themselves.²⁵ As time passed more and more rules were imposed on the institution by the colonial centre in order to enforce or alter boundaries decided upon in France. The first major act in this narrative was the promulgation of the Code Noir. The Code was a royal ordinance issued by Louis XIV in 1685 to standardise the interaction of masters and slaves. It ‘incorporated the colonies and their inhabitants—slave and free—into the body politic of the ancien régime’; or, in other words, it sought to make the islands adapt to the shape and expectations of continental French society.²⁶

The Code created and specifically defined the status of slaves and freedmen and combined ostensibly humanitarian edicts with abject restrictions of rights. Among its dictates, it stipulated that all slaves should be baptised Catholic; that no work, by anyone, was to be done on Sundays from midnight to midnight; that slaves required their masters’ consent for marriage; that slaves’ offspring belonged to the owner of the mother; that slaves

²³ Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 161.

²⁴ Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, p. 197.

²⁵ McCloy, p. 15.

²⁶ Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, p. 205.

were not allowed to assemble under any circumstances and could carry no weapons, even sticks, or present sole testimony in court. One particularly notable restriction was the Code's removal of a provision that allowed slaves who came to France to be immediately set free.²⁷ The Code also regulated coupling and reproduction and within and alongside this set the conditions of freedom. In its provisions, children born of a freed slave and one still in bondage were only granted freedom if both parties married. In addition, the Code punished interracial affairs, but 'only in the presence of offspring'; the production of mixed-race children now resulting in 'a hefty fine of two thousand pounds of sugar' and enslavement of the children unless the offender married his mistress.²⁸ Nonetheless, the Code made emancipation a move into an entirely different status, it 'was the legal equivalent to "birth in our islands", and therefore granted the *affranchi*—the freed individual—the same rights as those born in the kingdom'.²⁹ Although *affranchis* were obliged to 'show respect to their former masters' and 'could be re-enslaved as punishment for certain crimes', African origin, in and of itself, was not a target of discrimination.³⁰ So, boundaries were moved, but ways and means to navigate them still existed.

The Code was not followed to the letter and the eighteenth century saw additions to its legislature that firmed up borders between groups. Because of the burgeoning influence and power of mulattoes and free persons of colour, much of this legislation sought to keep their place in society fixed and below that of white colonisers, but in doing so, it naturally kept black slaves in their place on the bottom rung of society. 1711 saw the ban of mixed marriage in Guadeloupe; long-term residence of slaves in France was made illegal in 1738; in 1764 'people of African descent' were no longer able to practice 'medicine, surgery or pharmacy'; in 1765 that was extended to a ban from working in law; in 1773 mulattoes

²⁷ Michelle Chilcoat, 'In/Civility, in Death: On Becoming French in Colonial Martinique', *boundary 2*, 31 (2004), 47-73 (p. 52).

²⁸ Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, pp. 205-06.

²⁹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (London: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

could not adopt the names of ‘masters or white relatives on the ground that such a practice destroyed the “insurmountable barrier” between the groups’; in 1777, in response to a lack of enforcement of the ’38 law, a new law, the *Police des Noirs* disallowed entrance into France for all non-whites; in 1778 ‘miscegenation was outlawed’ altogether and, in legislature at this time, slaves began to be referred to by their colour, as “black slaves” [...] As opposed to the *Code Noir* where slaves and free people were not further qualified as black or white’ creating an explicit link between skin colour and bondage; and a last, and particularly sweeping, law of note was that of 1779 which ‘made it illegal for free people of color to “affect the dress, hairstyles, style or bearing of whites”’.³¹ Many other laws changed during the eighteenth century. Although the *Code Noir* allowed masters to manumit their slaves without providing a specific reason, these powers were taken away, in addition, the eighteenth century saw laws that complicated elites’ ability to transfer ‘land, money, and material possessions’ to their mixed offspring.³² These more draconian laws, these shifted boundaries, led to unrest on the islands, both in the black underclass and within the mulatto middle-class who especially saw their rights slip away while the rights of the *béké* class remained unchanged. The eighteenth century famously featured twin rebellions in the francophone world that were products of popular frustration both on the islands and on the continent. Both are directly linked: the French Revolution of 1789 set into motion events that culminated with Haitian independence and catalysed a period of frantic change in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

³¹ See Catherine A. Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), p. 34; and Dubois, p. 62.

³² Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, p. 213.

Closing Borders: The French Caribbean in the Revolutionary Era

Although the French revolutionary government gave little thought to its empire when it drafted the Declaration of the Rights of Man,³³ the same could not be said of those resident in the colonies themselves. Immediately after the Declaration, French Caribbean mulattoes demanded their rights and various conflicts between mulattoes and whites took place.³⁴ Two years later, mulattoes were granted citizenship so long as they were born from two free parents.³⁵ Despite the fact that the colonial world in general was not at the forefront of the revolutionaries' minds, slavery was a longstanding concern and topic for debate. As noted by Robert Aldrich, 'before the Revolution, liberals in France had called for termination of the slave-trade; a few went further and called for emancipation of the slaves' even though these ideas were actively opposed by the islands' planter class'.³⁶ Owing to this, after much argument and more social unrest, including the start of a war with Britain, slavery was abolished by the National Convention on 4 February 1794. It has been claimed that this was done out of a self-interested desire for slaves to join in the battle against the British Empire,³⁷ but whether or not this is definitely the case is immaterial; what is important, and very significant, is the fact that once Napoleon assumed control of his country the equal status of black slaves was to be short-lived. The soon-to-be-emperor's statement that, 'It is perfectly clear that those who wanted the freedom of the blacks wanted the slavery of the whites' is a neat summary of his feelings about emancipation and his belief in the importance of the old border.³⁸ Napoleon moved to re-instate slavery in the French

³³ Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 17.

³⁴ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 54-62.

³⁵ McCloy, p. 73.

³⁶ Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18. This sentiment is echoed by Sam Haigh who has written simply that emancipation was prompted by British incursion on the French islands and the fact that 'large numbers of extra soldiers were needed at this time'. See her 'Introduction', pp. 2-3.

³⁸ Dubois, *Avengers*, p. 261

Caribbean in 1802. The repeal would ultimately fuel the 'radicalization' of the Haitian people and eventual Haitian independence.³⁹

The situation on Martinique and Guadeloupe was markedly different from that in Haiti. Neither island had any successful revolutionary action and, due to occupation by the British in the eighteenth century, Martinique did not even benefit from the short-lived abolition. Guadeloupe, on the other hand, was captured by the British then recaptured by France. Two things occurred as a result of this: the first was the execution of 865 people as supposed collaborators with Britain, which prompted the flight of most of the planter class from the island,⁴⁰ the second was that Guadeloupe was beneficiary of the revocation of slavery, but subsequently had its slaves put back in chains.⁴¹ Both things combined to give Guadeloupe a markedly different character and composition from its fellow French Caribbean island.

Borders Re-opened: The Second Emancipation

Slavery only became an issue to the residents of the metropolis in the second half of the eighteenth century, the era of revolution, and the loss of Saint Domingue and the subsequent slaughter of Haitian whites in 1804 once more pushed slavery to the back of metropolitan minds.⁴² Despite decreased abolitionist advocacy at the start of the nineteenth century, the slave trade was ended in French territories in 1815.⁴³ Britain's 1833 emancipation followed shortly thereafter and was used by French abolitionists as kindling for their arguments that all French slavery must end.⁴⁴ In the same year, mulattoes were granted full citizenship,⁴⁵ and, eventually, after sustained opposition to the institution of slavery, French opinion

³⁹ Reinhardt, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Aldrich and Connell, *Greater France*, p. 28

⁴¹ Roberts, p. 245.

⁴² Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, pp. 4, 6.

⁴³ McCloy, p. 141.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 143.

⁴⁵ Sam Haigh, *Mapping a Tradition: Francophone Women's Writing from Guadeloupe* ([Leeds:] Maney Publishing, [2000]), p. 2.

turned and by 1842, 'the questions left for solution were only when and how it would be done'.⁴⁶ The question was answered after the Revolution of 1848, which brought with it full manumission.⁴⁷ Unlike Britain's slow granting of rights to its former slaves, male slaves were immediately put on par with metropolitan people and received the full rights of citizenship.

Ostensibly, emancipation was the removal of all colour-based borders. Where previously only white residents had access to the *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* claimed to be the rights of all men, now seemingly all male islanders could enter into the French fold. To underline this, after emancipation, great effort was made to 'obliterate all reference to color lines', by deleting any mention of race from public documents, including census figures and newspaper reports.⁴⁸ In addition, ex-slaves were given surnames and an amnesty was granted to those who had been engaged in rebellion, inviting them 'to become members of a society that considered them as equal brothers'.⁴⁹ The rearrangement of borders was not yet entirely finished and an egregious change came in 1849 when slaves lost the right to vote, a right not restored again until 1870.⁵⁰

Despite greater immediate freedoms, social change post-emancipation roughly followed the model of the British islands. Like their anglophone counterparts, many emancipated slaves in the French Caribbean no longer wanted to work plantations, and left them as soon as they were able. This prompted France, like Britain, to import replacement labour.⁵¹ From 1852-59 France transported 13,000 Africans and 65,000 Indians into their Caribbean colonies.⁵² Just as elsewhere in the colonised world, when on plantations, free black people saw few improvements in their lifestyle and 'continued to work in conditions

⁴⁶ McCloy, p. 145.

⁴⁷ Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 21.

⁴⁸ McCloy, p. 158.

⁴⁹ Reinhardt, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Helen Hintjens, 'Constitutional and Political Change in the French Caribbean', in *French and West Indian*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno, pp. 20-33 (p. 22).

⁵¹ W. Adolphe Roberts has revealed a pre-emancipation decline in productivity that caused a large part of the sugar cane crop of 1848 to be lost. See Roberts, p. 247.

⁵² McCloy, p. 160.

which differed little from slavery'.⁵³ At the higher levels of the social hierarchy the propertied, 'planter class exercised almost exclusive control over political representation',⁵⁴ and mulattoes saw themselves ascend to become the new 'professional elite', as many already possessed freedom and education and now found their use of these privileges unrestricted.⁵⁵

The New Elite: Martiniquan and Guadeloupean Organic Intellectuals

Throughout the history of the French Caribbean colonies, the Atlantic Ocean served as a kind of final frontier, a border that separated islanders from the significant benefits available in the metropole. As we have seen, in the area's early history a move to French soil meant instant freedom for the enslaved. Even after that provision was removed, freedom in France still beckoned as a possibility and black and mulatto artisans sent to the continent to receive professional training often deigned not to return.⁵⁶ Post-emancipation, as former slaves and their descendants slowly overcame handicaps placed upon them by servitude, France remained, in many tangible ways, a last barrier for full social ascent. This was partly a result of the structure of the francophone world. Just as legislature was exported from Paris, so too was everything else. France, and more so Paris itself, was decidedly the centre of the French universe, especially for education. In like manner to the skilled artisans sent to France for further study of their trade, in the early twentieth-century a new class would emerge who had to voyage to France, specifically Paris, in order to fulfill their educational aspirations.

⁵³ Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Hintjens, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 22.

⁵⁶ McCloy, pp. 29-30. As with other border transgressions, this crossing prompted new legislature. Laws passed in the 1770s forbade families from bringing slaves to France and ordered all recently established blacks and mulattoes to leave the country. See McCloy, p. 30.

Before emancipation, access to schooling was limited to whites and freedmen but widespread ‘social prejudice’ – the implicit foundation of the explicit barriers already considered – functioned as a obstacle to the attendance of nonwhites, resulting in ‘few if any’ black and mulatto children taking full advantage of opportunities for study.⁵⁷ This would change. From the early 1800s, new schools began to provide education specifically for mulattoes, followed by schools set up for all, so that, by the estimate of the bishop of Fort-de-France, ‘by the early 1850’s approximately one-third of the children of Martinique were attending school’.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, it took a good deal of time for the black majority to take advantage of access to education in numbers on par with their percentage of the populace. This was complicated by a school tax levied from 1853-1871 that essentially barred former slaves from education, as was its intention.⁵⁹ In addition, most schools were in towns, rather than in rural areas where most black people lived, and the government was more willing to promote the benefits of education and schooling to mulattoes than to others.⁶⁰

As should be clear, all of this resulted in a variety of structural advantages for the mulatto and white elite, which remained in place until French colonial policy changed near the turn of the century. Where early provision for the education of former slaves was roughly on par with that of Britain after emancipation, France began to make a more concentrated and overt attempt to integrate its newest citizens into the nation. In line with this, elementary schooling became compulsory in France and its colonies from 28 March 1882 and numbers jumped quickly at the start of the twentieth century.⁶¹

The reason for this alteration, this decision to remove another boundary, was again a change in metropolitan philosophy. Britain, from the mid-nineteenth century onward, practiced what Henri Brunschwig has dubbed ‘anti-colonial colonialism’ – government at

⁵⁷ McCloy, p. 182.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 186, 188.

⁵⁹ Chilcoat, p. 59.

⁶⁰ McCloy, pp. 192-93.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 193.

arms' length – that can be seen in the House of Commons' desire to devolve the governing of its African colonies to native tribes as early as 1865.⁶² France on the other hand was more directly involved in the development and management of its overseas possessions. It is important to note that although 'one single theory, ideology, or practice did not guide French expansion from the beginning to the end of empire', France's famous policy/philosophy of an assimilating, 'civilising mission' had gained traction by the late-nineteenth century.⁶³ It was a plan aimed at replicating French society in colonial outposts by granting colonial residents the same rights and responsibilities as those in mainland France, a policy which sought to create 'little overseas Frances and perhaps, in the fullness of time, to turn Africans, Asians and islanders into French men and women of a different colour'.⁶⁴

In line with this objective, *lycées* were set up in Martinique and Guadeloupe for the purposes of preparing local students for the baccalaureate and providing them with 'the basic training for later professional study'.⁶⁵ Those who were to benefit the most from this higher education were expected by the French to form an intermediate class, one fully separated from local customs and wholly inculcated within the French way of seeing the world. These special, educated natives were trained across French colonial holdings and were taught to be, in line with assimilationist discourse, 'true Frenchmen'.⁶⁶ Known as *évolués*, these educated elites were indoctrinated by a country that 'ignored or scorned' local culture, the simple fact that successful students were dubbed *évolués* revealing French disdain through its suggestion that these young people had 'presumably [...] "evolved" from a lower to a higher stage of civilization'.⁶⁷ It is these *évolués* who would go on to form the organic intellectual class with the motivation and means to emigrate to Europe and the cultural capital to find a foothold in

⁶² Henri Brunschwig, *French Colonialism 1871-1914: Myths and Realities*, rev. edn (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), pp. 12, 13.

⁶³ See Aldrich, *Greater France*, pp. 89, 92. For a brief history of the concept of France's 'civilising mission' see Sorum, pp. 21-23.

⁶⁴ Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 110.

⁶⁵ McCloy, p. 198.

⁶⁶ Sorum, p. 211.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

the Parisian literary community. These individuals were, seemingly even more so than their British doubles, separated by their education from their countrymen, victims of ‘a cultural uprooting’, and, by virtue of the structure of the French colonies in relation to the metropole, necessarily emigrants.⁶⁸

As mentioned, throughout French history mainland France was the centre of the francophone world. Native-born French citizens predominantly remained within its confines, and emigrants to the colonies during the nineteenth century only ever numbered in the hundreds rather than the thousands.⁶⁹ Throughout the French Caribbean colonies a desire to move closer to the metropole, a desire ‘for greater assimilation’ was substantial.⁷⁰ This desire, and the pursuit of higher education, made Paris a centripetal force for colonial students; it necessitated travel to the centre – a further ‘uprooting’ that involved ‘attempting the difficult examinations that characterised France’s elitist schools’.⁷¹ As with the anglophone intellectuals, ‘only the advantaged, persevering and intelligent could aspire to the higher levels of education’, or, only the elite of the elite students could gain access to the best metropolitan education.⁷² It was to this group, of highly-educated, differentiated, emigrated, potential members of the professions, who were expected to go home, that all first-wave French Caribbean authors belonged.

It is worthwhile pausing to stress that rather than seeing themselves as somewhat separate from their people by their education, as the British-island-educated cohort of authors, these authors were taught, while in the Caribbean, to see themselves as *Frenchmen* – to believe themselves to have crossed the remaining post-emancipation social boundaries to become equal to the educated residents of the metropole. While the intellectuals from the anglophone Caribbean were shocked by ignorance and racism when they arrived in Britain,

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 212.

⁶⁹ Brunschwig, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Richard D. E. Burton, ‘The French West Indies à l’heure de l’Europe: An Overview’, in *French and West Indian*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno, pp. 1-19 (p. 2).

⁷¹ Aldrich and Connell, *France’s Overseas Frontier*, p. 167.

⁷² Ibid.

they were always dubbed *subjects* in their upbringing and education and therefore positioned as somewhat separate from and subordinate to the British. French Caribbean intellectuals were explicitly taught the opposite. They were trained to see themselves as full citizens and their arrival in the ‘mother’ country was to surprise them with the fact that the French people themselves did not instantly see their colonial subjects as equals. The unexpected shock of this experience, and its attendant, radical identity reconfigurations, delimited by a classical French education, is the most influential difference between these intellectuals and those from the anglophone Caribbean. After generations watched borders alter and open and close, the *évolués* were to find what seemed to be the final border between themselves and the white French permanently barred.

Emigrant Intellectuals and the French Literary Field

Many of these *évolué* authors wrote at least briefly of this shock and the reflex search for identity and acceptance it prompted. Frantz Fanon, an *évolué* himself, described the desire for black men in the Caribbean to adopt the culture of the mother country and become ‘whiter [...by] renounc[ing] his blackness, his jungle’.⁷³ This desire for ‘whiteness’ led, in Fanon’s description, to a pathological pursuit of acceptance in the metropole, one undertaken, in order to destroy ‘the myth of the R-eating man from Martinique’.⁷⁴ Aimé Césaire ‘confessed that until he left Martinique in 1931, he did not know what it meant to be black’.⁷⁵ Edouard Glissant has said ‘it is very often only in France that migrant French Caribbean people discover they are *different*, become aware of their Caribbeanness’.⁷⁶ It is this ‘discovery’ of different identity, coupled with the Fanonian desire to be accepted in

⁷³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 18.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷⁵ H. Adlai Murdoch, ‘*Ars Poetica, Ars Politica*: The Double Life of Aimé Césaire’, *Research in African Literatures*, 41 (2010), 1-13 (p. 2).

⁷⁶ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. 23.

France by the terms that France set (language mastery, in the quotation above) that appears to be the driving force behind much French Caribbean work and the subtext of the bulk of it. The felt need to be as if not more French than the French and simultaneously stress an essential link to the colonies – to develop a newly claimed identity – seems to have stoked many creative desires and led to the expansion of a space within the French field for French Caribbean writing.

I say ‘expansion’ because the creation of a ‘French Caribbean’ sub-section of the French field was not a twentieth-century phenomenon. Writing about the colonies themselves has a long, largely, continental history. Celia Britton notes that ‘between 1635 and 1940, at least 325 metropolitan French writers wrote about the French Caribbean – of these, fifty had lived there for some period of time, seventy-five had visited it briefly, and two hundred had never been there at all.’⁷⁷ Despite the marked lack of direct experience of the colonies by many of their chroniclers, publication in France by educated colonial elites formed many of the 125 pieces of writing that were published within Britton’s time span. Two significant figures in this tradition are Julien Raimond and Auguste Bissette. Raimond, a mulatto from Saint Domingue, published polemics about the need for equal rights for people of colour while based in nineteenth-century France.⁷⁸ Bissette followed Raimond’s example and published the monthly *Revue des Colonies* ‘for the purpose of informing the reading public in France of the sufferings and oppressions experienced by his race’.⁷⁹ The audience of these early tracts was either island elites or continental-based readers, the cost of publishing the *Revue des Colonies* in particular limiting ‘its circulation almost exclusively to the more well-to-do colonials, even as its bias would have limited it to the free colored and Negro readers’.⁸⁰ These predecessors of twentieth-century emigrant authors established trends that would be repeated by their descendants: they wrote for an elite, primarily

⁷⁷ Celia Britton, ‘Eating Their Words’, p. 16.

⁷⁸ McCloy, p. 209.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 212.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 213.

metropolitan audience; they sought treatment as equals; they advanced critiques of their islands while established abroad and they were politically engaged.

Evident in the example of Bissette and Raimond is the fact that there was an established precedent of metropolitan intellectual involvement in debates about the colonies before the arrival of the first-wave Caribbean emigrants.⁸¹ This tradition continued during the World War-era when many modern thinkers, working as advocates for the exploited, put forward their ideas about the justness of the colonial enterprise. Jean-Paul Sartre's journal *Le Temps moderne* 'provided a major forum for serious critical articles on colonial issues' as did Mounier's *Esprit* and *Chemins du Monde*.⁸² The French surrealist movement in particular took an especial interest in this issue, both supporting Moroccan agitation for independence and 'actively call[ing] for the overthrow of French colonial rule'.⁸³

It was into this scene, one where Caribbean intellectuals had previously played the role of participant-observers of colonial injustice, where cultural elite recognition of subjugated groups was standard practice, and where colonialism had revealed itself to be one of the pressing issues of the day, that many Caribbean *évolués* arrived. They entered a country that was particularly receptive to the thoughts of intellectuals, and a Paris that was, as early as the thirteenth century, the 'capital of knowledge in the Western world',⁸⁴ a title it arguably retained well into the twentieth. They were quickly shocked by their difference from the French and their lack of acceptance on equal terms and therefore more likely to feel and explore their identity. When the cultural field and the literary field are viewed from this perspective the clear space waiting for those who could speak knowledgeably about the colonies using the words and ideas of the respected French tradition is clear, as is the likelihood that these utterances would find intellectual sponsors and an audience. Adding to this, there was a particular gap in the market for first-hand accounts, as 'leftist intellectuals

⁸¹ Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 93.

⁸² See Aldrich *Greater France*, p. 5; and Sorum, p. 47.

⁸³ Robin D. G. Kelley, 'A Poetics of Anticolonialism', in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), pp. 7-28 (pp. 18-19).

⁸⁴ Marshall B. Davidson, *A Concise History of France* (London: Cassell & Company, 1971), p. 46.

and politicians, were themselves out of touch with colonial problems'.⁸⁵ Because of the clout of French intellectual production, which is sustained today, this subspace within a wider field of writing offered access to real political influence, a global audience, and elite status.

Negrophilia: New Spaces Created in Paris

The World War-era literary field, as presented above, created ideal opportunities for newly emigrated students to speak from the perspective of colonial subjects but other historical factors made their identity as *black* representatives of the colonised world gain extra value. Despite early and rampant interracial mixing on the French islands and a blindness to colour evident, paradoxically, in the Code Noir, by the time of France's forays into Africa in the nineteenth century, African ancestry had gained a negative value. During this period, only the minority of 'reports about Africa failed to reduce Africans to beasts, often using comparisons with monkeys or chimpanzees'.⁸⁶ In addition, during the nineteenth century 'skin color was typically believed to reflect a person's moral character [...] Black skin was not only considered aesthetically displeasing, it also made it doubtful that Africans were fully human'.⁸⁷ These attitudes began to change after the First World War when the achievements of soldiers from the colonies turned public opinion in their favour.⁸⁸ This alteration in regard was slightly preceded by an artistic re-evaluation of Africa in the first decade of the twentieth century when artists like Matisse and Picasso began to show their appreciation for the unique nature of African art and kick-started a 'primitivist' artistic movement.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Sorum, p. 29.

⁸⁶ Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 202. Alistair Hennessy notes the 'Chain of Being', which relegated Africans to a status beneath that of whites, as one of the Enlightenment's innovations along with the concepts of 'Liberty Equality and Fraternity'. See 'The Hispanic and Francophone Tradition', in *Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century Caribbean, Volume II, Unity in Variety: The Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean*, ed. by Alistair Hennessy (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1-35 (p. 3).

⁸⁷ Reinhardt, pp. 28, 29.

⁸⁸ Aldrich, *Greater France*, p. 116.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-56.

Assisted by the reassessment of old ideas of species-differentiation, primitivism gained ground and blackness became a fad. Interest in African and African-American culture rose and the likes of Josephine Baker were able to ride this wave to success.⁹⁰ Alongside this, representations of black people changed from depictions of their savagery to depictions of their possession of an essentially childlike nature.⁹¹ This, of course, is merely racism in sheep's clothing – a swap of degradation for romanticisation. Nonetheless, more positive racist stereotypes combined with popular performers and avant-garde artistic representations to create a veritable 'negrophilia' which paved the way for the first novel produced by a black author from the French Caribbean, René Maran's *Batouala*.⁹²

Maran was a literary herald. His work fulfilled all the criteria of the field vacancy described above: it was focused on the colonies, it damned colonial practice from its authors' experience, and it was written by a French-trained member of the elite group of black intellectuals, therefore granting it legitimacy. In fulfilling those criteria it was the first in a long line of French Caribbean works – from Césaire's to Chamoiseau's – that would occupy a similar space in the field. What is unique about Maran's work, and is the reason that I would claim that Césaire is the first major author to occupy a French *Caribbean* space in the literary field, is that his novel is focused on Africa.

Published in 1922, *Batouala* was actively positioned by its author as a critique of imperialism: its preface denounces, in violent and direct language, the exploitation taking place in the French colonies of the time, exploitation initiated by an empire built upon 'corpses' ('sur des cadavres').⁹³ Maran, a colonial officer in Africa when he wrote the book, uses his preface to assert that his novel is 'completely objective' ('tout objectif') and only

⁹⁰ For an exhaustive study of this period, see Benetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp. 19-42.

⁹¹ Chilcoat, pp. 49-50.

⁹² I have borrowed this term from James Clifford's article 'Negrophilia', in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. by Denis Hollier and others (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 901-08.

⁹³ René Maran, *Batouala*, trans. by Barbara Beck and Alexandre Mboukou (London: Heinemann, 1987), p. 8. The French is taken from *Ibid.* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1938), p. 11. Further references to the novel are cited in parenthesis within the text with the page numbers for the French edition cited after a semicolon.

‘states facts’ (‘il constate’) about the African continent (7, 8; 10). This is reinforced by the novel’s oxymoronic subtitle as a ‘true black novel’ (‘véritable roman nègre’). In the preface, Maran calls directly upon his ‘brothers of France, writers of all persuasions’ (‘mes frères de France, écrivains de tous les partis’) to challenge colonial exploitation (9; 11). His self-representation as a source of both Africa’s ‘truth’ and the ‘truth’ of colonial abuses, was validated by the French intellectual community, in their awarding the Prix Goncourt to his novel, the year after Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, and by the French government with their ban of *Batouala* throughout their colonies.⁹⁴

Maran’s example is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, his positive reception in France, evidenced in the award of the Goncourt, shows the active desire for creative writing about black colonials in continental circles. Secondly, the overtly political orientation of his novel, through its preface, shows Maran as an heir to the legacy of Bissette and Raimond as a colonial critic. Thirdly, Maran’s preface shows his *explicit* alignment with his contemporary French intellectual community – his ‘brothers of France’ in the manner of an individual who shared an educational upbringing with French thinkers. Lastly, and importantly, is the novel’s direct claim to represent the ‘truth’ and thus its inauguration of a tradition of colonial writing which purported to offer documentary accounts of the French empire.⁹⁵

The author’s choice to use Africa as his setting and ‘nègres’ as his protagonists set a trend in *évolué* writing of focusing on colour and the African continent. This trend is evident even in the titles of works by Maran’s contemporaries. *Batouala* was followed by Oruno Lara’s *Questions de couleurs – noirs et blanches* (1923); Suzanne Lacascade’s *Claire-Solange âme africaine* (1924); and Léon-Gontran Damas’s volume of poetry, *Pigments*

⁹⁴ Donald E. Herdeck, ‘Introduction’, in René Maran, *Batouala* (London: Heinemann, 1987), pp. 1-6 (p. 1). Christopher L. Miller explains that the ban was a direct result of the book’s preface. See ‘Francophonie and Independence’, in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. by Denis Hollier and others, pp. 1028-34 (p. 1029).

⁹⁵ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 81- 82.

(1937).⁹⁶ The challenge to identity that was a necessary product of emigration forced authors to reconfigure their thoughts about themselves. As emigrants to the centre they were destined to encounter other colonials and, for a variety of reasons, including contemporary French interest and island isolation, it was natural for transplants to look at their African contemporaries, and through them to the African continent, for sources of identification.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, a lack of contact with Africa itself led to misrepresentations – misrepresentations which revealed the overdetermining influence of French education and location on the conceptual loci of these authors.

Batouala in particular, when read beyond the preface, seems only to reinforce ideas of African inferiority and predilections for torpor, impulsiveness and sexual depravation that corresponded with European racist, negrophilic stereotypes. A lack of sexual restraint is a reoccurring theme in the novel. We are told, through the thoughts of Yassigui'ndja, a female character that 'a woman should never refuse the desire of a man, especially when that man pleases her' ('une femme ne doit jamais se refuser au désir d'un homme, surtout quand cet homme lui agréé') (36; 47). Later the same character reveals that 'the fire which devoured her could not be quenched by the one sexual experience her husband provided her each day' ('le feu qui la dévorait ne pouvait se contenter de l'unique politesse que son mari lui consentait chaque jour') (45; 57). Lest we think that Yassigui'ndja is uniquely hypersexual, the novel peaks with a village celebration that descends into an orgy, one involving the entire tribe, young and old, child and adult. After a ritual dance that features 'an enormous painted wooden phallus' ('un énorme phallus en bois peint') (86; 110) (worn by Yassigui'ndja),

a strange madness suddenly seized the confused human throng surrounding the dancers. The men tore off the pieces of fabric which served as loincloths; the women also removed the rest of their clothes.

⁹⁶ Haigh, 'Introduction', p. 9.

⁹⁷ See Maurice Burac, 'The French Antilles and the Wider Caribbean', in *French and West Indian*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno, pp. 98-111 (pp. 101, 104) on French Caribbean isolation.

The breasts of the women bounced. A heavy odor of genitals, urine, sweat, and alcohol pervaded the air, more acrid than the smoke [...] the children imitated the movements of their elders.

(Une étrange folie, s'empara d'un seul coup du désordre humain qui environnait les danseuses. Les hommes se débarrassèrent de la pièce d'étoffe leur servant de cache-sexe, les femmes, celles qui en avaient, de leurs pagnes bariolés

Des seins brimbalaient. Les enfants imitaient les mouvements de leurs aînés.

Une odeur lourde de sexes, d'urine, de sueur, d'alcool s'étalait, plus âcre que la fumée'). (87; 111)⁹⁸

As noted by Eleni Coundouriotis, the orgy scene in particular is 'evidence of how the contents of the novel are shaped by a discourse that precedes the novel'.⁹⁹ It is notable that, in spite of its declaration of being a 'true black novel', its author, at no point in his preface identifies himself with the Africans or even as a 'nègre' himself; Maran instead positions himself 'as a special kind of funnel, a privileged conduit of "native" information'.¹⁰⁰

Maran was an important emigrant intellectual figure. He had contact with the major names of the Harlem Renaissance through the Paris periodical *Les Continents* which preceded other 1920s periodicals like *Dépêche africaine* and *Le Cri des Nègres*. All of these titles were organs of 'black vanguardism' or 'correspondence among the *évolués* and the Talented Tenth' which featured no interaction with the masses they were representing.¹⁰¹ Just as Maran was to inaugurate *évolué* writing about Africa, so too was he, in his elite-focused black internationalism, to foreshadow the type of interaction common in the era of Césaire and early Glissant.

⁹⁸ Note that Beck and Mboukou here have moved the description of the children's participation further down in the detail of the scene's events. It is difficult to assess their motivation for this, but it does serve, at least for me, to heighten the shock of their active roles in the orgy.

⁹⁹ Eleni Coundouriotis, *Claiming History: Colonialism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 35.

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, pp. 83, 89.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99, p. 117.

Negritude: New Faces Creating in the Metropolis

In *Rules of Art*, Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates the influential role of nineteenth-century French literary salons in structuring their contemporary literary fields.¹⁰² In twentieth-century Paris, one particular salon of *évolués*, which featured ‘black vanguards’ like Maran, had a similar influence. Its founder, Paulette Nardal, was Sorbonne-educated Martiniquan based in Paris. During the 1930s she brought together aspiring and established writers from around the Atlantic Triangle.¹⁰³ Like other colonial emigrants to the metropolis, Nardal herself experienced a change in self-perception on arrival. Where in her youth she did not consider herself to be black, unlike, perhaps, ‘Africans or members of the lower classes [...] life in Paris soon taught her that the French did not distinguish between blacks from different parts of the world’.¹⁰⁴ As a result of this realisation, Nardal adopted an interestingly analogous stance and began advocating a universal black culture ‘based upon emotion and innate artistic creativity’ in her 1931 journal the *Revue du monde noir*.¹⁰⁵ Nardal’s ideas, the founding principles of her salon, were to be echoed and disseminated through the hugely influential Negritude movement championed by Aimé Césaire and the Senegalese poet, and Nardalian salon attendee, Léopold Sédar Senghor. Senghor credited Nardal’s salon as the means through which he established contact with African-Americans, his fellow Africans, and people from the French Caribbean, while living in Paris as a student.¹⁰⁶ This contact seems to have incontrovertibly direct effect on the Negritude (literally ‘blackness’) movement and thus Nardal played a seminal, though often unrecognised role in shaping her contemporary literary field.

¹⁰² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. by Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 52-53.

¹⁰³ Tyler Edward Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Mariner, 1996), p. 100; and Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ Stovall, *Paris Noir*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

The proponents of Negritude, in like manner as Nardal, asserted that transnational characteristics united all members of the black race. As seen in Nardal's example, and Senghor's comments about the contacts he made abroad, Negritude was a clear product of emigration and a response to the Parisian context. In the city, the various groups of black emigrants were generally separated and Negritude's champions actively sought to unite them through its philosophy.¹⁰⁷ Negritude's rise saw transplanted Caribbean intellectuals break away from island assumptions about race and reorient their identification away from Europe toward their African peers. Negritude was though, from the start, an inward-looking, emigrant elite-focused movement.¹⁰⁸ It was a conversation at the top, a version of Maranian 'vanguardism' that had little influence on or connection to the mass of the Caribbean people. Further evidence of the importance of Paris to this philosophy is the fact that its ideas about African identity, as evident in Nardal's example, were drawn directly from European concepts¹⁰⁹ and its popularity was, as we shall see, the product of French intellectual patronage.

Richard D.E. Burton has christened Negritude 'an assertion of otherness', but noted it was an assertion hamstrung by the fact that its advocates, who were 'exposed to the deracinating effects of an assimilationist upbringing', did not seem to have 'any clear *concept* (though they had a powerful gut *feeling*) of what it was to "be" or "remain oneself"'.¹¹⁰ What Burton says here is as true of writing specifically aligned with the Negritude movement, like Césaire's, and that of other pre-1960s *évolué* emigrants, like Glissant's. All were 'assertion[s] of otherness' in a Parisian world that accepted emigrant-intellectuals only as 'others' and where emigrants felt that had to prove themselves. The

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁰⁸ Hennessy, 'The Hispanic and Francophone Tradition', p. 30.

¹⁰⁹ Richard D. E. Burton, 'The Idea of Difference in Contemporary French West Indian Thought: Negritude, Antillanité, Créolité', in *French and West Indian*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno, pp. 137-66 (pp. 141-42).

¹¹⁰ Richard D. E. Burton, 'Between the Particular and the Universal: Dilemmas of the Martiniquan Intellectual', in *Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century Caribbean, Volume II: Unity in Variety*, ed. by Alistair Hennessy, pp. 186-210 (p. 202).

subtext of Burton's words seems to be that what the Negritude authors wrote could not express their identities because the authors themselves did not know what their identities were. I would argue the opposite. Despite the fact that the French Caribbean writers we are focused on here were struggling to create new senses of self, it seems natural that these very struggles, in literature, were an expression of their 'selves'. As their own self-identifications were fraught, arguably even more so than their anglophone counterparts, so too were the works they produced – works full of contradictions and active assertions of kinship with both Africa, the Caribbean and, often subtly, France; works where the Caribbean, though always centre frame, is nonetheless explicitly criticised in terms that recall the writings of continental intellectuals – works that are unique to this group of people at this time. As we shall see, the first-wave writers Césaire and Glissant could not but betray what they 'were', in all its messiness, in their major post-emigration texts.

Chapter 4:

Emigration, Césaire, Glissant

As we have seen, the context surrounding French Caribbean authors was decidedly different from that of their anglophone counterparts. Although French *évolués* were educated to consider themselves equal to their fellow citizens in Paris, when they arrived in the capital they found a place obsessed with assumed differences between blacks and whites. In response, and by their own admission, they began a scramble for new identities. Individuals could struggle, as in Fanon's description, to assert their right to a French identification or look elsewhere, to the wider black Atlantic world, for a foundation for a new sense of self. Within the group of *évolués* who pursued careers in literature, this search and re-orientation was a public undertaking, one that expressed itself explicitly in tropes of flight, exile, excavation and exploration – the themes of Glissant and Césaire's earliest works.

Establishment within the French field for these authors required support. While anglophone writers benefitted greatly from the exposure provided by favourable reviews and Henry Swanzy's *Caribbean Voices*, French emigrant-authors were recipients of a louder, more active advocacy by intellectual patrons. As is widely acknowledged, intellectual practice in France is a more public and renowned activity than it is in Britain. French intellectuals have a much more substantial influence than British thinkers on public opinion, and thus have a greater ability to define the careers of new entrants into the fields of cultural production. In Bourdieu's description, built from an analysis of the French literary environment, 'the artist who makes the work is himself made, at the core of the field of production, by the whole ensemble of those who help to 'discover' him and to consecrate him as an artist'.¹ Within the field of French literature 'consecrators' from the intelligentsia proved essential for the establishment, validation and 'discovery' of French Caribbean talent.

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. by Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 167.

The content of the training of French intellectuals, including colonial subjects, and their relationship to their wider public means that in the process of discovery and consecration, their work seems to be more often slotted into one or another tradition of thought by reviewers and patrons. This is particularly true for twentieth-century French Caribbean writers for whom patronage was important. As we shall see, Césaire in particular, and through him the subsequent generations of authors from his region, benefitted directly from acceptance by the intellectual elite and his placement in field as a black colonial author. Perhaps more so than entrants into the British field, the subspace that these French authors occupied was very much defined by their early reception and, because of the intellectual capital of early patrons, their first positionings have had a active influence on their legacies and attempts to position themselves in relation to their peers. While Césaire and Glissant faced different constraints than Lamming, Naipaul and Selvon, they were still, nonetheless, constrained.

Patronage and Positioning, the Case of Césaire

While Aimé Césaire is not the first figure in the French Caribbean literary tradition, his work directly influenced the writers who would come along after him, many of them, especially the most notable, finding their fame through the direct critique of Césaire's ideas. In many ways, Césaire cleared an area for a specifically French *Caribbean* space in the field. The paradox here is that, certainly at first, Césaire, like his fellows in the early Negritude movement, seemed to advance a black colonial identity more avidly than that of a Caribbean subject. Despite this, one could very easily argue that the entire modern French Caribbean literary tradition is a footnote to Césaire, and the majority of Césaire's work a rehash of themes touched upon in his most famous text, *Notebook of a Return to Native Land*.

Césaire's renown is unmatched by any other French Caribbean writer: his name pops up in epigrams and references in a range of contemporary writing about the Caribbean; he has schools named after him in Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritius, Togo, Haiti and France; in April 2009,

all Martiniquan students had a special school day dedicated to the man and his work; and, as of this year, one of his texts will be included in the French baccalaureate curriculum.² Beyond this recognition, Césaire has won many plaudits including the Grand Prix National for poetry and has had special editions of his poems illustrated by the likes of Picasso and Wilfredo Lam.³ In addition, critics have held and continue to hold the author in high regard. H. Adlai Murdoch recounts his first and only meeting with Césaire in the essay ‘*Ars Poetica, Ars Politica*’ at a 2005 conference in Fort-de-France. He recalls that when it was announced that Césaire was about to arrive the delegates rushed to greet him and then ‘the great man descended the staircase [...] The moment was alive with indescribable emotion; some people were literally crying’.⁴

This kind of emotional outpouring is a product of Césaire’s long literary and political career. He famously won the ’44 -’45 elections in Martinique ‘by a landslide’ to become mayor of Fort-de-France up until 2001 and represent Martinique in the French National Assembly, as a deputy, in two phases, the final one terminating in 1993.⁵ He has been praised for being the first to use the term ‘negritude’ which, in the words of Maximilian Laroche, ‘short-circuited the effects of colonial discourse’ (‘court-circuitait les effets du discours colonialiste’).⁶ Susan Frutkin has lauded Césaire as ‘an exceptional product of the colonial experience and a prophet of his race in the modern world’ and possessed of an ‘influence [...] which] transcends the narrow limits of his island home and reaches beyond his even wider reading public’.⁷ Selwyn Cudjoe has said that with the *Notebook*, ‘Césaire struck at the very heart of Western civilization, at its ontological presumptions, at its syllogistic reasoning, at its

² Renée Larrier, ‘A Tradition of Literacy: Césaire in and out of the Classroom’, *Research in African Literatures*, 41 (2010), pp. 33-45 (pp. 41-42).

³ Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

⁴ H. Adlai Murdoch, ‘*Ars Poetica, Ars Politica*: The Double Life of Aimé Césaire’, *Research in African Literatures*, 41 (2010), 1-13 (p. 1).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ Maximilien Laroche, ‘La Bataille de Vertières et le *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*: westerns du tiers monde’ in *Présence Africaine* 151-152 (1995), pp. 180-96 (p. 190).

⁷ Susan Frutkin, *Aimé Césaire: Black between Worlds* (Coral Gables: Center for Advanced International Studies, University of Miami, 1973), p. 1.

moral and ethical values'.⁸ A manifestation of the renown surrounding Césaire is the fact that the composition of his poem the *Notebook* has, in at least one instance, taken on the characteristics of a legend.⁹ Because of his importance in world writing and his centrality to the French Caribbean canon, we will linger longer on Césaire's development than we have on his anglophone peers; in many ways the path Césaire's career took allowed his predecessors, like Glissant, a relatively easy entry into the French literary field.

Born just over a decade past the turn of the century in Basse-Pointe in northern Martinique, Césaire had an inauspicious background, his father a 'minor' bureaucrat, a tax inspector, and his mother a dressmaker.¹⁰ As with most Caribbean authors, his background was not in the affluent class and education provided a means for him to break through social boundaries and advance into a position of influence. Césaire's father famously pushed his children hard to excel in school and Césaire himself went on to attend the Lycée Schoelcher, the sole secondary school for all of the French Caribbean territories until after WWII.¹¹ Upon graduation, Césaire 'took prizes in French, Latin, English, and history and was designated the best student overall'.¹² As with other elite *évolués*, the logical step was for Césaire to move to the metropole to continue his studies after completing his course at the lycée. He duly did so, voyaging to Paris on 24 September 1931. In hindsight Césaire described this departure as a

⁸ Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (London: Ohio University Press, 1980), p. 133.

⁹ The exact circumstances surrounding the writing of the *Cahier* vary based on the source consulted. General opinion seems to be that Césaire began writing it when visiting a friend in the former Yugoslavia, but the details of that story are far from agreed. One telling, by Robin D. G. Kelley, has a mythic, almost folkloric tone. We are told that Césaire, after seeing a small Yugoslavian island, had a flash of inspiration and 'stayed up half the night working on a long poem about the Martinique of his youth—the land, the people, the majesty of the place. The next morning when he inquired about the little island he was told it was called Martinska. A magical chance encounter, to say the least; the words he penned that moonlit night were the beginnings of what would become his most famous poem of all'. See Robin D. G. Kelley, 'A Poetics of Anticolonialism', in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), pp. 7-28 (p. 13). Césaire himself claimed to have started the poem after returning to Martinique. See René Depestre, 'An Interview with Aimé Césaire', trans. by Maro Riofrancos, in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), pp. 81-94 (p. 81). Interestingly, both these accounts are collected in the same book.

¹⁰ Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire* (London: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 1.

¹¹ Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, pp. 4-5; and Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 4.

¹² Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 8.

joyful occasion, his pursuit of further study supported by a scholarship to prepare for entrance exams to the École Normale Supérieure where he enrolled in 1935.¹³

It is no secret that this emigration and the exposure it provided were essential to Césaire's artistic development. Jeannie Suk summarises accepted opinion when she states that 'it was in Paris, not in Martinique, that Césaire became aware of belonging to a community of blacks of the African diaspora, and of the imaginative potential of Africa as an origin and source of renewal'.¹⁴ Césaire's focus on Africa was almost certainly tied to his friendship with Léopold Sédar Senghor, who was, as we have seen, an attendee of Paulette Nardal's salon and exercised a strong influence on Césaire and his thought.¹⁵ Within the Senghorian student circle the works of the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius – works that challenged European denigration of Africans as possessing no culture or developed societies – were well-known, admired and formed the basis of the ideas of Negritude.¹⁶ Césaire would remain away from Martinique in this group and absorbed in Parisian student life until 1936 when he travelled back to his island for his holidays.¹⁷ Despite his early intellectual promise, the future

¹³ Mireille Rosello, 'Introduction', in Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to my Native Land: Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 1995) pp. 9-68 (p. 20).

¹⁴ Jeannie Suk, *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing: Césaire, Glissant, Condé* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), p. 30. Roger Toumson and Simonne Henry-Valmore poetically echo this in their statement that the Parisian environment gave Césaire 'a second birth: that of a writer' ('une seconde naissance: celle de l'écrivain'), See Ibid., *Aimé Césaire: Le nègre inconsolé* (Paris: Syros, Vent des îles, 1993), p. 39.

¹⁵ Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 33.

¹⁶ The Césairean distillation of Frobenius's theories can be found in Suzanne Césaire's article 'Leo Frobenius' where, among other ideas, she explains that 'Ethiopian civilization is connected to plant life and the vegetal cycle. It is dreamy, completely enfolded within itself, and mystical. The Ethiopian personality does not try to understand phenomena, or to seize and dominate external facts'. See 'Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilizations', in *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. by Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 82-87 (p. 84). Although Césairean Negritude differed from the 'Senghorean' version, the shared influence of Frobenius is evident in Leopold Sédar Senghor's essay 'Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century'. In the essay, a number of essentialist declarations about African ontology are made, among them that 'it is precisely because [the African] is sensitive to the tangible qualities of things – shape, color, smell, weight, etc. – that the African considers these things merely as signs that have to be interpreted and transcended in order to reach the reality of human beings'. This statement echoes Suzanne's Césaire's declarations about Ethiopians eschewing domination of phenomenon. See *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (London: Harvester and Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 27-35, (p. 30).

¹⁷ Toumson and Henry-Valmore, p. 36.

author would return to Paris, fail his *agrégation* exams at the École Normale and shortly afterward settle permanently in Martinique in 1939.¹⁸

The abridged biography presented above could be that of any student who, after high school goes on to higher education, makes new friends, learns new philosophies and returns home after failing to meet his potential. At least two things made Césaire different. The first was his involvement with Senghor who would be an intellectual compatriot through much of his career. The second was the fact that, on the eve of his 1939 departure back to Martinique, his first important patron, his professor M. Petitbon, helped him to get his *Notebook of a Return to Native Land* published in the journal *Volontés*.¹⁹ Césaire's global fame would be the direct result of the completion of this work and its subsequent recognition by two additional and more powerful patrons, the surrealist writer André Breton and the French philosopher and author Jean-Paul Sartre. Both played a major role in bringing the colonial world into the metropolitan frame and both positioned Césaire as a leading, black, literary figure from the colonies. Debra L. Anderson claims that both Sartre and Breton 'essentially *colonize* the works of French African and Caribbean poetry they read', including Césaire's, by imposing their interpretations of the colonial world upon them.²⁰ This is true to an extent; as we will see Césaire's patrons almost certainly spun his work to meet their own interpretations of the man and his world, but the relationship between Breton, Sartre and Césaire was less the parasitism implied through the verb 'colonize' and more a commensalism of mutual benefit to all parties. Breton and Sartre set Césaire's orientation within the literary field on their own terms, certainly, but they clearly drew upon characteristics *within* his work when passing judgement, and, as all readers do, gave greater value to the aspects that resonated with their own perceptions of the world.

Breton discovered Césaire's writing while stranded in Martinique during World War II. On returning to the island on the eve of the war, Césaire began teaching at the Lycée

¹⁸ Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, p. 13.

¹⁹ Larrier, p. 39.

²⁰ Debra L. Anderson, *Decolonizing the Text: Glissantian Readings in Caribbean and African-American Literatures* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 3.

Schoelcher and started publishing the journal *Tropiques* in collaboration his wife Suzanne and other local intellectuals. Césaire reprinted his *Notebook* in the journal, and Breton discovered this reprint and Césaire himself during his sojourn. Breton's description of this discovery and his praise for the poet and his work is nothing less than hyperbolic. In his book about his stay in Martinique, *Martinique: Snake Charmer (Martinique: Charmeuse de serpents)*, Breton wrote of when he found the poem that, 'I could not believe my eyes [...] All those grimacing shadows were shredded and dispersed; all those lies, all those sneers fell away in tatters: The human voice was not stifled and broken after all; it rose here like the very staff of light. Aimé Césaire was the name of the one who spoke'.²¹ He praised Césaire's 'mastery in his tone that enabled one to distinguish him so easily as one of the great poets rather than a lesser one' (87). He also detailed his face-to-face encounter with Césaire, an encounter in which he was struck by the writer's 'pure blackness' which he uses as the foundation of Césaire's uniqueness (87). Breton goes on: 'it is a black man who handles the French language as no white man is capable of handling it [...] it is a black man who is the one guiding us today [...] it is a black man [...] who becomes more and more crucial as the supreme example of dignity' (88). Something like a 'colonisation' of Césaire and his work is apparent here in this initial position-giving. The writer is slot into a category based on his ethnicity, its expression in a depth of 'blackness' worthy of especial reference. Despite the panegyrics offered by Breton, Césaire's blackness casts a shadow over the remainder of Breton's praise; the gist of the laudatory 'it is a black man' riff seems to be that readers would be – or perhaps even should be – stunned by the fact that a black man, a very black man, could write so well.

Breton continues on, however, to ensure his readers that Césaire is no ordinary black person. He mentions first the fact that the *Notebook* was composed in Paris and that Césaire attended the École Normale Supérieure, although he still 'belongs body and soul' to the society of Martinique (92). When seen in conjunction, Breton's praise and list of Césaire's qualifications position Césaire as a unique member of his race, an heir to the French

²¹ André Breton, *Martinique: Snake Charmer*, trans. by David W. Seaman (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), p. 86. Further references are cited in parenthesis within the text.

intellectual tradition through his education and his residence in the capital but still physically, fundamentally linked to his island. Césaire becomes, through Breton's words, something of an ur- or über-*évolué*, 'the great black hope for a tired European imagination'; one so well trained in the French tradition that he outdoes the French, the student who has become a teacher.²² This championing of Césaire seems to extend the Surrealist tradition of involvement in anti-racist and anti-colonial effort, and the French intellectual tradition of bringing the colonial world to the metropolitan public for discussion and debate.

Despite some of the more curious aspects of Breton's championing of Césaire's work, Césaire himself recognised a degree of debt to the man.²³ He went on to maintain close ties with Breton and his fellow surrealists from 1941-47 and even attended the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1947.²⁴ Connection to the surrealist movement was key to Césaire's increased global value and access to the literary field. Breton played an important role in getting Césaire's *Cahier* reprinted for the access of wider audiences. The first stand-alone edition of the *Cahier* was a bilingual edition published by Brentano in New York in 1947, which was followed by a new draft published months later in Paris.²⁵ Both drafts were the products of Breton's championing of the author.²⁶ Césaire's literary star did not begin to rise until the publication of these editions, in the 1950s, a full decade after 1939 publication of the *Notebook* in *Volontés*.²⁷

The author's second literary midwife was Jean-Paul Sartre, the writer dubbed 'the most important cultural broker or intellectual mediator in French Caribbean literature' by J. Michael Dash.²⁸ Sartre wrote the influential essay 'Black Orpheus' ('Orphée Noir') as an

²² Suk, p. 50.

²³ Kelley, p. 17.

²⁴ A. James Arnold, 'Césaire's *Notebook* as Palimpsest: The Text before, during, and after World War II', *Research in African Literatures*, 35 (2004), 133-40 (p. 136).

²⁵ A. James Arnold, 'Beyond Postcolonial Césaire: Reading *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* Historically', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 44 (2008), 258-75 (p. 262).

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 263.

²⁷ Toumson and Henry-Valmore, p. 96. See also Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 339.

²⁸ J. Michael Dash, 'Postcolonial Eccentricities: Francophone Caribbean Literature and the *fin de siècle*', in *The Francophone Caribbean Today: Literature, Language, Culture*, ed. by Gertrud Aub-Buscher and Beverley Ormerod Noakes (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2003), pp. 33-44 (p. 36).

introduction to the 1948 poetry collection, *Anthology of New Black and Madagascan Poetry in French* (*Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*) edited by Senghor in which an extract from Césaire's *Notebook* was published.²⁹ Sartre's essay praises the work of the black colonial authors in the collection almost unconditionally, but, like Breton's praise of Césaire, it seems to value the work as much on its own merits as its perceived implicit, if not necessary, challenge to the European status quo. It begins: 'When you removed the gag that was keeping these black mouths shut, what were you hoping for? That they would sing your praises?'.³⁰ This is an overt, direct and antagonistic challenge to 'you' – the assumed European reader. This focus on a European addressee is maintained throughout the essay as its purpose is to introduce this assumed reader to the anthology and to assert the need for the reader to take it seriously. Thus, the essay comments upon, at length, what these 'black and Madagascan' poets have to say that is of interest to Europeans. In Sartre's formulation, all the poets declare that Europe's days are numbered. In line with this, when speaking of continent's decline in comparison to the United States and the Soviet Union, Sartre writes that Europeans are 'hoping at least to find a bit of our greatness reflected in the domesticated eyes of the Africans. But there are no more domesticated eyes: there are wild and free looks that judge our world' (292). The colonised are now Europe's assessors and they do not like what they see. Through reading these poems, Sartre implies, white Europeans will realise how marginalised they are within the world they had a hand in creating.

Sartre's positioning of this work, then, is incredibly, albeit logically, Eurocentric. Like Breton, he stresses that the poets are European products almost as a method of validation. He notes that they had 'gone through white schools' and that, paradoxically 'contact with white culture' has caused self-alienation and 'it is because he [the black poet] was already exiled from himself that he discovered this need to reveal himself [...] It is a

²⁹ Leopold Sédar Senghor, ed., *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Presses universitaires de France: Paris, 1948).

³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Black Orpheus', in *What Is Literature' and Other Essays*, [n. trans] (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 289-330 (p. 291). Further references are cited within parenthesis in the text.

double exile: the exile of his body offers a magnificent image of the exile of his heart' (298). Sartre here foreshadows much later studies, like this one, that explore the extent to which *évolué* authors were separated from their society by their upbringing; like other studies, and unlike this one, he argues that despite early divorce from origins, the core of all of these authors remains fundamentally attuned to their native lands. By stating that these poets are exiled from themselves, Sartre suggests there is a true 'self' to be exiled from. In addition, to reinforce this notion of essence, Sartre describes the return prompted by educational exile as strengthening connection. 'By speaking only of himself,' the reader is told, the black poet 'speaks for all Negroes' (300). So disconnection really is illusory; all black people suffer a similar kind of alienation that the poets necessarily express through their work – like fractals, all parts reproduce the whole.

Although Sartre's praise is spread widely, the writer that he values most, over all others, is Aimé Césaire. We are told that 'a poem by Césaire [...] bursts and wheels around like a rocket; suns turning and exploding into new suns come out of it: it is a perpetual going-beyond' (311). In addition Césaire makes 'the opposites in the "black-white" couple expand like a phallus in its opposition to the other' (311). Both phrases recall Breton's 'grimacing shadows [...] shredded and dispersed' and 'staff of light' used to celebrate Césaire's *Cahier*. The shared characteristic is a posited illumination offered by Césaire's work that is linked to some virile, intrinsic 'phallus'- or 'staff'-like strength.

The evidence for a 'colonisation' here, again, is clear. Sartre's explicit link of Césaire's power to a penis recalls centuries of racist discourse about black men's inherent carnality and sexual prowess. Even more so than Breton, Sartre seems to bend Césaire's and the other poet's work to his desire to criticise Europe, even as, through his patronage, he brings them into the fold of European literature. His sexual metaphors abound, among them that 'for our black poets [...] Being comes out of Nothingness like a penis becoming erect' and that the black peasant is 'the great male of the earth, the world's sperm' (318, 316). Taken out of context, Sartre's comments seem obviously racist, ghettoizing and objectifying and yet, a quick flip through to the extract from Césaire's *Notebook* that is included in the

collection reveals similar images of virility and essential black difference. Sartre clearly has his own issues to advocate, his fixation on Europe's decline, seen in the claims that Césaire's writing 'destroy[s]' 'white culture' (311) strikes as his own attack on the bourgeois channelled through another vessel but ultimately he does seem to be drawing upon elements that are very much present within the work.

Further, in the essay, Sartre plays a similar role as that he assigns Césaire and others. He happily speaks for the people of France and her colonies, of all backgrounds, and serves as the ventriloquist for their interests and desires (294-95). He does the same with the interests and desires of black men, explaining what a black man thinks when he 'makes love with a woman of his race', and black peoples' opinions of Christianity (318, 323). He is, by doing this, undertaking standard intellectual practice by the rules of his day: he goes against mainstream thought, agitates on behalf of the people, and speaks angrily of the failures of his world, all of the things he claims the black poets do, and, judging from the evidence, the role Césaire in particular continued to play. Thus Sartre's putative 'colonisation' is really an attempt to explain, as Breton and the early anglophone reviewers did, how given black intellectuals could be considered participants in the European field. This explanatory act, of course, involved compression and exaggeration but it does not seem to have the exploitative intent that associations with colonialism imply.

Breton and Sartre's comments about Césaire, their introductions of the man and his work into the literary field, roughly sketched the shape that Césaire's own, later self-positionings would take. Both Breton and Sartre called Césaire a pioneer, and he himself recognised this when, in interview, he said that he 'undoubtedly influenced an entire generation'.³¹ As with his anglophone counterparts, Césaire readily took up the mantle of a spokesman for his people: in another interview given in 1960, he explained his 'role' as being 'one of those "griots" [native storytellers] who connect a people to its history [...] to build

³¹ Quoted in Larrier, p. 41.

and exalt the effort of those who build'.³² In line with his supporters, Césaire has described himself a singular talent who shunned Nardal's salon for being 'too bourgeois, too *mulatto* [...] and too Catholic'.³³ Seemingly in an effort to reinforce his uniqueness, Césaire minimised the influence of his first patron, stating 'that he was already a surrealist and that Breton's contribution was nothing more than a confirmation of acknowledgement of his literary and political projects already in progress', a statement that goes against the evidence of the earliest drafts of his *Notebook*.³⁴ Césaire also asserted his difference from other Martiniquan students and said of his stay in Paris that 'at that time Martiniquan students assimilated either with the French rightist or with the French leftists. But it was always a process of assimilation', implying that he himself resisted this.³⁵

In addition to his comments in interviews and elsewhere, Césaire undertook two great acts of self-positioning. The first was the publication of his short polemic, *Discourse on Colonialism* (*Discours sur colonialisme*) in 1955, the second was his resignation from the French Communist Party in 1956 to found the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais (PPM). The ins and outs of the *Discourse* need not delay us long here, but the text initiates a leap from the position of representative of the *black* world that Césaire showed in his earlier works to a position of representative for all the world's colonised. One of the first statements in *Discourse* is that "'Europe" is morally, spiritually, indefensible' and the entire text continues in that vein.³⁶ We are told that 'at the very time when it most often mouths the word, the West has never been further from being able to live a true humanism'; that colonialism 'cannot but bring about the ruin of Europe itself'; and that 'Europe, if it's not careful, will perish from the void it has created around itself'.³⁷ The echoes of Sartre's statements in 'Black Orpheus' here are notable, as is the fact that when making these pronouncements, Césaire was a French

³² Thomas A. Hale and Kora Véron, 'Is There Unity in the Writings of Aimé Césaire?', *Research in African Literatures*, 41 (2010), 46-70 (p. 47).

³³ Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 11.

³⁴ See Anderson, p. 22. We will go on to explore the first draft of the *Notebook* in detail.

³⁵ Depestre, p. 85.

³⁶ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), p. 32.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 75.

political representative who would continue to serve in that capacity for another half century. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that these and other contradictions within Césaire's asserted stances would be fully explored by his critics. His biographical data began to be read into his famous *Notebook* at this time and, concurrently, Césaire's literary position as the preeminent colonial spokesman from French Caribbean was being challenged by a similarly contradictory figure, Edouard Glissant.

Positions Given, Positions Taken: Edouard Glissant

If Césaire is the leading author from the French Caribbean then Edouard Glissant is undoubtedly the runner-up for the title. Glissant is an individual with a similar history and positioning within both French letters and the wider, global literary field. Like Césaire, Glissant was an *évolué*, one who, like Paulette Nardal, chose to emigrate to the metropole to pursue his studies at the Sorbonne. An attendee of the Lycée Schoelcher in Martinique when Césaire was teaching there in the 1940s, Glissant actively supported Césaire's successful election campaign before departing for France in 1946.³⁸ The extent to which Césaire directly influenced Glissant is unclear. Despite overlapping time at the Martiniquan lycée Césaire never taught Glissant, though he may have had some indirect influence through his alterations to the poetry curriculum.³⁹ What is known is that Glissant's trajectory in France was very similar to Césaire's, despite his being less reliant upon patrons than the earlier man – arguably because the work of Césaire and other Negritude writers established an interest in colonial texts.

Just like his predecessor, Glissant's recognition came from his links to fellow emigrant authors, artistic circles, and Africa-focused movements and organisations. Like Césaire, Glissant came to France during a period of post-war interest in the colonies. This is evident in the establishment and successes of *Présence Africaine*, a journal focused on writing

³⁸ J. Michael Dash, *Edouard Glissant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 9.

³⁹ See Larrier, p. 43 n. 17; and Betsy Wing, 'Introduction', in *Black Salt: Poems by Edouard Glissant* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 1-13 (p. 2).

from the black francophone world which began publication in Paris in 1947 and subsequently developed Éditions Présence Africaine, a book publishing arm, which opened in 1949.⁴⁰ In like manner to Césaire, Glissant was a member of a radical black student group, the Fédération des Etudiants Africains Noirs. In addition he engaged in debates organised by *Présence Africaine*, participated in the 1956 and 1959 Congresses of 'Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs' and, in 1960, was one of the signatories of 'Manifest des 1231' which supported Algerian independence.⁴¹ While established in the capital, Glissant became a member of the executive committee of the Société Africaine de Culture, was influenced by the avant-garde New Novelists, had numerous intellectual friends including Roland Barthes and was actively involved in the French artistic scene.⁴²

There are, nonetheless, differences between the two men. Unlike Aimé Césaire, Glissant's first lengthy work, his novel *The Ripening (La Lézarde)*, which we will consider in detail, received a mixed response. Although it garnered the approval of the intelligentsia in the form of a Prix Renaudot awarded in 1958, one early reviewer described it as 'artificial, unnecessarily difficult to read'.⁴³ Despite receiving less effusive praise than that Césaire gained from Breton and Sartre, as Césaire's star waned in the 1980s, Glissant's star began to rise. The chief cause for this phenomenon was the response to the author's *Caribbean Discourse (Discours antillais)*, a collection of essays he penned in the 1970s. As noted by Mimi Sheller, the increase in interest in Caribbean literature corresponded to the increase in interest in 'postcolonial' literatures, all of which took place in the same decade as Glissant began to garner global attention. The import of literatures from the Caribbean, according to

⁴⁰ Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), p. 6. For a detailed engagement, from multiple perspectives, with the birth of Présence Africaine, see V. Y. Mudimbe, ed., *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947-1987* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴¹ Bernadette Cailler, *Conquérants de la nuit nue: Edouard Glissant et L'h(H)istoire antillaise* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1988), p. 42.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 41-42; J. Michael Dash, 'Introduction', in Edouard Glissant, *The Ripening* (London: Heinemann, 1985), pp. 1-17 (p. 6).

⁴³ See Dash, *Edouard Glissant*, p. 54 for awards; L. S. R., 'Untitled Review', in *The French Review*, 32 (1959), 586-88 (p. 587).

Sheller, is ‘the idea that they have in them something which is ‘creole’, native to the Caribbean’, an idea pushed forward actively by Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse*.⁴⁴

We touched upon some biographical similarities between Césaire and Glissant above but there are further parallels between the two figures. *Caribbean Discourse* is one of them. Its title alone recalls Césaire’s major act to enter a transnational stage, his *Discourse on Colonialism*, and its content advances Glissant as a spokesman on a par in authority with Césaire, but one with a sharper focus on the Caribbean region. The book is full of essays that feature Glissant commenting on aspects of the life and history of his contemporary Martinique, not through a lens of ‘blackness’ or African or colonial identity as Césaire had, but through the lens of its own distinct, creole, Antillanité. *Le Monde* recognised the book ‘as one of the three most important works of the decade’ and the critic Chris Bongie has described it as ‘magisterial’.⁴⁵ It is Glissant’s contemplation of the singularity of the Caribbean space that won this work, and the author himself, the most plaudits. They are themes he has revised and supplemented in his career to date and the source of his value to his advocates.⁴⁶

Richard Burton tells us that Glissant’s theory of Antillanité ‘shed[s] the regressive, matrocentric orientation common to both assimilationism and Négritude. It is less a quest for origins than a project for the future’.⁴⁷ Maryse Condé credits the writer as being ‘the first pen to praise for creolized cultures, which would not constitute a category in opposition to other

⁴⁴ Mimi Sheller, ‘Orality and Opacity: Resisting Metropolitan Consumption of Caribbean Creole’, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University (2003) <<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/sociology/papers/sheller-oraliteracy-and-opacity.pdf>> [accessed 02 October 2010] (p. 6).

⁴⁵ See Dash, *Edouard Glissant*, p. 19; and Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 140.

⁴⁶ Peter Hallward has identified this trend; he has written that ‘Glissant is applauded as a new and appropriately ‘flexible’ alternative to the Manichean essentialisms of Négritude’, and that ‘much of the published commentary on Glissant involves little more than illustration of these subversions’. See his *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 70, 71.

⁴⁷ Richard D. E. Burton, ‘The Idea of Difference in Contemporary French West India Thought: Négritude, Antillanité, Créolité’, in *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana Today*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 137-66 (p. 148).

categories'.⁴⁸ J. Michael Dash tells us that 'For Glissant, negritude with its promise of instant history is more than outmoded and divisive in the West Indian context.'⁴⁹ As should be clear, Glissant is recognised primarily for being something of the anti-Césaire and thus, his entrance into the literary field has been *through* Césaire.

Although Glissant is principally a novelist and poet, the overarching impact of *Caribbean Discourse* has led to a situation where his theories are awarded far greater value, and receive far wider dissemination, than his novels or poetry. As a result, Glissant, more so than any of his peers from any Caribbean writing tradition, is privileged with having his poetry and fiction read primarily through his own interpretations. Peter Hallward has noted that there has always been an overlap between Glissant's theory and his fiction,⁵⁰ but this has resulted in the writer being particularly capable of orienting his own reception, his own place within the field of French Caribbean writing. Clear evidence of this is Debra L. Anderson's mention, in passing, that Glissant's first novel is unique because it is 'unlike Glissant's other novels, which must be deciphered with the author's help'.⁵¹

Anderson's comment is an explicit articulation of a frequent, implicit assumption: that Glissant's texts cannot be interpreted without Glissant.⁵² Evidence of this is everywhere. H. Adlai Murdoch uses *Caribbean Discourse* to read *The Ripening* and notes that the author 'puts into practice [...] a metafictional approach to the narration of antillanité', essentially exploring how the writer's work displays his own theory.⁵³ In like manner to Césaire's earliest champions, modern readers are told how Glissant defines himself with little challenge given to his self-definition. Readings of Glissant's works that stress how they echo his other

⁴⁸ Maryse Condé, 'The Stealers of Fire: The French-Speaking Writers of the Caribbean and their Strategies of Liberation', *Journal of Black Studies*, 35 (2004), 154-64 (p. 157).

⁴⁹ Dash, 'Introduction', in *The Ripening*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ Hallward, p. 118.

⁵¹ Anderson, p. 38.

⁵² In this aspect, Glissant is closest to the anglophone author Wilson Harris who, in the introduction to *The Literate Imagination: Essays on the Novels of Wilson Harris* is acknowledged for aiding critics in their efforts to make sense of his work through his non-fiction production. See Michael Gilkes, 'Introduction: An Overview of the Work of Wilson Harris' in the above, ed. by Michael Gilkes (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 1-9 (p.1).

⁵³ H. Adlai Murdoch, *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), p. 54.

works are common.⁵⁴ And lastly, Glissantian-analysis, of the kind we will analyse shortly, often pops up in interrogation of Glissant's work. Phrases like J. Michael Dash's, 'given the official silence in departmentalised Martinique about the past, and the self-inflicted amnesia among the Martiniquan people...' echo Glissant's tone and content in *Caribbean Discourse*, seemingly without question.⁵⁵

None of this is egregious critical practice. In fact, some use of the techniques above can likely be found in studies of almost every author. What makes Glissant's case unique is how widespread these techniques are across the body of his criticism. As noted by Ronnie Scharfman there is always a 'problematic rhetorical relationship [...] when a poet writes prose about his poetry'.⁵⁶ Also, though speaking of Maryse Condé, Jeannie Suk notes that there is a certain type of academic from the developing world who 'generates creative work and also leads the discourse about the standards by which it will be appreciated'.⁵⁷ Glissant almost certainly fits into this category. In a sense, the author eats his cake and bakes it too. With the exception of Peter Hallward's chapter on Glissant in *Absolutely Postcolonial* there is very little written about the author in English that challenges his position-taking or statements at all.⁵⁸

This is all very unusual. It is unusual because Glissant's work should be no less subject to an interrogation from an emigrant, *évolué* perspective than Césaire's. It is also unusual because Glissant's writing, like Césaire's, at times mirrors the image of the Caribbean propagated by V. S. Naipaul, which is widely and thoroughly criticised. In his early poems, collected in *Black Salt*, Glissant many times refers to wounded nature of the Caribbean; he calls them the 'scorched Tropics' in the poem 'November', describes the people as bearing 'cane scars' in 'Wild Reading', sees the islands as 'brains splattered in the

⁵⁴ See Anderson, p. 38; and Richard D.E. Burton, 'Comment Peut-on être Martiniquais?: The Recent Work of Edouard Glissant', *The Modern Language Review*, 79 (1984), 301-12 (p. 305), for just two examples.

⁵⁵ Dash, *Edouard Glissant*, p. 54.

⁵⁶ Ronnie Leah Scharfman, *Engagement and the Language of the Subject in the Poetry of Aimé Césaire* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1980), p. 62.

⁵⁷ Suk, p. 20.

⁵⁸ Hallward, pp. 66-125.

trash bin of the new ocean' in 'Slow Train'.⁵⁹ He describes volcanoes as bleeding breasts in 'The Nourishing Air' and onwards, the first set of poems dedicated to 'every tortured geography'.⁶⁰ This can be read as evidence of Glissant's feeling that France has manipulated the islands to the point where they are critically wounded – as Beverley Ormerod has written, a desire for Martiniquan independence from the French is the undercurrent of much of Glissant's work.⁶¹ Yet, building on the allusions in the *Black Salt* collection, Glissant's comments in *Caribbean Discourse* go far beyond a mere description of a subjugated French Caribbean. In it, the people are often depicted as mindless mimics with no sense of what is best for them.

We are told early on in *Caribbean Discourse* that 'the alarmed observer [...] realizes that unbelievable cowardice is a characteristic of the French Caribbean elite. Imitation is the rule [...] and any departure is considered a crime'.⁶² This sort of criticism of the silent or silenced upper- and middle classes is perhaps common in radical literature, particularly from the French tradition, but Glissant goes further than this. We are told that after emancipation the people were frustrated by an 'impotence in *collectively* asserting their true selves', that the Martiniquan 'seems to be simply passing through his world, a happy zombi' (9, 59). Group identity in Martinique is 'embattled' and 'nonexistent' and all of this makes 'the emergence of the individual impossible' (86). The people's lack of identity and zombie-like lives are not, according to Glissant, their fault, but the effect of 'the pressure to imitate' the French in the metropole and Glissant informs his readers that this pressure 'is, perhaps, the most extreme form of violence that anyone can inflict on a people' (46). This is a force so painful that 'it does not matter that our raw materials are not exhausted here, that the multinationals do not exploit us brutally, that pollution is still slight, that our people are not gunned down at every turn [...] nevertheless, we are part of the disorientation of the world' (3). In other words, this

⁵⁹ Edouard Glissant, *Black Salt: Poems by Edouard Glissant*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp. 22, 23, 25.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 17.

⁶¹ Beverley Ormerod, "'Beyond Negritude": Some Aspects of the Work of Edouard Glissant', *Contemporary Literature*, 15 (1974), 360-69 (p. 366).

⁶² Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. 7. Further references are cited in parenthesis in the text.

imitative pressure is on par with the ‘disorientation’ felt by those oppressed by bullets and material exploitation and thus French-style assimilation is ‘one of the most pernicious forms of colonization’ (5). The people here have no agency; they are puppets of the insidious French; they imitate the French and adopt French fashion and trends not by active choice but because they are either incapable or unwilling to do anything else. Glissant informs us that his people have ignored what they ought to be doing; he informs us that ‘when a people collectively denies its mission, the result can only be disequilibrium and arrogance.’ (6).

What the people’s ‘mission’ is or ought to be is an open question. As others have observed, Glissant’s most widely read theoretical work seems to be a direct response to a decline in local culture that took place in the late- 1960s and 1970s, one marked by an evident outside influence on clothing, language, eating habits and carnival.⁶³ For this reason there is, perhaps, anger behind Glissant’s words, but this is anger which – because of the sweeping overshadowing influence of *Caribbean Discourse* – is used in readings of Glissant’s very earliest works and is seen as a straightforward, untendentious depiction of the French Caribbean. This sort of pessimistic analysis bleeds into commentary about the islands that uses Glissant as a source. Richard Burton claims, echoing Glissantian social commentary that, because of a decline in productivity on Martinique, Martiniquans ‘are condemned to live increasingly inauthentic and superficial lives, in which deep insecurities coexist with manic extroversion and in which competitiveness and a disposition towards violence are more and more apparent’.⁶⁴ The problem here of course is the highly charged use of the term ‘inauthentic’ which echoes Glissant’s ‘mission’ and, despite whatever social ills declining productivity has created, remains an extremely judgemental term, its use always asserting a position of knowing, privileged distance from the observed.

The use of the writer’s 1970s essays as the glue to unify all of his work has seemingly distracted many critics from the contradictions within *Caribbean Discourse*, and its difference from Glissant’s early, first-wave-era production. The primary and fundamental contradiction

⁶³ Richard D. E. Burton, ‘The French West Indies à l’heure de l’Europe: An Overview’, in *French and West Indian*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno, pp. 1-19 (pp. 12-13).

⁶⁴ Burton, ‘Comment Peut-on’, p. 307.

is Glissant's praise of creolisation – essentially 'syncretism' within a specifically Caribbean context – a process that necessarily involves the loss of certain aspects of culture – sitting alongside his anger at the cultural change resulting from French influence. Glissant himself seems to recognize this essential problem and tries to show what kind of syncretism is valuable. He writes that, 'synthesis is not a process of bastardization [...] but a productive activity through which each element is enriched,' (8). Unfortunately, the differentiation here seems to be simply semantic, 'bastardisation' striking as a pejorative form of 'synthesis'. Glissant's rage against 'bastardisation' clouds the entire work and soars to the highest reaches of outrage at points throughout. He says, among other things, that the 'mimetic impulse' is 'futile' and 'intolerable'; it is 'a kind of insidious violence' and causes 'trauma' (18).

Another major flaw with *Caribbean Discourse* is its oscillation between grand, general statements, and its calls for cultural specificity. The fact that the 'mimetic impulse' is always terrible comes just one page before a statement that 'no theory of cultural contact is conducive to generalization' (19, n. 1). Glissant criticises Americans who travelled to Liberia asking, 'what to make of the fate of those who return to Africa [...] but *who are no longer African?*' (17). He implies here that identity is not static; it shifts and attempts at reclaiming origins after a time are doomed to futility. That theory, of course, is fair. But Glissant says shortly afterwards that East Indians in the Caribbean 'maintain[ed] [their] identity while participating reluctantly in the emergence of a people' (18, n. 1). This statement calls into question the entire theory of France's overarching power over Martiniquans as well as the statement about American black people no longer being African because of their detachment from the continent. In Glissant, people seem to have a concrete essential core that should not be denied – he speaks elsewhere of 'the specific nature of the Martiniquan people' – and to be in a state of irresistible, often productive internal flux (68).

A final flaw, which echoes that of George Lamming's unclear positioning in relation to the Caribbean people, is Glissant's positioning of the Caribbean intellectual. He writes that 'in our context, the work of the intellectuals is invaluable. Only his claim to leadership is to be condemned' (242). And yet, for writers 'cultural activism must lead to political activism, if

only to bring to fruition the unification of those implicit or explicit areas of resistance' (253). How one can bring about change and be an activist without leading, while the population, at all levels, is seemingly blind to its predicament, is never clarified. As with other Caribbean emigrant-intellectuals, Glissant fails to acknowledge that writers are members of the dominant class and in line with this he ironically states that the elite 'have progressively contaminated the thinking of everyone by [their] belief in a single history and in the strength (the power) of those who create it or claim to be in charge' in a work that advocates an altered account of history and the responsibility of writers like himself to be activists who inspire the people (92). With equal unacknowledged irony, later on he claims that in the French Caribbean context only the elite have the 'right to representation' and that 'all representation [by the French Caribbean elite] means the alienation of the represented' despite presenting several denigrating representations of the Martiniquan people from the earliest pages of his work (205). These kinds of statements continue and continue. We learn 'the elite "express" (themselves); the people are silent' – a statement which, logically, places Glissant into the category of the elite through his expression of his opinions in a text about the people's silence (206).

The question that arises again and again is *Where is Glissant?* If the author is aware of the problems of the country, and has the social capital to express them, by his own terms he is necessarily not one of the people, but through his constant barrage of criticism of the elite he positions himself as equally outside of their ranks. Statements like his description of the need for Antillanité 'to transcend the intellectual pretensions dominated by the learned elite and to be grounded in collective affirmation, supported by the activism of the people' cannot but force the reader to think about how a work, which contains at least some theory on the Caribbean, that repeatedly claims the people don't understand their own circumstances, written by a graduate of the Sorbonne, somehow slips free of being considered a product of a member the 'learned elite' without popular support (222). Wilbert J. Roget offers an answer in his essay 'Land and Myth'. He explains that for Glissant, the writer 'in a sense, must project himself, at various levels, into the very consciousness of the community so as to

become fully capable of articulating their expressive needs and limitations without seeming to be an alien presence'.⁶⁵ Hallward elaborates on this in his claim that in the early Glissant, 'the writer is consciousness incarnate [...] Through literary writing, "the cry of the world becomes word" [...] Glissant need never describe the relation from part *to* whole as such; the part is already expressive of the whole, from the beginning.'⁶⁶ The question here then is, How and why should readers take this Sartrean fractal philosophy at face value?

Challenges to Césaire and Glissant

I have lingered over Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* simply to highlight the contradictions and problems inherent within it and hopefully to inspire questions around why Glissant's work has received so few challenges. Bourdieu has written that the statements of 'cultural producers', like writers, 'under the guise of saying what is [...] aim to make us see and make us believe, to make the social world be seen in conformity with the beliefs of a social group that has the singularity of having a quasi-monopoly on the production of discourse about the social world'.⁶⁷ This statement is particularly applicable to Glissant's *Discourse* and to Césaire's work as well. Césaire, as the critic of Europe who worked within and benefited greatly from Europe politics, education and culture spoke from a similar position and obfuscated it within his comments about his singularity and role as a 'griot'. Like our anglophone authors, these writers present a relationship with their subjects that seems to clash with the actual. I would argue that in both cases this distorted vision is a product of their position as emigrants and their dual, though differing, status of intellectual representatives while within the metropole.

Critical engagement with the gap between Césaire's positioning, philosophies and actual status has increased as time has passed, as has engagement with the fact that much of

⁶⁵ Wilbert J. Roget, 'Land and Myth in the Writings of Edouard Glissant', *World Literature Today*, 63 (1989), 626-31 (p. 630).

⁶⁶ Hallward, pp. 73, 74.

⁶⁷ Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, p. 56.

Césaire's production is a direct result of his time spent in Paris and his educational upbringing. Negritude in particular has steadily tumbled from any position of respect. This began with a critique of the movement by French Marxists in the 1960s, who took issue with its debt to French primitivism.⁶⁸ Many others have since raised an opposition flag. Maryse Condé criticised Césairean Negritude and advocated abandoning the term 'nègre' as a coloniser's concoction in a 1974 article 'Négritude césaireenne, négritude senghorienne' which coincided with the release of her own novel *Hérémakhonon*.⁶⁹ Wole Soyinka has offered the most comprehensive critique of Negritude's flaws, including the failure of the movement to challenge racist European assumptions about the relative development of Africa.⁷⁰ Césaire's debt to Eurocentric philosophies and philosophers is a common area of critical focus. Ronnie Scharfman supplements this body of writing in *Engagement and the Language of the Subject* where she notes that in Césaire's essay, 'Poésie et connaissance', the 'speaking subject [which we can take as Césaire himself]', positions his work in a 'long line' of poets, including Lautréamont and Rimbaud who are, in Scharfman's words, 'all French and all white'.⁷¹

Further, Césaire's use of the French language of French intellectuals, rather than the Creole of the Martiniquan people has also been a source of critical eyebrow raising, especially since Césaire openly criticised the ability of Creole to express abstract ideas.⁷² Césaire addressed the question of his use of French in his 1967 interview with René Depestre, in it he said he expressed himself in the French language 'whether I want to or not' but that he had nonetheless 'always striven to create a new language, one capable of communicating the African heritage [...] an Antillean French, a black French that, while still being French, had a

⁶⁸ Burton, 'The Idea of Difference', pp. 141-42. Bennetta Jules-Rosette describes late-60s 'antinégritude' as becoming subsumed within the Negritude movement and functioning as both 'an ideology and a publication strategy'. This shows that opposition has been a means for individuals to establish themselves in the literary field. See *Black Paris*, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Doris Garraway, "'What Is Mine': Césairean Negritude between the Particular and the Universal", *Research in African Literatures*, 41 (2010), 71-86 (p. 75).

⁷⁰ Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 126-39.

⁷¹ Scharfman, p. 62.

⁷² Raphaël Confiant, *Aimé Césaire: Une Traversée paradoxale du siècle* (Paris: Stock, 1993), pp. 15-16.

black character'.⁷³ This early positioning-taking would not pacify later critics. Césaire's abandonment of Creole is a particular source of censure from the latest generation of French Caribbean writers, the Creolistes. One of their number, Rafaël Confiant, penned a book-length criticism of Césaire, in which the claim, above, that Césaire's complex French expressed an essential blackness is summarily cast aside.⁷⁴

The Creolistes' critiques have had a major effect on Césaire's contemporary reputation.⁷⁵ Although there have been some recent attempts to salvage him, notably a recent issue of *Research in African Literatures*, his status is far from what it was in the middle of the last century.⁷⁶ In one sense the recognition of the influence of Césaire's time in France and the influence of French thought on his work harmonises with the critiques I have so far put forward in this essay. In another they do what is often done with V. S. Naipaul in the anglophone tradition: Césaire is singled out. These critiques, including those of the Creolistes, tend to insert Glissant in Césaire's place and present him as somehow untainted by his sojourn in the metropolis and his educational upbringing. There are exceptions to this statement, but on the whole, interrogations of Glissant's tend to be cursory and superficial.

At the risk of using Glissant to read Glissant as so many other critics have done, it is worth noting that the writer himself has admitted the importance of emigration. As noted in the previous chapter, in *Caribbean Discourse* Glissant comments that 'it is very often only in France that migrant French Caribbean people discover they are *different*, become aware of their Caribbeanness', in that same passage, he claims the coming-into-self caused by immigration comes too late; the migrant cannot 'return to his origins (there he will find that the situation is intolerable, his colleagues irresponsible; they will find him too *assimilé*, too

⁷³ Depestre, p. 83.

⁷⁴ Confiant, pp. 108-09.

⁷⁵ Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle*, pp. 325-326.

⁷⁶ I have quoted from issue *Research in African Literatures* 41 (2010) above. It is entirely devoted to Césaire and features largely favourable articles that attempt to face his criticisms head on. Noteworthy essays in this vein are Thomas A. Hale and Kora Véron's 'Is There Unity in the Writings of Aimé Césaire?', pp. 46-70, Bernadette Cailler's 'Aimé Césaire: A Warrior in Search of Beauty', pp. 16-32 and H. Adlai Murdoch's, 'Ars Poetica, Ars Politica: The Double Life of Aimé Césaire', pp. 1-13. Among some choice defences, in Cailler's essay she writes that 'blaming Césaire the politician for not having fully met the dream of Césaire the poet makes sense only if one does not try to remember what artistic creativity is all about' (26).

European in his ways, etc.) and he will have *to migrate again*' (23). We see echoes of Fanon and Naipaul in this statement of the alienated in-betweenness of the Caribbean emigrant. In a typically Glissantian fashion the statement is disconnected from any personal experience; we are speaking here of the 'migrant French Caribbean people', no 'I' is evident within this, and yet the clear expression of Anselin's concept of 'circulation', the need for ongoing re-migration, seems to resonate with Glissant's life, one spent primarily outside of the French Caribbean.

Claims like these above beg for an emigrant optic to be applied to Glissant; despite this and unlike Césaire, the harshest criticisms of his work tend to be surface-level. More often than not, his critics, when they are interrogating him, speak merely of his writing style and not much more. The fact that Glissant is considered difficult to read springs up more frequently in commentary than any consideration of his status as an emigrant. Elinor S. Miller makes this particularly clear by dedicating an entire, long footnote to the list of sources who have mentioned his difficulty.⁷⁷ The critic Selwyn Cudjoe, whose glowing praise of Césaire's *Cahier* was presented above says 'in Glissant we find a ponderous prose style with a highly contrived artistic presence that tends to diminish much of the urgency of the content of the work'.⁷⁸ This is harsh criticism but it says nothing of the author himself or even much about the content of his writing. The most scathing criticism of Glissant available in English is that cited in Chris Bongie's *Islands and Exiles* given to Glissant by Jack Corzani who disparaged *Caribbean Discourse* as seemingly written 'from the intolerably authoritative perspective of the "Martiniquan-who-knows-everything-about-Martinique-and-the-Martiniquans"'.⁷⁹ This is, again, a harder critique but one that fails to engage specifically with content or context. The closest we come to Césaire-style questioning of position is in Frederick Ivor Case's claim that we cannot really consider Glissant to be marginalized because 'he writes in French and [...]

⁷⁷ Elinor S. Miller, 'The Identity of the Narrator in Edouard Glissant's *La Lézarde*', *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 43 (1978), 17-26 (p. 25 n. 1).

⁷⁸ Cudjoe, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature*, p. 177.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*, p. 143.

his works are published in France and read largely by French-speaking intellectuals'.⁸⁰ We see here an engagement with audience and, to an extent, positioning within a field of literature, but nothing more.

Departure: Glissant, Césaire and the Caribbean Emigrant Tradition

There are far more similarities between Glissant and Césaire's works and positions than have heretofore been acknowledged.⁸¹ The failure to note the similarities between these authors, and the utter lack of engagement with the fact that analogous themes and tropes unite their early work with that of authors from the anglophone tradition, stems, I think, from a tendency to look at Glissant and Césaire's oeuvres in separation from other Caribbean texts and to read Glissant's works as a uniform whole. When Césaire and Glissant's first major works are read in parallel they show evidence of a conceptual loci that overlap with those of our English-speaking authors and each other. As they should: both were educated in separation from the bulk of the people they would go on to represent just as the anglophone authors were. In like manner, both authors were trained in the same educational system as each other and emigrated in similar conditions to a Paris that was equally unpopulated by Caribbean people.

Another problem with assessments of Glissant and Césaire is the huge influence their theories of Negritude and Antillanité have in their readings. Glissant's work is read backwards and forwards from *Caribbean Discourse* almost without exception, despite the fact that that work was released almost a decade after his first novel, *The Ripening*, and long after the start of his poetic career. Césaire's Negritude, a philosophy that was elaborated in the pages of *Tropiques* after his return to Martinique, is the frame through which his entire life is read, not least his *Notebook* where the term first appeared. Despite this, when their earliest

⁸⁰ Frederick Ivor Case, 'Edouard Glissant and the Poetics of Cultural Marginalization', *World Literature Today*, 63 (1989), 593-98 (p. 597).

⁸¹ Peter Hallward has described Glissant's early works as 'compatible' with those of Fanon and Césaire. See *Absolutely Postcolonial*, pp. 68. This claim is made despite the assertions of singularity claimed by many of his readers.

works, written as emigrants, are bracketed off from their theories, much insight into the intersections between the two authors and the vanguards of the anglophone tradition can be found. When Césaire's first, 1939, pre-return, draft of the *Notebook* is read in depth, insight into his position as an emigrant-intellectual, rather than as a radical island teacher with surrealist sympathies, or a politician with aspirations to speak for the world's colonised, are revealed. In Glissant's case *The Ripening*, his first extended post-emigration work, is an excellent source of insight into the fraught position of the French Caribbean emigrant in the historical moment when the focus of French Caribbean intellectuals switched back to the Caribbean. The similarities in the two works shadow the similarities in the lives of their writers. Both deal with the dual necessity of escape and return to stifling island homes. Both engage with the gap between intellectuals and the people. And both, like Lamming, Naipaul and Selvon's texts, focus on a detached, panoptic narrator who filters the perceptions of his people for an external audience. This narrator occupies an interstitial space between the reader, the events and people he describes and, in statements and actions, mirrors the social position of the emigrant authors themselves.

Angela Chambers has written that 'in attempting to express the alienation of his own background and of the inhabitants of a small island in the Caribbean, Césaire immediately gave voice to the concerns of the inhabitants of the African diaspora'.⁸² Although Chambers' comment gives Césaire the massive representative role of the voice for the concerns of all members of the African diaspora in all locales, it does flag an important point that we must consider before moving on. It is necessary to stress that both Aimé Césaire and Edouard Glissant have done much to bring the concerns, and even the existence, of the Caribbean DOMs into the metropolitan frame. Césaire in particular had a real, tangible, impact as a Martiniquan politician and global activist. Nevertheless, the positions these writers asserted and which their advocates attributed to them, masked their relationship to the elite and the people of their country. Césaire's statements have recently been unpicked but the direct

⁸² Angela Chambers, 'Critical Approaches to Literatures of Decolonization: Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*', in *An Introduction to Caribbean Francophone Writing: Guadeloupe and Martinique*, ed. by Sam Haigh (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 35-50 (p. 39).

parallels between his status, work and his stances and that of those who followed him have been under-explored. For Glissant a myth of his singularity has manifested a tendency to read the writer as he reads himself, ultimately obfuscating his links to Césaire, his predecessor, and the emigrant-intellectuals of the anglophone Caribbean.

The Emigrant as Redeemer in Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to Native Land*

So far I have taken for granted the fact that the 1939 edition of Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to Native Land* is a unique text, one that is very different from its later manifestations. Christopher L. Miller has written in *The French Atlantic Triangle* that 'there are multiple Césaires'.⁸³ In Miller's usage, this statement seems to mean simply that there are multiple interpretations of the poet and his work, but it is also true in another sense. Aimé Césaire's preoccupations and concerns changed over the course of his life and literary career; with these various changes, came alterations in context, perspective and social position – changes in conceptual locus – that are evident in his writing. Thus, while there was only ever one, physical Aimé Césaire, because he wrote his texts at various stages in his life, at various set periods during ongoing perceptual flux, his writing reveals the many 'Césaires' that he was over the span of his lifetime. Of all these 'Césaires' the earliest, the student-emigrant, the *évolué*, speaks loudest in the 1939 first draft of the *Notebook*, published in the small French journal *Volontés*. For many reasons, including that of availability, the 1939 *Notebook* is rarely ever read. Historically when critics have sought the student Césaire within his major work, they have searched versions of the poem that were drafted long after the author's student days had ended. Until two recent articles by A. James Arnold that called upon Césaire's readers to

⁸³ Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle*, p. 328.

pay greater attention to the fact that the *Notebook* underwent a series of revisions, the first Césaire effectively dodged all critical recognition.⁸⁴

Through both articles, Arnold expands upon and reinforces an early claim that the current, widely circulated *Notebook* should not be read as a ‘prewar poem’ at all.⁸⁵ His argument and his evidence are compelling; both make it abundantly clear that the early, 1939, *Notebook* is the only source for true insight into Césaire’s emigrant position. In his articles, Arnold calls upon Césaire’s readers to acknowledge the changes the author made as his poem journeyed from its first publication to its release in a ‘definitive’ edition in 1956. Arnold draws attention to the fact that the ’56 edition, published by Présence Africaine, and the standard text consulted and referenced in critical studies, was in fact the third of three major editions of the poem. It is a version that expresses or reveals a very specific Césaire: the Cold War-era anti-colonial writer/politician that he was at its time of publication.⁸⁶ The two landmark editions that preceded it, the aforementioned *Volontés* draft of 1939, and its second, printed in New York in 1947, were significantly different texts. The driving force of Arnold’s argument is that changes in the poem are linked to changes in Césaire’s political stance. He notes a variety of amendments that were seemingly influenced by events in Césaire’s life, such as the fact that some religious imagery was dropped between the 1947 and 1956 editions around the time of Césaire’s strongest connection with socialist party politics.⁸⁷ These sorts of changes have, to the detriment of Césaire studies, gone wholly unremarked upon; the Présence draft is now in the widest circulation and serves as the source text for the current standard English translation by Mireille Rosello and Annie Pritchard⁸⁸ and is approached as the only *Notebook* that exists. Arnold advances the idea that the lack of recognition of the poem’s first two drafts stems from the fact that the Présence edition incorrectly credited itself

⁸⁴ The articles are ‘Beyond Postcolonial Césaire: Reading *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* Historically’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 44 (2008), 258-75; and ‘Césaire’s *Notebook* as Palimpsest: The Text before, during, and after World War II’, *Research in African Literatures*, 35 (2004), 133-40.

⁸⁵ Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 147.

⁸⁶ Arnold, ‘Beyond Postcolonial Césaire’, p. 262.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁸⁸ Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land: Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, trans. Mireille Rosello and Annie Pritchard (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 1995).

as the poem's 'second', thereby crediting the New York draft, implicitly, as the poem's first. In addition the *Présence* version's claim to be the 'definitive' edition has, according to Arnold, and clear within readings of the poem, made readers uncurious about the earlier variants.⁸⁹

Césaire too played a role in this. As a politician and an active advocate of the colonised, the writer possessed a profoundly privileged status. With this came the ability to position his writing in ways that would maintain their influence and survive the challenges of Marxists and Creolists and others. In the article 'Beyond Postcolonial Césaire', Arnold asserts that it was in Césaire's best interests to ignore his earlier *Notebooks* and suggest readings of his writing that directly aligned with his post-war political views.⁹⁰ While it is unlikely that Césaire actively sought to deceive his readers or interviewers, the 'Césaire' he put forward and oriented his readers toward, through re-drafts of his poem and his own references, was the Césaire he was – the Aimé Césaire he became in Martinique, not the Aimé Césaire who emigrated to France. With a shifted conceptual locus – one that was the product of a new context – came an altered self-perception, one the writer read into, or wrote into, his old poem.

We have looked at a number of these 'position-takings', or attempts to orient self and work, by both anglophone and francophone authors, above. It is again worthwhile to stress that these statements about the purpose or content of a piece of writing, the nature of a literary movement, or the situation of self within a field, likely all in cases, were not conscious efforts to obfuscate facts, even if, in my reading, many years after these statements were made, evidence of some distortion is clear. Nonetheless, as I have done with Lamming, Selvon and Naipaul, and will go on to do with Glissant, I will try to skirt or bracket off the author's own thoughts about himself, his life, and his work in order to interrogate the original edition of the *Notebook*. Through this, I hope to illuminate the student Césaire's depiction of the relation of

⁸⁹ Arnold, 'Beyond Postcolonial Césaire', p. 263.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

the emigrant to his people and therefore illuminate the conceptual situation of Césaire in his final years as an emigrant to France.

The early poem puts forward some important differences between the Césaire of '39 and that of '56 but its overall content and form remain roughly the same. In both poems the 'plot' follows identical arcs: an unnamed 'I' thinks about the island of his youth and recalls its many flaws; he then thinks deeply about himself and his identity; eventually he rediscovers pride in his origins, and his colour, and builds the willpower to return home triumphant. The same ambiguities remain in the poem: it is always unclear where the 'I' is in relation to his island, although, based on Césaire's biography, and some lines in the poem, it is natural to assume that he is speaking from Europe, at least at first. Added to this it is never entirely clear whether the return depicted is merely imagined or enacted by the speaker – whether he fantasises about going home and dreams it in detail, or if he actually undertakes the journey he describes.

The prime difference between the two texts is simply a difference in length. The 1939 edition is markedly shorter than its descendant. Although some material was removed as the editions progressed, Césaire seems to have taken an additive approach to his re-drafting. Using the pagination of the Rosello translation, the definitive edition contains an additional eight pages of material, the majority of it linked to one or another post-war movement with which Césaire was engaged. Minus these sections, many of them performances of surrealist or Marxist ideas, the *Notebook* has a much more focused and personal feel. It reads far more like a chronicle of an individual subject's thoughts and feelings – a notebook or journal that charts the development of the speaker's decision and nothing else. Owing to this, Ronnie Scharfman's statement that the title of the poem 'denotes a writing-exercise book, [and] connotes a private, reflexive, for-the-self aspect' is a particularly accurate description of the first draft.⁹¹ The close focus of the '39 poem on the rationale of a return makes perfect chronological sense, of course, as Césaire wrote and published it almost immediately before his actual return journey to his home island.

⁹¹ Scharfman, p. 30.

The historical context of the *Notebook*'s composition has not escaped critical attention, by any means, but this attention has been directed at the wrong source. Because of this, much of what critics have said about the *Notebook* and have abstracted about Césaire based upon it, is annulled in the face of the 1939 edition. For instance, frequent comments about the poem's political intent fade when compared to an essentially non-politicised first draft. When Jeannie Suk says that 'the voyage of the *Cahier* aims to produce a political engagement, a reclamation of cultural and racial identity, a reunion with a collectivity, and a restitution of a bond with Africa, in addition to a return to the homeland' the first clause of her sentence does not refer to the *Cahier/Notebook* as such, but to the 1956 edition of the poem.⁹² Suk's commentary reveals the extent to which readings of the poem have been dominated by interpolations of Césaire's status as a post-war politician and his anticolonial engagement. Another example of this is H. Adlai Murdoch's claim, when writing of Césaire's political significance in the francophone post-war world, that the *Notebook*, Césaire's resignation letter from the French Communist Party and *Discourse on Colonialism* are 'three nonfictional discourses'.⁹³ Here the political aspect of the poem overshadows it to such an extent that its fundamental identity as an imaginative text is blotted out. Besides a lack of political content, another distinct difference in the '39 version is the loss of the poem's tripartite structure, a structure which tracks the speaking subject's capture and loss of identity, which many critics have used as the foundation of their analyses.⁹⁴ Arnold has called the earlier poem one possessed of a 'loose', more fluid arrangement; this is essentially the case and connects to its shadowing of its speaker's decision-making process.⁹⁵

Although some popular ideas about the poem fail to apply to all of its editions, because many passages remain unchanged, some of the main critical insights into it still apply and will inform my analysis. I mentioned above that only the first clause of Suk's quoted

⁹² Suk, p. 36.

⁹³ Murdoch, 'Ars Poetica', p. 11.

⁹⁴ See Maryse Condé, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal: Césaire, analyse critique* (Paris: Hatier, 1978), p. 33; Gregson Davis, 'Negritude-as-Performance: The Interplay of Efficacious and Inefficacious Speech Acts in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*', *Research in African Literatures*, 41 (2010), 142-54; and Scharfman, p. 34.

⁹⁵ Arnold, 'Césaire's *Notebook* as Palimpsest', p. 136.

above were not relevant to the first edition of the poem. This is true, and the remainder of her ideas about the development of the self tracked in the work, the ‘reclamation of cultural and racial identity, a reunion with a collectivity, and a restitution of a bond with Africa’, directly apply to the first draft. In fact, these things may apply even more to the ’39 *Notebook* than its successor. As mentioned, the early *Notebook* is deeply concerned with the development of the self, but it is specifically concerned with his development into a leadership figure, a process that requires the ‘reclamation[s]’ and ‘restitution[s]’ that Suk references. The poem is, at its heart, all about the means through which the emigrated speaker can come to terms with his identity and thus gain the qualifications to return and lead his people. Leadership is central to the function of the speaker and its existence as a theme makes some critical commentary especially relevant to the early version. In her 1978 reading, Maryse Condé says the speaker has the function of a prophet (‘assume une fonction précise. Il est le prophète’).⁹⁶ Mirroring this, Beverley Ormerod dubs the speaker a ‘Redeemer’.⁹⁷ Like its descendent, Glissant’s novel *The Ripening*, and to an extent, Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin* and Selvon’s *A Brighter Sun*, the early version of the *Notebook* actively questions where and how the self-exiled, implied intellectual, fits in with his people. The answer it provides is that he should – if not *must* – lead them as a Redeemer/Christ/prophet: he must provide both insight and direction in order to save his compatriots from their silence and squalor.

Like the anglophone novels already considered, the inadequacies of the people are recurrent images in Césaire’s emigrant text. This is a characteristic of both the early and late *Notebook*; however, as a result of the significantly reduced content in the earlier version, even greater stress is placed on the debased situation of the people. The 1956 version begins:

Get lost I said you cop face, you pig face, get lost, I hate the flunkies of order and the
cockchafers of hope. Go away bad grigri bedbug of a monklet

⁹⁶ Condé, *Cahier*, p. 41.

⁹⁷ Beverley Ormerod, *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1985), p. 4.

(Va-t-en, lui disais-je, gueule de flic, gueule de vache, va-t-en je déteste les larbins de l'ordre et les hannetons de l'espérance. Va-t-en mauvais gris-gris, punaise de moinillon).⁹⁸

In Doris Garraway's words, the opening is one of 'violence' where the unnamed speaker utters a series of phrases of 'vengeful disgust', which extend beyond those quoted above.⁹⁹ Here the speaker immediately asserts himself, his rage and his opposition to the standard bearers of influence the 'cop-face[s]' – '*flic*' being the French pejorative for 'policeman'. This is direct challenge to colonial, or repressive authority and suggests a turn away from established order, an idea reinforced by the phrase that follows shortly after: 'Then I turned toward paradises lost to him and his kin' ('Puis je me tournais vers de paradis pour lui et les siens perdus') (72, 73). Here the speaker actually, physically swivels away from the representative of the system to a better place. Two things are happening in this opening. First the reader is introduced to the world of the poem through the speaker's anger and iconoclasm; it sets up the 'I' as an active, rebellious, incensed individual. Secondly, the islands upon which the speaker will focus, beginning in detail in the next stanza, are presented as 'paradises' – places where the 'I' would rather be and to which the 'cop-face' has no access. The first stanza is, in a sense, something of a prologue or précis for the rest of the poem; it gives us a taste of the journey that the speaker will undertake that will, as summarised above, result in his abandonment of Europe for his former island home.

The second stanza of the 1956 version, the description of the 'paradises' mentioned, is:

⁹⁸ Césaire, *Notebook*, pp. 73, 72. Further references are cited in parenthesis in the text. Throughout two numbers are cited, one for the English translation and one for the French translation on the facing page. Where references are drawn from or include the poem printed in *Volontés* (20 (1939), 23-51) they are preceded by a 'V'. Sections that appear only in *Volontés* I have translated myself (with assistance). If and when phrases are duplicated from the Pritchard and Rosello translation, I have used their words and cited accordingly. There are some spelling errors in the earliest version of the poem that were corrected for the later edition. Where this is the only difference between the two versions, I have used the spellings in Rosello and Pritchard's edition.

⁹⁹ Garraway, 'What is Mine', p. 71.

At the brink of dawn, budding with frail creeks, the hungry West Indies, the West Indies pockpitted with smallpox, the West Indies blown up by alcohol, stranded in the mud of this bay, in the dust of this town sordidly stranded

(Au bout du petit matin, bourgeonnant d'anses frêles les Antilles qui ont faim, les Antilles grêlées de petite vérole, les Antilles dynamitées d'alcool, échouées dans la boue de cette baie, dans la poussière de cette ville sinistrement échouées). (73, 72; V 23)

The tone here, of course, is radically different. When this stanza appears in the 1956 edition, following on from the 'Get lost' opening, it creates some dissonance: it forces a gap between the speaker's description of the places to which he switches his focus as 'paradises' and their reality. Things are different in the 1939 version. In it, there is no 'Get lost' stanza at all; the poem begins with the one quoted in full above. Thus in the 1939 version there is no gap; the islands are not first 'paradises' and then suddenly 'budding with frail creeks'; they *are* 'pockpitted with smallpox [...] blown up by alcohol [...] stranded [...] sordidly stranded'. The '39 poem puts island degradation at its forefront; its immediate focus is the damaged, abandoned condition of the Caribbean.¹⁰⁰ Here the islands are ruined, desolate, and far from paradisiacal. This fact is only further only reinforced by the stanzas that follow, where they are called

desolate bed sore[s] on the wound of the waters [...] flowers of blood withering [...]
old poverty rotting under the sun silently
[...]
the frailest stratum of the earth
(désolée[s] eschare[s] sur la blessure des eaux [...] les fleurs du sang qui se fanent
[...] une vieille misère pourrissant sous le soleil, silencieusement

¹⁰⁰ The ambiguity of the French '*Antilles*' is worth flagging here. The word can be used to refer specifically to the French islands or to the Caribbean as a whole. In the Rosello and Pritchard translation, the term 'West Indies' is used which puts focus on the entire island chain, expanding Césaire's vision in line with his later, wider political views. It is questionable whether, in 1939, those Parisian students who used the term '*Antilles*' thought much about hispanophone and anglophone islands with which they would have had no contact.

[...]

cette plus fragile épaisseur de terre). (73, 72; V 23)

The absence of the angry 'I' at the start, and the removal of a target for his anger, reorient the entire poem. Rather than seeing the strength of the speaker from the beginning, the reader is struck merely by the degradation of the islands described – islands that are not connected to any distinct individual perspective for almost four pages, when the word 'my' ('ma') appears for the first time (V 26). In this space, before the 'I' emerges as distinct from the collective, the reader is presented with a subject subsumed within the mass. The third stanza is, simply 'the hideous inanity of our reason for being' ('l'affreuse inanité de notre raison d'être'), the 'I' appearing merely as a voice within the gestalt 'our' – another mouth inside the suffering mass (V 23). From that point, a far from triumphant entrance onto the stage of a distinctly collective speaker, the reader is treated to a litany of failures, problems and sufferings felt on these 'hungry' Caribbean islands. These failures are shared by the speaker, who remains nothing more than one of many.

Many problems within the Caribbean are presented. The twenty stanzas that detail them before the appearance of a separated subjective eye are, barring very minor changes in capitalisation and punctuation, identical in the '56 and '39 editions. Despite the word-for-word duplication of the earlier poem's content in the latter, the absence of the 'Get lost' opening means the negativity directed at the islands is not leavened by the strength the 'I' asserted on the first line. As a result, there no way to say, as A. James Arnold does in his early analysis of the 1956 poem, that the use of negative words to describe the black people of the islands 'assume[s] a view of the black experience from the outside'.¹⁰¹ Because there is no 'cop-face'; there is no outside. Nor is it possible, as Garraway, Chambers and Ormerod do in their readings of the 1956 poem, to situate the degrading depiction of the people as a criticism of France, slavery or colonialism in order to reduce its sting.¹⁰² There is no 'France' at the start of 1939 version; no outsider at whom aggression is targeted, or at whom a finger is

¹⁰¹ Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 155.

¹⁰² See Garraway, 'What is Mine', p. 72; and Ormerod, *An Introduction*, p. 10; Chambers, 'Critical Approaches', p. 38.

pointed and from whom the speaker twists away in disgust. There is no strength or aggression at the start of the 1939 version at all. In fact, the many problems portrayed in the people are connected to weakness, silence and a *lack* of strength. The islands are ‘martyrs who will not bear witness’ (‘les martyrs qui ne témoignent pas’) with ‘old poverty rotting under the sun, silently’ (‘une vieille misère pourrissent sous le soleil, silencieusement’) the town is ‘flat [...] inert [...] dumb’ (‘plate [...] inerte [...] muette’) (73, 72; V 23). It possesses a ‘squabbling crowd’ a ‘strange crowd [...] alone under this sun’ (‘foule crierde’, ‘étrange foule [...] seule sous ce soleil’) (74, 75; V 24). The word ‘inert’ is repeated again and again to describe the town the text zooms in upon, a town full of ‘leprosy, of consumption, of famines, of fears’ (‘lèpres, de consommation, de famines, de peurs’) (74, 75; V 24).

The use of muteness, weakness and inarticulateness in descriptions of the Caribbean people, and later on black people elsewhere, is one of the poem’s main tropes. The people or the town, their metonym, are always ‘dumb’ or ‘inert’ or a variation on those two themes, including

this sorry crowd under the sun, taking part in nothing which expresses, asserts, frees
itself in the broad daylight of its own land

(cette foule désolée sous le soleil, ne participant à rien de ce qui s’exprime, s’affirme,
se libère au grand jour de cette terre sienne). (75, 74; V 24)

This kind of description is deployed for all people, except the speaker, throughout the poem. It includes a black man seen much later on who is described, in a passage deleted from the later version, as ‘a nigger with a voice clouded by alcohol and destitution’ (‘un nègre à la voix embrumée d’alcool et de misère’) (V 38). Lost voices also characterise the slaves transported across the ocean who utter ‘shackled curses’ (‘malédiction enchainées’) and ‘gasps’ (‘hoquettements’) while dying – the sort of incomplete unexpressive noises that issue from the townspeople at the start (107, 106; V 37). Beverley Ormerod has said that Césaire inaugurated a tradition of a ‘critical and pessimistic view of present-day life in the West

Indies'.¹⁰³ Ormerod links this negative tradition solely to the writers of the French Caribbean, but this is clearly an anglophone fixation as well; these descriptions replicate the contrast between the representative and the represented in the first-person novels of Lamming and Naipaul. The people's inertia is a central motif in the *Notebook* and like Naipaul and Lamming's texts the poem juxtaposes the people/town/crowd/nigger who cannot speak, move or act, with an 'I' who, when he appears, is particularly articulate, mobile and capable. Césaire's *Notebook* is well known for the difficulty and complexity of its language and because of this once the speaker fully detaches from the masses and begins speaking solely for himself as 'I' an immediate gap is created between his complicated, convoluted utterances and the non-words of the 'squabbling' crowd.

Along with descriptions of the people's debased condition, we receive similar descriptions of the damaged land, of the kind shown in the second and third long quotations above. The landscape of the islands is central to this poem. It serves three functions. Firstly, it places the poem in the Caribbean through its 'many references to the Antilles with their vegetation and landscape features'.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, in its description of the natural world, it marks a break from earlier exoticising French poets,¹⁰⁵ many from the ranks of non-residents we considered above. And lastly, and of especial relevance to us here, the land serves as a metonym of the people. The 'frailest stratum of the earth' is itself 'humiliated' ('humiliante') the water is 'naked' ('nue') and the volcanic hills or 'mornes' are 'repressed' ('contenu') (73, 72; 75, 74; V 23, 25). Later on a morne is described as 'famished' ('famélique') only one stanza before a school child, a 'somnolent little nigger' ('négrillon somnolent') is described as losing his 'famine voice' 'in the swamp of starvation' ('dans les marais de la faim que s'est enlisée sa voix d'inanition') – yet another link between man and land (77, 76; V 25). Despite this explicit paralleling, there is one fundamental difference in the descriptions of the inert

¹⁰³ Ormerod, *An Introduction*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Angela Chambers, 'Universal and Culturally Specific Images in the Poetry of Aimé Césaire', in *Black Accents: Writing in French from Africa, Mauritius and the Caribbean, Proceedings of the ASCALF Conference Held in Dublin, 8-10 April 1995*, ed. by J.P. Little and Roger Little (London: Grant & Cutler, 1997), p. 33.

¹⁰⁵ Condé, *Cahier*, p. 56.

town and inert people. At the start, where the people are silent and their actions frustrated, the land seems to sit in expectation of a great upheaval. The crosscutting between individuals and ground surrounding them in the first few pages of the poem suggests that this dormant expectation exists within the people in some unarticulated or inexpressible form.

There are a few factors that suggest this connection. First, the land's expectation can be seen in the third stanza where we are told

the volcanoes will break out and the naked water will seep away the ripe stains of the sun and nothing will remain but a tepid bubbling pecked at by sea birds [...] and demented awakening

(les volcans éclateront, l'eau nue emportera les taches mûres du soleil et il ne restera plus qu'un bouillonnement tiède picoré d'oiseaux marins [...] et l'insensé réveil).

(73, 72; V 23)

While this may initially scan as a nihilistic and apocalyptic image – some forecast of the future ruination of the islands – the coming upheaval will bring with it an 'awakening'. Rather than a physical decimation of the Caribbean, this seems to read as a symbolic sweeping away, one barely contained within the volcanoes, and which awaits a stimulus. We see this again in a description of the frustrated fertility of the land. Césaire describes

the tormented sensual concentration of fat nipple of the mornes with the odd palm tree as hardened germ, the jerking orgasm of the torrents, the hysterical grand-sucking of the sea

(la tourmentée concentration sensuelle du gras téton des mornes avec l'accidentel palmier comme son germe durci, la jouissance saccadée des torrents et [...] la grand'lèche hystérique de la mer). (79, 78; V 27)

Although the torrents are described as 'orgasmic', the arousal of the 'nipple' of the morne is 'tormented' and the pleasure here 'jerking' or arrhythmic. Taking all of this imagery together we receive a description of an angry, almost masturbatory non-release – this is orgasm without pleasure, 'hysterical', unfulfilling and unable to satisfy the expectant stiffness of the morne and palm.

The expectation of the land is linked directly with a developing expectation in the people as the poem advances. Shortly after the lines cited above, we learn that Christmas is coming, its arrival forecast ‘by a tingling of desires, a thirst for new tenderness, a budding of fuzzy dreams’ in the masses (*‘une soif de tendresses neuves, un bourgeonnement de rêves imprécis’*) (79, 78; V 27). This is the first unequivocally positive description of anything related to the people in the poem. We see here a same desire for something uncertain, described with similarly sexual imagery as that used to depict the sensual excitement of the morne. Here ‘sensual concentration’ becomes a ‘tingling’ sensation in the people and a ‘budding’. What is it that the people and the land so expectantly await? There are two clues. The first can be found in the fact that the people’s dreams begin to sprout – although in a ‘fuzzy’, still unarticulated form – around Christmas time. Christmas is, of course, the celebration of the birth of the Messiah. The second clue comes one stanza above the description of the stimulated morne: the ‘I’ emerges as separate from the collective, decisively, when he states that recollections of the people ‘mak[e] me aware of my present misery’ (*‘m’apportant la connaissance de ma présente misère’*) (79, 78; V 26). The 1939 draft separates this statement with twin line breaks which announce that the ‘I’ has arrived, his consciousness detached from that of his compatriots. The birth of the sole perspective corresponds with the birth of Christ, the only joyful time the people experience in the poem’s opening. The ‘I’ is linked to the Messiah.

The opening pages of the poem subsume the one, the speaker, within the many. Unlike the 1956 draft where the narration shifts from ‘the distancing, objectifying subject “I” to the collective “we”, and then to the singular transcendental “I”, which unifies the collectivity into a single agency’,¹⁰⁶ the 1939 draft begins with the collective and then shifts to the individual. By the time the speaker emerges we are well aware that he is ‘of’ the people and we have no reason to suspect, as we do in the 1956 version, that he possesses powers that they do not. His similarity is reinforced immediately after his emergence in his consideration of his family home. The reader is led along a road to a

¹⁰⁶ Garraway, ‘What is Mine’, p. 72.

wooden carcass comically perched on tiny skinny cement paws, and which I call ‘our house’, its hair of corrugated iron waving in the sun like a drying hide, the dining room, the rough wooden floor with glimmering headnails, the joists of pine and shadow running along the ceiling, the ghostly straw chairs, the grey light from the lamp, the swift and glossy light from cockroaches, painfully buzzing...

(la carcasse de bois comiquement juchée sur de minuscules pattes de ciment que j’appelle ‘notre maison’, sa coiffure de tôle ondulant au soleil comme une peau qui sèche, la salle à manger, le plancher grossier où luisent des têtes de clous, les solives de sapin et d’ombre qui courent au plafond, les chaises de paille fantomales, la lumière grise de la lampe, celle vernissée et rapide des cancrelats qui bourdonne à faire mal...). (79, 78; V 26-27)

I quoted that passage at length to show the degradation from which the speaker says he has emerged. His shared home is characterised by darkness, the lamplight is limp and ‘grey’ only the roaches skittering along the floor providing any real illumination. This house, ‘our house’, can be read as a synecdoche of the degraded island described previously; it is a tableau of the ruined surroundings the speaker shares with his people. The fact that ‘our house’ appears after the speaker detaches from the mass reminds us once more of his inauspicious background as his status as one among the many, a fact that is reinforced shortly thereafter with a description of the degraded state of his family (83, 82; V 29).

The speaker is, without any question, of the people. He is though, as I have already presented in the contrast between his elaborate speech and the confused words of the masses, also a singular, privileged member of the collective. He is empowered where the people are weak; he possesses a vision and the ability to act where they are a ‘crowd which does not know how to be a crowd’ (‘cette foule qui ne sait pas faire foule’) (75, 74; V 24). He is their saviour. As mentioned above, this saviour-status is utterly explicit in the 1939 *Notebook* and

it is deeply interwoven into its religious imagery.¹⁰⁷ In a passage quoted above the poem describes the islands as mute martyrs ‘who will not bear witness’. This repeats the trope of island silence, its connection to Christian imagery serving to reinforce a concept of pointless, unnoticed ruin. What is implied here is that the islands need martyrs who will bear witness – without a voice to speak on their behalf, their deaths are in vain. This imagery of unnoticed, silent martyrdom is repeated in the description of the town as ‘panting under the geometric burden of its forever renascent cross, unresigned to its fate, dumb’ (‘essoufflée sous son fardeau géométrique de croix éternellement recommençante, indocile à son sort, muette’) (73, 72; V 23).¹⁰⁸ In *Modernism and Negritude*, A. James Arnold reveals that Césaire was ardently anti-Catholic. He claims that ‘the Catholic Church, into which Martiniquans are customarily born, came to represent for Césaire at an early age the spiritual arm of French colonialism. There was never any question in his mind of reconciling Catholic belief with the values of the black world’.¹⁰⁹ This then, draws a link between the pointless martyrdom and the ‘renascent’ or ever- or always-growing popularity of the Catholic cross. This presents an idea that faith in the Christ of Catholicism is part of the people’s oppression. The Catholic Christ is not the means for salvation as he does not act on the people’s behalf; a different Redeemer is needed, one that will give the people a voice.

That the ‘I’ is this Redeemer – and is a specifically *secular* prophet/leader – is reinforced in a section where he decides to return home, and then compares himself to Toussaint L’Ouverture, leader of the Haitian Revolution. The section after the speaker considers all of the failings of his town is followed, in the 1939 poem, by an explicit decision to voyage back to lead his people. This section is not included in the definitive edition and is central to an understanding of the role played by the ‘I’ in the first draft of the poem. The section reads:

¹⁰⁷ As mentioned, A. James Arnold notes that much of this imagery was removed from the poem. Without these clear and frequent references to the speaker as a Christ-figure, his singularity is significantly reduced.

¹⁰⁸ I have taken my interpretation of the significance of this image from Ormerod in her analysis of the poem. See Ormerod, *An Introduction*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 10.

To leave. My heart was humming with emphatic generousities. To leave...I would arrive smooth and young to this land of mine and I would say to this land in which the silt interpenetrates the composition of my flesh: “I have wandered a long time and I return to the deserted hideousness of your wounds”

(Partir. Mon cœur bruissant de générosités emphatiques. Partir...j’arriverais lisse et jeune dans ce pays mien et je dirais à ce pays dont le limon entre dans la composition de ma chair: “Je longtemps erré et je reviens vers la hideur désertée de vos plaies”).

(V 31)

The sense here is that the speaker is making a sacrifice by returning to the ‘hideousness’ of the people – hideousness that contrasts with his ‘smooth[ness]’ and youth. His return is an act he characterises as connected to a sense of ‘generosity’, of sacrifice. Read negatively this can be seen as a kind of condescension – that the speaker is stooping to help those below. And, almost out of awareness of implied arrogance and an attempt to soften it, we again have the fact that the speaker is *of* these people put forward. In this extract his autochthonous identity is presented through the image of the very soil of his island making up the fundamental composition of his skin. His connection to the land is therefore presented as a material reality; he does not condescend then, it seems, he merely is returning to his rightful place to fulfil his rightful function.

Nonetheless, despite the land in his flesh, it is evident again here that the speaker is unequal to the multitude, especially since, unlike the other people of the soil, he can speak. The quotation marks in this passage signal the first coherent ‘speech’ in the poem. They and the statement serve as an instantiation of the credentials of the ‘I’ to represent – the ‘I’ can speak for the people because he, unlike them, *can speak*.¹¹⁰ The speaker’s desire to be a mouthpiece is reinforced immediately afterwards by the famous line that “My mouth will be the mouth of those griefs which have no mouth, my voice, the freedom of those that collapse in the dungeon of despair” (“Ma bouche sera la bouche de malheurs qui n’ont point de

¹¹⁰ It is worth noting that the 1939 edition of the poem ends with a biography of Césaire, which stresses his education at the École Normale and birth in Martinique. This is a clear assertion of credentials, one that parallels Sartre’s and Breton’s acts of validation. See V 51.

bouche, ma voix, la liberté de celles qui s'affaissent au cachot du désespoir””) (89, 88; V 31). Again, the fact that this declaration is in quotation marks shows that the speaker is already performing the role he has chosen for himself. His mouth is, *already*, the mouth of those who cannot speak. Shortly thereafter, through his words, his island is situated in the world and gains identity as Martinique, through the description of its placement in relation to Guadeloupe and the rest of the Caribbean (91, 90; V 32). The silence of the people is being overcome by the speaker's words; he is beginning to give them an identity.

Not long after these speech acts comes the speaker's self-comparison to Toussaint L'Ouverture. In the 1956 version, this likening to Toussaint comes after a surrealist digression where the speaker assumes the identities of

a kaffir-man
a Hindu-from-Calcutta-man
a man-from-Harlem-who-does-not-vote
[...]
a Jew-man
a pogrom-man
a puppy
a beggar
(un-homme-cafre
un-homme-hindou-de-Calcutta
un homme-de-Harlem-qui-ne-vote-pas
[...]
un-homme-juif
un-homme-pogrom
un choit
un mendigot). (85, 84 ; 87, 86)

The adoption of these other identities makes the eventual comparison to Toussaint less arrogant, less portentous and less significant: Toussaint is merely one of a series of the

oppressed to which the speaker likens himself. Without the other hyphen-man identities, the section on Toussaint draws clear parallels, if not exact equivalences, between the 'I' and this historical Redeemer. Especially when linked to the earlier section on the decision to depart. The passage reads:

What is mine
a man alone, imprisoned by whiteness
a man alone who defies the white screams of a white death
(TOUSSAINT, TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE)
a man alone who fascinates the white hawk of white death
a man alone in the infertile sea of white sand
(Ce qui est à moi
c'est un homme seul emprisonné de blanc
c'est un homme seul qui défié les cris blancs de la mort blanche
(TOUSSAINT, TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE)
c'est un homme seul qui fascine l'épervier blanc de la mort blanche
c'est un homme seul dans la mer inféconde de sable blanc). (91, 90; V 33)¹¹¹

At first this section appears to be the speaker's description of himself; it is only when the incantation of Toussaint's name appears in parenthesis that it becomes clear the speaker is simultaneously describing himself, 'What is mine', along with Toussaint's predicament in his final days. The speaker figures himself as similarly imprisoned within a confining white world as Toussaint, who died in exile in France. In addition, we have the first explicit criticism of the white world in the 1939 poem, its infertility contrasting with the previous description of the potentially ripe, fertile, expectant lands and mountains of the Caribbean where the speaker is needed. This Toussaint section gains additional significance when combined with the earlier declarations about becoming a mouthpiece, and when, as it was in 1939, it is detached from the kaffir-man riff. With the 'kaffir-man' sections of the 1956

¹¹¹ In *Volontés* the word 'blanche', when it appears, is placed alone on a line, highlighting the connection made between 'whiteness' and death.

edition, the desire to represent the oppressed seems to be a desire to speak for the downtrodden worldwide and Toussaint seems to be summoned simply as an oppressed black historical figure. In the 1939 edition, however, the desire of the speaker comes across as a desire to speak solely on behalf of the Martiniquan people in the style of the secular Redeemer Toussaint. Read historically, this makes perfect sense for Césaire. Before entering politics, the idea that he could speak on behalf of the wider colonial world was likely unformed; even in this imaginative rendering of a speaker's return to the Caribbean, the focus is on his specific island.

The rest of the poem essentially rehearses and performs all of these ideas, sticking to an advancement of the speaker's credentials and showcasing his deployment of them in his actions, rather than meandering around and beyond the individual like the 1956 edition. After the Toussaint passage the speaker begins to enact his triumphant return as a leader. First, he leaves a screaming and frightened Europe behind ('Au sortir de l'Europe révoltée de cris [...] au sortir de l'Europe peureuse') criticising European black stereotypes as he goes (101, 100; V 34). He does momentarily question his desire to lead the people and declares it 'madness to dream of the wonderful pirouette above lowliness!' ('quelle folie le merveilleux entrechat par moi rêvé au-dessus de la bassesse!') (103, 102; V 35). But that momentary hesitation is swept away, blending into criticism of Europe where he sarcastically says 'for sure the Whites are great warriors/ hosannah to the master, and the nigger-castrator!' ('parbleu les Blancs sont de grands guerriers/ hosannah pour le maître et pour châtre-nègre!') (103, 102; V 35). The use of 'hosannah' again recalls the Christ, the castration image again reiterating the infertile conditions of the white world. The speaker is turning away from the white Christs of the renascent cross, and becoming a new kind of messiah. His transformation is complete after he admits his complicity with white racism while in France in a scene frequently read in critical studies. Within it the speaker tries to disassociate himself from the aforementioned black alcoholic on a tram and is filled with shame (106-08; V 38). Once he emerges from this painful memory he declares, in a line deleted from the later edition, that 'the baptismal water on my forehead dries' ('l'eau de baptême sur mon front se sèche') (V 38). The biblical

relevance of this statement, in the connection with Jesus' transformation from carpenter to Christ after baptism, is quite clear.

After the 'I' admits his cowardice the morne on his island is described as ready, at last, to speak and disturb the long 'silence' (109, 108; V 37-8). The speaker is the key to unlocking the frustrated virility of the land. God-like he declares that 'everything is in order' ('cela est bien ainsi') (111, 110; V 40). He asks to be made 'a man of insemination' ('un homme d'ensemencement') (117, 116; V 43), and calls for 'the courage of a martyr' in order to free his people ('donnez-moi le courage du martyr'), through his 'catholic' love ('mon amour catholique') (V 42, 43). In a final, grand act, the speaker accepts all the frailties of his people – frailties that his various grand declarations seem to be, if not absent in him then expunged – and becomes Onan 'who entrusted his sperm to the fertile earth' ('qui confia son sperme à la terre féconde') (V 46). Shortly after this transformation into the arch-inseminator, this Christ-like forgiveness of his dejected people, the speaker's oppressed nation is elevated, their rise symbolised by the 'négraille', or black rabble, bursting from their slave ship to stand tall (131, 130; V 49).

The image of black slaves standing up to be counted is pivotal. It completes the association of the speaker with Toussaint, showcases the effect of the speaker's fertilising return, and is the foundation of the early concept of Negritude presented in the poem. In Christopher L. Miller's reading of the '56 *Notebook* he claims that the poem states what negritude isn't, but it never says what negritude is.¹¹² That statement is less true of the 1939 version. Although Negritude is not specifically defined in the 1939 or 1956 edition of the *Notebook*, the concept in the earlier draft it is quite strongly linked to a revolutionary reclamation of black dignity, one driven by the actions of a strong leader. Thus we are told that Haiti is where 'negritude stood up for the first time' ('la négritude se mit debout pour le première fois') only shortly before the narrator invokes Toussaint's name (91, 90; V 32). There is also, as there is in both poems, a sense that an old way of being black – which is linked to subservience and reverent respect for whites – must pass. The speaker celebrates the

¹¹² Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle*, p. 334.

passage of the ‘old negritude’ in both versions (129, 128; V 48), but in the first draft he adds that the old way forced his grandfather ‘to honestly content himself with being a good nigger’ (‘se contenter honnêtement d’être le bon nègre’) (V 48). A new order is coming, a new Negritude is headed to Martinique with the returning speaker, it is one where contentment will take a more fulfilling form because the returning speaker seeks to instil the pride in his people that Toussaint instilled in his; he has awakened the dormant land and he dances the ‘it-is-beautiful-and-good-and-legitimate-to-be-a-nigger dance’ (‘la danse il-est-beau-et-bon-et-légitime-d’être-nègre’) which casts aside old shame (133, 132; V 50). In many ways the speaker’s triumph strikes as even greater than that of Toussaint who was ‘imprisoned by whiteness’, because he has broken free.

There is a productive irony in the fact that there is a lack of a subject in the title of this poem, in all its various manifestations. The irony stems from the fact that this is a poem very much about ‘my return’ or the return of the ‘I’ speaker; it is by no means the generic, general return that the lack of a possessive adjective signals. Yet, this irony is ‘productive’ because it links to the consistent connection of the speaker to the people. Jean-Paul Sartre’s claim that when the black poet speaks his people speak too, is acted out in this text. The speaker’s words fuel his own actions and the actions of the people he represents. The possessive adjective is discarded because the speaker is intent on showing his connection to the masses, that his return is merely ‘a’ return. And yet, as we have seen, and in line with the anglophone work we have considered, the ‘I’ is decidedly singular.

The last section of the poem is often read as triumphalist.¹¹³ The *Notebook* ends, according to J. Michael Dash ‘with the apocalyptic fantasy of the tongue or language of fire that spurts from the reanimated volcano and triumphantly announces a new, disalienated future’.¹¹⁴ As it is little changed between the ’56 and ’39 versions, this sense of massive upheaval, a new future for the people that is intertwined with a new future for the speaker

¹¹³ See Condé, *Cahier*, p. 33 and Chambers, ‘Universal’, p. 34. For Arnold, the third movement sees a ‘transformation of the speaker from observer to committed participant and then to inspired leader’ which ‘involves, in this final avatar, a very considerable leap’. See *Modernism and Negritude*, p. 164.

¹¹⁴ Dash, ‘Postcolonial Eccentricities’, p. 38.

remains. Much attention has been given to the neologism with which the poem ends, ‘verrition’, but almost no attention has been paid to the passage that comes before it.¹¹⁵ It is:

embrace, embrace US [...]
but then embrace
like a field of wise filaos
in the evening
our multicoloured purities [...]
rise, Dove
rise
rise
rise
I follow you, imprinted on my ancestral white cornea
rise sky-licker
and the great black hole where I wanted to drown a moon ago
this is where I now want to fish the night’s malevolent tongue
(embrasse, embrasse NOUS [...])
mais alors embrasse
comme un champ de justes filaos
le soir
nos multicolores puretés [...]
monte, Colombe
monte
monte
monte
Je te suis imprimée en mon ancestrale cornée blanche.
monte lécheur de ciel

¹¹⁵ See Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle*, p. 337-38, for a summary of interest in ‘verrition’.

et le grand trou noir où je voulais me noyer l'autre lune
 c'est là que je veux pêcher maintenant la langue maléfique de la
 nuit) (135, 134, V 50-51).¹¹⁶

This passage raises many strange questions. In a poem that 'repeatedly us[es] white in a negative context and finally equat[es] it with death',¹¹⁷ where the terms 'black' and 'white' are never used casually, it seems particularly odd that the speaker, the Redeemer, has white associated so closely with his vision, and, through the dove, with his own escape from Europe. In addition, the use of 'multicoloured purities' is unusual, as it seems to signify a productive mixing of elements rather than a reclamation of a unified, black, identity. Is the speaker here saying that he is, at his core, mixed? Is this merely a throwaway oxymoron by Césaire that anticipates his later, rampant, surrealist experimentation? When the rising dove is contrasted with the black hole, where the speaker *wanted* to drown in a moon ago – what is being said? Does this not return us to the idea of blackness being some kind of lack – the 'old negritude'? What is the significance of the white dove combining with the, we must assume, *black night*? And why is the dark night 'malevolent' here'?

In Gregson Davis's reading the repetition of the phrase 'At the brink of dawn' ('Au bout de petit matin') in the first few pages of the poem as a 'refrain' that 'periodically reminds us that the speaker is between two worlds, positioned at the margins where cultures intersect and, above all, where lines of identity become blurred'.¹¹⁸ The final section of the poem seems to be a maelstrom of confusion that, through the questions I listed above, and other potential questions, seems to reveal an uncertainty about identity. Angela Chambers has reminded Césaire's readers 'that his decision to write the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* was motivated not by a desire to be a poet but by the discovery of his cultural alienation and, in particular, of his cultural heritage through meeting Léopold Senghor and reading

¹¹⁶ Although the words in the 1939 edition are identical to those quoted from the Rosello and Pritchard translation above, there is some variation in the use of lowercase and capital letters at the start of lines. In addition, there is also a line break after 'maintenant'. In my opinion these have a negligible impact on the meaning. For that reason I have reproduced this section from the Rosello and Pritchard edition for ease of reference.

¹¹⁷ See Scharfman, p. 41.

¹¹⁸ Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, p. 24.

Frobenius'.¹¹⁹ The 1939 *Notebook* seems to be an angry, almost arrogant declaration of the end of that alienation – perhaps even the declaration that the alienation itself was illusory. It places its speaker as the hope of all his people, a Redeemer with an identical composition. Despite this though, the stronger condescension evident at the start along with the implication that the people are incapable of doing the things the speaker can do, combined with the ending – the odd link of a degrading, manipulative whiteness with the exiled Redeemer himself – question some declarations the speaker has made.

The speaker is definitively located outside of the mass. This location is 'definitive' in all its senses: his place in relation to his island seems be the reason that he can redeem it. Because the speaker is elsewhere he is able to reflect and observe from afar, gather strength and return. He can see all the problems that the people cannot see and, of course, he has the means to speak. Although no audience is posited in this poem, and whites are generally criticised, the speaker's location outside, as an emigrant, is so closely linked to his ability to articulate that it seems safe to assume that this position gives not only the training and the experiences necessary to find a voice but some kind of audience. Clearly the text itself is a performance of this. It was printed and published in France, albeit in a small journal; it was a declaration through a means and for an audience that did not exist on Martinique. The 1939 *Notebook* is the work of a colonial *étudiant noir*, it is the work of an *évolué* who it seems have absorbed the idea of his privileged position while simultaneously absorbing a sense that he does not and cannot belong in France. The speaker must return, but all the declarations of sameness he makes assert his difference and the intrinsic value of being outside. In its earliest version, the *Notebook of a Return to Native Land* clearly communicates alienation and confusion – a twisted identification – linked to a desire to be closer to the people of Martinique, but a fixation on their flaws, flaws identified from an external perspective. It puts forward the idea that the emigrated intellectual, organic in every sense – and possessed of even greater power than the likes of Toussaint – is the sole means through which the people will cast aside their inert, silent ignorance with an active, articulate knowledge of themselves.

¹¹⁹ Chambers, 'Universal', p. 32.

Through this depiction it foreshadows *The Ripening*, the first major work of Edouard Glissant.

Are They All the Same?: Intellectuals = Land = People in Edouard Glissant's *The Ripening*

On the surface, Césaire's *Notebook* and Glissant's *The Ripening* have almost nothing in common. Césaire's text is a long poem that, even in its more straightforward 1939 edition, cannot really be considered a strictly narrative work. Glissant's text on the other hand, cannot really be described as anything other than a linear novel, albeit one characterised by formal experimentation and some divergences from its primary focus. Césaire's text is about the development of a lone speaker – his attempt to come to terms with his people and himself and his decision to lead them in actual or spiritual revolution. Glissant's text is, ostensibly, about the development of collectives: the growth of a small group of intellectuals, their town, and the island where they live. Both works focus on Martinique but, besides that central similarity, they otherwise strike as divergent artistic endeavours.

The gap between the *Notebook* and *The Ripening* is only exacerbated by the gap between their times of writing and release. I have already mentioned that Glissant and his first work emerged at a pivotal moment in the history of French Caribbean literature. Both slipped into the field at a moment of change, in the space between the decline of Césaire's Negritude and the rise of new writing, with new perspectives, that would be produced by the next generation of French Caribbean emigrant-intellectuals. In addition this historical juncture preceded, or perhaps prefaced, a changed relationship between the island Departments and the French metropole. Local agriculture and industry began to contract on the islands in the 1960s. This prompted the French government to encourage mass migration, and created conditions for rising numbers of French Caribbean people to seek their fortune in France. This decline seems to have had a causal relationship with the rise of radical movements on the

islands and, in 1958, the year of *The Ripening*'s release, DOM communists were seeking increased autonomous power.¹²⁰ In the spirit of this period, Glissant himself would, as the mood on the islands began to shift, go on to co-found the Front-Antillo-Guyanais, which sought Departmental independence, earn the ire of Charles de Gaulle and have his travel to the Caribbean banned.¹²¹

As well as emerging just on the cusp of significant historical upheaval, *The Ripening* was released at the end of an eventful decade that saw French Caribbean literature emerge into the space of French letters through recognition of the work of Césaire.¹²² However, the time of Césaire's steady ascendancy was almost up in the late-1950s and the altered relationship between the DOM islands and France in the 1960s would incite a shift in the relationship between the DOM emigrant-intellectuals and their people and a change in overall self-perception. When Césaire's *Notebook* was first printed, vast spans of physical distance separated Caribbean *évolués* from their homes and their identifications migrated to Africa; shortly after the publication of *The Ripening*, physical distances narrowed dramatically as large numbers of islanders came to France. It is easy to detect a different positioning, a turn away from Africa-centred identity in the books of later authors like Condé and Schwartz-Bart.

The combination of differing content with differing contexts creates a strong argument for seeing Césaire and Glissant's works as occupying two exclusive camps. Alongside this, as I have attempted to illustrate above, the nature of Glissant's reception has meant that his later works have significantly overshadowed his earlier writing and prompted readings of *The Ripening* that see it as a Glissantian statement of intent, a forecast of things to come. The novel certainly is these things and serves as a clear precursor to Glissant's later work. Still, while I do not want to completely discount the importance of the book to the development of a Glissantian aesthetic, I would argue that though the text shows signs of the

¹²⁰ Hintjens, Helen, 'Constitutional and Political Change in the French Caribbean', in *French and West Indian*, ed. by Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno, pp. 20-33 (p. 27).

¹²¹ Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*, p. 140.

¹²² It probably does not hurt to restate the fact that although Césaire's *Notebook* was first published in 1939 it only came to fame in the 1950s, after it was reprinted in standalone additions and championed by Césaire's patrons.

spirit of the upcoming age of changed relationships, *The Ripening* displays equal allegiance to the age of black vanguardism, Césaire's age.

This dual debt befits the text's emergence into a historical moment between moments, but its connection to the earlier age is difficult to detect due to its content, structure and style. I said above that the novel was home to a degree of experimentation, but the mask that hides its Césairean influences is one constructed less from passages written, for instance, in dramatic dialogue or in sudden second-person perspective, and more from its comprehensively complicated style of representation. J. Michael Dash has summarised Glissant's technique as 'a system of narration that short-circuits the traditional elements of suspense, plot and characterization and insists on the link between the novel as an imaginative construct and the underlying realities of social life'.¹²³ In addition, Beverley Ormerod has written that the novel is, at its heart 'abstract' and lacks 'domestic detail'.¹²⁴ Taken together, these statements map Glissant's work exactly. *The Ripening* is untraditional and its techniques subvert any strains of social realism. Like Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*, the first-person floating narrator has little time for close consideration of the development of characters' thoughts and the novel serves primarily as a space for the performance of ideas. Its main messages are pushed particularly hard and other interpretations, including any Césairean influence, can be very difficult to grasp.

The Ripening tells the story of the Martiniquan post-war election that brought Aimé Césaire to power and it follows a group of radical young intellectuals based in the fictional town of Lambrianne. Mathieu leads the cabal, and Thaël, a young man who abandons his mountain home and journeys into the town, joins the group at the start of the novel. The narrative is powered by the intellectuals' shared desire that the candidate they support, who we must assume is Césaire although he is not named, wins the election. In order to assure this outcome, they plot the assassination of Garin, a flunky of the current regime who, it is suggested, poses a threat to the life of the candidate. The plot is relatively simple. The

¹²³ Dash, 'Introduction', in *The Ripening*, p. 13.

¹²⁴ Ormerod, *An Introduction*, p. 39.

narrative begins with the meeting of Mathieu and Thaël, it continues on to Thaël's decision to join the intellectuals and take sole responsibility for Garin's assassination, it moves ahead to Garin's death at Thaël's hands and climaxes with the candidate's successful election. At the end the intellectuals splinter and important members choose to emigrate and head to France. Thaël, in the final chapters, ventures back to the mountains, a choice that ends in tragedy.

Despite its plot-level simplicity, the novel is extraordinarily convoluted. Much of its complexity is a result of its style. Beyond mere 'short-circuit[ing]' of convention or its existence as place for the presentation of ideas, the novel has other features that wrap its straight narrative arc into a series of knots. *The Ripening* is, first and foremost, profoundly self-aware; it is prone to doubling back on itself and revealing a knowingness about its own representations. This technique creates an uneven feeling, one only compounded by frequent stridency. These features – particularly the text's tendency to make bold, declarative statements – disrupt interpretive efforts that attempt to move around the proclamations the characters and narrator make. For this reason, I feel, few critics have engaged with the book beyond what it has to say about itself. Issues related to emigration, along with others, are hidden behind characters whose words and actions cannot always be understood without the narrator's aid, obscured by a veil of self-decoding symbolism, and covered with overt challenges to the questioning reader.

It makes sense to demonstrate these things before we navigate a way around them. One of most interesting aspects of *The Ripening* is its use of character. The novel's cast is, for a work of its size, quite large. The intellectual group to which Thaël and Mathieu belong contains nine members, all named, plus the novel's unnamed narrator. Despite their multiplicity, on the whole, these characters all speak with one voice: their utterances issue in a symbolic, poetic, declaratory tone through which individual identities are hard to discern. Anything the characters say always seem to gesture at a higher symbolic valence. Every sentence begs to be decoded. The fact that the central group of island intellectuals are childhood friends, and are all young adults, is an irrelevance; there is no 'domestic detail'; all characters speak to each other in consistently portentous words. There are as many examples

of this, but one extended quotation should suffice to demonstrate the general trend. In a conversation with Thaël about his ex-lover, Mathieu comments, unprompted:

“I saw a four-year-old child: he was leading a yoke of oxen across a barren field. [Skeletal oxen], furrows badly formed, joyless labour[er]. A child close to the oxen and his father pinned to the plough! [...] The flowers blared like trumpets, the water was dawn with no noonday, and yet the sun was sinking in the evening, gently like a girl beside her lover! I witnessed that: the terrible beauty of it all, and the Lézarde River, conducting its yellow symphony from stone to stone. I heard the river (with its swirling mud and the beam that crossed it) [a chaotic and savage] song. The Lézarde was calling out to life. Yet, at the same time a four-year-old child...no taller than the harness of scrawny oxen, while the sky blazed and was covered with glowing coals.”

(“J’ai vu un enfant de quatre ans: il dirigeait un attelage de bœufs, au travers d’un champs stérile. Bœufs squelettiques, sillons sans rigueur, laboureur sans joie. Un enfant près de bœufs, et son père cloué à la charrue ! [...] Les fleurs trompetaient, l’eau était une aube sans midi, et pourtant le soleil déclinait vers le soir, tout doux, comme une fille près de son amant! J’ai vu cela : une richesse impitoyable sur toutes choses, et la rivière, la Lézarde, qui menait de roche en roche son concert jaune. J’ai entendue la Lézarde : elle criait (avec des boues et de poutres par tout son travers) une chanson chaotique et sauvage. Sûr, la Lézarde criait à la vie. Pourtant, là! un enfant de quatre ans... Il arrivait à l’encolure des bœufs maigres. Le ciel éclatant s’est couvert de brasiers!”).¹²⁵

Glissant’s background as a poet rings through this passage, as does its attempt to juxtapose images of a potentially fertile land of trumpet-like flowers and symphonic rivers with a stifled people. What is missing from this passage is any connection to the subject at hand: Mathieu’s

¹²⁵ Edouard Glissant, *The Ripening*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (London: Heinemann, 1985), pp. 29-30; Ibid., *La Lézarde* (Paris: Editions du seuil, 1958), p. 27. Further references are cited in parenthesis within the text with the reference to the translated edition preceding that of the original. Where I feel the translation has diverged too far from the original text, I have adapted his words and placed my own in brackets. In addition, the earlier English translation, by Frances Frenaye, has been used for cross-consultation. That edition is Edouard Glissant, *The Ripening* (New York: George Braziller, 1959).

former lover. As should be clear, despite the beauty of the prose, the prevalence of this type of dialogue makes conversations in the novel come across as nothing more than items designed to be slotted into a larger philosophical framework – merely a series of signs.

Actions too beg for non-literal interpretation. That is, characters' actions often seem random, and often utterly unprompted. One particularly telling example of this is what seems to be a rape early on in the narrative. This event comes from nowhere and fades away, never to be referenced again. The scene is brief. Mathieu spies Valérie, a member of his intellectual group, in a field and then springs on her. They enter into 'a savage, silent struggle' ('sauvage combat, sans un cri') then the girl inexplicably goes from fighting off the attack to smiling (49; 55). The episode ends with 'Valérie, who did not like Mathieu (and she already knew it) [giving] him a cheerful smile,' she says, "'I like you, you know'" ('Valérie, qui n'aimait pas Mathieu (et qui le savait déjà) lui sourit gaiement —Vous me plaisez bien, vous.') (Ibid.). This entire scene is utterly inexplicable. Like the characters' words, their actions often require explanation, some interpretive aid, a degree of authorial midwifery – all things the text provides.

The self-awareness of the novel I mentioned above serves as the means through which it explicitly decodes itself and steers its readers away from any unaligned interpretations. This technique is built upon the way the novel, through recognition of its artificiality, creates a sense that all within the work is intended, and merely requires the correct interpretive frame in order to be assessed. For instance in an early conversation between Mathieu and Thaël, Mathieu explains that within the town of Lambrianne:

"Here all is vague, all is confused! But only until we enter that subterranean current, the nexus of life! What to do? Suffer, weep. Anger like maddened iron filings. Resignation, like a rotted corpse. The night, a sudden blaze!...Then what? [...]"

Then Thaël shouted: "I want to live, know this misery, endure it, fight it!"

Mathieu looked towards the garden, towards [the explosion] [...] He understood this way of speaking, this outburst, he was consumed by the same passion but he would not admit it.

(“Tout est vague, tout es diffus par ici! Mais c’est tant que nous n’avons pas pénétré le courant souterrain, le nœud de vie! Quoi? Souffrir, pleurer. La rage, comme une limaille affolée. La résignation, cadavre pourri. La nuit, une flambée!... Alors ? [... ”]

Alors Thaël cria : “Je veux vivre, savoir cette misère, la supporter, la combattre!”

Mathieu regarda vers la jardin, ver l’éclat [...] Il comprenait ce langage, ce cri, il éprouvait cette flamme, mais il ne voulait pas l’admettre.). (31; 29)

Here we have a non sequitur of Mathieu’s followed by one of Thaël’s. Both are characteristically portentous, of the pedigree that pops up throughout the text, and both are acknowledged as odd by Mathieu’s thought that Thaël’s way of speaking and his own, their ‘outbursts’, are born of their shared passion. This statement does not normalise sentences like ‘But only until we enter that subterranean current, the nexus of life!’ but it does note an awareness of their nature, and, I believe, invites them to be ‘read’; it tells the reader to stop questioning the register of the words and instead try to measure their significance.

A similar acknowledgement and call to ignore apparent artificiality happens on a greater scale during Thaël’s move toward the murder of Garin. The chapters preceding Garin’s death feature Garin and Thaël walking together along the Lézarde River. Garin is a notorious murderer and is well aware that Thaël intends to kill him when they reach the river’s mouth. Nonetheless, Garin agrees to walk along with Thaël to the end of the river, peacefully. The unrealistic nature of this journey is profound and clear through the many chapters it spans. It begins with Thaël’s declaration that he will try to kill Garin when they reach the river’s end, then:

The water flows between them. Garin slowly raises his foot. He traces a line on a rock between Thaël and himself. The leather of his boot squeaks, and a ribbon of grey water forms on the dry surface of burnt rock.

“Put your foot there, if you dare.”

Thaël climbs on to the rock. Garin reflects.

“All right. [Let us walk] as far as the delta.”

(L'eau court entre eux. Garin lève la jambe, avec lenteur. Il trace une ligne sur une roche, entre Thaël et lui. Le cuir de ses bottes crisse; et c'est un ruban d'eau grise sur la sécheresse de la pierre brûlée.

— Pose seulement ton pied dessus, si tu as du courage.

Thaël monte sur roche. Garin réfléchît.

— Ça va. Jusqu'au delta.). (79; 101)

We could perhaps say that Garin has little to fear from a boy in his late-teens who has promised to kill him; but I would argue that the dramatic line in the sand action undermines that reading. Garin's sudden switch from menace to openness is startling and the almost-absurdity of this scene, especially when the backgrounds of the characters are taken into account, continues throughout their journey.

As with Mathieu's dialogue above, the text recognises the oddness of this episode and includes an extended scene that again draws attention to its artificiality and invites the reader to interpret what is taking place. Only pages after Thaël and Garin's meeting in the river, the novel cuts away to a village storyteller. The man is recounting a journey of two foes who, like Thaël and Garin, travel together along a river to its mouth. Although this story is being told simultaneously with Thaël and Garin's journey-in-progress we soon come to realise that that the teller is describing Thaël and Garin; he is narrating their actions, despite his claim that his story is one from legend. The self-consciousness of this sudden doubling is jarring and naturally forces forward an even greater scepticism in Thaël and Garin's actions – but then, unexpectedly, this scepticism is directly addressed. During the telling of the 'legendary' account, an audience member 'Mr Sceptic' ('Monsieur Sceptique') declares that the tale is obviously a pack of lies (81; 103-04). In response, 'the storyteller pleads innocence; he is not responsible. The story is common knowledge, go discuss it with those who knew the country at that time' ('le conteur s'excuse: il n'est pas responsable. L'histoire est connue, qu'on aille débattre avec ceux qui ont vu le pays dans ce temps-là') (81; 104). This is clearly a metafictional device, an exculpation of the by the text itself. We, the readers, are Monsieur

Sceptique, and the challenge of the storyteller is a challenge to us. This manoeuvre instructs the sceptical reader that his objections must be suspended and, it implies, once more, that the artificiality of everything is intended, that something other than realism is the objective.

The text is always aware. It addresses our scepticism and, due to its frequent use of symbolic, non-literal language and unexpected actions, it leaves us at its mercy to interpret it. Although Debra L. Anderson claims, as quoted above, that we do not need Glissant's help to understand *The Ripening*, one is hard pressed to access the novel and synthesise its events without Glissant's assistance. In recognition of this, the novel provides many interpretive blueprints by explaining its own symbols repeatedly and explicitly. We are told of the people that 'the land did not belong to them, the red earth was symbolic of their will to be, like desire or anger' ('la terre ne leur appartenait pas, la terre était une rouge aspiration de l'être, un désir, une colère!') (49; 56). We are told what three trees, which appear repeatedly through the story, symbolise (60; 72). In addition, we are told how to read the sea, another recurrent symbol: it is 'the future' ('l'avenir') (100; 129). These are only a few examples of many internal readings. The text offers its hand to the reader as an aid to his negotiation of its content. We are told what is intended, what is important, and when to suspend our scepticism. If, somehow, by the end of the book, we are still confused, or still have problems with the text's techniques, there is a final coup de grâce that seeks to explain away the novel's form.

Like all the works we have considered except Selvon's *A Brighter Sun*, *The Ripening* is told from a first-person perspective. As mentioned, our narrator is a somewhat spectral first-person, who rarely uses the pronoun 'I' and does so only at points in the novel to remind us of his presence and to insert himself into a handful of events. Again, this links with Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*. Our narrator, like Lamming's G., is at times omniscient and then not; but he is significantly less present and recognisable as a distinct character than Lamming's protagonist. Nonetheless, the narrator is always there. In Elinor S. Miller's reading, the narrator's description of the many occurrences in the text which he did not physically attend give evidence that he is 'informed enough [...] to present an omniscient

point of view'.¹²⁶ In the novel, like Lamming's *Castle* and Naipaul's *Miguel Street*, the narrator is a child but speaks from a position beyond the action, looking back at a historical moment in which he was involved, presumably using information gleaned later on to fill in gaps. Miller has also argued that this child narrator, who grows as the narrative progresses, is 'symbolic of the development of the consciousness of the people'.¹²⁷

The narrator is present only as a spectator to the intellectuals' actions throughout the majority of the text. It is only towards the very end of the book that he joins them as a participant in the action and follows the group around during the election of the Césaire stand-in. When the group splinters at the end, after the candidate is successfully elected, the various characters explain their plans to leave the town. Along with Mathieu, the narrator declares that he will go to France. He then receives clear instructions:

"Write a story," said Mathieu. "You are the youngest, you will remember. Not our story, that's not interesting. Not with all the details [...] Fill it with the monotony of passing days, the indistinguishable voices, the endless nights [...]"

"Write it like a kind of testimony," said Luc [...]" And don't forget, don't forget to say that it is not that we [intellectuals] were right. It is "the land which is right."

(— Fais une histoire, dit Mathieu. Tu es le plus jeune, tu te rappelleras. Pas l'histoire avec nous, ce n'est pas intéressant. Pas les détails [...]Fais-le avec la monotonie, les jours qui tombent, les voix pareilles, la nuit sans fin'[...]

— Fais-le comme une témoignage, dit Luc. [...] Et n'oublie pas, n'oublie pas de dire que nous n'avions pas raison. C'est le pays qui a raison). (174-75; 224)

The other intellectuals chime in and tell the boy to write the story like a winding river and 'like a poem' ('comme un poème') (175; 224). I called the narrator a coup de grâce because, as I hope this passage illustrates, he serves as a means of noting any lingering issues with the content and form of the narrative: his existence allows a final direct address of the slow-

¹²⁶ Elinor S. Miller, 'The Identity of the Narrator, p. 17.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 21.

moving ‘monotony’ of the story and the ‘indistinguishable voices’ of the interchangeable characters. Everything is intended, this passage declares. As a part of this declaration, as with the other self-conscious passages we have read, we are asked to focus our attention elsewhere, this time at the land – the source of truth. Thus, this passage not only engages with the construction of the novel and its use of character, it also situates the narrator, and hence the text, as a conduit for the collective story of ‘the land’ and its inhabitants.

The text here is telling us that the indistinguishable voices it features are unimportant as individuals. In addition it is telling us, once more, and in line with this, that our interest should always be directed at the wider people, the collective, the land. Our distinct, we now realise, *emigrant* narrator has structured the story to present a fictionalised chronicle whose goal is to celebrate the coming-into-being of the community. Paradoxically, just as the narrator is born into the story as a defined individual consciousness we are told that he, and his intellectual compatriots, are subordinate to the land. The text frequently uses figurative language to illustrate an essential connection between all its players and their homeland, and this passage of instruction to the narrator also instructs the reader that the land should be seen as the most significant thing in the narrative. As in Césaire’s *Notebook*, the direct link of the intellectual to the land itself serves throughout as a metaphor for the connection of the intellectual to the people. However, unlike the *Notebook*, *The Ripening*’s conceptual structure is something like: intellectuals = land, people = land: intellectuals = people. The final premise in this syllogism is asserted through implication rather than explicit declaration; in the novel the intellectuals are never directly connected to the people – their connection can only be assumed by everyone’s linkage to the land. Because all are one, the leadership of the intellectuals need not be questioned, and cannot be criticised – they, like the people, merely enact the will of the land. This is perhaps better illustrated than explained.

The most common symbolic language used in the text compares humans to objects in the natural world. For instance, when the intellectuals decide at first to kill Garin we are told ‘that was the nature of *the land* and *its* first suppression of injustice. *The land* which was learning the new and violent way of the world, after so much forgotten violence; and it made

its cry heard [my emphasis]’ (‘C’était la terre, et son premier retranchement. La terre qui apprenait la violence nouvelle du monde, après tant de violences oubliées; et elle criait’) (25; 20). Thus the intellectuals’ will is presented as being identical to the hidden desires of their entire environment. There are further examples of links between players and their place. The Lézarde River is likened to the people as a whole and intellectuals in particular throughout. In the sixth chapter it ‘surges forward, like a people in revolt’ (‘elle bondit, comme une peuple qui se lève’) (32; 30), later on the intellectuals’ words have ‘crosscurrents and alluvial deposits which [under the words carried their secret passion]’ (‘des alluvions et des courants qui sous les mots charriaient leurs fureurs secrètes’) and replicate the make-up of the river (53; 62). Garin is likened to a tree whose roots disrupt the flow of a river (76; 96). Thaël says the earth is ‘black’ and a connection of its colour to the people’s colour is implied (87; 112). The river overflows as a precursor to the successful election (128; 167). Further connections are made everywhere and range in technique from metonymy to synecdoche to standard metaphor. In this novel, as in Césaire’s *Notebook*, the part again equals the whole: soil again equals native flesh – and intellectuals, through their roots in the soil, are necessarily rightful representatives of the people.

These endlessly cited connections have prompted critical commentary like Debra L. Anderson’s which says that the intellectuals, although initially detached from their people, by the end of the novel feel ‘the unconscious influence of the land’ and that ‘the landscape plays an important role in the formation of their awakening identities’.¹²⁸ Further, Ormerod writes that there are ‘multiple parallels between the mythical situation of the protagonist and the awakening consciousness – the “ripening” – of his country’, a point echoed by Hallward who notes that ‘Mathieu and Thaël’s coming into manhood [...] doubles the popular “coming into nationhood”, and vice versa’.¹²⁹ Though these critics go on to diverge from the interpretative blueprint the novel provides, their comments show the extent to which the conflation of man and land, and through this, intellectuals and people, is fundamental to this work. We are

¹²⁸ Anderson, p. 41.

¹²⁹ Ormerod, *An Introduction*, p. 39; Hallward, p. 83.

repeatedly instructed to ignore the privileged individuals who shape events or see them instead as mere enactors of an unexpressed popular sentiment. The text's frequent lack of an explicit 'I' asks us to ignore the narrator as well, in favour of thinking about the events. Although all occurrences are driven by a detached and evidently different, dominant group whose actions are filtered through the perspective of a further detached and orienting perspective – the text asserts that everything is merely an aspect of a wider, 'coming into nationhood': the 'ripening' of the people. However, by ignoring the text's overt directions, and zooming in on what it asks us to overlook, we can see even greater Césairean debts than the soil metaphor, and understand the importance of emigration to the novel's content.

Like the other works we have seen, there are clear and meaningful gaps presented between the empowered, inspired intellectual group and the people they motivate in the election – not least their right, conveyed by the narrator, to speak for others. The text actively resists these factors being seen as significant. Whenever it puts forward a claim about the special nature of the intellectuals, it tends almost immediately to deny it. So, we have the intellectuals specifically singled out as different and separated from others when we are told, early on, that 'the ordinary people[,] always quick to judge, were indulgent towards them' ('le peuple, prompt à juger, accordait son indulgence') (23; 17). But shortly thereafter we are told that the rising political fervour in the island is 'a question of a country and not men making unreasonable demands' ('c'est d'un pays qu'il s'agit là, et non pas d'hommes sans raisons') (24; 18), a concept supported by the quote above where the intellectuals' decision to kill is an instance of the *land*'s will, not their own. Throughout the text, just as soon as the intellectuals are distinguished they are lumped back together with the masses. There is further seesawing, particularly in the novel's penultimate section. Whether or not the intellectuals truly know the people is questioned in conversation (143; 184-85), but shortly thereafter the fact that the public believes and agrees with the intellectuals ideas is reasserted (147; 190-91). Later, almost in contradiction, Mathieu denies that he had any major involvement in the election (149; 193) and then, moments later, after seeing a sympathetic minor character cast his vote,

Mathieu assures Thaël that the man voted ‘for us’ (‘pour nous’) – a claim that flies in the face of the minor involvement the character claims to have had (151; 195).

Regular assertion and denial of the intellectual’s influence showcases a degree of self-consciousness about their centrality to the narrative and their obvious differences from the collective. Additional gaps between the intellectuals and people are openly put forward. Pablo, one of the intellectual group, expresses his problem with ‘poor people’ (‘les malheureux’) wasting their money on cockfights (35; 35). A field worker fails to realise he has been struck by enlightenment while our intellectual narrator, implicitly does, in like manner with Lamming’s peasants who cannot see where they fit into the larger pattern that G. describes (46; 51). Our intellectuals refuse to join the ‘People’s Party’ (‘parti de peuple’) although they recognise it as good for the people themselves (101; 132). These are but a few examples, but overall, intellectuals are consistently granted a unique prescience and insight. They are openly admired by the people and provide the peasants, as represented by the only labouring character, Papa Lomé, the fruits of their increased mental and monetary means.

In one of Thaël’s reflections we receive the declaration that ‘the only true wealth [...] was that of a country which had freely chosen a set of values in keeping with its essential nature’ (‘car il n’est de richesse [...] que pour un pays qui a librement choisi l’ordre de ses richesses, par telle ou telle organisation qui convient à sa nature’) (141; 182). Politics therefore, have to reflect the true, ‘essential’ nature of the collective: they must be the instantiation of the people’s fundamental being. But what is the fundamental being of the people as represented? As a group, ‘the people’ are very much at the periphery of the narrative; they appear primarily as mute symbols of poverty or raucous post-election celebrants at the edges of the intellectuals’ perception. Papa Lomé serves as their embodiment, but his only essence seems be a deep-seated respect for the intellectuals combined with a jocular, upbeat manner. In a scene that opens the third section of the novel, a disdainful judge expresses a patronising, negrophilic attitude towards the people of Martinique. He claims ‘these people are like children. They are noisy but essentially good-natured. They have no thought for the future’ (‘ce peuple est comme un enfant. Ils sont

bruyants, mais enfin ils sont gentils. Ils ne pensent pas plus avant') (125; 163). For all it seems we should take this as an example of prejudiced colonial denigration, this description of 'the people' fits Lomé, their only representative, very well. The character is decidedly carefree, noisy, and childlike. For instance, when he arrives to meet the intellectuals after the election, 'he was, as always, full of fun and enthusiasm' ('il était, comme toujours, gaillard et plein d'entrain') and he goes on to sing a loud song, using a chair as a drum, to celebrate electoral success (175, 179; 225, 229).

In addition to this privileging of intellectuals, the text repeats the tropes of silence, destitution, insignificance and stagnation of the town and people that we have seen before. The town is presented as 'minute dot' ('infime partie') in the world (53; 62) a 'speck of dust' ('[une] poussière du monde') (101; 130). It is not even 'a hole [...] and it cannot compete with the outside world' (ce n'est pas une ville, même pas un trou [...] ça ne peut pas faire concurrence un monde') (96-97; 125). Echoing Césaire's text, Lomé, the people's representative, ironically admits that the people cannot speak for themselves (128; 167). The stagnation of the people is not an exact match with that of the *Notebook*, the presence of Lomé, a member of the masses who can actually speak (even if he doesn't think he can), makes that impossible, but intellectuals are nonetheless the motive force behind the town's development. The 'ripening' of the area and the surge of its waters, come immediately after Garin's death, an act of sacrifice for the benefit of the community which recalls Césaire's necessary sacrifice – the 'martyrdom' of his Redeemer. Just as with Césaire, this act of rabble-rousing catalyses a positive change and is the act of a separate, intellectual leader on behalf of his mute and uninformed people.

Not only are intellectuals again the engines of change in this text they also gain power and insight through movement – like all of the protagonists so far considered. J. Michael Dash notes that 'the initial sequence of the novel is an extended poetic meditation on the beginning of a journey, the consequences of leaving home, the dawn of a new

consciousness'.¹³⁰ The novel's opening image of Thaël's joyous departure from his mountain home and its closing images of death when he and Valérie return to the mountains, create a sense that travel away from origins is a positive and productive act – one characterised by enlightenment and development – and return is destructive. This may initially strike as an inverse of Césaire's model – and it is to an extent – but we must remember that in the *Notebook* the speaker gathers strength from being away, without his residence in the area of 'white death' he would not have the power to return in triumph and liberate the masses. The benefits of escape in *The Ripening* are clearly performed when the narrator describes, at length, his younger pre-emigration self as characterised by ignorance (33; 31-32). We know at the end that he has left for France in order to tell his tale and we are also informed of the power of words, words he now uses deftly to tell the tale of the 'land'; words which 'never finish dying' ('les mots n'achèvent jamais de mourir') (180; 231); words which, as an emigrant, he has been granted the power to use.¹³¹ All of this seems to figure flight as both the source of enlightenment and, for the narrator specifically, the source of his ability to consecrate events in permanent, powerful language.

The gap between the heroes of Glissant's works and the people they speak for or on behalf of has been noted by critics, but the fundamental importance of the narrator to his first novel has been generally overlooked.¹³² If we take the text on its own terms as the account of an emigrant of his younger days, the doubling back and self-consciousness it uses to assert the link between intellectuals, the land and their people, disrupt other readings and discourage other questions, all come across as a concerted attempt to assert a rooted identity. The text's various betrayals of its own statements of essential connection and its doublespeak regarding the importance of the intellectuals to the novel's events, seems to signal an attempt to exalt

¹³⁰ Dash, *Edouard Glissant*, pp. 60-61.

¹³¹ It is significant that the narrator is asked to tell the tale of the intellectuals and their island *because* he is leaving. From a historical perspective this makes perfect sense: in the world outside of the text Paris, as we have seen, was the home of writing about the colonies.

¹³² Dash, Cailler and Hallward all make mention of the space between the heroes in Glissant and the people. See, respectively, *Edouard Glissant*, p. 5; Bernadette Cailler, 'Edouard Glissant: A Creative Critic', *World Literature Today*, 63 (1989), 589-92 (p. 590); and *Absolutely Postcolonial*, p. 86.

the people's power and potential that the text itself cannot but undermine. The intellectuals are privileged and the narrator himself, the detached and panoptic 'I', is privileged even above them.

The narrator is, of course, merely an expression of the perspective of his creator, Glissant; he is a product of the author's own world perception, his conceptual locus. We see here, again, both inside and outside of the text, the immigrant working as a representative. Direct challenges to the outsider's perspective, such as that of the storyteller who directs his comments about his land at skeptical readers, and the text's convoluted nature, position this novel as the depiction of an inaccessible reality and the narrator as our only means to understand it. This fact is also performed through the text's own complicated representational strategies and doubles the author's own position as a decoding, vocalising intermediary – a role he continues to play as a theorist. The connection of all members of the populace to the land's essence is a Césairean gesture to the emigrant's essential right to represent. It is a gesture that includes the work's fictional and actual author. Yet, interestingly, this insider stance unravels itself in its own presentation. We logically ask: Are the intellectuals a part of the people or aren't they? The answer, clearly, is they are not fully within the mass. They, and their representative, our narrator, are distanced leaders of a people who require intellectual guidance. While the main cast and the emigrant-narrator question their own relationship with the people and their importance to them through their actions and statements, they showcase the people's fundamental need for their leadership. Our emigrant, the representative of these representatives, is positioned even above these leaders. They themselves feel the need for him to tell their tale and he is, like our other first-person speakers, another 'mouth for those griefs which have no mouth' – our interlocutor – who brings the people, and the land, into being through his Word.

Conclusion

The Ripening is by far the most self-conscious of the texts we have considered, and Césaire's *Notebook* is one of the least. While Césaire's 1939 text confidently asserts the Redeemer's right to be the mouthpiece of his people, Glissant's characters and narrator do not admit what is, on close analysis, clear: their superiority to those around them and their role as leaders/speakers. It is obvious that Césaire's text issues from the era of the *évolué*, where the questioning of the connection between the representative and those he represents was not often asked; whereas Glissant's text, as befitting its place in history, begins to complicate its own positioning through its ambivalence. In line with this, *The Ripening* can be seen as a bridge between Césairean triumphalism and later Condéan scepticism – as a text that emerged at a point between theoretical and historical moments. Nonetheless, despite the differences between Glissant and Césaire's first major works, through their twin privileging of the emigrant-intellectual, both texts closely adhere to model of the novels of Naipaul, Selvon and Lamming, and come across as products of a similar conceptual loci. We will conclude with further exploration of these connections.

Conclusion: New Arrivals, Further Departures – Caribbean Movement and the Future

The connections between the work of Lamming, Naipaul, Selvon, Césaire and Glissant are many. In all of their works that we have considered, we have been presented with a male main character, one separated or separating himself from the masses and who has a complex, questioning, and often negative view of his own origins. In Naipaul, Lamming, and Glissant, this male hero decides to emigrate, and through emigration either finds or has the promise of finding the means to both speak for his people and to understand their essence. In Selvon, migration from origins offers equal promise, but the process is frustrated by the intrinsic limitations of the main character. In Césaire the world outside alienates the speaker/Redeemer from his true origins and his only option is to return. All of the texts we have considered are about movement and flight; all of them deal with particularly gifted, articulate, active and mobile main characters who contrast greatly with their unambitious or utterly stagnant peers; and all of the texts give the orienting perspective a language and actions that contrast with his people, endear him to the reader and privilege his perspective.

But this study is not the first to recognize some of these analogies. In her essay ‘Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer’, Maryse Condé charts what she sees as various trends, written as ‘rules’ within early French Caribbean writing,¹ they are:

1. Individualism was chastised. Only the collectivity had the right to express itself.
2. The masses were the sole producers of Beauty, and the poet had to take inspiration from them.
3. The main, if not the sole, purpose of writing was to denounce one’s political and social conditions, and in so doing, to bring about one’s liberation.

¹ In the article Condé refers to ‘West Indian’ writing, but her references to French authors, French critics and French events seem to signal she is, in fact, only occupied with French Caribbean writing. See Maryse Condé, ‘Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer’, *Yale French Studies*, 97 (2000), 151-65.

4. Poetic and political ambition were one and the same.²

Condé connects these trends to the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre and communism on the authors of Aimé Césaire's generation. She goes on to say that the rules for French Caribbean writing changed with the publication of the Haitian writer Jacques Roumain's *Masters of the Dew* (*Gouverneurs de la rosée*), which 'established a model which is still largely undisputed to this day':

1. The framework should be the native land.
2. The hero should be a male, of peasant origin.
3. The brave and hardworking woman should be the auxiliary in his struggle for his community.
4. Although they produce children, no reference should be made to sex. If any, it will be to male sexuality.³

Condé's statements are characteristically provocative, and characteristically situate her own work, along with that of other female writers from the Caribbean, at the margins of the Caribbean canon.⁴ Nonetheless, her 'rules' replicate some of the intersections between the texts we have considered here. Namely, Condé notes, as I have, the centrality of the collective and the male peasant hero, the focus on denouncing colonialism, and the setting on home islands as intransient features. Curiously though, she sees these things first as *French* Caribbean trends, the results of mimicry, politics and maleness, rather than the effects of movement combined with the demands of the literary industry.

On reflection it should not come as a surprise that Condé would fail to note emigration as a significant factor in the production of this literature. This is because, like the other authors we have considered, Condé herself was an emigrant from the Caribbean, and one who faced the same pressures to prove her insight as her predecessors. In carving out her own space within the literary field, she has highlighted her sex as a source of a clearer,

² Condé, 'Order, Disorder, Freedom', p. 153.

³ Ibid., p. 156.

⁴ Condé has a well-established reputation for making provocative statements. See Dawn Fulton, *Signs of Dissent: Maryse Condé and Postcolonial Criticism* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2008), p. 5.

more interesting view of the Caribbean than the likes of Césaire and Glissant. In her contemporary essays, the complications of viewing her ‘home’ from abroad are downplayed, her difference from other authors from the same tradition are displayed, and a new image of the leading lights of the French Caribbean field is put forward.⁵ Condé often marginalizes and differentiates herself in her critical work, yet builds her assessment of her male peers on their similarity. Again, it is logical that this approach could or would be taken. Throughout this study I have referred to authors’ shared or individual ‘conceptual locus’, their unique place from which their perceptions of the world issue and which is the orienting factor in their self-representations and creative work. This prism, this mental and historical space through which authors’ and everyone’s assessment of reality diffracts, creates perceptions that diverge from apparent facts – the ‘facts’ here being Condé’s far from marginal location in the contemporary French literary field. As with others, Condé’s writing is overdetermined by both her own conceptual locus and the ways in which this intertwines with the pressures of her field to declare uniqueness, justify insight and assert the value of her words over those of others.

Our authors, like Condé, were all emigrants. All of them came to countries that were un- or under-informed about their places of origin and all faced identity crises when they arrived in London or Paris. For our anglophone authors this crisis forged a united West Indian identity that was a reaction to imperial misrecognition of their home islands and lack of understanding of their ethnicities. For the francophone authors, the crisis was caused by a

⁵ Condé’s restructuring of the field in her favour is at times very overt. One notable example is in her essay ‘The Stealers of Fire: The French-Speaking Writers of the Caribbean and their Strategies of Liberation’, *Journal of Black Studies*, 35 (2004), pp.154-64. In this essay she refers to herself and her work in the third person and offers it an overwhelmingly positive reading. She first exalts literary practice by declaring that for Guadeloupe and Martinique literature ‘is the *only* space of freedom left to these politically, economically, and culturally subjugated islands’ [my emphasis] (154), and in an unsubtle reconfiguration of the field, states: ‘What does the second generation of French-speaking Caribbean writers, such as Simone Schwarz-Bart, Myriam Vieyra, and Maryse Condé have to offer? Except for Simone Schwarz-Bart, [leaving just herself and Vieyra] this generation confronts Africa [...] Going one step further than Césaire, they undertake a physical journey back to the continent. Mother Africa, alas, is nothing but a wicked stepmother’ (162). Further Condé writes that Glissant ‘systematized the “theme” of the Maroon to make it the keystone of Caribbean history. Maryse Condé, however, inconveniently recalled that the famous Maroons were nothing but opportunists’ (163).

distorted view of blackness that began before the war and led to strict definition of the form, content and value of black writing by intellectual patrons. For all, identity altered when the authors arrived abroad and those alterations caused shifts in perception that were necessarily reflected in writing. I have just called attention to Condé's failure to note her actual influence in the world of letters; I criticised Lamming's dubbing of all real 'West Indian' writers, despite earnings and location as 'peasants'; I took issue with Glissant's complex, self-contradictory representations of intellectuals as well as Selvon's 'folk poet'-style utterances and noted that Naipaul's uniqueness is not as unique as he, or some of his readers, seem to think. Despite the many clashes between authors' utterances about themselves and others and the reality of their place in the world, it seems in every case that these writers were not seeking to hide or obfuscate or lie. All evidence presents a case that, rather than seeking to manipulate their critical or casual readers, these writers merely expressed the ways in which they saw themselves, perceptions that – by virtue of their origins, time period and the pressures of their literary context – hid aspects of their selves from their sight.

In this way, this study diverges from wider, postcolonial studies of the relationships between emigrated authors and the people they portray. Whereas Caribbean critics have had the tendency to raise issues with authors' representative status only in passing, critics within the postcolonial tradition have developed detailed critiques with extended coverage of the oft-concealed relationship of emigrated, organic intellectuals to their people 'back home'. These studies have, on the whole, avoided any major engagement with Caribbean writers or the Caribbean context at anything other than a superficial level,⁶ and they have generally criticised writers for actively exploiting their positions of influence or wilfully distorting the true relationships with those they represent.

There are many examples of this brand of criticism and it is a pedigree that can be traced back, roughly, to the late-1980s and early 1990s. Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes*,

⁶ Graham Huggan, for instance, considers Naipaul's novel *The Enigma of Arrival* in his 2001 book *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), but besides some brief references to Naipaul's Caribbean background, there is no connection of the author to the Caribbean literary tradition, his peers, or the post-war wave of Caribbean emigration (see pp. 85-90).

Nations, Literatures is a key text in this tradition. In it, the critic calls attention to the class differences between postcolonial writers and theorists and the people they write or theorise about. Among other things, Ahmad declares that attention must be paid to the facts that ‘exile’ and immigration and ‘documents produced within non-Western countries and those others which were produced by the immigrant at metropolitan locations’ are not the same.⁷ Much of what Ahmad argues within *In Theory*, as should be clear from this brief quotation, has informed my own construction of the argument presented here. What I hope has not infiltrated this study, but is evident throughout monographs and articles on this topic, is a hostility to certain postcolonial authors and critics that is particularly strong in Ahmad’s text.⁸ Throughout Ahmad’s critique there is a strong sense conveyed that the postcolonial author is, as we have seen in Rob Nixon’s work on Naipaul, a schemer and a manipulator. As mentioned, this negativity is also evident elsewhere in the wider works of other analysts of the relationship between the producers of postcolonial literature and the people they depict. Graham Huggan in particular replicates Ahmad’s sentiment in his critique of ‘strategic exoticism’ of postcolonial authors whose books are ‘designed as much to challenge as to profit from consumer needs’ and who stage or ‘dramatise their “subordinate” status’ for the imagined benefit of a majority audience’.⁹ In Huggan we encounter an overt claim that emigrant authors willingly and knowingly exploit themselves in order to generate profit.

To me, this approach is simply unfair. While competition within a field of literature requires some strategic play for success, our Caribbean authors – Lamming, Césaire, Selvon, Glissant and Naipaul – evidence no malice or machinations in their self-representations, unlike, perhaps, in some of their conflicts with each other. In addition, all presented more nuanced, complex, and in many cases, sympathetic depictions of the people of the Caribbean as their careers progressed, their social positions changed, and their perceptions shifted, even Naipaul. In my analysis, the sometimes troubling representations they wrote into their works

⁷ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 91.

⁸ For a succinct summary of Ahmad’s argument, as well as his tone, in the above, see Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 19.

⁹ Graham Huggan, pp. xi, xii.

were performances of their reassessments-in-action. Their texts were, at least partially, unconscious products which were necessarily tainted with the prejudices of their upbringing and the problems of their own precarious positions as expected representatives. While pressure to differentiate themselves from their peers led to declarations of authenticity or inauthenticity as well as bitter rivalries, a great deal of the claims of exotic identity came from the wider field of publishers, reviewers and patrons. Sarah Brouillette, has made a convincing argument that our reviews of 'positioning' should not stop at the author. She notes that while 'expressions of self-consciousness, whether ultimately self-exempting or self-implicating, are a constitutive feature of the postcolonial field' that 'the seemingly extra-textual world [of publishing] surrounding books [...] is also material for the construction of specific kinds of meaning'.¹⁰ Further, she notes that there is no need when bringing an author's life into criticism to see the author as intending everything that can be detected in their text; in fact this type of 'interpretation often identifies aspects of an author's posturing that the writer in question would most likely discredit'.¹¹ While I would argue that what the author credits or discredits should not hold us up too much, Brouillette's ideas are doubly useful. First, her declaration that we look at the world the author inhabits – at all his contexts including that of the literary industry – in order to understand a position-taking, moves away from seeing any author's public identity and reception as wholly self-constructed. Secondly, in her re-acknowledgement of the fact that what we see in text and what its creator sees in the same text are often, if not always, different, she reinforces a point that I have attempted to make clear: writing always expresses elements of an author's identity and an author's origins and context – his conceptual locus. This locus, or, in its simplest form, point-of-view, is a complicated position, influenced by many factors that an author is not always best placed to describe or to fully appreciate.

¹⁰ Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Other Leave-Takings, Later Generations

The Caribbean writers I have touched upon were unique in the time of their arrival and the part they played in the creation of a literary sub-field but they were not unique in their emigration itself. One thing that Condé stressed, and that I have so far glossed only briefly, is the fact that Caribbean writing of the first wave is a *male* tradition while early emigrants included, of course, representatives of both sexes. In the fixation of this study upon the most influential first-wave figures of anglophone and francophone Caribbean letters, the first female writers from the region have necessarily been neglected. This is solely because the very first female Caribbean writers were relegated to the sidelines during the early construction of spaces in Europe for Caribbean letters.

I use the term ‘relegated’ intentionally. In both the anglophone and francophone regions, women’s writing was not afforded the same value or granted the same critical or public attention as men’s writing until decades after a Caribbean sub-field was formed. For years the common narrative in anglophone criticism was that the literary production of women from this region began in the 1970s. In the francophone tradition, Michèle Lacrosil and Mayotte Capécia are the names most often cited as the first influential Caribbean female writers. Lacrosil began her major production in the 1960s – almost twenty years after Césaire first declared himself the voice of the voiceless and roughly a decade after his fame began to rise. Capécia on the other hand, although writing in the late 1940s, owes her notoriety to Frantz Fanon’s attack on her work in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (*Peau Noire, Masques Blanches*).¹² Many critics have touched upon the barriers to entering the field that female writers faced. Marie-Denise Shelton notes that ‘the development of literature by women has been thwarted or at least retarded by the prevailing social order in Haiti,

¹² See Clarisse Zimra, ‘Daughters of Mayotte, Sons of Frantz: The Unrequited Self in Caribbean Literature’, in *An Introduction to Caribbean Francophone Writing: Guadeloupe and Martinique*, ed. by Sam Haigh (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 177-94 (p. 179). It is worth noting that in the same essay, Zimra says that Lacrosil’s publishers explicitly requested that she write in the style of Capécia which hints at a degree of behind-the-scenes influence, on perceptions of the nature of women’s writing, possessed by the earlier author (186). For the attack by Fanon, see his *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), pp. 44-45.

Martinique, and Guadeloupe, where literature has traditionally been viewed as a male prerogative'.¹³ In line with this, Evelyn O'Callaghan reminds her readers that 'determining the "absence" (or not) of early women's writing [from the anglophone tradition] then, involves asking who are the arbiters of value at a particular time, and what ethnocentric or gendered discourses inform their judgements'.¹⁴ It has been claimed that black male writers actively barred women's access to the literary establishment in the Britain of the 1950s and 1970s,¹⁵ and it is clear that the prevailing image of a Caribbean writer is that of a certain type of male who produces a certain type of engaged fiction – a fact which cannot have served as anything other than a roadblock to women's access to publication and promotion.¹⁶ The long exclusion of women from the field has resulted in a situation where women's writing has been seen as an addendum or appendix to the vast body of male Caribbean work – a tacked-on addition always viewed in one lump as 'women's writing' rather than the production of distinct personalities.¹⁷

The structure of this study has, so far, only reinforced this perception, but my hope is that the justification of my inclusions is clear. The fact remains that the preeminent female writers of this tradition gained attention with the coming of the second wave. There remains a vacancy in the field of Caribbean criticism that awaits a sustained engagement with

¹³ Marie-Denise Shelton, 'Women Writers of the French-Speaking Caribbean: An Overview', in *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, ed. by Selwyn R. Cudjoe (Wellesley: Calaloux Publications, 1990), pp. 346-56 (p. 347). Joan Dayan goes even further in her essay 'Women, History and the Gods: Reflections on Mayotte Capécia and Marie Chauvet'. She describes female francophone authors as occupying a 'position outside all forms of production, whether literary or popular'. See *An Introduction to Caribbean Francophone Writing: Guadeloupe and Martinique*, ed. by Sam Haigh, pp. 69-82 (p. 73).

¹⁴ Evelyn O'Callaghan, *Women Writing the West Indies, 1804-1939: 'A Hot Place, Belonging to Us'* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.4.

¹⁵ See Beryl Gilroy, *Leaves in the Wind: Collected Writings of Beryl Gilroy*, ed. by Joan Anim-Addo (London: Mango Publishing, 1998), p. 213; and Arthur Paris, 'The Transatlantic Metropolis and the Voices of Caribbean Women', in *Caribbean Women Writers*, ed. by Selwyn R. Cudjoe, pp. 82-85 (p. 85).

¹⁶ Bill Schwarz notes the overarching influence of C. L. R. James on creating an image of the Caribbean intellectual from all regions as a male iconoclast like himself. As a result, Schwarz says, 'it is still difficult to get *past* James, and past those formed in his image' in both the anglophone and francophone traditions. Although Schwarz notes Césaire as someone 'formed in the image' of James, one could easily argue that Césaire has played a Jamesian role in the francophone context. See 'Introduction: Crossing the Seas' in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, ed. by Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 1-30 (pp. 19-20).

¹⁷ See Alison Donnell *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.

alterations in the Caribbean sub-field as time passed and island immigration declined in Britain and spiked in France. That study would detail the ways in which the obstacles barring the acceptance and success of women were removed, how Guadeloupean writers entered the French Caribbean frame, and how the second wave in both the anglo- and francophone context interacted with and challenged their forebears and brought existing, although hidden, talents into the public eye. That study would be deeply intertwined with this one, and advance the thoughts presented here about the mental and material demands placed on authors to fit into a constellation of work produced in a certain context. My hope is that, if all goes well, it is a study I will be able to undertake.

The Future is Transnational

I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.

- Derek Walcott

That oft-quoted passage from Walcott's poem, 'The Schooner *Flight*' is an appropriate final quotation for the end of this journey. In many ways, Walcott's lines encapsulate the techniques and situation of the first-wave authors. It features the reduction of self to simply one of many, 'just a red nigger who love the sea'. It highlights the overdetermining aspect of colonial upbringing in identity through its 'sound colonial education'. It reveals the mixed heritage of Caribbean transplants, the source of complicated identifications, one too-often troubled and complicated by Walcott's central, ascribed identity, not 'black' but 'nigger'. And lastly, in the final line quoted above, it presents the central dilemma of any intellectual who belongs to a disempowered group – if he speaks for himself alone he is merely a

‘nobody’, another one of ‘them’, maybe a lucky one; but if he makes his voice the voice of the collective, if his words are said to echo everyone’s thoughts, suddenly he becomes ‘a nation’.

The story of the speaker Shabine as told in Walcott’s poem is a tale of an itinerant: the speaker sails away from home, restless, unhappy, and finds no refuge elsewhere. Shabine’s odyssey is that of all Caribbean peoples. The region was and continues to be a space of migration. Movement in and out is the norm – whether that takes the form of French Caribbean ‘circulation’ or permanent resettlements across the globe – population churn began with Columbus and has not yet stopped. Owing to this, the Caribbean is the arch-‘transnational’ space, one whose migrants are constantly re-negotiating their feelings about themselves and their homes, uncertainties which are regularly expressed in diasporic artwork. The Caribbean may be the preeminent and oldest ‘transnation’ but it is far from the last or the only. As the decades of our new century progress, migration will only become more of an issue, and, as money moves East, it is likely that at least some of us Western residents will move to follow it. This, of course, will not only be a reversal of the trends of the twentieth century in the twenty-first, it will create a whole new crop of emigrants from the Caribbean and across the globe, with their own organic intellectuals to represent their experiences, identity-crises, and changed relationships with their places of birth. When the time comes for studies of that body of work, from the empire inverted, my hope is that this brief thesis serves as a useful outline of the way in which literary criticism can engage with the movement of people that has defined, and will continue to define, our age.

Bon voyage.

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